

STATELESS SOCIETY: AN ANARCHIST VOICE IN URSULA K. LE GUIN 'S *THE DISPOSSESSED*

- Dr. J. Muthulekha,
- Assistant Professor in English, Sona College of Technology, Salem.

Etymologically, the word 'state' is derived from the Latin term *status*, which means, "condition" or "status". In the 14th century Europe, this term is equated with the legal status of persons such as noble, common, and clerical and the status of the king. In ancient times, the word 'state' is used by Greeks to refer to '*polis* or *city-state*'. Ancient Romans used the word 'state' that means *civitas*. In the first part of the sixteenth century, Machiavelli used the word *La Stato* to refer state as 'power system' and it has gained its currency in his work *The Prince*. At the end of the sixteenth century, Bodin the French philosopher called it a *republic* and remarked state as sovereign power. In the seventeenth century, Hobbes, the British philosopher says that the state had unlimited power.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines state as, "an organized community living under a unified political system, the government" (890). State has emerged as an omnipotent entity to save people and forms government to execute activities against evils that prevail in society such as racial discrimination, slavery and poverty. William Godwin postulates that government is formed to cater the needs of society and to eradicate the 'injustice and violence' that prevail in the society but desperately it leads to 'wild projects of calamity, to oppression, despotism, war and conquest' and 'by perpetuating and aggravating the inequality of property', it induces men towards 'robbery and fraud' (*Political Justice*). The essence of government is to enhance the society by executing just laws and rules that may lead the state towards progression. But in recent times, laws implemented by government serve neutral.

Government is the "political system by which a nation or community is administered and regulated" (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 393). Government is sole responsible for governing society in a systematic pattern but it fails in its notion by its patriarchal domineering authority by means of state, religion and patriarchal society. It is the social apparatus of the state to achieve its end and the authority has to serve people and bring solidarity among community.

Government that is evolved for the wellbeing of society becomes a tool for the progression of a few powerful authorities. Rules and laws serve as a powerful weapon to suppress downtrodden people. The anarchist opposes such authoritative organizations that hamper peace prevailing among people. 'Anarchism is a social philosophy where central tenet is that human beings can live justly and harmoniously without government upon human beings is in fact harmful and evil' (*New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1:371).

In this paper, the anarchists' voice for stateless society has been dealt with and it has been analyzed through Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*. Anarchism is an ideology that unlocks the slavery chain of an individual from the domination of state or hierarchal authority. Etymologically, the term anarchism is derived from the ancient Greek word *anarchos* which refers to "without rulers". It upholds the stateless state, free will and free desire and insists freedom of an individual to act upon the evils that prevail in the society and preaches social responsibility and compassion towards fellow human beings.

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 have formed their own country with idealist anarchist principles after they came out of Urras.

They are the faithful followers of the anarchist rebel Odo and hence the Urrastians gave their moon Anarres to the anarchist society to keep away from ‘wrecking their profiteering states and setting up the just society there’ (39).

Decentralization has become an integral and irresistible part of Anarres. Although there is no government, they formed a group or syndicate named Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC) for administration and management. Their prior concern is not governing the people but administrating the production. As Shevek explicates, “They have no authority either to support me or to prevent me. They can only tell us the public opinion of us where we stand in the social conscience” (*TD*, 81).

The capitalist government hampers freedom of an individual and people by laying down strict laws and regulations and thereby tries to subordinate people by saying that it is functioning for the good of people but executes rules for the benefit of rich and powerful mongers. The rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer and the worst situation is the government that should function for the people is against them. People are scared of dominant authorities and become voiceless even in the crucial scenario. Government uses Property, Education, Nationalism, Militarism/Prison and Racial Discrimination as a means to achieve its end.

In this paper, the tyrannical rules of state and its harassment towards layman have been discussed. It also picturizes how common people are paranoid and are swept into the vortex of ultimate destruction by these virulent weapons used by state.

Property

Property, the powerful weapon of the capitalistic world to crush downtrodden to ashes, becomes a debatable issue in anarchistic society. The state propagates selfishness, jealous, zeal for land, colonization among people and disintegrates not only the land but also the minds of people. In his work, *What is Property?* Pierre- Joseph Proudhon critiques capitalism and reflects the injustice prevailing in the society. He coined the phrase, “property is theft” and brought 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.

He condemns the legitimate property (possession) since it is produced out of labor and occupation and critiques, “The proprietor, the robber, the hero, the sovereign – for all these titles are synonymous – imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control; that is, he pretends to be the legislative and the executive power at once ... [and so] property engenders despotism”.

In the novel *The Dispossessed*, the planet Anarres represents anarchist society. In Anarres, people share their land and things and there is no private property. Robbery and Murder never exist in 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) and there is no job discrimination in their society. Everyone has the right to access everything they wish in the anarchistic world. 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.

“Property is”, Goldman, relates, “the dominion of man’s needs, the denial of the right to satisfy his needs. She stresses that “Sacrifice! Abnegate! Submit!” are the recurrent voices of the government and proposes that anarchism is the only way that redeem the people and make them view the world as ‘the insatiable, devouring, devastating nature of property, and he is preparing to strike the monster dead’ (*Anarchism and Other Essays*, 23).

The word “belonging” is meaningless to Anarrestians. Sharing is the motto in Anarres society. The singular forms of the possessive pronoun in their Pravic language is used just for emphasis. Instead

of saying ‘my mother’ or ‘my hands hurts’, they learn to say ‘the mother’ or ‘the hands hurts me’ and so on. In Anarres, 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” (*TD*, 26).

When Shevek was born, his mother Rulag had been promoted to work in the Central Institute of Engineering, Abbenay. His desolated life starts from his childhood. Though he lives only with his father, he is very much happy to be with him and likes to be a good physicist. His interest in Mathematics and Physics raised him as a good scientist. The scientist’s search will predominantly underlie various innovative ideas regarding material prosperity but Shevek’s search is towards human solidarity. His desire to link both worlds- Urras and Anarres through his new theory enables him to understand what the bitter reality is in understanding the true color of both the planets. A scientist’s anarchist vision has resulted in the invention of ‘ansible’ that may serve as a bridge between Anarres and Urras. Shevek’s mind is internalized with anarchistic ideals and thoughts.

When he went to Urras, he was surprised by the luxurious lives of Urrastians, which is contradictory to their anarchistic world. While he was taken to villages by a hired car, he wonders that people ‘owned a car privately but they were heavily taxed’. From his childhood, Shevek had been taught to perceive Urras as ‘a fasting mass of inequity, iniquity and waste. But all the people he met, and all the people he saw, in the smallest country, village were well dressed, well fed, and, contrary to his expectations, industrious’(*TD*, 70).

After giving a lecture, Shevek received 10,000 International Monetary Units and a grant of 5000 from the Ioti government and had it in his account in the National Bank. Instead of being glad to receive a good sum of money, 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’ (*TD*, 109). According to him, bank is a place where greed, laziness, and envy were assumed to move all men’s acts and this sounds dangerous to him.

When Shevek sees 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...” (*TD*, 171). Yet he tries to accept bitter reality and remarks, “When in the Land of Property think like a propertarian. Dress like one, eat like one, act like one, be one” (*TD*, 174). His acceptance of life is not passive; he suffers willingly for society. To him the word “happiness, sorrow, and identity” are abstract meaningless words. Luxury, he enjoys in Urras never tempts him and at the same time poverty in Anarres never allows him to regret on his sufferings.

In *Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin elucidates that in an anarchist society, people works voluntarily. He puts forth that work is “a psychological necessity, a necessity of spending accumulated body energy, a necessity which is health and life itself”(6). In Urras, people do work for money or desire for profit but in Anarres, people take hard jobs but they will do it with utter satisfaction. They worked for the sake of work and they won’t expect any reward or won’t do anything out of fear of law.

The Urrastians mistakenly identify themselves with body. They accept such thoughts as “I am white and I am a man”, or “This is my house, my country, and my religion”. Due to their ignorance, they give priority to their material needs forgetting their ultimate destination; unaware of the fact that their happiness born and decay within this temporality. Shevek invents General Temporal Theory that will lead to the invention of a new device called ‘ansible’ against FTL (Faster than Light Travel). This device enables people to communicate with people in various planets within a short period. He wishes that his visit to Urras will be fruitful to him by enabling him to share his idea with the Urrasti scientist and may help him to give his theory to entire world. But he was disappointed by the selfish attitude of the Urrastians. Being an idealist, his priority is only towards welfare of the society, not the capitalist government.

Shevek is dispossessed of what he has. He belongs neither to his native land Anarres nor to his adopted land Urras. When he was lured by the beauty of Urras, his detachment towards material needs made him say, “I’m thinking like an Urrasti...Like a damned propertarian” (*TD*, 172).

Shevek has realized the basic distinction between Urras and Anarres society. The capitalistic world deprives resources for the benefit of selfish minor groups but lay man toils till their death out of poverty. The government exacerbates the livelihood of common man and builds its powerful fortress. It uses property as a tool to suppress downtrodden people. “Property”, says Emma Goldman, “recognizes its own gluttonous appetite for greater wealth, because wealth means power—the power to subdue, to crush, to exploit, to enslave, to outrage, to degrade” (*Anarchism and Other Essays* 24).

The Anarrestians are unpropertied class and they never possess title. Their life is only for the development of their society and their pains are inescapable. Though they dispossess rich resources, they share available resources equally without any bias. Their pain counts. Compassion is the best thing in the world. But in Urras, selfishness dominates the mind of every one. The government tries to withstand its power over people. The scientists took Shevek through a new housing development to show ‘how the state looked after its people’, whereas ‘the settlers of Anarres had left the laws of man behind them, but had brought the laws of harmony along’ (*TD*, 75).

In recent times, education, a source of refinement has turned a guillotine to freedom of thought. State insists the importance of education not to enlighten minds of individuals but to master minds of students to comply with rules and regulations made by government and thereby education acts as ‘a narrow wall’ and prevents students to welcome innovative thoughts. Existing education system has turned students to robots by changing them into a ‘social construct’ of state rather than a free individual.

The purpose of education is to impart knowledge that enables students to contribute to society but knowledge they acquired stands as a mere concept than deeds. Real education should shape and enrich the mind of an individual but state education fetters the questioning mind of students and implores them to continue their conventional method of learning than thinking out of the box. Anarchists, the liberators of free mind oppose this kind of system and try to decolonize the mind of the young, dynamic students towards critical and creative thinking. Emma Goldman critiques the education system that prevails in recent times as, “The 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 due system of exploitation and oppression” (*Anarchism and Other Essays*, 17). Education becomes whole and organic only when students know to see the distinction between good and right. Unfortunately, conventional education system is a mediocre and glossy predicament in the existing world.

Institutionalized education conditions the mind of students and thereby makes them a slave to state. It quenches its greediness for power by injecting the hierarchal system of life and allowing them to see their fellow beings low.

In Anarres’ learning centre, all the skills that include ‘singing, metrics, dance, the use of brush, chisel, knife, lathe and so on’ are taught. ‘The children learn to see, speak, hear, move, handle’ (*TD*, 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’ (*TD*, 131). But in Urras, students are stuffed with mere theoretical knowledge than skills. Students were trained in an excellent manner and they are care free, young adults. As said by Shevek, “They were superbly trained... Their minds were fine, keen, ready. When they weren’t working, they rested. They were not blunted and distracted by a dozen other obligations. 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). However, their freedom appeared to Shevek as ‘their lack of freedom of initiative’ (*TD*, 107). In Anarres, people had not been ‘free from anything; only free to do anything’.

Education should impart egalitarianism, cooperation, mutual aid and human solidarity to young vibrant future citizens but conventional education system provokes students to see discrimination among people such as racism, nationalism, caste and community discrimination and uses militarism and prison as a tool to serve its needs. It aggravates ever-lasting war between each other and never allows fellow beings to treat as brother or equal partner. Hierarchical pattern dominates the mind of people and controls their behavior to obey its command.

One of the major institutions that hailed slavery is religion. Submission to God is blindly believed as submission to scriptures, written by patriarchal society. Anarchists attack religion that serves as institution. They believe that conventional rules and regulations practiced by such institutions end in chaos and subjugation of human beings. Religion allows one to be scared of everything they came across in life. It preaches against self-reliance. These institutions make one to depend on celestial being and discourage one's effort. Religion becomes an integral and inseparable part of one's life. Men start to practice what it preaches. Unfortunately they don't rethink or consider the underlying thought that is inherent in it.

Nationalism

Nationalism serves as a tool for state to subordinate people. Le Guin critiques nationalism and depicts it as a barrier to human compassion in all her novels. Leo Tolstoy defines patriotism as, "the principle that will justify the training of wholesale murderers; a trade that requires better equipment for the exercise of man-killing than the making of such necessities of life as shoes, clothing, and houses; a trade that guarantees better returns and greater glory than that of the average workingman" (qtd. in Goldman 49). Nationalism induces selfishness of people instead of showing development in the society and leads to violence in society and brings out discrimination among people in terms of race, religion, caste and creed and has thus resulted in war. State uses this mighty force to create chaos among fellow beings and make them respect physical boundaries.

State builds the mental wall among people and creates the illusion that people can live in harmony only when they submit entirely to their government. The innocent and ignorant people respects the rules and laws laid by the state blindly unaware of the result it will create in the society. With the help of its own people, state creates military to protect the nation from neighboring nations. Ironically, military that is created for protecting people destroys neighboring people.

Patriotism narrows and blinds human mind to look at other countries inferior and induces emotion of people to fight against neighbouring country and tends them to forget humane trait that is imbibed in them. Emma Goldman condemns patriotism by saying that 'Patriotism is inexorable and, like all insatiable monsters, demands all or nothing. It does not admit that a soldier is also a human being, who has a right to his own feelings and opinions, his own inclinations and ideas. No, patriotism cannot admit of that' (*Anarchism and Other Essays*, 53).

The protagonist of Le Guin is the metaphor of anarchist principles and he is against suppression, inequality by any means and poverty. To him, national boundaries are just luminal walls, not a boundary to mind. The wall does not serve as the restraint of mind and human freedom. The word 'nationalism' is used by a state as a political weapon to serve its needs.

Shevek show passive resistance towards their government and the nationalistic attitude of people. In *The Dispossessed*, Chiffoilisk argued in favour of his country. When he finds out that Shevek is not having written papers of his General Temporal Theory, Chiffoilisk remarks:

I haven't your individualistic moral scruple, you know. I knew you didn't have the Theory down in writing. If I'd thought you had, I would have made every effort to get it from you, by persuasion, by theft, by force if I thought we could abduct you without bringing on a war with A-Io. Anything, so that I could

get it away from these fat Ioti capitalists and into the hands of the Central Presidium of my country. Because the highest cause I can ever serve is the strength and welfare of my country. (117)

But Shevek repudiates the nationalistic notion of Chifoilisk and says, “I want solidarity, human solidarity. I want free exchange between Urras and Anarres. I worked for it as I could on Anarres, now I work for it as I can on Urras. There I acted. Here I bargain”.(TD, 116)

Mahatma Gandhi, the epitome of anarchist principles, critiques against patriotism in an interview in *YoungIndia* magazine on 4 April 1929:

My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or exploitation of other nationalities. The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always in every case, without exception, consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large. (qtd. in. King, 337)

Nationalism kindles violence among nations and make them forgot human solidarity and compassion that exist between each other. It enhances divide rule policy than cooperation, mutual aid and fetters individual responsibility towards society. The Urrastian’s selfishness to use ansible for the benefits of their own nation enables them to cheat the global scientist Shevek. Patriotism plants selfishness, jealousy and greedy among people and never allows them to share anything freely with other nations. It allows people to build a wall both physical and mental and makes them aloof and allows being far off from humanity – “THERE WAS A wall (*sic*). It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared; an adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than wall” (TD, 5). Now people are aware of the harassment of state. They are thinking in a global perspective due to advancement of science and technology.

Militarism/Prison

Militarism/prison is the major weapon of state to lure people by showing an illusion that state will protect them at any means. Ironically, it is used to suppress the 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). It assures people that peace will prevail in country but creates only chaos by war. It disturbs harmony among people.

Atro, the scientist in Urras, favors militarism and admires the bravery of soldiers to Shevek. He narrated war at Benbili and appreciated soldiers who died for noble cause:

You’ll find the soul of the people true as steel, when the country’s threatened. A few rabble-rousers in Nio and the mill towns make a big noise between wars, but it’s grand to see how the people close ranks when the flag’s in danger. You’re unwilling to believe that, I know. The trouble with Odonianism... is that it’s womanish. It simply doesn’t include the virile side of life. ‘Blood and steel, battle’s brightness,’ as the old poet says. It doesn’t understand courage—love of the flag. (TD, 236-37)

Soldiers are instrumentalized by state to achieve its end without thinking of great loss occurred through war. If one fights against such cruel actions laid by government, he/she is severely condemned or punished as crazy one by the government.

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

Government creates law only for poor citizens who suffer in all means, who submits oneself to government and yearns for freedom and peace from it. The ruthless state sees poor as a convict and considers their freedom as 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’ (*Anarchism and Other Essays*).

In the novel *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin critiques laws imbibed by government as, “To make a thief, make an owner, to create crime, create laws’ (116). Prison and punishment is only for the layman. The rich man is led free by state since it is running out of corruption. State scares to take any action against rich and mighty politicians and harasses layman who pays taxes for the benefit of state. What do you think the Asylum is – a prison? It’s a refuge. If there are murderers and chronic work-quitters there, it’s because they asked to go there, where they’re not under pressure, and safe from retribution. (*TD*, 142)

Law punishes criminals by saying that they will realize their mistakes and become responsible citizens but in turn, it changes them into brutal men. The ‘so-called’ criminals will be excluded from society as ‘untouchables’ and have been condemned by state as prisoners. They were aloof in society once they were led free from the prison. If government gives job opportunity and space for convicts and respects them as one among them in society, it is able to eradicate crime from society gradually, but it fails to do it and thereby the real cause of evolution of prison has become hypocrisy in the existing world.

State, created for maintaining social harmony has failed in its mission in recent times. For governing people, it has laid down strict laws and regulations. Unfortunately, such orders serve only the rich and mighty persons. The government forces layman to comply with rules laid by them. Law and order is an illusion in the existing world. It punishes the pauper and downtrodden people who steals a small sum for quenching their basic needs and leaves the corrupted politicians and rich men free. People should fight against the suppression of hierarchical institutions such as state and religion to achieve freedom. Human solidarity is the only way towards global harmony towards nature.

As said by an anarchist Shevek in *The Dispossessed*, “Pain counts”. Suffering for the cause of human solidarity is the highest dharma in the world. One should come out of conventional rules to fight for the welfare of society.

No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected is free, whatever may be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified. The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it. Each is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily *or* mental and spiritual. Mankind are greater gainer by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest. (Mill 720).

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