

# RHETORIC AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR MANIPULATION AND DISTORTION OF TRUTH

## An Analysis of Orwell's *1984*

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**Abstract:** Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, points out that all individuals indulge in rhetoric to demonstrate the truth or righteousness in what one wants to say. Problems arise only when rhetoric is used to appeal to emotions, rather than reason. In the current times, when rhetoric is used by leaders for propaganda, to whip up emotions in terms of nationalism and racism, George Orwell's remark that "political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable,"<sup>6</sup> sounds relevant. The author examines Orwell's *1984* to demonstrate how rhetoric is a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders that can control the thoughts of individuals, to the extent of reducing them to non-entities. In an era where manufacture of consent is possible, the paper highlights how the quality of rhetoric has vitiated over time and the concern that the abuse of language prevalent in fascist regimes of Hitler and Stalin is slowly creeping into democracies too. A peaceful and harmonious existence is possible only when political leaders engage in responsible rhetoric and are willing to dialogue with dissenting voices.

**Keywords:** Doublethink, Language, Newspeak, Propaganda, Reason, Rhetoric, State, Totalitarianism

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<sup>6</sup>George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* <[www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e\\_polit/](http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit/)> (20 April 2016).

## 1. Introduction

Language is a dynamic tool used for communication, connected to every aspect of human life, thought and interaction.<sup>7</sup> We use language to organize our social existence, beginning from the family, to that of the state. It is indeed a known fact that language has a political dimension too. People in power, or those who desire power, use language to achieve their aims. This is done through rhetoric, which, according to Aristotle, is the art of persuasion.<sup>8</sup> In the political climate of modern times, another term that is gaining prominence is 'propaganda', which is information of a biased or misleading nature, which is used to promote a political cause or point of view. Ludwig Wittgenstein clearly highlights the immense potential of language when he says: "The limits of my language means limits of my world."<sup>9</sup> Limiting one's language is to limit the immense potential that language can offer. Unfortunately, in the hands of politicians, language gets distorted and manipulated, drastically narrowing down its prospects for peaceful and harmonious existence between nations. In the past few decades, we have been seeing how there is a tendency for nations to shun dialogue and the easier path seems to be to wage wars. A classic example for this would be the US invasion of Iraq in the pretext of unearthing large reserves of weapons of mass destruction. In the conflict between India and Pakistan too, dialogue seems to be a distant dream, with political leaders engaging themselves in rhetoric on war and taking pride in surgical strikes.

In such a vicious political environment, where rhetoric and propaganda have become the norm, and the significance of

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<sup>7</sup>Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, Cambridge, MS: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 3.

<sup>8</sup>George Klosko, "Persuasion and Moral Reform in Plato and Aristotle", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol. 47, No. 184(1), 1993, 31, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2394952>> (19 June 2016).

<sup>9</sup>T. R. Martland, "The Limits of My Language Mean the Limits of My World" *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 29, No. 1, 1975, 26, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20126734>> (9 March 2016).

dialogue is vanishing, this paper traces the origin of rhetoric to Greece and the noble intentions with which political leaders engaged with the art of persuasion. However, with time, these noble intentions have vitiated and rhetoric has become a tool in the hands of politicians to manipulate, distort truth and manufacture consent of the masses. The novel *1984* is used to demonstrate how the State can use language and rhetoric to numb individuals, so that voices of dissent and opposition can be silenced forever. The fact that dictatorial regimes thrive by creating an environment of fear, suspicion, surveillance and depriving individuals their freedom to speak and express, is well established by rulers like Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and the current government in North Korea. The novel examines the devastating effect that language and thought control can have on individuals, pulverizing them to non-entities, devoid of independent thinking. Of late, seeds of such an environment are being sown in democratic countries too, with hate speeches, targeting of religious minorities, lynching of mobs and racist killings. In this context, the paper concludes, emphasizing the need to mellow down the rhetoric used by political leaders and to keep the doors of dialogue open, so as to nurture cultural plurality for peaceful and harmonious existence.

## **2. Rhetoric as a Political Tool**

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion and a very powerful tool in the hands of one who is using it. Mark Antony's speech during Caesar's funeral clearly demonstrates the persuasive power of rhetoric, as he succeeds in turning the Roman mob against the conspirators. One of the qualities required for the success of a politician is the ability to lead others, by articulating a clear and inspiring vision of a better future. An orator can also mislead the masses into believing that the interests of the governing party are actually the interests of the people as a whole, when they often actually work against the people. Unfortunately, political rhetoric often distorts truth, to appeal to the emotions of the masses and not to their rationality. George Orwell, in his essay *English and the Political Language*, holds politicians

responsible for the deterioration of English language. According to him, "political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible."<sup>10</sup> Political language is deliberately made vague and ambiguous so as to hoodwink the masses. Even when villages are bombarded, the government claims that they are engaged in *pacification*. When millions of people are rendered homeless and are forced to seek refuge in other countries, governments call it *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are also imprisoned for years without trial, and often shot in encounter killings – this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such beautiful terms are required to prevent gory images of war creeping up into the minds of the people. Hitler could convince his people to hate the Jews, to the extent of engaging in genocide. Stalin even had the support of the Russian Church to propagate his ideas. Thus, rhetoric becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the ruler, to manipulate truth.

### 3. Analysis of 1984

*1984* is a dystopian novel set in the post-war period. It is a text that alarmingly demonstrates how language can be abused, manipulated and distorted, by people in power, to achieve their ends. Winston Smith, the protagonist, works in the Ministry of Truth, very skilfully rewriting the past, to suit the needs of the Party. He rebels inwardly, in spite of being under the complete control of the totalitarian regime, symbolically headed by Big Brother. Day and night, he is under the surveillance of telescreens and the watchful eyes of Big Brother. As the story progresses, Winston realizes that the true price of freedom and liberty is betrayal. The novel's closing statement, 'He loved Big Brother',<sup>11</sup> is a dreadful reminder as to how the State can pulverize the psyche of an individual and get things done, by instilling fear in the minds of the people.

Walter Lippmann, in one of his essays argues that the public can be made to agree with the State, without any opposition, by

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<sup>10</sup>Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, [Online].

<sup>11</sup>George Orwell, *1984*, London: Penguin Books, 1989, 342.

'manufacturing consent', through new techniques of propaganda.<sup>12</sup> In a technology driven world, we see the State working hand in glove with the media, to whip up frenzy among the masses, so as to toe its line. It is bewildering to note how even the thoughts of people can be systematically controlled, by the sheer power of rhetoric and propaganda. The technology driven Oceania with its telescreens and surveillance, powerfully demonstrates this and depicts how the State can even intrude into the private thoughts of individuals. Noam Chomsky highlights how the tone and tenor of political rhetoric has horrifically deteriorated with time. It is used indiscriminately by leaders to distort and manipulate history, facts and truth.<sup>13</sup> This is what Winston does in the Ministry of Truth. According to Big Brother, the past needs to be completely erased from the memories of people to recreate the present.

Doublethink as used in Emmanuel Goldstein's *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, a text outlawed in Oceania, is a form of mental discipline, whose goal is to achieve two contradictory truths at the same time. This is demonstrated in the three party slogans 'War is Peace', 'Freedom is Slavery' and 'Ignorance is Strength'. O'Brien, the Inner Party official, is the embodiment of doublethink, in the novel. He can project his sincerity to the regime and simultaneously impersonate a devout revolutionary committed to its overthrow. The Ministry of Peace wages war, the Ministry of Truth tells lies, and the Ministry of Love tortures and kills anyone who is deemed to be a threat. The Ministry of Peace firmly believes in the slogan, 'War is Peace'. As Orwell highlights in his essay, *Politics and the English Language*, peace is a beautiful word that can camouflage the brutal pictures of war, which not only accomplishes destruction, but also succeeds in achieving it in a psychologically acceptable way. The Ministry of Truth

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<sup>12</sup>Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, London: Transaction Publishers, 1922, 127.

<sup>13</sup>Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, London: Pluto Press, 1989, 198.

primarily engages in distortion of history and truth. "He who controls the present, controls the past and the future"<sup>14</sup> is the policy of the Ministry of Truth. It was claimed in the Party's history books, that it had invented aeroplanes and negated the roles of certain individuals, which Winston knew was not true. But nobody could question this or prove the contrary. As per the Ministry of Love, desire itself is a thought crime. The Party did not want men and women to form loyalties, which it might not be able to control. O'Brien, the Inner Party member makes this clear when he says:

Already we are breaking down the habits of thought which have survived from before the Revolution. We have cut the links between child and parent, between man and woman, between man and man. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of this, Winston secretly maintains a personal diary, which goes against the State's dictate to erase memories.

One of the major themes of *1984* is the role of memory and the attempts made by the State to erase it from the psyche of individuals. The authenticity of memory is validated by the personal diary that Winston maintains. The attempt to write the diary begins the main thread of the plot in which private memory is defended against the official attempts to rewrite history. Although Winston strives to authenticate vague memories, what he finds among the Proles is extremely disturbing: their memories are short, random, wandering and often ridiculous. It needs a trained mind to have a trained memory, in oppressive circumstances. In his essay, *The Prevention of Literature*, Orwell points out that in totalitarian regimes, masses are told that historical records are biased and inaccurate and that such a state would probably set up a schizophrenic system of thought and see nothing wrong in falsifying a historical fact.<sup>16</sup> Abolition of history by the party is

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<sup>14</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 40.

<sup>15</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 306.

<sup>16</sup>George Orwell, "The Prevention of Literature" < [http://orwell.ru/library/essays/prevention/english/e\\_polit](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/prevention/english/e_polit) > (30 January 2016).

another way of making the surface of the world strange. This abolition means that ordinary people have trouble giving shape to their memories into a coherent life narrative. Generally, when one suddenly remembers some sharp detail from the past, the rest of the "relevant facts" also become clear. Thus, the objects in a random personal memory can be dated and contextualized.<sup>17</sup> This is detrimental to the functioning of totalitarian regimes as these memories could trigger voices of dissent.

Another strategy resorted to by the totalitarian regime is the introduction of Newspeak, replacing Oldspeak, as the official language of Oceania. The purpose of Newspeak was to make all other modes of thought impossible to the masses, thus making thought crime literally impossible. Newspeakers had the potential to turn rhetoric into a weapon. "A Party member called upon to make a political or ethical judgment should be able to spray forth the correct opinions as automatically as a machine gun spraying forth bullets."<sup>18</sup> Language, thus, is used as a weapon to restrict thought. O'Brien clearly states that the intention of the Party was to annihilate thought. Apart from reducing vocabulary, no word that could be dispensed with, was allowed to survive. The vocabulary of Newspeak was tiny, and new ways of reducing it were constantly being devised. When Newspeak completely replaces Oldspeak, all links to the past will be completely severed.<sup>19</sup>

The story is set around 1948 – a post war world, brutally and arbitrarily divided into spheres of influence by the great powers and the explosion of the atom bomb. It is a dystopia that projects how the future is going to be. The broad satiric themes dealt within the book are – the division of the world at

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Clune, "Orwell and the Obvious," *Representations*, Vol. 107, No. 1, (Summer 2009) 38 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2009.107.1.30>> (18 July 2016).

<sup>18</sup>Jefferson Hunter, "Orwell's Prose: Discovery, Communion, Separation," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3, Summer 1979, 438 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27543579>> (20 January 2016).

<sup>19</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 354.

Tehran by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, the role of the mass media, hunger for power and the horror that totalitarian regimes are, the debauching of language in the drive towards Newspeak, so that criticism of the party would become linguistically impossible, and the destruction by the Ministry of Truth, of any objective history and truth.

A dictator is one who refuses to engage in dialogue and its most vicious form is revealed in *1984*. Big Brother hardly has a physical manifestation in the novel. But his invisible presence looms large as a threat in the lives of the people of Oceania. Anyone who dares to even think against the State will be taken to Room 101, for appropriate punishment. Newspeak, the new language is introduced with the intention of doing away with dissent and opposition and to manipulate thought through propaganda and 'spin'.

... This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs – to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance ... All history was just a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as necessary.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Big Brother's rule exhibits all elements of fascism – control of behaviour and thought, absolute subordination of the individual, surveillance etc. The government in Oceania is more interested in the exercise of power, in its unrelenting war on memory, rather than the lure of wealth. Under such regimes, Winston declares: "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull."<sup>21</sup> Absence of dialogue is characteristic of oppressive regimes.

The deterioration in language and rhetoric that Orwell and Chomsky lament about is demonstrated in a violent and vicious manner in *1984*. Rhetoric as an art of persuasion, however, was initiated in Greece with the noble intention of moulding good

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<sup>20</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 47.

<sup>21</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 32.

citizens. The origins of rhetoric as a formal method of persuasion in the Western literary tradition can be traced to the democracy of Athens, in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>22</sup> Rhetoric and public speaking were essential for success in public life, and for the Greeks, they were highly respected skills. Sophists were the first instructors in this art, the purpose of which was to persuade others to what was not the fact. However, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle condemned the Sophists for disregarding truth. Plato believed in arguments based on logic, which should ultimately lead to truth, and that communication and truth should go hand in hand.<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, emphasized on how the ability to persuade, convince, cajole or win around, was one of the most useful skills in human life.<sup>24</sup> He strongly felt that the rhetoric that appealed to emotions and attempted to psychologically manipulate audience cannot be called as 'art'.

Robert Morstein-Marx, in his book *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic*, states that there is a strong relationship between public speech and political power in the Roman Republic, through a detailed analysis of the rhetoric of Quintilian and Cicero.<sup>25</sup> Cicero, in his treatise *De Inventione*, refers to how eloquence without wisdom is not advantageous to states and that rhetoric should contribute to the good of humanity. Quintilian in his *Institutes of Oratory* highlighted that a rhetorician must be a good man, speaking for purposes of

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<sup>22</sup>John E. Joseph, *Language and Politics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, 110.

<sup>23</sup>William L. Benoit, "Isocrates and Plato on Rhetoric and Rhetorical Education," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter, 1991, 63, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3885281>> (19 January 2016).

<sup>24</sup>Carnes Lord Hemes, "The Intention of Aristotle's 'Rhetoric'," 109 (1981), 326-339, 331, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4476218>> (19 January 2016).

<sup>25</sup>Robert Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic*, Cambridge, MS: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 22.

justice, fairness and truth.<sup>26</sup> In the middle ages, the importance of rhetoric shifted from political to religious discourses. St Augustine's *Confessions* was meant to influence his readers, and by means of language and form, to direct their attitudes and conduct, grounded in spirituality as entailed by Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

With the commencement of modern times, the focus of rhetoric shifted back to politics. The twentieth century, American, literary theorist, Kenneth Burke's *Rhetoric of Motives*, had a powerful impact on the rhetorical theories of modern times. He defined rhetoric as the use of words by human beings to appeal to people or to encourage some action in them.<sup>28</sup> Habermas too stresses on how freedom, equality and rational enlightenment should be embedded in our everyday speech. He also argues that all individuals should be free to express their attitudes, desires and needs and no speaker should be prevented by internal or external forces, from exercising his right to speak.<sup>29</sup>

Quite contrary to the philosophical ideas on rhetoric put forward by great thinkers, who invariably stressed that it has to be truthful, rational and intending the good of the state, we realize that is not the way it works in real political scenarios. "Today, George Orwell is justly remembered as the novelist who introduced the nightmarish society of thought police which required slavish obedience to Big Brother, promulgated

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<sup>26</sup>Peter France, "Quintillian and Rousseau: Oratory and Education," *Rhetorica*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Summer 1995, 301-321, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rh.1995.13.3.301>> (19 January 2016).

<sup>27</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans., E. B. Pusey, *Project Gutenberg*, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296-h/3296-h.htm>> (19 March 2016).

<sup>28</sup>James L. Kastely, "Love and Strife: Ultimate Motives in Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*," *Rhetorica*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Spring 2013, 172-198 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rh.2013.31.2.172>> (19 January 2016).

<sup>29</sup>Bent Flyvbjerg, "Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?" *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 49, No. 2, June 1998, 210-233 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/591310>> (20 January 2016).

newspeak, and manipulated the record of the past to control the present."<sup>30</sup>

On one level Winston attempts to resist through activism, rebellion and by seeking out the enemies of the regime. But, on another level, he simply struggles to maintain his individuality. In this struggle, which he pursues with tenacity and courage right up to the final torture – memory and mutual trust that he develops with Julia, helps him to negotiate through the turbulent currents. Orwell seems to say that while we have someone to trust, our individuality cannot be destroyed, as man is a social animal and our identity arises from interaction, not autonomy. Unfortunately, this is exactly what the State does to Winston – destroy his individuality by ensuring that he is left without a conscience or independent will. In the end, when he declares that he loves Big Brother, the readers comprehend that the State has succeeded in its mission of reducing Winston to a nonentity. To a large extent, the State achieves this by severely restricting the use of language, as this will curb the scope of one's world. Aristotle, in his *Politics* asserts that mutual trust is necessary for true citizens and the very thing that a tyrant must destroy, if he has to perpetuate his rule successfully. The quality of trust is of supreme importance to a civic culture, as political action is impossible without it. When that is lost, fear and suspicion reign. After the torture that Winston and Julia undergo in Room 101, both feel detached and are no longer the individuals that they were earlier, as "something was killed in your breast: burnt out, cauterized out."<sup>31</sup>

Jean-Jacques Courtine and Laura Willett refer to how totalitarian regimes try to dominate language, as the intention of such regimes is to silence the masses, so that there is no opposition. A uniform language in the form of newspeak is also meant to uproot individuals from their own selves and make

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<sup>30</sup>Richard White, "George Orwell: Socialism and Utopia," *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, (2008), 92 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719892>> (18 July 2016).

<sup>31</sup>Orwell, 1984, 334.

them alien to one another. The recollection of a past or memories of childhood should be completely erased and has to be reduced to a non-entity. According to the authors, "power must become master of language since language is the living memory of man and offers him a space for inner resistance."<sup>32</sup> Thus, language is a threat to such regimes and therefore people must be cured of their language by eliminating old and obscure terms. Signs must be purged and purified and then refilled. O'Brien makes this clear when he says: "We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves."<sup>33</sup> Thus, purification of language is crucial to denote the end of history.

The article, "Selfhood, Language and Reality: George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four," written by Lillian Feder, shows how the 'self' is the greatest challenge to authoritarian regimes and it has to be eradicated not only by all kinds of physical abuse, but by the conversion of language and culture into mental barriers.<sup>34</sup> Facts and truths emanating from the 'self' are a threat to such regimes and have to be permanently flushed out of the world. Political lying, distortion and reconstruction of reality can thrive only when individuality is suppressed. Winston Smith, the protagonist, is seen preoccupied with personal and historical memories, by which he attempts to reconstruct his own self. His yearning for truth and sanity, makes his destruction inevitable.

Morris Dickstein, in his article "Hope against Hope: Orwell's Posthumous Novel," emphasizes that Orwell was also one of the first to describe a new kind of terror state that had evolved since 1930, in which older forms of resistance, including what we today call civil society, could no longer function. Active

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<sup>32</sup>Jean-Jacques Courtine and Laura Willet, "A Brave New Language: Orwell's Invention of *Newspeak* in 1984," *Substance*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Issue 50, 1986, 70 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3684756>> (24 January 2016).

<sup>33</sup>Orwell, 1984, 306.

<sup>34</sup>Lillian Feder, "Selfhood, Language and Reality: Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four"," *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Summer 1983, 395 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41398529>> (24 March 2016).

opposition was wiped out by the secret police, but mental opposition was leveled just as effectively, by new tools for lying, spying, and propaganda.<sup>35</sup> Winston instinctively recoils from a regime that unhinges language from reality, history from memory, and he finally breaks down when his own sense of reality has been undermined.

#### **4. Relevance of 1984**

In the 1930's, during Hitler's and Stalin's regime, we see the abuse of rhetoric moving towards a more vicious form of mind control that threatened to turn whole population into slaves, subservient to the will of a leader. The primary task of Winston, who is employed in the Ministry of Truth, is distortion of history. In a similar manner, Trotsky and Bukharin actually vanished from Soviet history, during the Stalin regime. A classic example in this regard would be how *The Soviet Encyclopedia*, which first referred to Trotsky as a hero of the Civil War, then, removed him entirely from historical records.<sup>36</sup> In Orwell's dystopia, the state is the mass media and vice versa and the citizens of Airstrip One do not have the right to go to the airport of their choice, or choose between airlines, or to move anywhere they are not directed. The official state, from the Taliban, to Saddam Hussein, to the Kim Jong II cult in North Korea, does indeed have very advanced ideas of how absolute the power of the state over the individual should be. Many reporters in Baghdad were compelled to use the imagery of *1984* to convey the sense of the atmosphere there. There are also speculations that the Kim Jong II state founded at the same time as the publication of *1984* might actually have employed the novel as a blueprint in designing its system of total surveillance, regimentation and endless misery.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Morris Dickstein, "Hope against Hope: Orwell's Posthumous Novel," *The American Scholar*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (Spring 2004), 107 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41222329>> (17 July 2016).

<sup>36</sup>John Rodden, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 155.

<sup>37</sup>Rodden, *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, 204.

According to the propaganda model that Chomsky refers to, more democratic societies like the US use subtle, non-violent means of control, unlike totalitarian systems, which use force. In this context, his remark, "Indoctrination is to democracy what bludgeon is to totalitarianism," sounds very apt.<sup>38</sup> In his book, *Media Control*, he refers to the Woodrow Wilson government during World War I, which was probably the first modern government propaganda operation. The population saw no sense in involving in the war. Hence, the government propaganda commission called the Creel commission was put into operation and within six months a pacifist population turned into a hysterical and war-mongering one.<sup>39</sup> In order to successfully implement this, another strategy often used by governments is to falsify history. The justification given by the US government for the Vietnam War that its intervention was required to defend southern Vietnam from its aggressive northern counterpart, also demonstrates this. This is true of all democratic deviations in the form of military aggression – be it the Middle East, Central America or US invasion of Iraq, in the pretext of destroying weapons of mass destruction.

History has time and again demonstrated that the consequences of war can be devastating and political leaders are best at erasing memories and distorting history. Rajeev Bhargava, in his book *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*, points out:

... manipulated history is not uncommon in India. Distortion, lies, exaggerations, the maligning of other communities, is found extensively in the historical literature of militant Hindu nationalists. But official history in India, an adjunct of state policy, invented a different common memory. In contrast to Pakistan's state-backed propagation of the two-nation theory, the Indian state vigorously tried to

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<sup>38</sup>Noam Chomsky, *Media Control*, New York: Vanguard Books, 2004, 20.

<sup>39</sup>Chomsky, *Media Control*, 11.

underscore that Hindus and Muslims *not only are but always have been a unified nation*."<sup>40</sup>

R. C. Majumdar, in his book *Historiography in Modern India*, highlights the fact that historians would be given official directives to disregard all norms of writing history in an objective way.<sup>41</sup> India, too, has had its tryst with autocratic rule during the emergency period in 1975. Ramachandra Guha, in his *India after Gandhi*, states that during the emergency, the contention of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was that emergency was declared to save the country from disruption and collapse: "What has been done is not an abrogation of democracy but an effort to safeguard it."<sup>42</sup>

Thus, aggression and state terror in the Third World becomes 'defence of democracy and human rights' and 'democracy' is achieved when the government is safely in the hands of the rich. According to Chomsky, a classic example for manipulation of facts using rhetoric would be the shift in the name of the Pentagon from the War Department to that of the Defence Department in 1947.<sup>43</sup> The change of name to a milder one is clearly meant to hoodwink the public, as it is a clear indicator to any thoughtful person that the US will no longer be engaged in defence, but aggressive war. The change in terminology was a strategy to disguise the fact that US is getting more into war-mongering. Terms like 'the free world' and 'national interest' are mere terms of propaganda. They are designed, often very consciously, in order to block thought and understanding.<sup>44</sup> Use of beautiful words to camouflage inhuman atrocities heaped on the masses is another strategy used by governments. This is reminiscent of the US invasion of

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<sup>40</sup>Rajeev Bhargava, *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, 116.

<sup>41</sup>R. C. Majumdar, *Historiography in Modern India*, Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1970, 39.

<sup>42</sup>Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, London: Picador, 2008, 494.

<sup>43</sup>Chomsky, *Media Control*, 15.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph, *Language and Politics*, 122.

Iraq, in the pretext of digging out weapons of mass destruction, which ultimately were never recovered. Even the recent US strikes in Syria and Afghanistan is more about Trump's presidential status and legitimacy than about making the world a safer place to live in.

Big Brother's role is currently reminiscent of the current regime in North Korea. We get to hear and see similar instances around us today through the media, and the rhetoric that emanates from politicians to hoodwink the masses, in the name of governance. This 'spin' is of use to remain in power. Mr Narendra Modi imposed demonetisation over night with the stated intention of weeding out corruption. How far this has been successful is any one's guess. But the masses were asked to put up with small inconveniences for the greater well being of the nation. The current government in India, in fact, uses nationalism as a convenient excuse to silence the masses.

Emmanuel Goldstein's contraband text, "Enemy of the People", argues that war is the state's most important product and the state must work to create the mentality that is appropriate to such times.<sup>45</sup> Jean Elshtain, in his article "The Relationship between Political Language and Political Reality," states that the very word 'war' is misleading, as by becoming continuous, war has ceased to exist.<sup>46</sup> A constant war-mongering can be seen in the conflicts between India and Pakistan too. Both nations whip up frenzy and flex muscles frequently, to the extent, that the masses too have been successfully hoodwinked to believe that such rhetoric is justified. Living in the time of hate crimes, racism, restriction on freedom of speech, expression and even on what to eat, moral policing, media trial, State-media nexus, distortion of history and nationalism each and every page of *1984* is realistic and convincing.

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<sup>45</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 380.

<sup>46</sup>Jean Elshtain, "The Relationship between Political Language and Political Reality," *PS*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Winter 1985, 20, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/418801>> (20 January 2016).

Orwell's *1984* is a politically bitter pill to swallow. As the harrowing events of Oceania, under a totalitarian regime, unfurl in front of us, we see traces of such events in full operation, across the globe in countries like Libya, Cambodia, Egypt, Iraq, North Korea, Syria, etc. In the era of post-truth, where lies, manipulation and propaganda are the key political tools for survival even in democracies, Orwell's *1984*, seems more relevant and realistic. Suppressing voices of dissent, refusal to negotiate with separatist groups, shunning dialogue with nations on matters of territorial disputes, State intrusion into the personal choices of individuals as to what to eat, how to dress and whom to worship, concentration of power in the hands of one or two individuals, in spite of an elected democracy – are all alarming signs of democracies transforming into fascist and dictatorial regimes at a much more faster and horrific scale than predicted by Orwell in *1984*.

This is why Orwell still matters and will continue to do so, as long as humanity and political ideologies exist. Hence, it is important that masses should not be swayed by the rhetoric and propaganda perpetuated by political leaders, and should use their rationality in evaluating such language. A healthy democracy must have a strong opposition, in order to prevent the government from taking unilateral decisions. Opposing views and ideas are essential for sustaining growth and plurality in a democracy.

Ashis Nandy, in *The Intimate Enemy*, establishes the possibility of a dialogue between the oppressors and the oppressed. He makes a plea for a "dialogue of visions" in a world where the super powers suppress the third world countries. He proposes initiating cross-cultural dialogues on grounds of equality, and not the big nations imposing their views on the smaller ones. Nandy strongly argues for a dialogue of cultures that can transcend the "flourishing intercultural barriers of our times."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, "Prelude to a Conversation of Cultures in International Society? Todorov and Nandy on the Possibility of Dialogue," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 19, No.

## 5. Conclusion

It is evident from the ideas presented on rhetoric in this paper that the noble intention with which political rhetoric originated in Greece, i.e., the good of the masses, has lost credibility over the years. It has become a tool that can be chiselled as per the needs of the speaker, to get into power, or to remain in power. Orwell aptly remarked:

The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics'. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer.<sup>48</sup>

The nature of language and its role in human interactions is not something eternal and transcendent. It evolves as societies evolve. Languages are historical constructs, with a political process at their centre. Language should never restrict one's ability to think. It should not be a mere garment of thought that exists independently, but should open up insights into other cultures or one's own, giving one multiple perspectives. In a democratic society, the government has the responsibility to explain and justify its policies and actions and effectively use the media towards this end. As seen from the various examples mentioned in this paper, rhetoric, if not used judiciously, can become anti-democratic. It should be used to debate among people of different political views and not to create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. The unilateral decision taken by the Maharashtra government to impose a ban on beef without engaging in dialogue with the various stake holders has jeopardized the livelihood of millions of people who are dependent on the leather industry. This is also a decision that intrudes into the eating habits of people in a nation that is

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1, Winter 1994, 33 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40644790>> (24 January 2016).

<sup>48</sup>Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*. [Online].

culturally diverse and secular. Imposing uniformity goes against the very tenets of cultural pluralism.

The battle of minds has to be won, not through a suppression of ideas, but through dialogues. Very often, in disputes between nations, war-mongering seems to be the easiest route for leaders, and not dialogue. This is because dialogue requires letting go of political egos and is a more time consuming process, the benefits of which might be reaped probably by the succeeding government. War-mongering, on the other hand, is more audible, can whip up emotions and appeals directly to the masses. This is so true in the conflict between India and Pakistan. Leaders on both sides of the border, rather than restraining their rhetoric, have been igniting passion.

Scientific and technological progress has shrunk the world into a global village. But the divisions within have only widened, leading to intolerance. In the troubled times that we are in, especially with religious fundamentalism on the rise, the significance of cross cultural dialogue assumes more significance. Dialogue, with a vision to inculcate the spirit of tolerance and compassion, is the need of the hour. High pitched rhetoric emanating from political leaders need to be toned down, especially of the kind going on between nations involved in territorial disputes. The public looks up to its political leaders and any wrong gesture from their side can have serious repercussions, within and outside the country. The prolonged silence maintained by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the context of vigilante groups indulging in mob lynching can only be interpreted as silent approval. Similarly, Donald Trump's decision, as soon as he assumed office, to impose Visa restrictions on Muslims from specific countries, to enter US, on the ground that these countries are fertile grounds for Islamic Fundamentalism, was not a sound one. This amounts to publicly acknowledging and approving the practise of racism. Thus, political leaders can become instrumental in eroding the secular fabric of democracies, when they engage in hate speeches.

Absence of dialogue leads to suppression of ideas and thoughts, and it can make individuals feel alienated and insecure, forcing them to resort to extreme steps. The very identity of an individual is at stake in an environment that does not nurture dialogue. Dissenting voices should be the fertile ground for democracies to thrive and grow. Hence, the spark of communication should not be extinguished, but rekindled, so that the flames of human dignity and freedom can burn incessantly. For, as Winston Smith aptly remarks: "It is impossible to found a civilization on fear and hatred and cruelty. It would not endure."<sup>49</sup> The wellbeing of a nation and its citizens lies in the judicious use of rhetoric.

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<sup>49</sup>Orwell, 1984, 308.