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Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Reality of Orwell's *1984*

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Abstract

Are we currently living in the reality of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*? The novel has a definite ring due to the many Orwellian words and concepts that have become part of our parlance, especially the political vocabulary – terms like “Big Brother”, “Doublethink” and “Newspeak” that have gained enormous significance in the present dispensation. The central theme of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the State's imposition of will upon thought and truth. The world that Orwell envisages does not allow privacy for the individual and does not allow the individual to have a personal identity and also aspires to falsify history. The novel in essence raises disturbing nevertheless pertinent questions with regard to power structure, motives behind the moves of the governments, war, and class distinctions based on economic criteria. There is an invasion on our privacy as the Government is closely monitoring us constantly and more so with the advent of Aadhaar card and the seeding of bank accounts, Pan cards, etc. And quite significantly, we perceive the exact scenario that has been portrayed in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The novel has elements of postmodernism because the reader is left in a quandary questioning, whether “Big Brother is real?” and “what apparently is real and what is not”, as a matter of fact, perceptible realities are only social constructs. This paper proposes to revisit Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by highlighting these pertinent questions of the past– with special reference to the power structure, Big Brother”, “Doublethink” and “Newspeak” and its contemporary significance to today's society.

Keywords- Surveillance, New World Order, Mind Control, Identity

We are living in days wherein tectonic shifts are happening all around us, more so with regard to the shrinking of international borders and individual freedom /personal space. In essence these are all the fall out of the opening of the floodgates of the Indian economy to the twin concepts of Globalization and Liberalization moving away from the Nehruvian agro-based economy. It had its widespread ramifications resulting in a cascading effect and whose impact is still felt in this vast subcontinent of ours. Suddenly what seemed to be a sleepy nation has woken up to a frenzied and frenetic paced lifestyle. The impact was felt to a great

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extent in some of the metropolitan cities of India where the vestiges of colonialism remained, only in getting translated to call centers and other high-tech cities. There is an ambivalent relationship that exists in the Indian context since we grudgingly embrace technology and that has taken us on the fast track but still we want to cling on to tradition and the concomitant bullock-cart-paced lifestyle. Modern India is a blend of both the ultramodern and the ancient and sometimes they work at cross purposes, unable to bear the weight of its own contradictions. With the introduction of Aadhaar, and the seeding of bank accounts and Pan card, the Indian economy as is perceived, is reinventing itself one more time. It seems that every decade has its share of innovation and uncertainty and the successive governments are clueless as to where it is all going to lead. This uncharted territory has given a negative turn to the growth of the mammoth economy. Some of the pundits claim that it is curtains, as many small time traders and establishments have folded up after the advent of GST, and sure enough it looks as though it may take a miracle for the Economy to rise up and as of now there are belligerent protests everywhere asking for wage hike and the Government is clueless not knowing how to get out of this bleak scenario. In the wake of Demonetization, there is further uncertainty (though the tall claim of nullifying the parallel economy / black money) and under these circumstances, the Orwellian prognostication assumes greater significance.

Like how each New Year is welcomed with exuberance, there were peals of celebration that ushered in the New Year 1984, there was an air of excitement all round, but also there was a somber atmosphere that prevailed in some circles, where the literati huddled into discussing the overreach of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. In fact the title *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is a reversal of the year it was written i.e. 1948 and it is a dystopian political fiction. The narrative revolves around the erstwhile Soviet Union, and Hitler's Germany and the prevailing diktat that public statements could not be questioned. In fact, currently as a nation we are under a similar fear psychosis, and that there is a possibility to even get arrested by the cyber squad if an "anti-national" view is expressed or endorsed.

Terms like "Big Brother", "thoughtcrime", "Newspeak", " $2+2 = 5$ ", etc. from the novel are all currently in common parlance and the novelist succinctly highlights the manipulation of recorded history by a totalitarian regime. Oceania the Superstate is under the control of the 'Inner Party' (privileged elite) consisting only of a mere 2% of the demography. The 'Inner Party' cannot brook anyone toying with the notion of "individualism" or indulging in 'independent thinking', known as- "thoughtcrime," but invariably he/she would only get detained by the "Thought Police". Winston Smith who is the protagonist of the novel works for the 'Outer Party' which constitutes roughly 13% of the population and works for the Records Department of Minitrue- "Ministry of Truth" as an editor, and is entrusted with the task of constantly revising historical records, to make the past conform to the ever-

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changing party line and deleting references to ‘unpersons’ (people who have been "vaporised", i.e., not only killed by the state but denied existence even in history or memory).

Newspeak

The effect of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on the English language is quite extensive; the concepts of “Big Brother,” “Room 101,” “the Thought Police,” “thoughtcrime,” “unperson,” “memory hole” (oblivion), “doublethink” (simultaneously holding and believing contradictory beliefs) and “Newspeak” (ideological language) have become common phrases representing totalitarian authority. “Doublespeak and groupthink,” are both deliberate elaborations of “doublethink,” and the adjective "Orwellian" similarly refers to Orwell's, conception pertaining to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Orwell's invented language, “Newspeak,” satirises hypocrisy and evasion by the state: the Ministry of Love (Miniluv) oversees torture and brainwashing, the Ministry of Plenty (Miniplenty) oversees shortage and rationing, the Ministry of Peace (Minipax) oversees war and atrocity and the Ministry of Truth (Minitrue) oversees propaganda and historical revisionism. Ironically, the Ministry of Peace deals with war and defence. Winston's job in essence is to rewrite past newspaper articles, so the historical record always supports the Party's agenda. The workers are told they are correcting misquotations, when they are actually writing false information in the place of facts. “Minitrue” also destroys all previous editions of revised work. This method ensures there is no proof of government interference. Smith is a diligent and skillful worker, but he secretly hates the Party and dreams of rebellion against Big Brother. These ideas seem to have a personal ring in the contemporary political milieu pertaining to India. Currently in the Indian political landscape, the NDA government seems to have its own definition of nationalism:

Apart from school education, important institutions of research such as the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and its current projects have also become the targets of government interference. For politicians of the opposition parties and many scholars, the aim obviously was to bring the representation of Indian history in line with a particular ideology. They protested against what they called a saffronization of history. (Gottlob 2)

Those words seem to have particular relevance to India's contemporary political milieu. What most activists and intellectuals across India seem to have forgotten is that those who forged India's constitution were ardent liberal democrats. Therefore, such a doctored nationalistic approach as we witness today, is detrimental and does not project the liberal India that was envisaged. It stifles the freedom of speech, and chooses to silence the intelligentsia and the sharp and young minds of the youth of this vast sub-continent. As the social historian, Michael Gottlob in his seminal work, “History and Politics in Postcolonial India states:

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The great public interest in the ongoing controversy has to do with the general historicization of thinking, which also characterizes modern politics. . . . particularly in the emergence of nationalism. Just as the interest in the past was stimulated by the idea of the nation, the nation-state was conceived of as a historical subject agent ... the notion of one's own historicity developed against the backdrop of the current suppression. (Gottlob 3)

In the light of the controversy surrounding Jawaharlal Nehru University and with the arrest of the JNU Student Union President Kanhaiya Kumar and the slapping of sedition charges against several students, the term "nationalism" has once again taken the centre stage of the mainstream discourse. TV anchors and government spokespersons have justified the police high handedness through the ruse of "nationalism" -- referring to the accused students, the JNU student community and the public supporting them as "anti-national", as "traitors", or more colloquially as "deshdrohi".

In the novel, Winston is captured by the Thought Police due to betrayal, along with Julia, in their rented condo, and interrogated by O'Brien who tortures Winston with electroshock, telling him that he can "cure" himself of his "insanity"—his manifest hatred for the Party—through controlled manipulation of perception. Winston is held in the prison for an unspecified length of time, and confesses to crimes that he is not guilty of. He does not betray Julia even under extreme duress, but after a rude awakening he eventually confesses his love for Julia and as a result is sent to the dreaded Room 101 by O'Brien, any prisoner's nightmare.

Big Brother

How true, we are moving into a police-society. Since the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the phrase "Big Brother" has come into common use to describe any prying or overly-controlling larger-than-life- figure, and attempts by government to increase surveillance. In the novel, Big Brother is a fictional character and symbol who is apparently the leader (most likely a symbolic figurehead) of Oceania, the totalitarian state crushing the hapless inhabitants.

In the society that Orwell describes, every citizen is under constant surveillance by the authorities, mainly by telescreens . The people are constantly reminded of this by the slogan "Big Brother is watching you": a maxim which is ubiquitously on display. In modern culture the term "Big Brother" has entered the lexicon as a synonym for any abuse of government power, particularly with respect to hemming-in of civil liberties, often specifically related to mass surveillance. The phrase "Big Brother" has come into common use to describe any prying or overly-controlling authority figure, and any or all attempts by government to increase surveillance.

The inhabitants of Oceania, particularly the Outer Party members or the proletariat (the remaining 85% of the demography), have no real privacy. Many of them live in apartments

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equipped with a two-way telescreen (transreceiving television set), so that they may be watched or listened to at any time. Similar telescreens, are found at workstations and in public places, along with hidden microphones. Written correspondence is routinely opened and read by the government before it is delivered (a similar apprehension is there about the emails sent or received). The Thought Police employ undercover agents, who pose as normal citizens and report any person with subversive tendencies. Children are encouraged to report suspicious persons to the government, and some even denounce their parents. Citizens are controlled, and the smallest sign of rebellion, even something so small as a facial expression, can result in immediate arrest and imprisonment. Thus, citizens, particularly party members, are compelled to obedience.

Posters of the Party leader, Big Brother, bearing the caption "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU", dominate the city, while the ubiquitous *telescreen*, monitors the private and public lives of the populace. Military parades, propaganda films, and public executions are said to be commonplace. Presently, to say the least, due to bio-metric profiling and the seeding of bank accounts and pan card, there is a dread that we have moved into the Orwellian dispensation. Every key-stroke is monitored, every transaction is under the watchful gaze of BB and slowly it is going to be a cashless regime and the "have-nots" are going to be elbowed out of the bandwagon. The ubiquitous Aadhaar is going to make a huge impact and is in fact going to be a powerful tool of mass surveillance. Already Aadhaar has generated a lot of debate in the Supreme Court and the argument that goes against it is that our Identity is at stake. Just a short step away is the bionic chip, and such an implant has already started in some of the Western countries and by virtue of having a head-start, it looks as though they are going to make this implant a trans-global phenomenon.

This brings us to the biggest danger of Aadhaar, its power as a tool of mass surveillance. This is, possibly, far more serious than the issue of confidentiality of the database. Once Aadhaar becomes an all-purpose identification tool, our lives will be as transparent to the state as "contact lens." Details of railway bookings, phone call records, financial transactions and so on will be accessible to the government at the click of a mouse without invoking any special powers. This is all the more worrying as the government has already shown an ominous propensity to control, or is trying to control, our thoughts and actions!

Ministry of Plenty

The Ministry of Plenty rations and controls food, goods, and domestic production; every fiscal quarter, it publishes false claims of having raised the standard of living, when it has, in fact, reduced rations, availability, and production. The Ministry of Truth substantiates Ministry of Plenty's claims by revising historical records to report numbers supporting the current, "increased rations", what a travesty of justice, just a juggling of figures as we see quarter-after- quarter in the trumped-up indices!

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For the citizens of Oceania, the standard of living of the populace was low, overall. Consumer goods were scarce, and all those available through official channels were of low quality; for instance, despite the Party regularly reporting increased boot production, more than half of the Oceanian populace had to trundle barefooted. The Party claimed that poverty was a necessary sacrifice for the war effort, and "The Book" confirms that to be partially correct, since the purpose of perpetual war consumes surplus industrial production. Outer Party members, occasionally gained access to better items in the market, which dealt with goods that were pilfered from the residences of the Inner Party.

The days are not very far when such a scenario is going to unfold right in front of our eyes. Already a deathblow has been given to the unorganized sector and so many individuals are laid-off, not knowing from where they would get their next square meal, literally staring at a bleak future. This is not a local phenomenon, slowly but steadily the world is getting seamlessly unified by the World Wide Web (www) and the chorus of more and more hungry individuals is reaching a crescendo. What in essence is happening, in front of our very eyes, is a shift in the geo-political equations rather imperceptibly. On the 1st of November, 1993, the Maastricht Treaty ushered in the EU. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency the Euro (to check the mighty dollar), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs. The EU was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2012, in recognition of the organization's efforts to promote peace and democracy in Europe. And it looks as though we are inevitably pushed to the end of the precipice to embrace a Transnationalistic ideology. Transnationalism refers to the diffusion and extension of social, political, economic processes in between and beyond the sovereign jurisdictional boundaries of nation-states. International processes are increasingly governed by non-state actors and international organizations. As Jenny Sharpe the social historian in, "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race," observes:

...Third World elites do not form a comprador class in the sense of serving First World interests or assimilating into western culture. Rather, they constitute a transnational capitalist class whose members act in the interest of the global system. (Sharpe 185)

In my reckoning, we are slowly but steadily moving towards such a dispensation that Orwell envisaged nearly Seven decades ago "A New Order of the Ages". Are we currently living in the reality of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four!

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