

The Champion of English Section

Junior Division

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Book Title : *Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984)*

Author : George Orwell

Publisher : Penguin Books

“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” I was astounded when I came across this slogan from the renowned dystopian fiction - *Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984)*. It was intoxicating, albeit terrorizing, to see a nation's history manipulated, people's minds controlled, and revolutionary acts committed through Orwell's startling words. Having seen the wars, struggles, and traumatizing tolls, Orwell, as a democratic socialist himself, expressed his resentment towards totalitarianism by delineating the dehumanizing domination of the party and the misery of people in his novel.

1984 is not only a mesmerizing fiction, but also a warning to states across the world. As a manifestation of annihilation of the physical body, mind, and human spirit under the dominion of the dictator and his party, the novel forewarns the deleterious threats brought by totalitarianism.

As the novel opens, Winston Smith, who works at the ironically named Ministry of Truth in the fictitious nation Oceania, is feeling frustrated about the autocratic rule by Ingsoc and Big Brother - the omniscient leader of the Party. Despite knowing the surveillance he is under, Winston decides to start a diary. He covertly writes down his criticism towards the dictatorship, his fascination of love and an inner party member who Winston thinks is the leader of the Brotherhood, a secretive group that endeavours to overthrow the imperious Party. Then comes Julia, a young lady who peculiarly slipped Winston a love note. They eventually started an affair, and even rented an old flat above an antique shop where they believe they are unwatched and safe. In a bid to rebel against the Party, Winston

and Julia decide to seek out O'Brien, who turned out to be a member of the Thought Police, an oppressive executor of the country's laws. Winston and Julia's commitment to the Brotherhood was soon drowned in arrest and torture, in which all of their disobedient thoughts were eradicated through O'Brien's brainwashing and physical torture. As such, they were indoctrinated as model citizens of Oceania.

One of the key ideas conveyed in *1984* is the control of people's minds. Technology is utilized to monitor party members' thinking. Telescreens, for example, are used to detect "unorthodox" thoughts through the observation of one's facial expression, breathing, and even heartbeat. At any moment, the tension inside one would be liable to translate itself into some visible symptoms with the use of these machines. They are used to eradicate thought-crimes, rebellious thoughts or queries against the dominating party. Even though Telescreens do not literally exist in our modern times, security cameras and hidden microphones are possibly omnipresent. Think about our

effortless access to electrical devices that can connect us from the East to the West in a second's time. It is conceivable that our footprints in the digital world can be tracked and traced at ease. Together with the rapid development of the media and technology, our privacy remains contentious and uncertain.

However, what struck me the most in the novel was not only the pervasive nature of technology, but also the pernicious form of thinking initiated by the Party – Doublethink. People were indoctrinated to believe in contradictory ideas, ideas that went against their consciousness, memories, and even the reality. One of the party slogans was “War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength”. It proselytized its people to believe in distorted meanings, replacing the objective truths that they once believed into baseless lies. Today, on the threshold of the real year 1984, although indoctrination is seemingly eliminated, this novel still triggered me to question whether the principles that we have been taught are righteous or not. We are born to believe that certain qualities and traits represent their reciprocal meanings through the interpellation by society and education.

Yet, the validity of these principles is postulated upon the notions upheld by the stakeholders of the society. What if the notions and knowledge that we have attained through our parents, teachers and peers are falsely determined? What if they are twisted and iniquitous? Doesn't it imply that we have been living in a deceptive and scandalous lie for decades?

To sum up, *1984* presents the psychological, technological and social dangers brought by totalitarianism. It criticizes the current trends and societal norms through the use of exaggerated worst-case scenarios, such as the enduring surveillance and the propagandization from the dictatorial Party to its people in Oceania. This novel has certainly made me question the notion of reality and whether our beliefs are justified or not. "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." To get away from this incantation, we have to stay true to ourselves, grasp the truth and reality that we hold dear, and remain conscious, decisive and brave in the everchanging world.