
ALDOUS HUXLEY'S *BRAVE NEW WORLD*: A JOURNEY

FROM FICTION TO FACTS

Sumita Kanwar

Assistant Professor, M.L.N. College, Yamuna Nagar, Haryana, India

Creative writers are essentially men by letters and learning whose legendary write-ups not only record the souls of their times but also give us a peep into eventualities and future possibilities shaping humanity and their lives. Huxley's *Brave New World* is one such successful work of art which executes skillfully the possibility of gauging the future of mankind and its urge to go beyond the physical world of surety and drudgery. What he perceived in theoretical perspective by creating an imaginary world of future has become the thrust area of science and technology these days. This lends universality to his 'Brave New World' which, when published in the year 1932, struck the intelligent readers as well as academic critics as a 'dystopia' recording an ironic vision of the times to come, comes before us as a factual representation of life in the western world in particular and the entire world in general. The miracle of 'fiction' transforming itself into 'fact' has materialized itself even sooner than Huxley had predicted. Hence the relevance of the present critical perusal of *Brave New World* as a journey from fiction to fact.

Masterpieces of world literature attain their status as classics primarily because they transcend their temporal setting and attain universality. They are the products of their age but in addition to focusing their attention on the problems and perplexities of their times they also forecast the shape of things to come. Their creators may adopt an ironic or satirical mode but the fictional world created by them assumes a distinct factual dimension. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley establishes this point with a definiteness which is amazing because many of the distinctive features of the World State created by him in this 'dystopia' strike to us as facts in less than a century after their presentation in the novel in the year 1932. Huxley has located them in the year 632AF (After Ford) i.e. in 26th Century A.D. but the Western World in particular and the entire world, in general, bears witness to the rapid

process of transformation from fiction to fact which is startling. Huxley himself, in the Foreword to his novel, has expressed the fear in the following words: "It looks as though utopia were for closer to us than anyone, only fifteen years ago, could have imagined. Then, I projected it six hundred years in the future. Today it seems quite possible that the horror may be upon us within a single century."

Brave New World is a satire not only on the present but also an ironic vision of the times to come. In this novel, which is a brilliant piece of science fiction, Huxley has satirized the idea of 'progress' put forward by scientists and philosophers. The dangers of excessive dependence on technology have reduced man to the position of a passive slave. His life today depends so much on the facilities made available to him that he feels helpless if he has to manage without them even for a while. Life has been mechanized and standardized so rapidly that man seems to have lost his individuality and creativity. If this process goes on unchecked, man will soon become a cog in the societal machine. He may be controlled and guided by the rulers so completely that he will lose his own feelings, emotions and aspirations. If we cast a critical look at the world around us, we are shocked to realize how rapidly Huxley's fictional prophecy has transformed itself into striking reality. In this regard Mr. Paul W Gannon remarks that "Science and technology should be the servants of man-man should not be adapted and enslaved to them. *Brave New World* is a description of our lives as they could be in the none too distant future, if the present obsessions persist for standardization according to the sciences-eugenics and psychology, as well as economics and mechanics.

Huxley's *Brave New World* covers a wide range of themes and issues which have become pertinent to the world we inhabit these days. From genetic engineering to class - struggle, the novel examines a future wherein embryos are chemically treated to ensure that they fit in a certain class and where babies and children are hypnotized into believing governmental doctrines as pure truths. In this world, as Diana Neill remarks, "Emotion has been eliminated from life, with the result that there is no art, culture, religion, love, ideals, loyalty or personality. The world is inhabited by healthy automata whose lives and amusements are completely mechanized. Now that stability has been achieved, it is preserved by a rigid

ensorship over all scientific and philosophic investigation." Pain, dirt, disease, squalor, poverty, conflict have all been abolished in this scientific paradise. Every physical desire is encouraged and can be gratified. Restraint is unknown because it is unnecessary. Science has effectively done away with the unpleasant consequences of human concupiscence. Youth beauty and vitality endure as long as life. But man has, in this world, lost his individual freedom and has been reduced to the level of a tamed beast showing complete subservience to the norms of the New World.

The novel opens with a scene at the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre where mass production of babies takes place by means of Bokanovsky process which involves the production of up to 96 identical twins from a single fertilized egg, thereby making maximum conformity possible and Pod snap technique which accelerates the process of ripening. Physiological conditioning is achieved through the addition of chemicals and spinning the bottles to prepare the embryos for the level of strength, intelligence and aptitude required for the tasks to be performed by them. Huxley's ironic representation of the techniques employed in mass production and conditioning of babies seems to acquire a realistic dimension as revealed through the advancements in science and technology today. Huxley's vision of babies being decanted in laboratories in *Brave New World* has materialized in the form of IVF (in vitro fertilization), a technique by which an egg is fertilized by the sperm outside the body. Likewise, with genetic engineering (a technique used to change the genetic make-up of cells to produce improved or novel organisms); humanity has reached a new landmark in biotechnology. Scientists today have been able to isolate certain genes in the human body that cause various disabilities.

In the novel, individual differences have been eliminated so as to achieve the World State's goals of Community, Identity and Stability. Citizens are characterized as Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons on the basis of the role the World State expects them to play. Whereas the Alpha plus are highly intelligent leaders, the Epsilon minus morons do all the menial work. An unpleasant aspect of Huxley's world is the method adopted for creating a semblance of contentment. Moral instructions are given to children by means of Hypnopaedia (sleep teaching). Thomas, the Director of the Central London Hatchery and

Conditioning Centre defines it as "the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all times." State prescribed suggestions like "More stitches, less riches, "and "Everyone belongs to everyone else" are fed repeatedly in the minds of the children during sleep. This process enables the governors of the World State to prepare the citizens for their pre-destined roles.

Today psychological conditioning poses to be a still greater threat to humanity as it has the potential to make a person lose his identity and individuality. It is three dimensional because the onslaught on the human mind takes place at the emotional, mental and spiritual level. Children these days are as emotionally isolated and alienated from each other as are the children in Huxley's *Brave New World*. As their minds are already conditioned due to the excessive use of gadgets, they display a shocking lack of childlike curiosity, innovativeness and creativity. When they grow up, they reflect a moral and spiritual hollowness because their thoughtless pursuit of material betterment makes them selfish and self-centered. Their faith in their own potential makes them disregard concepts like belief in religion and divinity.

The consumeristic society projected in *Brave New World* is strikingly familiar today. Huxley might have written about it satirically but it potentially holds even more weight today. Individuals these days are indoctrinated with catchy phrases that cement their belief in the capitalist and consumerist way of living enforced by the rulers of the society. This consumeristic tendency is clearly visible in the present day trend of reckless purchase of unnecessary things. The World State in *Brave New World* thrived on consumerism by keeping its citizens in need of unnecessary material things. Games like 'Centrifugal Bumble Puppy' and 'Obstacle Golf' which required the use of elaborate apparatus were encouraged. Likewise, in the world today, print media, electronic media and even social media sites are being exploited to encourage consumerism.

Beyond providing social engagement and involvement in work or play, the need for solitude and spiritual communion is gratified through the free availability and universal consumption of the drug 'Soma' in the World State. Soma reminds us of the ritualistic drink of the same name 'Soma Ras' consumed by gods and goddesses in ancient Indo-Aryan mythology. In *Brave New World*, soma is a hallucinogen that takes the users to an enjoyable

hangover. It was developed in the World State to provide these inner-directed personal experiences within a socially managed condition in the form of the state-run religious organizations which were sorts of religious clubs. Likewise, people today have the false notion that pill-popping can fix anything-unhappiness, anxiety or unpleasant feelings. They regard antidepressants as being a 'magic-pill' that can be a remedy for almost all ailments. We find a striking similarity between the universality and cavalier attitude towards drugs and antidepressants coupled with their abuse in *Brave New World* as well as in the present world.

The utter chaos in relationships can be viewed in terms of contrast between life in the World State, life on the Reservation and the situation we witness in the world around us. The maxim of the World State "Everyone belongs to everyone else" indicates that the very idea of 'family', 'mother' or 'father' was revolting in *Brave New World*. Marriages, natural birth, parenthood and pregnancy were considered obscene that people blushed on hearing about them. The life on the Reservation presented a sharp contrast because sex on the Reservation was a private rather than social activity. Chaos in man-woman relationship is let in when the values of the two worlds clashed with each other. This is reflected through the humiliation Linda had to bear at the hands of women on the Reservation who were hostile to her because of her promiscuous relationships with many men, including Pope. John's rejection of Lenina's sensual advances, despite his passionate leanings towards her, can also be attributed to the same (clash of values). Though Lenina desperately wants to have John, her unaccustomed vulnerability makes her a victim of John's violence twice. The picture in the world around us is as shocking as in Huxley's book. The live-in relationships, despite the inbuilt complications they create, are an established norm today. About the number and frequency of divorces, the least said the better. Huxley's prophetic vision seems to have materialized faster than he had forecast.

Thus *Brave New World* unfolds before us a bizarre though exciting series of developments related to a futuristic world which seems to be human though everything about its inhabitants is perfectly controlled. The fact that the inhabitants in the World State are 'hatched to perfection' and 'made to order' strictly according to the demand, their physical,

emotional and mental faculties are suited to the tasks they are expected to perform and their entire conduct is so tamed that they strike us as automata rather than human beings, is really remarkable. We have only to look around us and realize that in our own world at the beginning of the 21st century many of their marked tendencies are easily identifiable in children and even adults: their likes and dislikes, their emotional, intellectual and spiritual make up, their fast making and breaking bonds, their over-dependence on gadgets, drugs and electronic media. We are left wondering if we have, even without our conscious effort, stepped into the future Huxley has created in the present novel. Thus *Brave New World*, in this sense, is an authentic journey from fiction to fact.

Works Cited

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Chatto and Windus.1932.

Neill, Diana. *A Short History of the English Novel*. Collier Books, 1964.