

# George Orwell's Social Vision: A Critical Study of the Road to Wigan Pier

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## Abstract

The concept of social vision as it is understood by scholars and philosophers is the visualization of a society. Vivid imagination and personal experiences of Orwell enabled him to find the true picture of life and store them up for the contemporary world as well as posterity. George Orwell's concept of social vision emerges clearly almost in his every work of fiction. The overall image that emerges the society is corrupt. The study exposes the dehumanizing and self debasing lust for power represented by the state where man's dignity and viability are not worthy. The idea of classless society depicted by Orwell is different from Marx and Engles' concept of socialism. Marx and Engles pay attention in changing the modes of production and exchange the psychological forces which determine human behaviour. The Road to Wigon Pier satirizes poverty, unemployment, imperialism, totalitarianism, authoritarianism and dictatorship in a forceful manner. There is also powerful exposition of racial discrimination and colonial hatred. As poverty and unemployment are the major themes in 'The Road to Wigon Pier' the writer stresses the realistic vision that is clamp of totalitarianism, devastation of war, pseudo-socialism and advance of science that rob the common man of his human attributes and basic needs of life.

**Keywords:** Unemployment, totalitarianism, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, imperialism.

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George Orwell a journalist, essayist and novelist whose writing style is clear, clean and somewhat direct had very distinct and clear vision of the society with vivid imagination, profound understanding, realistic deduction and personal experiences those enabled him to find the true picture of society. His highly imaginative anticipation about the shape of society is deeply rooted in his personal experiences and keen observation, through he wanted to struck a

balance between feeling and analysis and finally evolved a system, a virtual line of theory which is a comprehensive way may be traced in the weft of his social vision and can be found to have many aspects and implications. Infact poverty, unemployment, imperialism and totalitarianism are significant aspect of Orwell's social vision as he had seen dirty, named play of poverty where the question of breed, fags and fuel was the aching, pinching reality. The Road to Wigan

Pier is the road book from Mandalay with the full involvement of guilt and remorse and reveals the theme of poverty and unemployment that was based on novelist's personal experiences in London and Paris.

Like Malraux, Sartre and other French writers Orwell feels that the working class symbolizes some deeply meaningful myth of suffering and the general salvation of mankind lies in its liberation. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell did not disguise himself as a working man, as he did as a dishwasher in Paris and as a tramp in London; nor did he attempt to establish any kind of personal relationship with the miners but in fact diluted his intensity for the economically weaker sections of the society as a determined man who is anxious to discover the real world which exists below the illusion-ridden and superficial consciousness of the middle class.

In the very opening chapter of the book, Orwell gives a sharp and piercing essay in description in which Orwell paints a vivid picture of the Brookers' lodging hours in Wigan; the conditions in which these Brookers live give the impression, "they are not real people at all, but a kind of ghost for ever rehearsing the same futile rig moral." <sup>1</sup>

For Orwell, personal suffering and personal identification were only way, the only fuel to feed the fierce of social reform that burned inside his consciousness. His belief in democracy, his vote for reason, his respect for tradition, his faith in ordinary people, his deep commitment to the idea of the potential democracy of intellect constitute the essence of his social vision.

*The Road to Wigan Pier*, offers different aspects, forms and stances of poverty. The social structure was so ludicrous that millions of people in England were unable to get job. The middle class hated the mass of the unemployed men as lazy and idle loafers on the dole. People wanted

to work because work is considered the secret of self-respect and happiness. But there was no work as a result the unemployed people suffered from the problem of frustration and despair and in this way they lost their active participation in everything and varied reaction of different type of characters offers an interesting insight into the psychology of poverty. Orwell writes, "And if you have not got money you are not nice, you are dishonoured, somehow, you've sinned..." <sup>2</sup>

As Roberta Kalechofsky says, the problems touched by Orwell "are an indigenous of the modern industrial urban condition as the burning of heretics was to the religious faith that characterized the middle ages." <sup>3</sup>

In this way, the first half of this work is Orwell's social investigation of Lancashire and Yorkshire. It begins with an evocative description of working life in the coal mines those became victims of the capitalist system throughout the world. He celebrates the dignity of the proletariat by expressing his humanity, "If there is one type of man to whom I feel myself inferior, it is a coal miner." <sup>4</sup>

The second part is an autobiographical study that explains the class feelings and prejudices of a member of 'the upper-middle class' and this part is related to socialism and social class, it is also true that socialism is not an economic creed but a philosophy of life. In fact, the writer is trying to present as clearly and straight forwardly as possible a series of shocking truth that is clear from the foregoing analysis of methods and approaches which Orwell adopted in highlighting the problem of downtrodden. His social criticism can best be understood if we keep in mind the deep sense of guilt that worked in him that he wanted to root out from himself. The job of a police officer in Burma had left him with a 'bad conscience' and he wanted to belong to some other society where

he could feel assured that there was justice and where he could find fulfilment.

Human nature was basically greedy, mean and selfish and the instincts of cruelty and domination were inherent in man. Orwell finds not hope for better working conditions of the poor miners. As an agent of British imperialism Orwell experienced for some year, the tyranny and cruelty of an oppressive system in Burma, the reaction of which is plainly to be seen in the book *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me a bad conscience. Innumerable remembered faces-faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates I had bullied and aged peasants I had snubbed, of servants and coolies I had hit with my first in moments of rage-haunted me intolerably....<sup>5</sup>

There is continuous fighting in 'The Road to Wigan Pier' against oppression, tyranny, injustice and inequality. The indictment of colonial exploitation, human suffering and master-slave relation has been explored fully. This work also evokes a sense of culture shock where the native off springs, the victims of apartheid are unable to get proper place in modern society. Infact, this work is a sort of address to the comfortable people of England for making them aware of the discomforts of others and of the hypocrisy of their own position. Orwell has presented his experience with the zeal of a crusader. His experiences and observations assume moral and spiritual dimensions.

'The Road to Wigan Pier' is a vital and memorable book. It possesses timeless qualities which enable readers of different generations and different cultures to apply its lessons to their own circumstances. Reader feels a sense of participation in it. It is also important to the development of Orwell as a politically conscious

writer and it marks a watershed in Orwell's intellectual economic pilgrimage. Orwell did not merely visit miners homes, he actually lived in them and experiences all the situation of that society. He believed though cynically enough that human nature is basically greedy, selfish and vicious. He finds that 'there is always a new tyrant waiting to take over from the old'. He thinks that either of the two positions are tenable. These are revolutionary and moralistic approaches. The revolutionary supposed that human nature can be improved by changing the existing social system while the moralists believes that the world will change only when men have a change of heart.

George Orwell's major themes have always been 'human dignity and compassion' and that is the reason why his works, particularly. *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Burmese Days*, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* acquire a universal appeal. *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a narrative documentary based on author's personal experiences and presents the process of dehumanization and disintegration of individual personality. George Orwell was a socialist but he was a socialist of a different kind and was completely on the side of oppressed. Johnstone writes, "His hopes for the future lay in the continued integrity of the individual as the fundamental component of any society."<sup>6</sup>

## References

1. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 15.
2. George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936) 635.
3. Roberta Kalechofsky, *George Orwell* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., (1973)67.
4. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 102.
5. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 129-130.
6. Richard Johnstone, *The will to Believe: Novelist of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 119.