

CHAPTER VI

'HOMAGE TO CATALONIA'

Individual is not a means to further the motives of others..

anonymous.

Of the three voyages of spiritual self discovery, Orwell's journey to Spain, during the Spanish War of Independence, was the most consummate. His meeting of the Italian militia man was the actualisation of a desire expressed at the end of 'Down and Out' - a wish to know people more intimately and not from casual encounters. The ideal community conceptualised by Orwell after his intimate association amongst the unemployed of Wigan, with the destitute and the exploited of London and Paris and with the revolutionary militia men was found in the Catalonian community at war. Orwell discovered communion and the immortality of communion in love for one's fellows and in self-sacrifice. Orwell had always held the view that man would find true happiness in a society governed by love and curiosity - a combination of heart and head. The deadliest of Seven Sins, greed and fear, which enervate intellectual muscles, do not scourge the Catalan society. The hierarchy-less non-Weberian Spanish militia, where an order was given not to test blind obedience, but the same had become the verbal form of a mutually beneficial arrangement to keep each other's skin intact, orally communicated from one comrade to another for clear and obvious reasons, taught Orwell many things he could not have learnt in any other way.

In the sociological writings of the Thirties Orwell 'conscientised' his readers to the menace of unemployment which sapped the spiritual worth, mental fibre and the

physical vitality of individuals. Poverty which made people feel as if they had been struck by influenza, and class-consciousness which drew barbed wire in human relationship and the money-code aligned to respectability were the individual 'silhouette' of his three writings preceding "Homage to Catalonia". "The Homage", which crystallises Orwell's experiences at the front of Spanish Republican fight against Fascists, is a political novel in its literary trappings if the decadal counting of heads, Census, is political. The novel outweighs the polemical contents of the political and historical events of 1936 because of its intrinsic literary merit, thereby, adding one more dimension to Orwell's philosophy of 'democratic Socialism'. Egalitarian inter-personal relationship is the feature, Orwell had built into his political idea after its trial tests in the Catalonian war camps. The emergence of present day Spain with titular monarchy, which abdicated itself in the post-Franco era, General Franco himself steering the present day Spain with a commendable Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a life style of the people which commands unqualified respect from other members of the European Community, illustrates misconceived perceptions of Orwell about the Spain of 30's. If Communism had won in 1936, both Mussolini and Hitler would have created another World War front in Spain. Historically and politically the Republican values have been paled into oblivion: yet the cause of the fight, the literary merits

of the travelogue and the crystal-spirited militia man surge above the roll of time.

Orwell pawned his share of the Blair family silver to equip himself financially for the journey, as mentioned by Bernard Crick, and on getting blessed with a corduroy jacket from Henry Miller, ^{he} left for Spain. The motivational impulses of the Parisian wanderings and his life with the miners had both an empirical purpose and a spiritual objective. The spiritual compulsion of atoning for the Burmese complicity in class oppression was not the drive of the political journey to Spain. In his journey to Spain the secondary motive of writing a book was established; but the republican motive of fighting Fascism certified the purity of his mission. Orwell told John McNair (1987-1968) another devoted socialist that: "I have come to Spain to join the militia to fight against fascism" (quoted by Bernard Crick).

Barcelona, 1992 olympiad, was a working class town then. Everyone addressed each other as comrade * The use of the second person familiar "thou" in place of the distancing and generic you was very much after Orwell's heart. In the POUM militia, as Orwell relates,

"There was no military rank in the ordinary sense; no titles, no badges, no heel - clicking and no saluting; everyone drew the same pay, had the same

food, wore the same uniform and lived in the same quarters. The essential point of the system was social equality between officers and men. Everyone ... mingled on terms of complete equality ... of course there was no perfect equality, but there was a nearer approach to it than I had ever seen or than I would have thought conceivable in time of war". (Homage to Catalonia': P: 26-27 and 69-70).

In a letter to his life-long friend Cyril Connolly, Orwell says:

"I have seen wonderful things and at last really believe in socialism, which I never did before".
(quoted in 'A Life' - Crick: Penguin P:323).

As Bernard Crick qualifies, "the socialism in which Orwell believed prior to his journey to Spain was an intellectual matter and a moral compassion for people's suffering".
Orwell's political beliefs had always been undoctinaire. His concept of a just society was moral rather than economic. In Catalonia he experienced it for himself. The warm and human relationship he got while shaking hands with unknown Italian militia man inspite of the barrier of language had been immortalised in the portrait of "crystal-spirited" soldier.

Spain gave Orwell the first inkling into the manipulative tactics of Stalin. Orwell was not a 'main-stream

left' at the time of Spanish Civil War. The Moscow trials were known to well-meaning 'New Lefts' like W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and the Trotskyist Orwell. The Russian Terror was initially dismissed as an occasional aberration. The betrayal of the revolution, to become the theme of "Animal Farm", was personally experienced in Spain. The Stalinist approach of keeping the hype of a perpetual war in order to prevaricate the revolution with Hamletian procrastination was the tactic, adopted by Russia in Spain. Stalin's historic compulsion was to checkmate German and Italian intervention in Spain without antagonising the British and the French - a policy he followed subsequently with consummate skill first in the Russo-German secret pact on August 23, 1939, and later by annulling the same by Anglo-Russian pact. The pigs and the humans changing sides, the permanent war among Oceania, Eurasia and East Asia only with partners swapped, modelled on the political slogan, "there is no permanent enemy but only permanent interest", - an early 20th century strategy of Britain - were actual personages and events of Spanish Civil war. The Anarchists, the Trotskyites and the representative militias with initium like POUM, ILP, CNT and UGT had been disarmed by the Spanish Communist party. The Communist approach of building up the tempo and hype

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till the revolution had been impregnated by dialectical forces was experimented in Spain, though the fallacy of such an approach was established earlier in the days of the Great Revolution. What immediately struck him in Barcelona was, in his own words, "above all ... a belief in the Revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine."

(Homage to Catalonia' P:35). As David Kubal comments , "Orwell caught a glimpse of a society without tyranny and subterfuge. The idea of socialism, consequently lost the characteristic of a vague dream had become an actuality". (Outside the Whale' P: 118). This short-lived Golden Country of the revolution was smashed like the paperweight of "Nineteen Eighty-Four", when the revolution was betrayed. This setback did not enervate Orwell the revolutionary; he was embittered but unbegrudging: the uncorrupted icon of the militia man remained with him throughout.

The Spanish militias of 1936 foreshadowed Iranian Mujahaddin of the Eighties - 'the people's army, rather the army of liberation.' The Mujahaddin movement managed to survive the most ferocious repression from

the Iranian Clerics as its Spanish forerunner did in 1936. Orwell, the Spanish militia and the Mujaheddin were Marxist in their social thought. The Spanish militias degenerated into politico - military sects during the latter part of the Civil War under pressure from the Communist, even though they had been ideologically trained otherwise, like Orwell.

The Spanish Civil War was the theatre of operation between the socialist and anti-socialist forces represented by the Republicans and Nationalists, respectively. The socialist and anti-Clerical tendencies of the Republican Government was the bait to Franco, the General, in organizing the army revolt.

The apparent dividing line of Socialism and Fascism of the Civil War was the attraction to Orwell to get into the bandwagon. Orwell did not join the International Brigade because he wanted to participate in the Spanish struggle against fascism in order to form his own judgement. The Independent Labour Party, whose membership, he took subsequently, helped him with the required accreditations for the Spanish journey. As the correspondent of the journal of Independent Labour Party, Orwell entered Spain. The hypothetically assumed benefits of Orwell's joining the POUM, as J.R. Hammond analyses, in "A George Orwell Companion", are worth examining:

"Had he joined the International Brigade instead of the POUM militia ... his experience of the war

would have been entirely different. As it was, his involvement with the POUM and his witnessing of their subsequent persecution was to be one of the decisive experiences of his life, affecting his fundamental political attitudes and generating the apocalyptic vision which led in time to 'Animal Farm' and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' (P 131-132 - Macmillan).

Orwell found the Catalonians innately decent. The connotation of 'decency' in Orwell, relates simple, direct and honest responses in inter-personal relationship and the 'peace that passeth understanding' in man's stimuli to society and God. The unenforced communality of the revolutionary Catalonia coupled with the controlled 'possessiveness' of people and sharing of "common property resources" without being driven by the values of capitalist "entitlements", beep the "message of arrival" to Orwell in his search for an ideal society. Nagged by the harrowing experiences of his own native class-polluted society, doubly pricked by his physical involvement in the perpetuation of the values of that society in far off clime., even after performing the act of exorcism both in Paris and Wigan, the yearning for the Society of his dream had been daemonically driving Orwell, hither and thither. On the eve of the revolution, the peasants and workers of Spain ushered in the popular Democracy of Rousseau; then Governments were established

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in/ form of popular committees expressive of popular sovereignty.

The personal and political layers which establish the nexus between the artistic and the propagandistic elements of the work of art are consistently structured into the later writings of Orwell. At a personal level 'Homage' is reciprocation of the noble sentiments to the Spanish people, who were at their best in Catalonian province and 'Homage' is also to the experiment of socialism, the value he was fighting for. The reverberation of personal warmth in the title of the book, **'The Homage to Catalonia'** is evocative. Keith Aldritt writes:-

"Orwell celebrates a moment of vivid personal feeling and this is the force of the word 'Homage' in the title of the book". ('The Making of George Orwell' P-92).

The three-dimensional orientation of the work is also commented upon by him:-

"In 'Homage to Catalonia', Orwell has three main purposes: to write a polemic, to report the Spanish Civil War as he saw it and to write, ... the account of the succession of personal friendships and the state of emotional exhilaration which he enjoyed in Spain and which marked a turning point in his life. All three intentions dovetail into one another and the third subsumes and directs others". (Ibid P: 85).

Orwell's nostalgia for Barcelona (The book was written at Wallington, north of London, after a distancing period of ten months), in the Depression-ridden-Decadance (during the British Decadance the rich became richer), becomes all the more dear to satisfy personal urges and to validate his political convictions. He says, the ^{Socialistic} aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. To quote Orwell, "it was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle ... I recognized it immediately as a state of affair worth fighting for". To Orwell, after the Central European journey, the buzz concept of a 'classless society' travelled from the ethereal stage to something capable of realisation. He witnessed such a community in being. He was catapulted into the classless militia society in which political consciousness and dis-belief in capitalism had been the distinguishing marks. According to J.R. Hammond, such a stage is the blue print of a social revolution in action.

The Wilfred Owen War poetry sentiments of 'Homage to Catalonia' coupled with the romanticised idea of Spain and the camaraderie of the trenches together contribute to the ~~novels~~ ^{novels} outliving of the topicality of the subject. The fascist uprising was taken as an affront to human decency. The political events of the latter part of 1937, when his militia was outlawed and its members hounded out and the let-out of vile practices against the

Anarchist and the Socialist by the local Communist Party made him terribly upset. Like the insect, Cecidomyian gall midger that develops within the mother's body and eventually devours her, the former revolutionaries had betrayed their one-time associates, swallowed them, scapegoats were located: this evoked feelings of pain and disgust to Orwell. Critics relate the war machination of "Nineteen Eighty-Four" as well as the replication of the war scenes of 'Homage' to Orwell's primary contact with the Aragon front. Boxer-Clover-Benjamin triumvirate in 'Animal Farm', to their chagrin and shock, understood belatedly and when beyond the reparation stage that the ideals and vision they had stood for, when the Old Major stirred them had been betrayed: another **thematic thread** from Spanish Civil War.

The courage of Orwell, bordering foolhardiness in his attitude to George Kopps, the 'non-person' Commander of the out-lawed POUM and Orwell's visit to the Police headquarters and the easy calm he had shown in his inter-trench movements during the war command unqualified respect from his friends and foes alike. Orwell, 'the valiant', did not die many a time during the war. The significance of 'Homage to Catalonia' in representing Orwell's concern for historical truth in the context of totalitarian attempt to pervert the same is commented upon by J.R. Hammond:-

"... it marks a crucial stage in Orwell's political development: first, because it marks the beginning of his concern for objective historical truth - a concern - which came increasingly to dominate his life; and second, it records the transformation of his socialism from a theoretical belief to a positive faith". (Orwell Companion" P: 142).

Hammond continues at another place:-

"Until he arrived in Spain, his advocacy of socialism was entirely theoretical, based upon a passionate concern for social justice" (Ibid - P: 45)

The concept of objective truth was kept at bay by the followers of totalitarian ideology. Orwell saw the operation of the strategy, when truth was distorted in the descriptions of 'battles that-be'. In censored newspaper articles, lies and vilifications had distorted the narration of events and even the resemblance to reality was given a pass. Heroes becoming spies overnight and persons becoming, 'persona-non-grata' and then non-person, of course, reminding one, of the exalted position of Trotsky in Russian pantheon and finally getting murdered in Morocco, was an historical reality of Spanish Civil War. The treatment of Snowball in 'Animal Farm' was to become a mature allegorical caricature taking the cue from Spanish experience. The institution of 'Double-think' and the organization of Ministry of Love also might

have taken root in the war theatre of Spain. Goldstein and his testament in 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' are traced by Bernard Crick to Andrés Nin, the socialist leader of I.L.P.

In Catalonia, Orwell had the first direct and intimate experience of egalitarian society. As David Kubal argues, 'the masquerade of the accent-conscious ex-Etonian had been with Orwell till his emotional pilgrimage to Spain'. The shroud of class and the mantle of privileges fell off, like the mantle of Biblical Elijha on the eve of revolution. A fleeting glimpse of this Garden of Eden innocence is replicated in 'Animal Farm', in the uncorrupted pastoral locales immediately after the dawn of revolution and just before the outreach of the tentacles of pigs to the vacuum ^{at} left by Jones. The Catalan community, the microcosm of a classless society, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of socialism might be like, brings out the Biblical Apostolic communities in which, love, fear of a personal God and communality prevailed: 'possessiveness' and 'entitlements' were kept out of reach. In the militia, everything was common Property only privately possessed for public good. The Spanish manner of sparing the person of a lady and the bed in which she lied, inspite of her husband's association with an outlawed militia was another notable and attractive aspect - the state respecting the individuality of its citizens. Catalonia provided him with a practical experience of Socialism in action.

Orwell's unequivocal approach to Fascism, whether of capitalist stream or of communist off-shoot, and Britain's role in providing fertile conditions for its outgrowth is given a thick canvas in 'Homage' juxtaposing the doddering posture of Great Britain in the pre-second world war days. Orwell argues that, "So you will have Fascism with Communists participating in it. This is what has happened in Spain ... Fascism after all, is only a development of capitalism, and the mildest democracy, so called, is liable to turn into Fascism when the pinch comes. We like to think of England as a democratic country, but our rule in India, for instance, is just as bad as German Fascism ... (The English Socialism, CEJL. Vol: 3 P:125). Orwell's nonsense approach to contemporary political issues, stormtrooping foes and friends alike on the way, though made him equally unwelcome in either camps, enlivened his political ideas. Britain's ambivalence in the Spanish Civil War, like the repetition of the same in the early phase of the World War, was to the chagrin of Orwell. On the lines of his grandmother's social exclusiveness in Burma, his own class-consciousness and his country's dilly-dallying with Fascism are analysed with consummate critical acumen in the essay, entitled, 'The Lion and the Unicorn'.

Orwell's Anarchist sympathies, prior to the crystallisation and sedimentation of 'democratic Socialism'

into a viable political programme, traceable to his Spanish association. The grim realities of the Spanish War theatre, like the Left Wing slogan of "First win the war, then the revolution", the dissonance among the different contingents of the Leftist militias, the intimidatory tactics at home turf (in Britain) against the Republicans drove him to the Anarchist camp. In 'Homage to Catalonia', he says, 'he would have liked to join the Anarchist'. The ferment of revolutionary ideas sweeping across the continent through the writings of Borkenau, Ignatio Silone and Arthur Koestler put him also in the political cauldron. In her comparative analysis of Orwell and Koestler in the critical book, 'Chronicles of Conscience', Jenni Calder says that, the intensity and depth that had got stamped on the writings of Silone and (Borkoneu) because of the particular experience of European politics had been lacking in Orwell. To Orwell, the Spanish Anarchists were "the main revolutionary force". The British Anarchist libertarians like Herbert Read and Vernon Richards got associated with him during this period.

David Kubal analyses Orwell's value-added experience and "calm of mind and all passions spent" stage after the turbulent Phase Of Spanish Civil War. According to him:-

"At last, he believed neither in utopia, nor in the ultimate annihilation of man. If anything, he

learned in Spain that it is not the question of either/or. He acquired what Philip Rieff calls the 'post liberal imagination' which rejects naive optimism for the new temper of acceptance ... Orwell accepted neither perfectability nor absolute corruption but believed that, despite the disintegration of civilisation, there remained a vital morality in the common man; further he felt that this energy might be marshalled into a political force which could defy totalitarianism and effect an extension of freedom and happiness" ("Outside the Whale" PP: 24-25).

Orwell's placement of the militia members as the bulwark against Franco's machinations was a natural corollary to the prime-mover position he accorded to the miners. Orwell goes to the offensive by stating, "this is not to idealize the working class; yet the truth remains as in the long run ... the working class remains the most reliable enemy of Fascism, simply because the working class stands to gain most by a decent reconstruction of society. Unlike other classes or categories, it cannot be permanently bribed. ("Looking Back on Spanish Civil War" CELJ Vol. 2, P-298). The working-class-converted Proles of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' holds the beacon light.

The literary success of 'Homage to Catalonia' is in its aesthetic distance between the subject and the

first person narrator. As a contrast, Shavian "ventriloquism" was the dominant style of the other two books of Orwell's Francis of Assisi pilgrimage; 'Down and Out' and 'Wigan Pier'. Like the role of 'chorus' in Greek tragedies, Orwell, the dramatic personae, orchestrated the disillusionment and the spite of all contending parties in pulling the war into different directions thereby stalling the revolution. The directness and simplicity of the style of the travelogue, which was also a memoir were to become the trade-marks of Orwell's future style. In the essay 'The Prevention of Literature', Orwell says: "to write in plain, and vigorous language, one has to think fearlessly and if one thinks fearlessly one can not be politically orthodox". The political issues of the Civil War and the inner Party feuds, though touched upon, had been kept at bay. Orwell's fearless thinking brought out the man and the style alike.

The "naive idealism" of the Spanish Civil War was the focus in Orwell's writing. Orwell believed that, socialism would be realizable in the near future, taking the cue from the equality of the militias. The regimentation of the native English society and hierarchical structuring of a regular army - the bane of human relationship - were conspicuously absent in Spain. Material discomforts and shortages did not drive people to boot-licking and backbiting. The peculiar feeling of evil of human origin was not there. David Kubal untrammels the

political, apolitical and non-political tit-bits in Orwell's ideological baggage. According to him:-

"He (Orwell) was not, finally, defending an ideology but rather an emotion or experience which he had had with the militia ... he was not wrong about the reality of his experience. His disillusionment was in the realisation that his concept of socialism was not compatible with the European political situation. Spiritually satisfying as it might be, a creed based on such fundamental human values as justice, decency and camaraderie was not sufficient to direct a political movement or combat the realpolitik of Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, who were only interested in solidifying their positions of power; individual freedom, therefore, had to be dispensed with. Orwell's socialism could not survive in this situation because it was not political enough". ('Outside the Whale' PP 111-12).

The revelation Orwell had in Burma and the experiences he gained on the way from Paris to Wigan got culminated in the spiritual vision he had acquired in Spain. Orwell's writings and life resemble a one-man-army steam-rolling in the propagation and institutionalisation of 'democratic Socialism' codified from the previous, including the final, formative influences of his life. Orwell had no powerful

passions to get indelible impressions marked upon him since then. Orwell's romantic faith in the ordinary man, though divorced from the political realism of the age and not sharpened according to the vision and the tactics of practical politician, yet rooted in the irrevocable past of Edwardian England is one of the pillars of 'democratic Socialism.' Orwell's search for a 'voice' and suitable 'genre' of literary expression, as Lynette Hunter explains in "In Search of a Voice", and the attempt to get into a literary provenance, as Alan Sandison explains, takes the turn to a different 'genre' in the days ahead. According to Keith Alldritt:-

"There is a symmetry in Orwell's career. In the Thirties, through a determined involvement in experience he came to achieve an essentially democratic view of human and social relationships, of communication and of letters". The great culmination of this effort is to be found in 'Homage to Catalonia'! (The Making of George Orwell P: 145).

At the end of the Thirties, Orwell came to pay his homage to Catalonia and the crystal - spirited man: at the end of Forties, to the defeated Winston, who like the image-encased paper weight got burst before the Thought Police.

In 'Homage to Catalonia', Orwell was after the truth of the matter - to fulfil ^{the} historical mission of discrediting

the counterfeited coins concerning the Spanish Civil War then under circulation. The unverbaised personal purpose of the book was to vindicate the reputation of friends and acquaintances like George Kapps, Andrés Nin and fellow Anarchists. The polemical purpose, as Keith Aldritt identifies, is "to defend people who represent courage, humanness and decency against those who would slander and misrepresent them for political or personal advantage." The three spiritual autobiographies written in the form of travelogues do not sound like 'scratchy echos from the distant past' because of the sincerity of Orwell's emotional identification with the victims, who were on the 'other side' of the fence. (In his essay 'A Hanging', Orwell says he could not enter into a jail without the feeling ~~that~~ this role was on the other side of the fence i.e. with the criminals). Orwell, would have given due appreciation to Peter Drucker who infuriates both Right and Left when he says, a welfare system creates more poverty than it alleviates just like a jail creates more criminals. A prison's capacity to generate hard core criminals has been the concern of all social reformers since the days of Wilberforce. Without being a social reformer Orwell contributes to jail reforms including the contentions issue of guilting of convict's life when it is in full tide.

The historical authenticity of 'Homage to Catalonia' is discounted when historical events like the plight of the 'curios-de-arte', as brought out in a recent number of 'the

Economist' is juxtaposed with the major events touched upon in 'Homage'. This lapse vouchsafes the critical opinion about Orwell's non-concern for the 'objects-de-arte', a behavioural miscarriage of his fellow countrymen, as he says, in 'The English Socialism'. From the beginning of the war in 1936, Spain's artistic treasures fell victim to random violence. Chapels and Convents were favourite targets for arson by Republicans. The Republican Government set up Committees for the safeguard of works of art and historical monuments. At Pardo, the works of Harpen (painting) were kept in crates. The treasures identified at 1868 moved with the Republican government when it retreated from Madrid to Valencia then to Barcelona and finally to Figueras. Jose Maria Serb, a Catalan painter who had managed not to taking sides, was instrumental for the evacuation of the historical monuments to France. The Figueras Agreement evacuated the treasures to France as common property of Spanish nation. Had Spain remained republican, who knows, how the story might have ended?

Relationship in the Spanish militia was not motivated by self interest. One individual was not a means for furtherence of the desires of another. Human relationship bloomed when self interest had been relegated to the background. Driven by a common cause the militia men sacrificed the ephemeral for durable and their todays for democracy's tomorrows. Orwell adopted the sense of sacrifice of the militia men, which did not result in personal suffering, as one of the ethical strands of 'democratic Socialism.'