

Anarchism in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*

J.Muthulekha

Faculty (Ad-Hoc),
NIT,
Trichy

ABSTRACT

In this paper, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* has been taken up for analyzing anarchists' profundity of thought and ideology. This paper highlights the domination of the state and focuses on the brutal attitude of the government towards society. Le Guin critiques the laws imbibed by the government as, "To make a thief, make an owner, to create crime, create laws". Le Guin has pointed out the anarchistic principles as the salvation mode to achieve this high status in one's life.

KEYWORDS

Ursula K. Le Guin; Anarchism; Society; Law.

Introduction

Anarchism is an ideology that unlocks the slavery chain of an individual from the domination of the state or hierarchal authority. It upholds a stateless society, free will, and free desire. Etymologically, the term anarchism is derived from the ancient Greek word *anarchos* which refers to "without rulers".

Anarchism, 'an intellectual artifact' of the nineteenth century was formulated by William Godwin in England, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in France, and Peter Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin in Russia. Pierre Joseph Proudhon is the first person to record himself as an anarchist. His major work is *What is Property?* (1840) brings out the anarchist ideals to the public. He portrays anarchism as self-government or the end of oppression of man by man. He thought that social peace will be obtained only when people started to respect the natural equality in men.

The anarchists thought that society was corrupted by oppression and violence. They prefer the stateless state to

the existing government where human beings can live in harmony with one another without any fear. They pointed out the fact that men and women are born of their own free will and argued that this solidarity is corrupted by the state.

The following are the traits of anarchism:

- The labourers will not be hampered by overwork for the monopolist or the state.
- It opposes capitalism that runs against the principles of justice and the dictates of utility.
- They argue for decentralization, both territorial and functional.

The incredulous nature of the state tends the anarchist to take their principle directly toward the labourers. They did not become part of any political parties since they did not believe in fake governance of the state.

Various Classical schools of thought and Post-classical schools of thought come under the canopy of Anarchism. Mutualism, Individualist

anarchism, Social anarchism, Collectivist anarchism, Anarcho-communism, and Anarcho-syndicalism are the Classical schools of thought. Platformism, Synthesis anarchism, Anarcho-capitalism, Anarcho-feminism, Green anarchism or eco-anarchism, Anarcho-pacifism, Christian anarchism, Post-left anarchy, Post-anarchism, and insurrectionary anarchism come under the paradigm of Post-classical schools of thought.

The post-schools of thought reconceptualize the anarchist practices along the frame line of post-structuralist theory. Classical schools of thought flourished in the works of Proudhon, Bakunin, and William Godwin whereas post schools of thought have been seen in the works of Georges Bataille, Michael Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan. The other notable types of anarchism are black anarchism, religious anarchism that includes Buddhist anarchism, Christian anarchism, Jewish anarchism and Taoism, and collectivist anarchism. Further, anarchism has a strong connection with visual arts such as Surrealism, Futurism, and Music.

The anarchists use literature as a vehicle to express their ideal principles and they voice against the domineering authority and sketch the sufferings of the downtrodden people in their works. J.S.Mill's *Liberty*, Spencer's *Individual versus the State*, Marc Guyau's *Morality without Obligation or Sanction*, Richard Wagner's *Art and Revolution*, and the works of Nietzsche are the best instances of this type. Emerson, W. Lloyd Garrison, Thoreau, Alexander Herzen, and Edward Carson are notable anarchists in literature. Further, the dramas of Ibsen, the poetry of Walt Whitman, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Shelley's *The Masque of Anarchy*, Zola's *Paris*, and *Le Travail* come under this category. Emma Goldman,

Voltaire de Cleyre, and Louise Michel are notable anarcho-feminist writers.

In this paper, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* has been taken up for analyzing anarchists' profundity of thought and ideology. The protagonist in the novel, Shevek tries to unite two planets with different ideas Anarres and Urras. He is a young scientist and an anarchist from the planet Anarres. He wishes to exhibit his talents on his neighbouring planet Urras, which is considered to be the enemy of Anarres.

This paper highlights the domination of the state and focuses on the brutal attitude of the government towards society. Etymologically, the word 'state' is derived from the Latin term *status* which refers to 'condition or status'. In ancient times, the word 'state' is used by Greeks to refer to 'polis or city-state'. It gained its currency only in the late sixteenth century. Machiavelli popularized this word in his work *The Prince*. At the end of the sixteenth century, Bodin the French philosopher called it a republic and remarked it a sovereign power.

The state has thus emerged as an omnipotent entity to save the people and forms government to execute the activities against the evils that prevail in society such as racial discrimination, slavery, and poverty. Government is the social apparatus of the state to achieve its end. The authority has to serve the people and has to bring solidarity among the community.

Four recurrent devices such as Property, Education, Nationalism, and Prison/Militarism have been used by the government to serve its function. In the novel *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin visualizes the ideal Anarchistic principles through her character Shevek who struggles hard to unite anarchist Urras and the hope failed Anarres. Anarres, a moon of Urras are the strict followers of an anarchist Odo and her principles. The Odonians came out of Urras and formed their own country with

idealist principles. There is no government on Anarres but there's administration. Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC) is a group formed by Anarres syndicates, federative, and individuals for administration and management. Their prior concern is not governing the people but administrating the production. Decentralization has become an essential part of Anarres.

There was to be no controlling centre, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy, and the dominance-drive of individuals seeking to become captains, bosses, and chiefs of state (81).

Everyone has the right to access everything they wish in the anarchistic world. The anarchistic economy never allows them to have 'individual rooms/houses' except for sexual privacy. Those who want to live in private houses had to get away from society and look after themselves—"The social conscience, the opinion of others, was the most powerful moral force' (95) of Anarchists.

Robbery and Murder never exist in an Anarchistic society since "nobody owns anything to rob. If you want things you take them from the depository... Coercion is the least efficient means of obtaining order" (124). There is no job discrimination in Anarres whereas, in Urras, people do the work for money or desire for profit. But in Anarres,

People take the dangerous, hard jobs because they take pride in doing them, they can—...A person likes to do what he is good at doing ... But really, it is the question of ends and means. After all, work is done for the work's sake... There is no other reward, on Anarres; no other laws. One's own pleasure and the respect of one's fellows (*The Dispossessed*, 125).

Property plays a significant role in society. In his work, *What is Property?* Pierre-Joseph Proudhon critiques capitalism and reflects the injustice prevailing in society. He coined the phrase, "property is theft". Further, he brings out the distinction between the right of property and the rights of liberty, equality, and security. He says,

The liberty and security of the rich do not suffer from the liberty and security of the poor; far from that, they mutually strengthen and sustain each other. The rich man's right of property, on the contrary, has to be continually defended against the poor man's desire for property (1).

In Anarres, survival is the biggest problem. If one wants to survive, he/she has to go anywhere else for a job. The job is not permanent and they have been allotted to a particular area by PDC. PDC (Public Distribution Coordination) controls and runs the job of the Anarresti as it does not have a government. His wish to link both the worlds through his new theory enables him to understand what the bitter reality is in understanding the true colour of both the planets. A scientist's anarchist vision has resulted in the invention of 'ansible'. He thought that this new invention may serve as a bridge between Anarres and Urras.

The luxurious lives of Urras are contradictory to the lives of Anarres. Shevek has been taken to villages by a hired car. He was surprised to see people "owned a car privately but they were heavily taxed" (70). When Shevek sees the birds in Urras, he feels that the birds are chirping in the sky as "This is my propertee -tee, this is my territoree-ree-ree, it belongs to mee, mee..." (*The Dispossessed*, 171). Yet he tries to accept the bitter reality. He remarks, "When in the Land of Property think like a

propertarian. Dress like one, eat like one, act like one, be one" (*The Dispossessed*, 174). His acceptance of life is not passive, he accepts his sufferings willingly. To him, the word "happiness, sorrow, identity" never exist. The luxury, he enjoys on the planet Urras does not tempt him and at the same time, the poverty in Anarres doesn't give him any suffering.

Shevek had practiced being an Odonian from his childhood. A person cannot possess a thing but can use or share it with others. "It is not yours... Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share. If you will not share it you cannot use it" (26). He received 10,000 International Monetary Units and a grant of 5000 from the Iota government. He had it in his account in the National Bank. Instead of being glad to receive a good sum of money, he had a peculiar thought. He finds it hard to understand 'how bank functions and so forth because all the operations of capitalist were as meaningless to him as the rites of a primitive religion'. According to him, a bank is a place where greed, laziness, and envy were assumed to move all men's acts. This sounds dangerous to him.

Education is the next powerful weapon of the state to serve its needs. The State insists on the importance of education not to enlighten the minds of the individual but to master their mind with their values and codes. Such type of education will not give confidence to the individual to do one's task without the need of others. Emma Goldman critiques this kind of education system that prevails in recent times as,

Public School! ... more than any other institution is a veritable barrack, where the human mind is drilled and manipulated to submission to various social and moral spooks, and thus fitted to continue the due system of exploitation and oppression (24)

In Anarres' learning center, all the skills that include singing, metrics, dance, painting, and lathe are taught - "The children learn to see, speak, hear, move, handle" (131). There is no distinction between arts and crafts. To them, "art was not considered as having a place in life, but as being a basic technique of life" (131). But in Urras, students are stuffed with mere theoretical knowledge than skills. Students were trained in an excellent manner. They are carefree, young adults. As said by Shevek, they were superbly trained.

Their minds were fine, keen, ready... They never fell asleep in class because they were tired from having worked on rotational duty the day before. Their society maintained them in complete freedom from want, distraction, and cares (107)

But their freedom appeared to Shevek as "their lack of freedom of initiative" (*The Dispossessed*, 107). In Anarres, people had not been 'free from anything; only free to do anything.

Nationalism serves as a tool for the state to subordinate the people. Le Guin critiques nationalism and depicts it as a barrier to human compassion in all her novels. Nationalism induces the selfishness of the people instead of showing development in society. State uses this mighty force to create chaos among its fellow beings and make them respect physical boundaries. The state builds a mental wall among the people and creates the illusion that people can live in harmony only when they submit entirely to their government. The innocent and ignorant layman respects the rules and laws laid by the state blindly unaware of the result it will create in society. With the help of its own people, it creates a military to protect the nation from the neighbouring nations. Ironically, the military that is created for protecting the people destroys the neighbouring people.

The protagonists of Le Guin are against the suppression of men, inequality by any means, and poverty. According to them, the national boundaries are just the luminal walls. It's just a physical boundary, not a boundary to the mind. The wall does not serve as a restraint of the mind and human freedom.

Militarism is the major weapon of the state to lure the people by showing an illusion that the state will protect them by any means. Ironically, it is used by the state to suppress a country that has the same value.

The governments of the world, knowing each other's interests, do not invade each other. They have learned that they can gain much more by international arbitration of disputes than by war and conquest (Goldman, 51).

Militarism assures the people that peace will prevail in the country but creates only chaos through war and disturbs the harmony among people.

Anarchists fight against all sorts of discrimination such as race, and gender. Power induces racial discrimination, and nationalism among people and it enforces the ideology that

humans are divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races," that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural behavioural features, and that some races are innately superior to others (Encyclopaedia Britannica, web).

The power mongers prejudice the people who belong to Africa and Indians in America as 'barbarians or savages' and started to colonize their minds and body by making them feel inferior to their own land, culture, religion, and themselves. They have undergone inexplicable miseries and disrespect from society which affects their internal and social

relations. Their frustration and sufferings induce them to revolt against the whites.

The state, created for maintaining social harmony, has failed in its mission in recent times. For governing the people, it has laid down strict laws and regulations. Unfortunately, such orders serve only the rich and mighty persons. The government forces laymen to comply with the rules laid by them. Emma Goldman critiques this attitude as,

Order derived through submission and maintained by terror is not much of a safe guaranty, yet that is the only "order" that governments have ever maintained. True social harmony grows naturally out of solidarity of interests (25).

Law and order are an illusion in the existing world. It punishes the pauper and downtrodden people who steal a small sum for quenching their basic needs and led the corrupted politicians and rich men free. The ruthless state sees them as a convict and considers their freedom a crime. Nevertheless, the real convict is the state itself. In the novel *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin critiques the laws imbibed by the government as, "To make a thief, make an owner, to create crime, create laws" (116). She highlights the sufferings faced by the convict in prison through her protagonist Shevek.

Laws are created and followed by the government only for the poor citizens who suffer by all means, who submit themselves to the government and yearn for freedom and peace from it. The ruthless state sees them as a convict and considers their freedom a crime. Nevertheless, the real convict is the state itself. Emma Goldman defines crime as 'misdirected energy' and argues that 'the State is itself the greatest criminal, breaking every written and natural law, stealing in the form of taxes, killing in the form of war and capital punishment.

In the novel *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin critiques the laws imbued by the government as, "To make a thief, make an owner, to create crime, create laws" (116). She highlights the sufferings faced by the convict in prison through his protagonists Shevek and Estraven.

There is no prison in Anarres. According to Anarrestians, it is a strange kind of punishment followed by Urrastians. The Anarrestians had come to know about the prison from the life history of Odo, the anarchist revolutionist.

... a prison was a place where a State put people who disobeyed its Laws. But why didn't they just leave the place? They couldn't leave, the doors were locked. But what did they do inside one room all the time? Nothing. There was nothing to do. You've seen pictures of Odo in the prison cell in Drio, haven't you? Image of defiant patience, bowed grey head, clenched hands, motionless in encroaching shadows. Sometimes prisoners were sentenced to work. Sentenced? Well, that means a judge – a person is given power by the Law—ordered them to do some kind of physical labour. Ordered them? What if they didn't want to do it? Well, they were forced to do it; if they didn't work, they were beaten (31-32).

Through this vivid portrayal of prison, Le Guin brings out the atrocious attitude of the state toward the individual. Peter Kropotkin states that 'the entire apparatus of prison and punishment is an abomination which ought to be brought to an end (qt. In. Goldman, 26). Criminals have been punished by law by saying that they will realize their mistakes and becomes good man but in turn, it turns them into brutal. The 'so-called' criminals will be excluded from society as 'Untouchables' and have been condemned by the state as a prisoner. They were aloof

in society once they were led free from prison. If the government gives job opportunities and space to the convicts and respects them as one among them in society, it can eradicate crime from society gradually. But it fails to do it and thereby the real cause of the evolution of prison has become hypocrisy in the existing world.

The anarchists give a voice to the voiceless, not to the nation. Shevek and Estraven have undergone sufferings for the welfare of their society. But the state does not allow such individuals to express their ideas or notions. It holds them not to taking any action against their evil deeds. As Godwin remarked it becomes an 'Unnecessary evil' in society. These persons were termed as 'revolutionists' and have been seen as an individual hampering the peace prevailing in the society. Revolution was born out of suffering and frustration. If the basic needs of a man are violated by any means, it has to be questioned by an individual for the welfare of society.

No real social change has ever without a revolution. People are either not familiar with their luster, or they not yet learned that revolution is but thought carried into action (Goldman, 28).

Suffering exists everywhere but if one suffers for the welfare of society, it is appreciable. The anarchist stresses this ideal notion and advocates for everyone to follow this principle in their lives.

Anarchism is the only philosophy which brings to man the consciousness of himself; which maintains that God, the State, and society are non-existent, that their promises are null and void since they can be fulfilled only through man's subordination (Goldman, 23)

Ursula K. Le Guin has pointed out the anarchistic principles as the salvation

mode to achieve this high status in one's life. In her science fiction novels, she portrays the problems faced by people in real life in a far-distant future and makes the readers aware of those problems, and suggests an anarchistic model of life for global harmony. In addition to this, she emphasizes passive resistance –the strongest weapon taken by great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Jesus Christ to achieve ends.

Anarchism is therefore the teacher of the unity of life, not merely in nature,

and the social instincts, any more than there is between the heart and the lungs: the one the receptacle of a precious life essence, the other the repository of the element that keeps the essence pure and strong. The individual is the heart of society, conserving the essence of social life, society is the lungs that are distributing the element to keep the life essence- that is, the individual – pure and strong (Goldman, 23).

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