

# The Concept of Equality and its Betrayal: Exploring Class Struggles in *Animal Farm*

Nandita Paul,

Research Scholar, Department of English, Gauhati University, Guwahati

## Abstract

In George Orwell's seminal work *Animal Farm*; he vividly illustrates the perils of totalitarian regimes and the cyclical nature of political revolutions. He portrays how new leaders, who initially rise to power on the promise of equality and justice, often end up replicating the same oppressive behaviors as their predecessors. The pigs in the novel symbolize the ruling elite, while the other farm animals represent the proletariat, or the working class. As the narrative unfolds, a clear depiction of class struggle emerges, which reflects the widening divide between the working animals and the pigs who wield power. This paper aims to explore the representation of class struggle in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and examine how the promise of equality is systematically betrayed by those in positions of authority, leading to a grim reflection on the nature of power and corruption.

**Keywords:** Class struggle, Revolution, Proletariat, Power, Tyranny, Corruption, Manipulation

## Introduction

George Orwell, born Eric Arthur Blair in 1903, was a British writer known for his incisive critiques of social injustice and totalitarianism. He is best known for his novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which explore themes of political corruption, propaganda, and the dangers of oppressive governments. Orwell's writing style is characterized by clarity, intelligence, and wit, often incorporating elements of satire and allegory. Beyond fiction, he was a prolific essayist, exploring subjects ranging from politics to culture. Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a profound satirical allegory that explores the dynamics of power, control, and class struggles. At its core, the novella is a tale about the quest for equality and how it is subverted by those who seek to dominate. The concept of equality, initially a rallying cry for the animals' rebellion against their human oppressors, becomes a tool of manipulation and betrayal. It is a political allegory that satirizes the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. Published in 1945, the novel depicts a group of farm animals overthrowing their human owner to establish an egalitarian society. However, the pigs, led by Napoleon, gradually assume control, becoming as oppressive as the humans they replaced. The story mirrors the corruption of socialist ideals and the betrayal of the working class.

The story begins on Manor Farm, where the animals, inspired by Old Major's dream of a society free from human tyranny, rebel against Mr. Jones, their oppressive farmer. Old Major's vision, encapsulated in the principles of Animalism, promises a utopia where all animals are equal and free from exploitation, "a dream of the earth as it will be when Man has vanished" (Orwell, 14). The foundational commandment, "All animals are equal," symbolizes the hope for a just society (Orwell, 14, 22, 40). The initial success of the rebellion fosters a sense of unity and collective purpose among the animals. They work together to establish a self-governing community based on shared labour and mutual respect. This phase represents the idealistic phase of many revolutionary movements, where the promise of equality galvanizes the masses. As Orwell himself said: "What you get over and over again is a movement of the proletariat which is promptly canalized and betrayed by astute people at the top, and then the growth of a new governing class. The one thing that never arrives is equality. The mass of the people never get the chance to bring their innate decency into the control of affairs, so that one is almost driven to the cynical thought that men are only decent when they are powerless" (Ingle, p. 164). However, the ideal of equality soon begins to erode as the pigs, particularly Napoleon and Snowball, assume leadership roles. The pigs' intelligence and strategic thinking position them as natural leaders, but their growing power sows the seeds of inequality. The subtle shifts in the pigs' behaviour, such as taking extra milk and apples for themselves, mark the beginning of a new class hierarchy.

Rebellion often occurs when the gap between the oppressor and the oppressed becomes intolerably wide, leading those who are suffering to take action against their oppressors. In George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, the animals on Mr. Jones' farm experience severe hardship and exploitation under human rule. They are overworked, underfed, and receive little to no benefits from their labor, as Mr. Jones takes everything for himself. Initially, the rebellion on the farm promises a new era of equality and fairness. The animals rise up against Mr. Jones and seize control of the farm, establishing a new system with the guiding principle, "All animals are equal" (Orwell, 14, 22, 40). For a brief period, this change brings hope and a sense of justice as the animals attempt to govern themselves and distribute resources more equitably. However, this newfound equality is short-lived as the pigs, who position themselves as leaders, begin to consolidate power and privilege. This becomes evident when the pigs take extra rations of apples and milk for themselves under the guise of needing more food for brain work while the other animals continue to toil with meager provisions - "We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back!" (Orwell, 28-29).

This growing disparity becomes apparent when the pigs start sleeping in beds, breaking the commandments they helped establish, and altering the farm's rules to suit their desires. Initially, the commandments, which were established to promote equality and prevent the animals from emulating humans, explicitly banned sleeping in beds and consuming alcohol. These rules symbolized a commitment to animalism and a rejection of human vices. However, as the pigs gradually adopt human tyrannical characteristics, they start sleeping in beds and drinking alcohol, engaging in trades, blatantly violating the principles they once uphold. The pigs' betrayal of the commandments becomes evident by their manipulation of language and the rules themselves. For instance, when the other animals express concern about the pigs sleeping in beds, Squealer, the propagandist pig, uses his persuasive and deceitful rhetoric to convince them otherwise. He insists that the original commandment never opposed the idea of beds, twisting the meaning of words to suit the pigs' desires: "You did not suppose, surely, that there was ever a ruling against beds? A bed merely means a place to sleep in. A pile of straw in a stall is a bed, properly regarded. The rule was against sheets, which are a human invention" (Orwell, 47). By altering the commandments and the animals' perception of them, the pigs maintain their control and justify their increasingly privileged lifestyle.

George Orwell, however, illustrates how the animals, despite being given significant roles after their liberation from human rule, struggle with self-confidence and lack the necessary knowledge to achieve true equality. V. C. Letemendia notes, "Orwell is not implying by this the hopelessness of a proletarian revolution: he rather points to the need for education and self-confidence in any working-class movement if it is to remain democratic in character" (Letemendia, 129). The animals on the farm must become active participants in their society, rather than blindly accepting the dictates of their leaders. This blind acceptance leads to their exploitation, first by humans and then by the pigs who assume power. The pigs, benefiting from their ability to learn quickly and their superior education, use their knowledge to manipulate and control the other animals. For instance, the pigs, led by Napoleon, gradually alter the commandments of Animalism to justify their actions and maintain their authority. Throughout the novel, Orwell demonstrates how the animals' modesty and unquestioning nature contribute to their downfall. Boxer, the hardworking horse, epitomizes this blind loyalty by adopting the maxim "Napoleon is always right" and "I will work harder" (Orwell, 44). Despite clear evidence of exploitation and mistreatment, Boxer remains loyal to Napoleon. When the pigs begin trading with humans, contradicting the animals' original principles, Boxer does not question the decision. Instead, he works even harder, believing that it will solve the farm's problems. This blind loyalty ultimately leads to Boxer's tragic fate when he is sent to the glue factory once he becomes too weak to work. Similarly, the sheep's mindlessly repeated slogans like "Four legs good, two legs bad" demonstrates the animals' inability to recognize and challenge the pigs' corruption, allowing their oppression to continue unchecked (Orwell, 40). They fail to question the pigs' actions and propaganda, such as when Squealer constantly revises history and facts to align with Napoleon's agenda. This manipulation is possible because the other animals lack the critical thinking skills and education necessary to challenge the pigs' narrative. "If this simple, instinctive decency is to be preserved in the transition from revolution...other kinds of virtue are also necessary and must at all costs be developed by the working class if it

is not to be betrayed again" (Letemendia, 129). In *Animal Farm*, the absence of these virtues among the animals allows the pigs to establish a regime as oppressive as the human one they overthrew.

Education and knowledge are depicted as powerful tools in *Animal Farm*, but they are misused by the pigs to maintain their dominance. The pigs, especially Napoleon and Squealer, manipulate information to control the other animals. While Napoleon is the leader who issues commands, it is Squealer who plays a crucial role in sustaining their regime by deceiving and brainwashing the working-class animals. In his work "Communism and the betrayal of the revolution: a Marxist critique of the post-revolutionary manipulation of the proletariat in *Animal Farm*" James Inch argues that "violence and the threat of violence are of course extremely effective in eliciting a required response, but nonetheless foremost in the arsenals of those involved in the redistribution of power are rhetoric and propaganda. These tools can be used to sway the general opinion and win support for the way of thinking that suits those in power, or those hoping to attain power" (Inch, 06). This role is embodied by Squealer, who uses his rhetoric and persuasive abilities to reinforce Napoleon's dominance and employs propaganda to manipulate the truth and justify the pigs' actions. He twists facts and rewrites history to keep the animals in line, often telling them, "Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?" (Orwell, 41). This fear tactic prevents the animals from questioning Napoleon's authority. When the pigs begin to take extra rations of milk and apples, Squealer convinces the animals that it is necessary for the pigs' health, as they are the "brainworkers" of the farm. He uses complex language and statistics to confuse and placate the animals, ensuring they remain submissive. After Snowball is expelled, Squealer uses him as a scapegoat for any problems that arise, making the animals believe that Snowball is a villain who sabotages their efforts: "Snowball was in league with Jones from the very start! He was Jones's secret agent all the time. It has all been proved by documents which he left behind him and which we have only just discovered...Did we not see for ourselves how he attempted—fortunately without success—to get us defeated and destroyed at the Battle of the Cowshed?...Our Leader, Comrade Napoleon...has stated categorically—categorically, comrade—that Snowball was Jones's agent from the very beginning—yes, and from long before the Rebellion was ever thought of" (Orwell, 55). By spreading lies and exaggerations about Snowball's supposed treachery, Squealer strengthens Napoleon's position as the sole protector and leader of the farm and suppressing any potential rebellion.

The ultimate betrayal of the principle of equality occurs with the alteration of the original commandment from "All animals are equal" to "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 84). This change subverts all the initial ideals of Animalism, which were founded on the principles of equality and shared power among all animals. The animals initially fought against the humans to establish a society where all creatures were treated fairly and equitably. However, as the pigs gain more power, they begin to resemble the very oppressors they overthrew. For instance, the pigs start walking on two legs, wearing clothes, and even socializing with humans, actions that were strictly forbidden in the original vision of Animalism. Napoleon increasingly becomes a dictator, using propaganda and fear to control the other animals, much like the humans did. This transformation illustrates the cyclical nature of tyranny and revolutions, where new elites replace old oppressors but continue to perpetuate the same injustices and inequalities. The other animals, initially filled with hope for a better future, find themselves trapped under a regime just as exploitative and oppressive as the one they rebelled against. The other animals, especially Boxer, represent the hardworking, loyal, and naive masses that bear the brunt of the new regime's exploitation. His tragic fate, sold to the slaughter house despite his unwavering dedication, epitomizes the betrayal of the working class.

Orwell's portrayal of the class struggles in *Animal Farm* serves as a critique of totalitarian regimes and the corruption of socialist ideals. The novella reflects Orwell's disenchantment with the Soviet Union, where the promise of a classless society gave way to a new ruling elite and widespread oppression. The betrayal of equality in the novel is a cautionary tale about the perils of unchecked power and the fragility of revolutionary ideals. Although Orwell wrote the novel as an allegory for the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalin, its themes are applicable to any revolution or political uprising. The story illustrates how revolutionary ideals can be corrupted by those in power and the gradual erosion of the Seven Commandments and the revision of the farm's history to favour the pigs serve as examples of how those in power can rewrite narratives to justify their actions and maintain control.

As the story draws to a close, the working-class animals secretly observe the pigs and humans inside the farmhouse. To their shock and dismay, they can no longer distinguish between the two groups. The pigs, once their fellow animals and leaders in the rebellion against human oppression, have adopted the very behaviours, attitudes and features of the humans they once despised- “No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which” (Orwell, 88). This moment marks the culmination of the pigs' betrayal, as the original values of Animalism and the dream of Old Major are utterly crushed. The pigs' increasing resemblance to humans symbolizes the corrupting nature of power and tyranny. Throughout the story, the pigs slowly adopt human behaviours, until the distinction between oppressor and oppressed is obliterated. This revelation signifies their betrayal and marks the beginning of a new cycle of tyranny. The animals realize that their struggle for equality and justice has been co-opted, and foreshadows the potential for a new revolution.

### Conclusion

*Animal Farm* continues to be a timeless exploration of the concept of equality and its betrayal through class struggles. Orwell's incisive narrative serves as a caution about the dangers of pursuing idealism without accountability and focuses on how power can easily corrupt those in charge. Through the allegory of farm animals overthrowing their human owner, only to find themselves under an equally oppressive regime led by the pigs, Orwell critiques the cyclical nature of tyranny and the challenges inherent in establishing a fair and just society. The novella's enduring relevance lies in its ability to illuminate the complexities of human societies, and the continuous struggle for true equality and justice.

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