Communism – A Search for Utopia or Dystopia: A Study of Arundathi Roy’s *The God of Small Things* & Orwell’s *Animal Farm*

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Communism was created by Marx with an idealistic vision for the future and Marx envisioned the dawning of a new social order based on the equal distribution of wealth. The original concept of Marx is of course, benign and directly aimed at equality for all. But the later communist leaders who pretended to follow communism sought only to feather their own nests. In Russia, though the ideology of Marxism was good willed and was targeted to bring a true liberation for the suffering proletariat, it got twisted and convoluted later by self centered leaders like Lenin and Stalin. Even in the Communist regime, a single man’s domination became inevitable and established laws were broken by any leading or important member of the communist state. George Orwell could detect this exploitation done in the name of communism. In his *Animal Farm* (1945), he allegorizes Soviet totalitarianism and the ideologies of communism – over throwing the bourgeois regime with a revolution. Here animals play the roles of the Bolshevik revolutionaries and overthrow and oust the human owners of the farm, setting it as a community in which all the animals are apparently counted equal. However, class and status disparities soon emerge between the animal species and the system is corrupted by a brutal
tyranny from within. The same dystopian concept of communism is well manifested through an Indian novel too. Arundathi Roy’s *The God of Small Things* satirizes the actual capitalism and the cruelty lurking behind the so called “comradeship” cultivated and administered by Marxism.
Communism is a multifaceted pedagogy focused by recent theorists and social reforms and this paper attempts to analyse the subtleties through a study of Orwell and Arundathi Roy. Communism was created by Marx with an idealistic vision for the future and Marx envisioned the dawning of a new social order based on the equal distribution of wealth and possessions among the people. In 1848, German political philosopher Karl Marx along with Fredrick Engels published an influential pamphlet called the *Communist manifesto*, which trampled on the concept of capitalism with his scathing remarks. As a brilliant economist and social critic, Marx theorized that communism would make tranquil relations prevail between all men and women and all age-old problems of poverty, ignorance and starvation would vanish.

The original concept of Marx is of course, benign and directly aimed at equality for all. But the later communist leaders who pretended to follow communism sought only to feather their own nests. In Russia, though the ideology of Marxism was good willed and was targeted to bring a true liberation for the suffering proletariat, it got twisted and convoluted later by self centered leaders like Lenin and Stalin. Even in the Communist regime, a single man’s domination became inevitable and established laws were broken by any leading or important member of the communist state. In Russia ‘Comrade’ leaders like Trotsky and Stalin vied for power in the name of communism. Hence, writers of that age and arena were able to guess that in the garb of socialism, only individuals became powerful and despotic and the common man’s predicament was always at stake. Whatever is the mode of rule or the concept of the government, the plight of the working class remained the same, with only promises for improvement, and with no true development.

George Orwell could detect this exploitation done in the name of communism and in his essay, “Why I Write”, he points out that “every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism as I understand it”. In his *Animal Farm* (1945), he allegorizes Soviet totalitarianism and the ideologies of communism – over throwing the bourgeois regime with a revolution. Here animals play the roles of the Bolshevik revolutionaries and overthrow and oust the human owners of the
farm, setting it as a community in which all the animals are apparently counted equal. However, class and status disparities soon emerge between the animal species and the system is corrupted by a brutal tyranny from within. The novel demonstrates how a society’s ideologies could be so easily manipulated and twisted by those in positions of social and political power and how a utopian society is made impossible by the corrupting nature of the very power necessary to create it. Orwell proves that theoretically, communism is a Utopian concept. But, in practice, it is a dystopian concept, which is impracticable due to exploitation done by the selfish individuals who ascend to power. Basically, Marx advocated that after the revolution, a country should be governed by the “the dictatorship of the common man”. But ironically one “common man” becomes a dictator and he suppresses the society or the community or even the race that makes him their leader.

The same dystopian concept of communism is well manifested through an Indian novel too. Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things satirizes the actual capitalism and the cruelty lurking behind the so called “comradeship” cultivated and administered by Marxism. Though the nationality of the writers and the time of creation differ, both The God of Small Things and Animal Farm appear to be charming and appealing tales, the former more fascinating as a fable with animal characters and the latter with the fine portrayal of the characters of Estha and Rahel and their idyllic childhood episodes. Roy draws a picture of how communism is a failure in India and how it gets crushed in the hands of casteism. As long as discriminations in the form of religion or caste or creed survive and flourish in India or in any political set up, Marxism cannot succeed. The utopian concept will only continue to be a dystopian apparition of the original.

Both the novels mark numerous parallels with each other, highlighting the fact that communism gets inevitably moulded on the line of tyranny, unless there are no cunning, power-lust leaders, as in the set up devised initially by Marx. Devious conspirators can be noted in both the novels – Napoleon in Animal Farm and KMN Pillai in The God of Small Things. Both Orwell and Arundhati Roy are at their best when they satirize the term ‘comrade’. In Animal Farm, “all animals are comrades” is a ridiculous assertion, and in The God of Small Things the word is often ironically used to signify oppression and marginalization. Pillai often uses the word ‘comrade’
when he calls any man in Paradise Pickles, including Chacko. But the feeling he nurtures towards Chacko is far from being a comrade. He waits for a chance to bring ignominy on him in any form and succeeds in the issue of Ammu and Velutha. Similarly in Animal Farm too, Orwell points out that the Marxian original concept of freedom, that is intended to be achieved through communism, is not what is followed by Stalin. Stalin believes that inequality between nations is the key to success. This finally lands in a terrible injustice equal to capitalism, which the very system of communism aims to combat.

This paper seeks to find out three different varieties of character types, which are witnessed by both the novels taken for the study. The first category is formed by the theorists like Snowball who are the prototypes of the communist leaders like Trotsky of Russia in Animal Farm. The same type of character that can be observed in The God of Small Things is EMS Namboodiripad. These theorists are the initial principled idealists, the fathers for the concept of communism, who always strive at bringing the best of lives and results for the common man. Snowball genuinely works for the good of the farm and devises plans to help them achieve their vision of an egalitarian utopia, but is chased from the farm by Napoleon and his dogs, and rumours are spread on his integrity and dexterity.

In The God of Small Things, the main problem for the failure of the communist movement was that no one truly encouraged the joining of the low castes, the landowners, and the middle class proletariats into one large revolutionary group. No real national spirit existed among them. The main concern of the communist movement was of a socio-economic nature for each individual group of people--not for the good of the working man in general. Many supporters of the movement knew nothing about Marx and Engels; they were simply using the communist movement to show their personal vengeance and economic frustration. This failure to unite and create a new national identity is what led to the failure of the communist movement. Roy, in her novel elaborates on how Comrade E.M.S Namboodiripad evolved his theory of Marxism in Kerala & rose to the position of “the Chief Minister of the first ever democratically elected communist government in the world”[67]. People like Chacko read E.M.S Namboodiripad’s book “The Peaceful Transition to Communication” and were highly inspired to
become active Communists. Though Chacko did not try to be a card holding member similar to Pillai, he wished to practice Communism in his factory.

Though the initial theorists were idealists of egalitarianism with benign visions of true liberation for the working class people, in a communist state, people are misled practically by a group of clever leaders, who take advantage of the credulous people. Stalin is one such leader who became the dictator of Soviet Russia. “Dictators are the same whether they are in power under the mask of communism or fascism” is what is understood by the writers Orwell and Roy. Though they differ in their nationalities, they concur in their discontent with communism and their concern for the underdog and the victimized sector of the society. They affirm that a communist society is built over by a totalitarian society dominated by a tyrant, who manipulates all the resources of the country, and plays on the guilt and fear of ordinary people so as to satisfy his sense of power.

Violence is another factor that attributed to the failure of communism. It is important to analyze the violent struggle of the communist movement from its very beginnings in addition to the caste aspects discussed above which took place during the 1960s. The colonial state was prepared to crush any violent opposition to its power. Most importantly, the perspective of a violent overthrow of colonial rule presupposed a society confronted with undisguised brutality and oppression. Ever since limited constitutionalism was introduced within the colonial framework, social tensions were closely watched and kept under control to some extent--whether by aggravating the opposition by patronizing one section, as was the case concerning Muslim communalists, or by manipulating legislation as in the case of class conflict amongst workers and capitalists, or tenants and landowners (Joshi and Josh, 20).

David Frossard describes in great detail what makes Kerala so amazing from her history, to politics, to societal living. He calls Kerala, a thriving capitalist trade center as well as one of the poorest areas of India, a "bold social experiment" because it is the first ever democratically elected Marxist government. Kerala occupies only 1.2% of India's land area, yet it has 3.4% of India's population. Kerala is one of only a few anti-caste systems in India. Perhaps it is because there is a mixture of the Islamic and Christian religions. Both religions would tempt a lower
caste Hindu to convert in order to avoid the stigma associated with the lower castes. This lack of strict caste structure could also result from the influence of the Communist Party of India which sought to abolish the caste system. Kerala is also the home of the first democratically elected Marxist government modeled on Chinese and Soviet influences rather than the "social justice" ideas of Gandhi. This system is what allows for the comfortable standard of living in Kerala amidst much squalor and turmoil which exists throughout India.

The second type is of ruthless and self-centered opportunists like Napoleon in Animal Farm, who rise to the power of a dictator by overthrowing vulnerable victims like Snowball and Boxer, and oppressing the other animals in the Manor Farm. This symbolizes Stalin who led the people to slavery, in the garb of communism. Napoleon in the novel, receives titles such as Father of all animals, and Terror of Mankind. This is a reference to Stalin’s many grandiloquent titles. Trotsky is represented by Snowball, who is overthrown by Napoleon, as Trotsky was dethroned by Stalin. Boxer stands for the afflicted and the gullible proletariat, whose toil exudes no recognition or gratitude or compassion from the capitalist forces in power. His maxim “I will work harder” and his second maxim “Napoleon is always right” are examples of the sugar-coated propaganda used by Squealer to control the animals. When Boxer is injured and can no longer work as before, Napoleon sends him off to the knackers and deceives the other animals, saying that Boxer died peacefully at the hospital. Napoleon tosses away the animals when they are a threat to his position or when they are of no use to him. This reminds of Velutha in The God of Small Things, who is brutally murdered by the Police, as he is considered to be a threat to Pillai’s position in the Marxist troop.

Squealer in Animal Farm serves as the minister of propaganda for the Napoleon regime. He manipulates language to justify and extol all of Napoleon’s actions. He represents all the propaganda Stalin used to justify his own heinous deeds. Squealer limits debates by complicating it and he confuses and disorients, making claims of the pigs’ superiority. So is Comrade KNM Pillai in The God of Small Things. He aimed at landing in the Legislative assembly and planned to start a new Labour Union in Ayememnon which would be his future constituency. He was a wile conspirer who instigated the factory workers against Chacko and who willfully wiped out
Velutha whom he considered a rival in his journey towards power. It’s he who leads the lives of Estha and Rahel towards tragedy. Roy narrates his dramatic speech to the workers.

“People of the world” he would chirr up, “be courageous, dare to fight, defy difficulties and advance wave upon wave. Then the whole world will belong to the people. Monsters of all kinds shall be destroyed. You must demand what is rightfully yours” (120).

The same communist activist Comrade Pillai tells Chacko to dismiss Velutha from his factory because he was a ‘Paravan’ who threatened to bring him to obscurity. Pillai spells out maliciously:

“But frankly speaking, comrade, Change is one thing, Acceptance is another, you should be cautious. Better for him you send him off” (279).

Pillai's hypocrisy and double standards are also seen when despite his slogans of "caste is class," he deliberately distances himself from Velutha in order to maintain the support of Chacko's other workers who dislike working with a Paravan. Chacko himself appears to be an armchair Communist with no real understanding of the politics that surround him. Roy's representation of the Communist Party has met with much criticism from the Party. The late E.M.S. Namboodiripad criticized The God of Small Things for promoting sexual anarchy and bourgeois values (Deccan Herald 6) while the Marxist Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr.E.K.Nayanar, said that Roy had painted a "factually incorrect" picture of the social conditions in Kerala during the period 1950-70 and of the role played by Communists during that period (Deccan Herald 7).

The third type of characters found in both the novels taken for study is the class of victims. Through this group of characters the authors bring to light the tensions between the higher class and the working class, both of which are found prevalent in the societies of both the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. Velutha in The God of Small Things is "highly intelligent," an excellent carpenter with an engineer's mind, but he is also "The God of loss", "The God of Small Things". “He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no images in
mirrors" (265). The society presented in the novel is patriarchal. On the one hand we have a group of characters, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Kochu Maria the cook, who perpetuate the division of caste, race, and gender. On the other hand, Ammu and the twins, Rahel and Estha, consciously and unconsciously resist these hierarchies, and become victimized at the hands of the so called leaders of the place, who consider themselves all powerful.

Ammu, the biggest victim of the system, is an archetypal image of a daughter marginalized in a patriarchal society. As Roy records,

Perhaps Ammu, Estha and Rahel were the worst transgressors. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much". (31)

One interpretation of Roy’s theme of forbidden love or forbidden caste relationship is that love is such a powerful and uncontrollable force that it cannot be contained by any conventional social code. Another is that conventional society seeks to destroy real love or instinctual love, which is why love in the novel is consistently connected to loss, death, and sadness. Also, because all love relationships in the novel relate closely to politics and history, Roy stresses the interconnectedness of personal desire to larger themes of history and social circumstances. Love would therefore be an emotion that can be explained only in terms of two peoples’ cultural backgrounds and political identities.

Orwell through his *Animal Farm* reveals that communism looks good only on paper. As a small elite group wrests all the power of governing a large group and controls every facet of life, it becomes natural that the small ruling elite group will abuse the power they have and the society, as a whole will be subjected to corruption. In essence, communism is targeted to eliminate inequality and give all economic activity and control to the government. But this is driven out in practice, just as the proclamation of the pigs is revised to “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” The hypocrisy of the animals, who proclaim absolute equality for all their citizens, but give power and privileges only to a small elite group, is what is highlighted and condemned.
Works Cited


