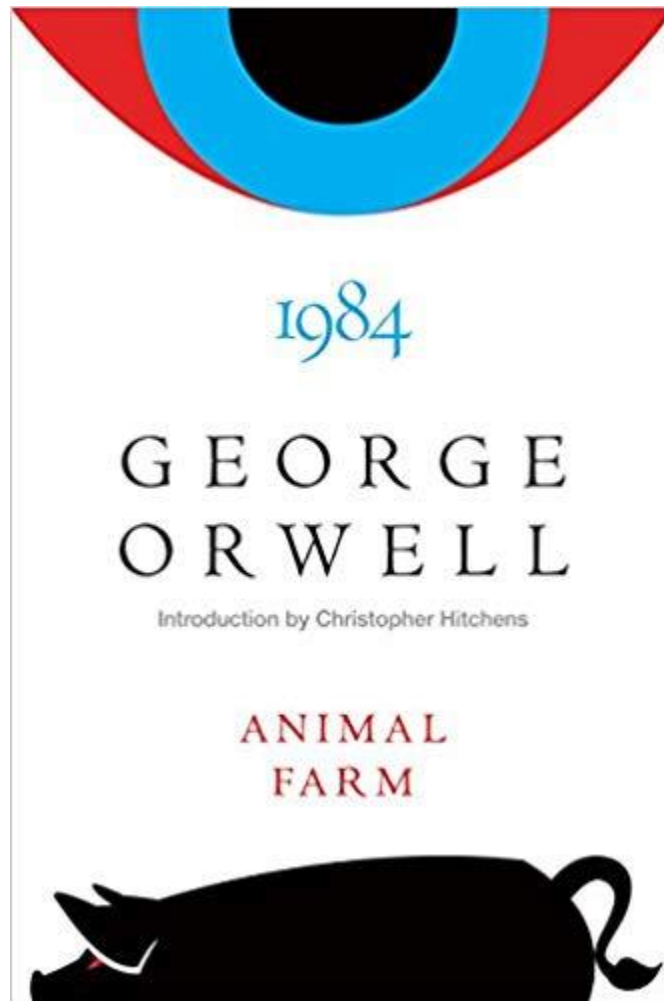


Understanding the Fundamental Nature of Power through Myths
in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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Abstract

This paper aims at examining myths to understand the fundamental nature of power; destructive, authoritative, coercive, omnipresent, and hierarchical. Grounding on the multiple dimensions of myth, predominantly expounded by Devdutt Pattanaik, an Indian mythologist, the study scrupulously engages with divergent connotations of myth while dealing with

power. George Orwell's landmark novella, *Animal Farm* (1945), while politically satirizing totalitarianism surrounding the Russian Revolution, also sagaciously represents the fundamental structure of power amidst the changing dynamics of relationships. Palpably, the paper cogently lends a fresh angle of analysing power, by meticulously assorting myth and power.

Keywords: *Animal Farm*, George Orwell, Myth, mythology, mythos, logos, Manor Farm, power, totalitarianism, real, unreal.

Introduction to the Topic

The aetiological understanding of the term 'myth' features its colonial meaning referring to the sense allocated by colonizers to the colonized in the nineteenth century. While referring to themselves as real, colonizers described the colonized as unreal/fake, thereby pejoratively introducing them as mythical/unreal. The term myth thus, earned its tenor through its binary association against 'real', conclusively amounting to its contemporary meaning; unreal. Progressively, the inbuilt association of 'myth' with falsehood/fiction/unreality augmented in so far contributing to its present definition as listed by *The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, "something that many people believe but that does not exist or is false" (n.pag.). Furthermore, the study of 'myth' referred to as mythology has presently forayed into the religious gamut, as is defined by Wikipedia, " 'myth is a folklore genre consisting of narratives or stories that play a fundamental role in a society, such as foundational tales or origin myths. The main characters in myths are usually gods, demigods or supernatural humans" (n.pag.). On analysing myth divergently, one learns that it is rather a value attributed to life in the form of stories, rituals, and symbols.

Devdutt Pattanaik (b. 1970), in his article in *The Hindu* eloquently states "mythology is a map of the human mind. It helps you understand the world, life and culture. It is a subjective truth based on memory". While bifurcating the universe into real and unreal contributing to fact and fiction respectively, Pattanaik introduces the in-between existence of something called myth, which is neither real nor unreal. Fact refers to the universal reality: hunger, starvation, cold, happiness, thirst etc., the existent abstract feelings, whereas, fiction refers to the universal unreality: Harry Potter, unicorn, mermaid, werewolf, Sphinx etc., the imaginatively non-existent concrete beings. Myth lying in between the two antipodal subjects, fact and fiction, is therefore, a "truth which is subjective, intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith".

Pattanaik in *Myth= Mithya*, subsequently redefines myth by studying its root word mythos, in connection with logos; reasonable deliberations, such that logos cater to questions: "how the sun rises and how babies are born", while myth caters to questions: "Why does the sun rise? Why is a baby born? Why does man exist on earth? For answers one had to turn to mythos. Mythos gave purpose, meaning and validation to existence" (Pattanaik xv).

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Max Weber (1864-1920) defines power as “the ability of people or groups to achieve their goals despite opposition from others” (n.pag.), thereby justifying power as a multifaceted structure. Thus, an attempt has been made to study the fundamentals of power; an authoritatively and structurally legitimized force exercised by the central authority over the marginalized to percolate its supposedly prerogative ideology. Conclusively, this paper while ardently asserting that everybody lives in myth; multitude subjective truths that render meaning to one’s existence, it delves deep into exploring the concealed dimensions of ‘power’.

Pattanaik in an article named, “The Power of Myths Explained,” cogently states “the power of myth is that it is a game changer. It allows you to enjoy your truth and other people’s truth and move towards greater truth. A world of plural truths which are constantly shifting and expanding”. The prevalent impactful narratives that emerge out of places, characters, symbols, oratories (songs, speech), ideas, effigies, figures, fables, tales etc., representing a particular way of life, plainly amounts to myth. Hence, this paper endeavours to study the despotic nature of power by using the prevalent powerful narratives/myths that emerge out of places: tarred wall, Manor Farm, Animal Farm; characters: Napoleon, Snowball, Mr. Jones; symbols: bed, whisky, cigarette, windmill, pigs, hens, horses; titles: comrades, Animal Hero, First Class, Animal Hero, Second Class, Comrade Napoleon; idea: animalism, and oratories: Monday morning speech, the Seven Commandments, *Beasts of England* song.

Thematic Analysis of Power through Myth

George Orwell (1903-1950), born as Eric Arthur Blair earned accolades as he sets a milestone by writing a political allegory named *Animal Farm*, based on Russian Revolution (8 March 1917- 7 November 1917); a period of political and social revolution across the territory of the Russian Empire, led by Vladimir Lenin and a group of revolutionaries called the Bolsheviks fighting for the abolition of the monarchy. Robustly wanting to bust the Soviet myth of equality and freedom, Orwell in his “*Preface to Ukrainian translation of ‘Animal Farm’*” states:

I understood, more clearly than ever, the negative influence of the Soviet myth upon the western Socialist movement. I would not condemn Stalin and his associates merely for their barbaric and undemocratic methods. It is quite possible that, even with the best intentions, they could not have acted otherwise under the conditions prevailing there. Since 1930 I had seen little evidence that the USSR was progressing towards anything that one could truly call Socialism. On the contrary, I was struck by clear signs of its transformation into a hierarchical society, in which the rulers have no more reason to give up their power than any other ruling class. (n.pag.)

Building on “from myth come beliefs, from mythology customs. Myth conditions thoughts and feelings. Mythology influences behaviours and communications” (Pattanaik xvii), clearly, Orwell acrobatically attempts to debunk the Soviet myth of prosperity that

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grounds on ‘power’. Old Major, a prize-winning boar, fomenting all the other animals of the Manor Farm to fight collectively against the human tyranny, lays the foundation of Seven Commandments: Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. No animal shall wear clothes. No animal shall sleep in a bed. No animal shall drink alcohol. No animal shall kill any other animal” (28). The Seven Commandments written on the tarred wall in great white letters refers to a myth; a narrative rendering value to the subordinating lifestyle of animals in the farms preparing them to combat the tyrannical power oppressing and controlling them in the farm. Karl Marx (1818-1883) in *The Communist Manifesto* (1850) exposes the deleterious nature of power well grounded in false consciousness, aiming to dictate power over the powerless by an instrument that makes them accept their powerlessness naturally. Apparently, Major through his speech kindles its congregation to rebel against the deleteriousness of power:

Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it, our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty. No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of animal is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth. (11)

Post Major’s death, his vision is aptly formalised and nimbly refined by three younger pigs, namely, Napoleon, Snowball and Squealer who prepare counter myths representing a rebellion song; *Beasts of England* and a communist philosophy; Animalism to describe the story of their coalescent struggle against human power and their corresponding acceptance of equality of all respectively. Comprehensively, a topoi of Major’s speech, rebellion song, communist philosophy, Seven Commandments abound in creating a power through counter myth; a narrative that “is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together” (Pattanaik xvi).

Pattanaik further elucidates in one of his articles named, “The Power of Myth Explained,” “Myth is subjective truth: your truth and my truth, not the truth. We communicate our truth through stories, symbols and rituals. We inherit them from our ancestors and pass them on to our children. Mythology is the study of these stories, symbols and rituals and the subjective truth they reveal” (n.pag.).

Late one night, the animals manage to defeat the farmer Mr. Jones in a battle, running him off the land and consequently renaming the property as an Animal Farm and dedicating themselves to achieving Major’s dream. Initially the Animal Farm prospers. Snowball works at teaching the animals to read, and Napoleon takes a group of young puppies to educate them in the principles of Animalism. When Mr. Jones reappears to take back his farm, the animals defeat him again, in what comes to be known as the Battle of the Cowshed and take

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the farmer's abandoned gun as a token of their victory. Adhering to the fundamentals of power, as discussed by Gary Gutting, "at the core of Foucault's picture of modern disciplinary society are three primary techniques of control: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. To a great extent, control over people (power) can be achieved merely by observing them" (n.pag.) Subsequently, resorting to graphical pattern of power, from the hierarchical observation in the Manor Farm marked with Mr. Jones at the centre and animals at the margins, to the normalized judgment marked with agile rebellion resulting in Animalism to the examination marked the internal quibbling in the Animal Farm. Observation being the key tool to subvert the structure of power, and then complicit with its scandalizing nature, Napoleon and Snowball observant of the changing dynamics of power from Manor Farm to Animal Farm, increasingly bicker over the future of the farm, each wanting to be more powerful, having authoritarian control over the other animals. Napoleon votes out Snowball by giving a brief passionate speech, derivatively declared as "our Leader, Comrade Napoleon . . . Father of All Animals, Terror of Mankind, Protector of the Sheep-fold, Ducklings' Friend" (95). Hooking on to Nawal El Saadawi's interview with the *Nation*, on combating powerful oppressive forces, she answers:

Well, it's very difficult. This is everyone's struggle—whether against men in the family, or against capitalism. It's power. I don't think that people in power can be convinced by words or articles. They will never give it up by choice. Even a husband in the house, no—power has to be taken with power. Mubarak resigned because the people showed their power. If it had been only a few hundred protesters, he would never go, but because it was 20 million, the whole country, he had no choice. You can't eradicate power with weakness. Knowledge and unity—these were power in the hands of the people. (n.pag.)

Furthermore, the ultimate conversion of the windmill to its commercial use is referential of betrayal, as it dabbles in human discourses of urbanization and modernization by fleecing its fellow mates for its own gain. Napoleon perpetuates to dictate its power by incorporating the initially abandoned schemes/forbidden agendas. Observant of the techniques embraced by Mr. Jones in Manor Farm, Napoleon now begins instructing his fellow animals as low, calling off the future meetings, wearing clothes, puffing cigarette, drinking whiskey, sleeping on bed, asserting his orders to trade with human beings, such that any dissent is treated with blood. Despite the need for food and warmth, Napoleon along with its community of pigs exploit Boxer and the other common animals by making them agree on the prevalent myth; 'No animal shall kill any other animal *without cause*' (93), "No animal shall sleep in a bed *with bedsheets*, No animal shall drink alcohol *in excess*, Four legs good, two legs *better*"(135). Hooking on Louis Pierre Althusser's (1988-1990) key term *interpellation* that discusses the apparatus of power working in two antipodal forms:

Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus, through force and ideas respectively, *Animal Farm* refers to Repressive State Apparatus in the Manor Farm and

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Ideological State Apparatus in the Animal Farm. Thus, all the animals surrendered to the totalitarian power experimented by Napoleon, who ruled the Animal Farm for years by setting another myth; narrative of ideas aiming at naturally stabilizing the nature of power.

Animal Farm lays bare the stratification of class tyranny and the harrowingly inbuilt tendency to maintain and control class structures, primarily in societies that erstwhile allegedly eulogize equality-freedom while slander power-control. It demonstrates how classes that are initially unified on a unanimous agenda eventually reflect excruciating policy following the repetitive graph of power-control-fall. The rise of Mr. Jones to a powerful position in the Manor Farm to controlling the animals to his terrible fall in the battle of Cowshed and the similar pattern of rise of Napoleon to a powerful comrade in the Animal Farm to pigs (Napoleon being their leader) controlling hens, horses, birds, dogs etc., to his gradual fall are the graphical representation of the structured functioning of power. Plainly the rise and fall of power is maintained by circulation of myths. Atul Sethi in response to the Ram-Sethu or Adam's bridge controversy, judiciously posits in the article named, "Truth Behind the Power of Myths," "it is society's constant search for heroes that creates myths, says ad guru Alyque Padamsee. 'Human heroes can falter and they eventually die . . . There is no evidence of a perfect world anywhere on earth. Perfection, be it Ram Rajya or Camelot, exists only in mythology. Yet everyone craves for it'" (n.pag.).

The eventual adoption of slogans like Napoleon is always right and the gradual mincing of the Seven Commandments of Animalism, meticulously demonstrate how those in power can legitimately play mayhem with other by creating myths. Conclusively, the Animal Farm represents power practiced through Ideological State Apparatus, reflecting its secretly destructive, coercive, omnipresent and hierarchical nature. The paper thus prepares a counter momentum to amplify the fundamentals of power, which, through divergent myths infuse totalitarianism and hypocrisy in the executor of power. It also rings a clarion call alarming the society with power structure to be regressively vitriolic, for "every opinion and every decision depend on the [regressive vitriolic] prevailing myth . . . (Pattanaik xvii). Blatantly, the paper through *Animal Farm* expounds that a stage of equality and freedom to all is a utopian idea which cannot exist because the avariciousness of absolute power to control will always incorporate vices; such that the vices then disseminate as myths wanting to naturalize their existence. Therefore, to achieve a perfect society is a utopian modal, for "even perfection is a myth" (Pattanaik xvii), conclusively catering to the apprehension of power through myths.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to provide a fresh insight in analysing the cryptic structure of power via myths. This is a fresh research for its newness amounting to delving in power-control theme via myths; wherein the present connotation of myth is far from falsehood or its static captivity with religion. The researches operated hitherto have been redundantly dealing with power via gender or sex or politics or society or discourse or science or law or medicine,

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however the novelty in the realm of power and myth has not only introduced a fringe of modernity in opening up a fluid space for myths, but has also widened the canvass of research to the future aspirants. Apparently *Animal Farm* expounding the theme of the reliance of power over control and vice-versa also illustrates the functional structure of power leading to corruption so much so that viciousness incepts naturally. Mr Jones owns the Manor Farm and thus owns the animals, derivatively the power of ownership corresponds to control, thus, Mr. Jones uses his assistants and whips to control animals and maintain his power.

Furthermore, Napoleon on seeking majority of the votes based on his unabated efforts to safeguard the interest of animals and the fervent vows, he owns the Animal Farm. Visibly,, as the ownership shifts from the Manor Farm to the Animal Farm, the power shifts from Mr. Jones to Napoleon, with fixed inbuilt agency of control over the animals. However, the focal point of concern is to apprehend power via myths, i.e., to study the static power structure as eternal truth by variable myths. Pattanaik sagaciously sums up the essence of myth in its competency to explore the concealed eternal truth, as he eloquently states, “within infinite myths lies eternal truth” (16). The paper, hence, attempts to examine the hidden structure of power through myths. Indeed, as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar points out, “Lost rights are never regained by begging and by appeals to the conscience of the usurpers, but by relentless struggle. Goats are used for sacrificial offerings and not lions.” (From “B.R. Ambedkar Quotes”)

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