CHAPTER II

THE CONTEXT AND THE SETTING

a) Period of Orwell

A study of the radical individualism of George Orwell requires, of course, an understanding of the historical context in and the setting against which he was writing. This becomes pertinent since literature is an expression of the 'zeitgeist' or the spirit of the age, and since the writer or the poet presents a 'weltanschauung' or a vision of life by giving an imaginative and artistic form to the contemporary realities and his reactions to such realities.

George Orwell lived during the first half of the twentieth century i.e. from 1903 to 1950. What did this period hold out for mankind? What light or gloom, what opportunity or predicament was there for man or the individual in that period? What way did man face the formidable challenges of the period, and how did he react literarily, culturally etc., in that period?

The period under review, i.e. the first half of the twentieth century defies any simple explanation. It was the period of imperialism, the rivalry between the Great Powers of Europe for grabbing whatever territories on which they could
lay their hands in other continents, greed for economic gains and raw power, the Spanish Civil War, the two totalitarian revolutions, and the catastrophes of the two world wars, all of which plunged the whole world into a terrible and unprecedented civilizational crisis. Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg have summed up these milieus very admirably: "Contemporary history writes itself in nouns: Fascism, Nazism, Communism, Spain, imperialism, Hitler, Stalin, nonaggression pact, Pearl Harbor, Dachau, Hiroshima, Moscow, Yalta, Hungary, Suez,... names of violence and disaster, of guilt, betrayal, spiritual exhaustion. And superimposed on the experiences these words evoke is a formula whose awful significance may never be washed away: $E=mc^2$, the key to Atom."¹

The starting point for the understanding of this period could be imperialism or the unrestrained European expansionism, which as though logically, led to the catastrophes of the two world wars. This point is made by Russell, who, having given a picture of imperialism and European expansionism concludes: "Henceforth, the planet was mapped out, and a gain to one State could only be secured at

the expense of some other. This intensified rivalries, and made adjustments more difficult; the expansive forces which had found their outlet in imperialism were compelled to operate, no longer in distant undeveloped regions, but nearer home, and in direct competition with neighbouring nations. Though statesmen foresaw the result, they lacked the will and intelligence to prevent it; impotently, though not blindly, they drifted to catastrophe."

The closing period of the nineteenth century witnessed the conquest and subjugation of vast areas of Asia, Africa and South America by the armies and reckless adventures of Europe, and the zenith of European colonialism. Of course, the colonial craze was for the insatiable desire for profit of the white master. On this aspect James L. Henderson and Malcom Caldwell write, "... by the end of the nineteenth century, it seemed there were no more worlds left to subdue and exploit: by fire and sword, the best part of Asia, Africa and South America had been made over into an agricultural hinterland for the industrialising countries of the northern hemisphere and their off-shoots in Oceania, and into a huge market for their

goods and a profitable outlet for their investments." The colonial greed of the European powers dislocated the traditional way of life and cultures in the colonies leading to untold miseries and sufferings of the natives. The European expansionism was no doubt callous and cruel to the peoples of the colonies they occupied, but at the same time it ultimately proved disastrous for the white masters and the world as a whole.

The European colonialism in general, and the British imperialism in particular in this context provided interesting stuff for some of the fine and remarkable literary works during the peak of their glory, and final dissolution. Allen J. Greenberger points out: "In historical terms, the period since Kipling's first works appeared in 1880s is a short one. However in terms of the history of the British Empire, these years cover the enormous changes from a secure world wide empire at its height, through the first serious attack on it, to its dissolution. The writers of fiction mirrored this development." He states that these authors fall into three


periods - The Era of Confidence, 1880-1910; the Era of Doubt, 1910-1935; and the Era of Melancholy, 1935-1960. Citing Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, as a work belonging to the Era of Confidence, he points out that Kim, the English character should order his Bengali friend Huree Chunder Mookerjee since Kim is the natural leader. The same arrogant inhuman imperial attitude devoid of genuine human relationship and love is found in *The Naulakha*. E.M. Forster in his *A Passage to India* and other works, and George Orwell in *Burmese Days* represented the Era of Doubt. Greenberger points outs that Forster and Orwell attacked the Raj more than from the point of view of what the Raj was doing to British. Similarly L.H. Myres in *Rajah Amar* attacked the whole Western society.

Greenberger observes that during the Era of Melancholy the writers tended to believe that the Empire was already dead. The literary works of this period as represented by John Godden's *The Peacock* expressed the predicament of the Anglo-Indians and their isolation from both India and Britain. While the writers like Orwell hated the evil system of imperialism, at the same time they did not sympathetically idealize the miserable conditions of the natives over whom they ruled.
It is facile and jejune to observe that the literature produced during the Raj in India was a mere replica of the British attitude to India or the mere racial prejudice the Raj entertained. At the same time it was also the search of man for a meaningful way of life in the Indian context, and such a search happens to be the perennial concern of literature. Goonetilleke asserts that Kim, A Passage to India, The Village in the Jungle of Leonard Woolf, Burmese Days, Paul Scott's novels and writings, and other literary works produced at the different stages of the Raj from the stage of confidence to the stage of decadence and fall, express the perennial concern of literature apart from delineating the exasperation of the ruling class, their attitude towards their subjects and their conditions of living.

European Scenarios

The rivalry between the Great Powers of Europe, the frenzy of expansion, worship of power which became a new religion, the power-mania of Hitler, Mussolini, the Fascist trends, the wholesale restructuring of nations on utopian models as in the former Soviet Union, the weakness of democratic governments which were themselves corrupted by imperialism and its attendant laissezfaire capitalism and
other evils prepared the ground for the plunge of Europe and the world into the catastrophe. The nations as embodiments of cultures became the war regimes. Even the democratic governments which were to fight war to end the war became war regimes and at least during the course of war shared the very qualities of the totalitarian war regimes. This was a terrible onslaught on the national cultures or cultural nationalities.

By the time of the Second World War the cultural nationalities in totalitarian States like Germany, Soviet Union and Italy, mainly speaking, had been fully dominated and monopolised by utopias of one or the other sort. Hugh Thomas, quoting from The Great War by Marc Ferro writes, "Ludendorff at one moment thought of mobilising the youth of both sexes in Germany when they reached the age of sixteen. All would be sent to training camps. There would thus be left a society neither civilian nor military. Instead, a truly egalitarian society would emerge, a 'nationalist - aristocratic - corporativist - socialist consciousness', the whole nation in step: a prophecy of both communism and Nazism."

There was a clear worship of war as a means to power as expressed by the

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Nazi leaders and the Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini who declared that war was to man what maternity was to woman.

The period under review was also the period of expression of euphoria over utopian social engineering, especially over the Communist Soviet Union and then a sudden disillusionment and disenchantment when the real nature of the totalitarian Stalin regime was realised. As argued by F.A. Hayek few recognised that Fascism and Nazism were not reactions against communist trends but a necessary outcome of those tendencies. Many were unwilling to accept this truth even when they observed many of the repellent similarities in the internal regimes in Communist Russia and National Socialist Germany. He quotes F.A. Voigt who observes that Marxism has led to Fascism and National Socialism, because in all essentials it is Fascism and National Socialism.

Referring to Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, André Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender who became communist converts and then came out of it totally disillusioned, Richard Crossman remarks that the very attraction of the individuals of intellectual stature towards Marxism exploded the fallacies of liberalism and Western Democracy. He observes that this phenomenon revealed the
bitter truth that progress is not automatic, that boom and slump are inherent in capitalism, that social injustice and racial discrimination are not cured merely by the passage of time, and that power politics cannot be 'abolished' but only used for good or bad ends. In the book edited by Crossman, Arthur Koestler in his explanation of how he joined the Communist Party of Germany and how he came out of it, expresses the terrible dilemma of the inter war period: "Fitting the two half-truths - the sociologist's and the psychologist's - together, we conclude that if on the one hand over-sensitivity to social injustice and obsessional craving for Utopia are signs of neurotic maladjustment, society may, on the other hand, reach a state of decay where the neurotic rebel causes more joy in heaven than the sane executive who orders pigs to be drowned under the eyes of starving men."  

This terrible dilemma exposed the moral poverty and inadequacy of capitalism as a human and humane ideology and system. But Bolshevik Russia proved that the remedy was worse than the malady. And the world plunged into the catastrophe as a net result of all social, economic, political, imperialistic,

racial, psychological, industrial technological, capitalistic, and utopian dilemmas.

Literary Scene

A writer's or literary artist's response to the terrible onslaught on culture which smashed all structures, established modes, values, and in short, the annihilation of culture itself should be a very exacting endeavour requiring new modes of expression, new style, novel form and vocabulary to cope with the formidable challenges. A literary artist was called upon to create his own pattern from the rubble of the catastrophe. The solid foundation of confidence, self assurance and the stability of the past being battered and shattered, a literary artist was required to search for his self and a meaning for man's life in the splintered culture of this period, and thus present a vision of life through his or her work.

G.H. Bantock observes that the two world wars and an accelerated social change have produced profound alterations from even the nineteenth century ethos. The serious artist did no longer remain aloof from social movements, not indifferent to moral dilemmas. And he states, "Rarely, indeed can there have been a time when 'background' more readily
obtrudes as an essential part of foreground. For all the comparative indifference with which they have been received, writers have less and less felt able to retreat into private worlds; instead, they have become increasingly committed to social, political, and therefore public comment."  

The survey of the dominant literary trends spanning the first half of the twentieth century naturally happens to be too broad a canvas to comprehend precisely. There were many currents and cross-currents which influenced the literary trends at the different stages of this period. In this period one can recognise the growing urbanization, commercialization, the emergence of a society of the cash-nexus, the breakdown of the traditional authoritarian pattern in private and social life, the influence of Freudian psychology, a temporary attraction to utopian system, especially socialism, and then a vehement assertion of individualism, suspicion of authority, erosion of faith caused by sociological, anthropological studies, the gloom of totalitarianism and warnings against it, the impact of further advancement in scientific technology, the influence of

propaganda machinery, cinema, television and the resultant confusion in arriving at a satisfactory picture of man or a vision of the 'self' against these formidable currents of life during this period. The writers, poets, novelists, and other literary artists who dominated the different stages of the literary scene of this period tried to give expression to these currents and cross-currents and a picture of life in their works.

A new wave of literary style began to manifest itself in the early twentieth century, and this new wave continued to mould all forms of literature owing to the rapid changes in the way of life which have been already pointed out. F.R. Karl and Marvin Magalaner highlight this point by quoting from a speech, "Mr.Bennett and Mrs.Brown", made by Virginia Woolf at Cambridge in 1924. They write that Virginia Woolf stated her opposition to the Edwardian novels of H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennet, and directly attacked the kind of reality they represented, which was, she indicated, a holdover from Victorian writers. Her main point was that the Edwardians (and Victorians) did not give the reader a sense of the character, did not reach into the substance of their people; did not, in effect, give the Mrs.Brownness of the
theoretical Mrs. Brown of her title. She adds that the new novelists, the Georgians like herself, and including Forster, Lawrence, Joyce, Huxley must reject this type of writing. In fact, this new style had already been forged and put to extensive use by Forster in his early novels, by Conrad as long ago as *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Nostromo* (1904), by D.H. Lawrence in nearly everything he wrote after *Sons and Lovers*, especially in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, and, most significantly by Joyce in *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*. Joseph Conrad’s emphasis on the individual artist’s conscious mind as guide to his artistic conceptions — an anti-traditionalist position and a throwback to the philosophy of 1890’s, the time of Conrad’s apprenticeship — found its counterpart in the statements of Huxley, Virginia Woolf and Joyce. The twentieth century novelist, it can be assumed, is concerned chiefly with the intensifying aspects of reality; and since he has rejected so many traditional values, he has to recreate for himself what his predecessors could take for granted. All these writers concur with Conrad’s statement that only the artist — and not the scientist and the thinker, who appeal to our common sense and intelligence — can reach into 'life’s
appearances and forms, the very spirit of life's truth for only the artist has 'a wonderful power of vision.'

There was the variation of the style and emphases on techniques of writing novels adopted by the novelists belonging to the early twentieth century. Christopher Gillie refers to the controversy between H.G. Wells and Henry James about their artistic styles. H.G. Wells declared "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it", and Henry James proclaimed, "It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance.... and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process". Referring to these views on the artistic practices of Wells and James, Gillie observes that in style Lawrence had kinship with H.G.Wells and Wells's friend Arnold Bennett and again that Wells in his social novels shared the methods of early Dickens. He hastens to add that as opposed to Wells, Lawrence was as consistently serious as James was, as a novelist. The difference between James and Lawrence was that while for James the novel was 'the great art and the great

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form', for Lawrence it was a mere 'tremulation on the ether' unless it brought life and vitalised the consciousness'.

As the novelists were trying to present a new vision of life based on the early twentieth century realities and experiences by experimenting with new techniques, similarly, the poets during 1910–20 were registering their distinctive marks on the general literary trends. Pound, Eliot and Yeats who were not directly involved in World War I were nevertheless influenced by it and they offered new interpretations to poetry as a medium. Then there were the war poets, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, Edmund Blunden, Charles Sorely, Julian Grenfell, Robert Graves and Isaac Rosenberg. All were soldiers, and only Sassoon, Blunden and Graves survived. For Sassoon and Owen the war was a tragedy, the sufferers of which were on both sides. In a note to his poems, Owen wrote:

"Above all I am not concerned with Poetry

My subject is War, and the pity of War

The poetry is in the pity."

9 Christopher Gillie, Movement in English Literature, 1900–1940 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 1, 12, 13.

10 Gillie, p. 16.
In this context David Diaches writes that in respect of literary techniques, the 1920s proved to be one of the most fruitful periods in the whole history of English literature. The 'stream of consciousness' in fiction, the poetical technique based on symbolism and the seventeenth century metaphysical trend perfected by Pound, Eliot and Yeats were great achievements. One should also take note of the revival of the theatre, the dramas of ideas of Shaw who drew inspiration from Ibsen, the plays of Oscar Wilde, J.M.Synge, W.B. Yeats and others.

Many great literary works were produced during the period between the two world wars (i.e. roughly 1919-1939). Anthony Burgess writes: "The First World War produced many works of great merit - think of Hemmingway's A Farewell to Arms, Richard Addington's Death of a Hero, Erich Maria Von Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, to give a few examples - but the Hitler war failed to stimulate novelists as it failed to produced poets of the calibre of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen." B.Ifor Evans reviews the English literature produced between the two world wars and

observes: "The most impressive synthesis in the whole period is that W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, working independently, all find the same problem, though their resolution of it differs widely. T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* (1922), James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922), and W.B. Yeats in such volumes as *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stair* (1933), are all trying to discover some formula through which the fragmentation of modern experience can be expressed." 12

In the later stage of this period poets like Auden and Spender, who, while expressing the social cultural disorder like Eliot broke away from their style. Of all the poets of this period it was Auden who expressed the anxiety, depression and fear of the period in his own style to find finally his anchorage, again like Eliot, in the Christian doctrine. Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis who made the Auden group shared the similar trends. In the years following the Second World War there were some remarkable minor poets. But no poetical work of the greatness of *The Waste Land* or *The Tower* saw the light.

A curious development in this period was the emergence of the novel of ideas. The fear that science might end by creating an easy mechanical life and destroying all human values associated with efforts and struggle, the fear that the war regimes even in democratic countries during the Second World War might become totalitarian, and finally a hatred against utopia were embodied by Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler and other novelists. Of these Orwell and Koestler portrayed the degeneration of the communist utopia into the dreadful totalitarian State.

It should be noted that corresponding to the needs of the time the style of prose of thought and literary criticism also changed. The language of prose became more transparent: it came to be employed as a medium of communicating a meaning or idea precisely and clearly, without any embellishment and pomposity. E.W.F Tomlin observes that the prose of thought is primarily concerned with intelligibility and this primary purpose is achieved by dialectic and eristic. He points out that whereas the dialectic elucidates the subject or thought in the form of statements, counter statement and conclusion with its primary appeal to reason, the eristic in a concealed manner seeks to impose the thought by its deliberate appeal to sentiments and prejudice. The ideal prose of thought would be
that in which these two elements were in equilibrium. He writes: "Without the early writings of Russell, G.E. Moore, and Wittgenstein, such influential works as Richard's *Principles of Criticism* and its offspring Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* might have never been written. The same applies to recent studies such as Frazer's *Economic Thought and Language* (1936), Weldon's *Vocabulary of Politics* (1953), and the recent symposium *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955)." 

Literary criticism came to have new contents, new techniques, new genres and vocabulary for evaluation of literature. The concepts of "dissociation of sensibility" 'unified sensibility' and 'objective co-relative' of T.S. Eliot, the concept of 'stream of consciousness' technique, the concept of the novel as 'the one bright book of life', which can make the whole man alive and tremble' of Lawrence, the concepts of the novels and dramas of ideas, war and politics, Oedipus complex, symbolism, surrealism, and co., constituted the new vocabulary of the literary critic. As the main currents of the literature of this period exhibited new trends, literary criticism also required a new vocabulary.

Since the scope of this survey has got to be limited, an attempt is made to offer only a glimpse of the literature of the first half of the twentieth century by referring to the examples of the greatest literary personalities and some of the representative figures. Probably, it is possible to find a broad pattern in the literary world though it was an offshoot of the confusing, chaotic, violent, fragmented world of greed, revolutions and wars. Thus, paradoxically there was 'reason in madness', order in disorder, or pattern in a patternless state. This speaks for the great imaginative works created in this period having the perennial concern of man for the search for his authentic self as their central theme, either implicitly or explicitly.

A very valuable insight offered by Frederick J. Hoffman in his revealing book, The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination throws more light on this point of the search for an authentic self by the literary geniuses. He analyses and interprets the entire literature of this period in terms of grace, violence and self. The focus of the analysis and interpretation happens to be the self's frantic efforts to find an identity in a perceivable pattern, vis-a-vis grace and violence. The religious grace having lost its attraction for many, they were trying to fill that vacuum with secular grace.
The need for a City of Man to replace Augustine's City of God combines the history of man's disappointment in the Church as institution with his desire for absolutes. Orwell's 1984, Arthur Koestler's Darkness at Noon and works of this type directly depicted the consequences of the 'secular grace' and the pursuit of the absolute, the City of Man, the Golden Age. Violence and death in the First and the Second World Wars had a terrible impact on the psyche of men and literary genuises and those who went in search of the Golden Age were disillusioned. Whereas the assailant - victim relationship in World War I was perceivable, in World War II it became ambiguous and the unparalleled violence became more impersonal. The unparalleled violence resulting in the scattering of bodies about the landscape was an affront to dignity. The concentration camps and the prison cells of trials of World War II were frightening centres of dehumanisation leading to the process of eliminating specific human qualities and individual identities. Man or the poet, or the novelist was to find his individual identify in such a terrible scenario. And in his most confident moments of self assertion, modern man is still in the act of willing his wholeness, his prospects of enduring in time, his dignity and his worth.
The literary genuises, Lawrence, Joyce, Eliot, Yeats, Orwell and others were trying to find the authentic self and assert the worth and the sanctity of the individual even in the debris of the splintered modern life. Some of the writers and poets retreated to the City of God. But the point lies in moulding the City of Man by piece-meal social engineering instead of making it absolutist or totalitarian by a holistic design. The focus therefore is on radical individualism and the perennial quest of man for meaning in life, for this finds its manifestation in the great literary works in amazingly varied but distinctively individualistic styles.
b) A Portrait of Orwell's Life

Since many critics on the works and achievements of George Orwell have emphasised, or rather over-emphasised the link between his works and his life, and since we should know Orwell, the man, it is relevant to attempt a sketch of Orwell's life in the context of this study. For many, Orwell, the man, becomes the focus of their study. But there are others who point out that though there are autobiographical elements in his works, the over-emphasis on the autobiographical strain would lead to the undermining of the creative imaginative faculty of Orwell. The different and contradictory points of view expressed by critics on the connection between Orwell's life and his works, in fact, demonstrate the uniqueness of the personality of George Orwell. Orwell lived in such a way that for many his life may appear more interesting than his fiction, and such a tendency is not wholly unjustified.

In his study of George Orwell, George Woodcock explains the unique personality of Orwell: "When I remember George Orwell, I see again the long, lined face that so often reminded one not of a living person, but of a character out of fiction. It was the nearest I had seen in real life to the
imagined features of Don Quixote, and the rest of the figure went with the face."\textsuperscript{14} Of course, the observations of Woodcock suggest that the facts of Orwell's life are stranger than fiction. Indeed, they are, and Orwell, in his dazzlingly dynamic way of life, attempted the impossible, at least, the impossible way of life for a vast majority of people.

Orwell was an Etonian, colonial policeman, tramp, dishwasher, hop-picker, tutor, teacher, reviewer and pseudo-Georgian poet, and employee in a bookshop, soldier, farmer, film critic, broadcaster, editor, war correspondent and, all too frequently, hospital patient, as well as an author. Pointing out these aspects of Orwell's life Jefferey Meyers writes, "Orwell's works are closely connected to the events of his life. He did not have great powers of imagination and could write only about things he had actually observed, so he deliberately sought out material he could write about and used every scrap of experience in his books."\textsuperscript{15}

However, the views of Meyers and the similar views expressed by Tom Hopkinson and others confirm that Orwell's works reflect his life. But the danger contained in such an

\textsuperscript{14} Woodcock, p.11.
approach is that it can underestimate the imaginative quality of his works. Bernard Crick in his classic biography of George Orwell makes this point clear. Crick writes that he realised from the beginning the complex relationship between Orwell’s life and his works. All of his books except the last two were obviously based upon his own experiences and it was clear that he deliberately went out to gain experiences in order to write about them. Orwell was primarily a traveller through his own memories. As V.S. Pritchett said, he was ‘a writer who has “gone native” in his own country.’ Crick who comments like this further points out that he soon saw how the autobiographical quality of Orwell’s novels became a commonplace of criticism from shortly after his death and it had been less often grasped how extraordinarily creative and imaginative were his ‘documentaries’. Down and Out in Paris and London, The Road to Wigan Pier, and Homage to Catalonia, as well as essays like "A Hanging", "Shooting an Elephant", and "Such, Such Were the Joys", his essay on prep school raise the problem of locating accurately between fiction and non-fiction. The comments of Crick reveal that while the works of Orwell were based on personal experiences, they were at the same time, woven into artistic pattern by Orwell, the literary artist.
Orwell was such a personality that there emerged after his death what Woodcock calls 'an Orwellian cult'. Without underestimating the creative and imaginative faculty of George Orwell, one can say that there existed a close connection between his life and his writings. Woodcock comments: "The triad of thought, act and artifact runs through the whole of Orwell's writing life, the pattern is not always so neatly arranged as I may appear to be suggesting but it is never entirely absent, and one has difficulty in envisaging a future in which critics will ever be able to think of Orwell's writings separately from his life."\textsuperscript{16}

George Orwell lived during the first half of the twentieth century. His actual life span covered 46 years from 25 June 1903 to 21 January 1950. When one studies the short but very active life of Orwell, one probably agrees with T.R. Fyvel who writes: "'THE savage pilgrimage'--- the term has been applied to the life of D.H. Lawrence. It could equally be used for the life of George Orwell, who died of consumption, like Lawrence, and died at much the same age."\textsuperscript{17}

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\textsuperscript{16} Woodcock, p.13.
\textsuperscript{17} T.R. Fyvel, "A Writer's Life", in World Review, Special Issue on Orwell, June 1950, p.7.
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George Orwell was the pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair. Orwell was Eric Blair before he assumed the pseudonym, 'George Orwell', or more properly before he developed into George Orwell. One can say that the story of life of George Orwell is, in fact, the story of how Eric Arthur Blair became George Orwell.

Eric Arthur Blair was born at Motihari in Bengal on 25 June 1903. He was the second child and the only son; Marjorie, his elder sister was older by five years and Avril, his younger sister was born five years later. Richard Walmesley Blair was Eric's father and Ida Mabel Limousine, his mother. Eric's paternal grandfather was in the Indian Army and his maternal grandfather owned teak yards in Burma. Thus Avril Dunn writes, "Both sides of our family had been connected with the East, for several generations." This fact is going to establish the imperialistic connection and the Anglo-Indian base of the family in which Eric was born.

Ida Blair came back to England with Marjorie and baby Eric in 1904 since nearly all 'Anglo-Indians' (the British in India) saw the advantages of bringing up even younger children.

in England. Richard Blair only lived in India to come back to India in 1907 on three months’ leave and then to join the family only in 1912 after his retirement. Imperialism had given a serious blow to the traditional family relationship. Ida Blair’s diary in 1905 is the only surviving document which gives some glimpse of Eric’s early childhood. From this it appears that Eric had bronchitis and the chest problem which remained with him all through his life. And Bernard Crick writes, "His mother appears to have been, in the very nicest sense, a bit of a gadabout. The diary gives the impression of a woman who could be very protective towards her children, but not ever present, perhaps over-compensating when at home.”

It was natural for Eric to feel lonely since his mother used to be out and involved in her own activities and his sisters could not be his play-mates. Eric, and later Orwell wrote in his essay, "Why I Write": I was the middle child of three, but there was a gap of five years on either side, and I barely saw my father before I was eight. For this and other reasons I was somewhat lonely, and I soon developed disagreeable mannerisms which made me unpopular throughout my schooldays. I had the lonely child’s habit of making up

stories and holding conversations with imaginary persons, and I think from the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and undervalued.\textsuperscript{20}

Avril Dunn denies that her brother Eric had an unhappy childhood and asserts: "We never played much together as children, because five years difference in age does make a great difference at that time of life, but I do remember interminable games of French cricket when he seemed to be in and we were always vainly trying to get him out. It has been said that Eric had an unhappy childhood. I don't think this was in the least true, although he did give out that impression himself when he was grown-up.\textsuperscript{21}

From the age of 5 to the age of 8 Eric was at a small, Anglican convent school in Henley. He must have done well there since he made no reference to that period in his writings. But hell broke out for him, or he thought it to be so, when he went to the prep school at the age of 8. It was there that he became acutely aware of the class to which he belonged and was really ashamed of it. Eric later on wrote as


\textsuperscript{21} Avril, p.256.
Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that he was born into what one might describe as the lower-upper-middle class, the layer of society lying between £2000 and £300 a year and his own family was not far from the bottom. And he writes: "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 above the level of the dole". However Crick in his biography of Orwell rejects this statement of Orwell and points out that the financial position of Orwell’s family was not that bad as stated by him. It is fair to say that Eric naturally felt so in the 'purse-pride' atmosphere at St. Cyprian's.

Writing on the prep school life of Eric, and making reference to the essay "Such, Such Were the Joys" that Orwell wrote explaining his experiences of the prep school days, Christopher Hollis observes: "A large part of the essay is a familiar catalogue of the faults which we should expect to find imputed to a preparatory school of those last pre-war years by one who did not like it. The boys were freely caned. The food was bad. Snobbery and purse-pride were rampant among

boys and masters. There was bullying. An unpleasant incident of sexual immorality was handled by the authorities with ineptitude. The teaching, indifferent to true education, was concerned only with cramming as many boys as possible into scholarships at public schools." 23

Crick agrees with Christopher Hollis and others on the bad conditions of the prep schools including the characteristic cruelty of the school in relation to arbitrariness and uncertainty of punishment but points out that Orwell's account of the terror of the prep school may have to be accepted as figurative rather than literal truth. Was it literally true that St. Cyprian's really led him to believe as he wrote that by their law he was damned, he had no money, he was weak, he was ugly, he was unpopular, he had a chronic cough, he was cowardly, he smelt? Stating that Eric's experiences at the prep school prepared him to reject imperialism when he went to Burma, and to side with the underdog, forever afterwards, Crick observes that they did not directly form the imaginative roots of Nineteen Eight-Four.

Jacintha Buddicom, Eric's childhood friend and Avril, his

younger sister refused to accept "Such, Such Were the Joys" as serious and literally true.

Eric seems to have been a great reader. This habit and his family background might have made him more solitary and feel to be so. He was instinctively rationalistic and anti-romantic. When Eric moved to Eton from the prep school he felt relatively happy and he enjoyed more privacy. He was at Eton from 1917 to 21. Cyril Connolly who had been with Eric at the prep school and Richard Rees (later Sir Richard Rees) were his friends and John Strachey his contemporary at Eton.

Eric joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma and served as a policeman from 1922 to 27. It was the time when the glorious days of the Empire were waning and the Raj was finding it difficult to manage the colonies. Eric, a tall young man, well able to act the Sahib, yet at heart a rebel, liking to shoot and also liking strange books, and with the sense of guilt aggravated by the authority and power of punishment at his disposal soon realised imperialism was evil. At the same time as a policeman he disliked the rudeness and insubordination of the natives. He hated imperialism and asserted that the British had no moral right to rule the natives. We find his feelings about the colonial regime
reflected in *Burmese Days*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and two essays, "Shooting an Elephant", "A Hanging" and other writings.

Eric returned to England from Burma on leave in 1927, and once he was in England, he decided to give up his job and did resign. It is revealing to know how Raymond Williams in his book on Orwell refers to the isolation and discontent in the prep school and then in Burma and states that the next nine years from 1927 was a crucial period in Eric's life. He writes: "For what these amounted to were the making of a new set of social relationships and the creation, in an important sense, of a new social identity. This is the critical evolution of Blair into Orwell." 24

Having come away from Burma with utter hatred against the colonial system, with his hatred against the class snobbery since his school days and with his desire to be a writer Eric could not settle down in the same class network. He wanted to get declassed and submerge in the lower class or sink into the condition of unemployment and poverty of the English poor. He saw and experienced the miseries and squalor of the life of

the poor in the East End of London, and then proceeded to Paris in 1928, and started staying in a rented room in a working-class area in Paris. While in Paris, Eric wrote two novels which were lost and published some articles in French and English. He was down with pneumonia, and worked ten weeks as a dishwasher and kitchen porter, and later returned to England at the end of 1929.

Back in England using his parents' home in Suffolk, he earned money from occasional articles and teachings for the next two and a half years. It was during this period that he completed several versions of what was to become his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. And Peter Stansky and William Abrahams observe: "There are two main themes that figure in Blair's life during the years between his return from Burma and January 1933: first, the struggle to become a writer; and then, the need to expiate the guilt he felt at having served in the Imperial Police. Eventually the two themes would fuse together, and from their fusion would result the only significant writing to be signed Eric Blair ('A Hanging'), and the earliest significant writing to be signed George Orwell (*Down and Out in Paris and London*)."  

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A sensitive Eric who had felt the horror, the sense of guilt, failure, ugliness, oppression, in the prep school, the hatred of imperialism as a policeman in Burma and a desire to expiate for the guilt of being an agent of despotism, dived into the abyss of poverty, squalor and miseries in London and Paris. Eric of the prep school, of the lower-upper-middle-class, of the Imperial Police in Burma and Eric the tramp, the dishwasher in Paris hotel, finally emerged from these and other diverse experiences as 'George Orwell'. And Crick observes: " 'George Orwell' was to be a clear Humanist, even a Rationalist with a pronounced anti-Catholicism, even though one with an ironic attachment to the liturgy, the humane political compromises and the traditions of the Church of England."26

Faced with a deep and genuine identity crisis, Eric was thinking of a pseudonym at the time of publication of his Down and Out in Paris and London by Victor Gollancz. Eric wrote:

"As to a pseudonym, a name I always use when tramping etc., is P.S. Burton, but if you don't think this sounds a probable kind of name, what about.

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26 Crick, p.229.
And as favoured by Eric, Victor Gollancz decided for 'George Orwell'. This is the story of how Eric Blair became 'George Orwell'. The Orwell was a river in Suffolk, south of his parents' home and Eric liked the Orwell which he knew. 'George' indicated English patriotism. While he was Eric to his old friends, he was George to new friends. Eric remained the name he used in all legal and domestic contexts—signing cheques, leases, contracts and getting married.

Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, the autobiographical reportage, was published in 1933. This work was followed by the anti-imperialist novel, *Burmese Days* (1934). He wrote two more novels, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, published in 1935, and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, published in 1936. This was also the period of an endless struggle against poverty for Orwell. He was writing journalistic pieces with which he was not

satisfied. During the early nineteen-thirties he worked as a private tutor and an underpaid schoolmaster in private schools. His health was delicate and his lungs gave trouble now and then.

It was during this period that he married Eileen Maud O'Shaughnessy who was of Irish stock, born in 1905. Eileen was the daughter of a customs collector, an Oxford graduate in English, a teacher and journalist, and later a London graduate student in psychology. Like her husband she was socialist in her convictions but did not join any political parties since she distrusted the parties. Eileen gave George Orwell a new optimism and she never complained to him urging him to take up a steady job, nor to change his bohemian habits. Orwell together with his wife kept a village pub and a village general store. Eileen proved a suitable and devoted partner to Orwell.

In 1936 Victor Gollancz commissioned Orwell to make a journey through the depressed industrial north of England and write a book about the condition of the unemployed in that area. This marked for Orwell an entry to a new project as a political writer which was to last the rest of his life. The offer helped Orwell in fulfilling his urge to learn more of
the English industrial working class by direct contact. He made the journey to Lancashire and Yorkshire and lived with the workers in Wigan, Barnsley and Sheffield. He had the toughness, sense, curiosity and humility to live with the workers. He stayed in cheap hotels, common lodging houses and at least for one night in a doss-house. The experiences and thoughts of Orwell during this journey were expressed in the book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The first part of this book or the report contains what Orwell was asked to write and the second part includes an essay on class and Socialism which indicated clearly Orwell's basic political position as a Socialist; and for him Socialism meant justice and common decency.

In the middle of 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out. Franco supported by Hitler, Mussolini and the other Fascists was heading the Fascist revolt against the 'Popular Front' government or the coalition of the Left-wing and republican parties in Spain. George Orwell as a political writer and a democratic Socialist concerned with public issues sprang to the defence of the 'Popular Front' government in Spain against the Fascists who were hands in glove with the Communists. It was on the Spanish Civil War front on the side
of the POUM that Orwell saw the similarities between Fascism and Communism. Crick refers to Orwell's review of Dr. Borkenau's *Spanish Cockpit* and writes: "Borkenau like Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler and George Orwell himself, had come to see that, however horrible and paradoxical it might be, Stalinism and Fascism had something in common both in style and methods."28

The experiences of Orwell as a POUM militiaman and the course of the Spanish Civil War as he saw it are expressed in his book or reportage, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). He was in the trenches and fought against the Fascists and a bullet from a Fascist sniper passed through his neck impairing his voice. But more shocking to him was the denouncement of the POUM as a Fascist outfit by the Bolsheviks, which was, in fact, a terrible lie. As the police were arresting the POUM men and since Orwell was also one among the wanted, Orwell came out of Spain along with Eileen who had joined him at that time. And Crick writes, "After the ordeals of Spain and writing the book about it, most of Orwell's formative experiences were over. His finest writing, his best essays and his great fame lay ahead."29

28 Crick, p.341.
29 Ibid., p.352.
When Orwell returned to England from Spain he joined the Independent Labour Party in June 1938 and quit it in the early months of the war. He had bouts of tuberculosis in the late winter of 1938 and was in a sanatorium until the late summer. He went to spend the winter in Morocco where he wrote his fourth novel, *Coming Up for Air* (1939). And when he returned to England he wrote some of his finest essays which established him as a well-known essayist and literary critic. The essays were published in a volume under the title, *Inside the Whale* (1940).

The Second World War broke out in 1939 and Orwell in 1940 tried desperately to join the Army but was denied on the ground of his poor health. As the next best alternative, he joined the Home Guard. Even as the war was going on, Orwell wrote *The Lion and the Unicorn* which was published in the 'Searchlight Books' series in 1941. From 1940 to 43 he worked for the Eastern Service of the B.B.C. which was classified as 'essential war work'.

After he gave up his assignment at the B.B.C. Orwell wrote articles after articles. And Fyvel states:

Week by week he wrote his incisive 'As I Please' for *Tribune*; he also wrote for the *Observer*, for the
American Left-Wing Partisan Review and New Leader, and he was reviewing for the Manchester Evening News. He was well-known in political circles; he had been literary editor of Tribune while Aneurin Bevan was its editor. Among his close friends were Arthur Koestler, and David Astor, who was about to take over the editorship of the Observer. And above all he had just published Animal Farm, that savage satire on the Soviet Union whose nostalgic descriptions of the English countryside made it a perfect tale in its own right. For once his passions had been kept in check, and his sense of construction had not failed him. Animal Farm had been an instantaneous success, especially in America, where it was the Book of the Month choice. At forty-two, Orwell was for the first time in his life comparatively well off.  

Orwell and his wife being issueless, had adopted a son in 1944 whom they had named Richard Horatio Blair. As he was working as a war correspondent at Cologne, Orwell received a wire from the Observer stating that his wife, Eileen was dead.

Eileen whose health had also been delicate like her husband's had died under anesthetic during an operation. Of course, Orwell rushed back to England. He became more solitary, though famous, and only his adopted son was to be his main love and interest for the rest of his life.

During the last years of his life, Orwell obtained a farm on lease in the island of Jura where he intended to make his new home. He went to Jura and settled there in 1946 with Richard and his housekeeper Susan Watson, though shortly afterwards his sister joined him as the housekeeper and Susan stepped out. He was back in London for the winter. He returned to Jura in 1947 and started staying there. He was a very tired man. His health was decaying. He wrote the first draft of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* while he was suffering from his old disease. He wrote the second draft of this novel in 1948 amid several attacks of T.B. and took to his bed in a state of collapse. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in 1949 and some critics have ascribed the pessimism of the novel to the serious illness of Orwell while he was writing it.

In September 1949 Orwell moved into the University College Hospital in London from a private sanatorium. He married Sonia Brownell who sympathised with his need for
someone to be his companion, to love him and take care of him and his domestic affairs. He died at once and alone on 21 January 1950 of lung-haemorrhage which the doctor had warned could happen at any time.

Orwell suffered the terrible pains and the predicament of his life stoically. His personal life was what Alexander Pope, an invalid for life, called, 'one long disease'. But this did not prevent Orwell from becoming a consistent, avowed and sticky, fighter for 'common decency' and 'justice' in life. Even during his last days, he did not give up hope and, in fact, made plans to go to Switzerland for recovering from his illness and thought of writing better books.

Crick compares the life of Orwell with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and writes that whereas Rousseau lived according to his beliefs in simplicity, spontaneity and natural way of life after he became famous, Orwell lived to his beliefs long before the day of his fame, indeed ever since he returned from Burma; and did so far more naturally and less self-consciously than Rousseau.

The comparison between Orwell and Rousseau appears an apt one although Orwell was a literary artist and less of a
political philosopher like Rousseau. It is apt in one important sense, i.e., the radical individualism as embodied by Orwell and Rousseau in their lives. But once again Orwell, the radical individual, did not develop an elaborate absolutist ideology like Rousseau, because Orwell was more rationalistic and realistic and less romantic in his attitude.

The study of Orwell’s life is important not only from the viewpoint of understanding his works, but also from the viewpoint of understanding the essential worth of man. In this context, Crick observes:

In striving to keep a deliberate balance between public and private values, between creative work and necessary labour, between politics and culture, Orwell’s life and his writings should both guide and cheer us. He hated the power-hungry, exercised intelligence and independence, and taught us again to use our language with beauty and clarity, sought for and practised fraternity and had faith in the decency, tolerance and humanity of the common man. And what is even more heartening, he was all that
and yet as odd in himself and as varied in his friends as man can be.\textsuperscript{31}

Orwell's life was the journey of a radical individual in search of a way of life in which the individual strives to find meaning in life for himself and for other fellow beings in society.

\textsuperscript{31} Crick, p. 581.