

Political Allegory in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*

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Abstract

Gulliver's Travels, the much debated seventeen century novel was written by the famous Anglo-Irish prose writer Jonathan Swift. Through this novel, Swift has brought forth the maladies and follies of the contemporary European society. Actually, the novel *Gulliver's Travels* is a political allegory. By employing literary devices such as invective, alliteration, sarcasm and satire, Swift endeavoured to present the seventeen century European society in which different aspects of the people are reflected. The protagonist of the novel Lemuel Gulliver has been presented as enterprising and adventurous who underwent a voyage to an imaginary nation called Lilliput. Swift has elaborately given account of Lemuel Gulliver and his family. During his first inducement to travel Gulliver is Shipwrecked and swims for his life to ultimately get to a safe place on the shore in the country of Lilliput. But Gulliver is imprisoned by the Lilliputian and taken to the court of the emperor of the country. The emperor of Lilliput, attended by several of the nobility comes to see Gulliver in confinement. The writer has elaborately described the emperor's personality and habit. He appoints learned men to teach Gulliver the language of Lilliput. Like other novels whose popularity outline its own time, the novel *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift is read by the people of all ages in vivid manners.

Key Words- Political allegory, satire, society,

Jonathan Swift has tried to scrutinize the corrupt practices of the Eighteenth Century English rulers' governments, religious society and people. He has successfully depicted the eighteenth century England where the religion was dominating over the society in toto. One can say that Swift's use of Gulliver to present the parody of the social circumstances of England is apt and it reveals a true picture of the contemporary English society. Swift has presented Gulliver's voyage to at least our places symbolically. Through this novel, Swift has succeeded incorporating numerous instances of satire. In fact, the novel is a reflection which unfolds the reality of the world.

The novel begins with the protagonist, telling the readers casual things which are startling because they do not match with the decorum of the sort of travelogue. It is so happy that Gulliver's voyage takes him to the land of Lilliput, an imaginary country as conceived by Swift. The inhabitants of Lilliput are so tiny that Gulliver couldn't believe them to be fellow human beings. Actually, the natives of Lilliput and Blefuscu are much shorter than the common European people. It is Gulliver who gives the readers an actual account of the Lilliputians:

“As our foreign correspondent, Gulliver gives us information about this strange place, its political life, its intrigues and some of its customs. When Gulliver is captured by Lilliputians and led into the city, he is chained down and billeted in a disused temple (which only well-informed readers will recognize as resembling England's Westminster Abbey) Alarmingly, however, his account then deviates into a description of his act of defection”.

“I had been for some Hours extremely pressed by the Necessities of Nature; which was no Wonder, it being almost two Days since I had last disburthened myself. I was under great Difficulties between Urgency and Shame. The best

Expedient I could think on, was to creep into my House, which I accordingly did; and shutting the Gate after me, I went as far as the Length of my Chain would suffer, and discharged my Body of that uneasy Load. But this was the only Time I was ever guilty of so uncleanly an Action; for which I cannot but hope the candid Reader will give some Allowance, after he has maturely and impartially considered my Case, and the Distress I was in” (Swift X).

On analysing the novel, we find that Gulliver’s Travel is a chapter of Swift’s socio-political idea and realistic contemporary connection between the novel and eighteenth century England. Swift has presented Gulliver’s voyage with an incredible detail. According to Robert P. Fitzgerald, the novel is:

“Ironically but just as assertively, Swift is telling what he took to be the most important kind of a truth, moral truth about human nature and human history for which the fantasy provides a vehicle. Gulliver was a sailor, first as a ship’s surgeon, then as the captain of diverse ships. Swift makes a realistic structure by fusing nautical jargon, elucidating detail that is connected in a “factual, ship’s – log” style and rehashed claims by Gulliver, in his story, “to relate plain matter(s) of fact in the simplest manner and style” (Fitzgerald 247-263).

We find Swift’s idea of presenting his personal view related to the contemporary British political setup and the clash between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics which resulted into fierce religious clashes. The novel presents Gulliver’s travel to a place called Lilliput where he is confronted with the natives called Lilliputians. They were tiny people who could easily walk on a rope and film on the stick. Such capabilities were the requisite qualifications to be a minister in Lilliput. Here Swift presents the political allegory of England. Through ‘High Heels’ he has symbolized the conservatives who delineated Tories. And the ‘Low Heels’ or ‘whigs’ or symbolic of the dynamic part of the politics of England. Both of the above

physically conspicuous characters have been symbolically presented by Swift as the political wings of the governance system in England. Ironically, their names symbolized by the tallness of their heels, referred to as the sign of the political parties of England. And within these political parties Swift has satirically depicted the British political setups and also depicted the fiercest religious clashes which had by then become common in England. All these things have been presented by Swift in a ridiculous manner. Swift has depicted the size of Lilliputians as six inches which refer to the dynasty of Queen Anne and George the first. The size of the Lilliputians refers to their thought-idea, intension and the way of their behaviour. The fact is that Swift has presented as the Lilliputian's Emperor's mightiest & weapon to overcome his world of two islands. In chapter 7 of the novel Swift has ironically presented the way of governance the emperor of Lilliput practised. Lemuel Gulliver was eager to know every aspect of the social, political and religious life of the Lilliputians. He befriended the secretary of the emperor who introduced him everything:

“It was a custom introduced by this prince and his ministry (very different, as I have been assured, from the practice of former times,) that after the court had decreed any cruel execution, either to gratify the monarch's resentment, or the malice of a favourite, the emperor always made a speech to his whole council, expressing his great lenity and tenderness, as qualities known and confessed by all the world. This speech was immediately published throughout the kingdom; nor did anything terrify the people so much as those encomiums on his majesty's mercy; because it was observed, that the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent. Yet, as to myself, I must confess, having never been designed for a courtier, either by my birth or education, I was so ill a judge of things, that I could not discover the lenity and favour of this sentence, but conceived it

(perhaps erroneously) rather to be rigorous than gentle” (Swift 68-69).

Famous critic J. A. Dowin has presented his analysis with respect to Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Dowin in his article *Political Characterization in Gulliver’s Travels* has presented Swift’s change of party which took place in the year 1710. This shift led to unimportant and uninvited upheavals in Swift’s politics. In England, Religious issues and the assistance from the church were supposed to be the critical elements about political psychology. Swift has successfully opposed the pretentious attitude of the British social strata by mimicking the physical variation of Gulliver and the Lilliputians. we can say that, religion was a political issue during Swift's time. Owing to a minor religious issue there caused a thoughtful fight and it also marks in the division of the nation into two political groups. Many lives were taken and many kings were to lose their power even their life was taken.

The seed of Industrial Revolution was sown much before its arrival which can be seen the form of protest and interest in society. Colonialism is also used as political allegory colonialism refers after the age of scientific discovery some countries were subjugated at political, social and economic level and were slave and exploited by the capitalist countries through military, political and economic means colonialism also includes cultural and ideological factors. The colonialist invaded. their culture, worldview, values, social system even religious beliefs in order to rule over them with full force Jonathan Swift himself born into Ireland. But Ireland was under colonial rule of England which persecuted their culture, religious and traditional values.

Swift has also succeeded in presenting the arrogant nature of the European society by using Gulliver’s vulnerability. Thus, he succeeded in his application of a specific strategy to satirize Europe. Gulliver’s Travel has embodied in itself imaginary land of realistic picture of society at the time of Jonathan Swift. In fact, everywhere the society was specified into small nations which was causing all sorts of instability. Corruption was at its core which diluted

enthusiasm and spirit of human being.

To conclude, I believe that Jonathan Swift has perfectly illuminated the objective of his allegory in *Gulliver's Travels*. He says that through satire he purposes at modifying the vices of his society. He dares to attack the evil of his society and thereby to wake enhancement. He wishes for the betterment of the social life of his time. Thus, *Gulliver's Travels* is not a children book but a serious reminder of a moral purpose. This novel has posed a serious question to the society as to what should be the attitude of the rulers towards the ruled area. It also highlights the degradation of humanistic approach towards sensitive issue of the society. The novel is a serious satire on the religious dominance of the Roman Catholics. Swift has tried to awaken the British society to ponder over the issues as raised in the novel through the sarcastic events and narratives between Lemuel Gulliver and the Lilliputians.

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