

## Reflection of Psychic Distemper in the Selected plays of Osborne

Twishampati

Research Scholar in Ranchi University.

**Abstract:** John Osborne was well-known among the members of this 'Angry' tradition. Again, Critics blamed the all-too frequent use of the phrase "Angry Young Men", one which was "employed to a group without so much as an attempt at understanding all those complacency, the idealistic bankruptcy of their environment"(Maschler,*Declaration*,P.7). Some other important members of the so-called "Angries" were novelists Kingsley Amis and John Wain. Osborne was the most significant figure of this 'Angry' movement, if not the outright innovator of the trend.

Hayman mentioned "Beckett, Osborne, Pinter and Arden as the four most important talents to emerge in the theatre in the mid-nineteen fifties. Of the four, he ensured, Osborne had the most direct influence on the new movement, in that he did more than anyone to popularise the new type of the hero and the new type of actor" (Hayman, *Evening News*, quoted in *Casebook Series*, P.46). Though Osborne only discontentedly allowed to it, one could consider that his play *Look Back in Anger* first produced in 1956 initiated the "Angry" movement.

Again, it is regarded that 'Angry Young Men' is new generation of writers appeared on the scene in 1950s Britain. The 1950s decade is remembered as the angry decade. The most famous of them were novelists like John Braine, John Wain and Kingsley Amis and the playwright John Osborne. All of them were the followers of Labour Government. Alongside, John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter and John Wain were portrayed as the key figures of the 'angry young men'. Nonetheless, Osborne opposed loyalty to any group including the angry young movement. But it can be observed that they have remained as a voice in opposition especially to the British Establishment. Most of the central characters of Osborne's later plays have something in common in the sense that they are, like Jimmy, angry about the conditions they are in. Osborne deals with the theme of anger in his later plays as an expression of other themes such as frustration, lack of communication, alienation, search for compassion and love, disillusionment, suffering, despair and self-pity. There are several reasons for psychic distemper of Osborne's

heroes. War damaged a scarcity of man- power and materials which combined to create a serious urban housing problem. London Smog of 1952 continued five days and killed more than 4,000 people from heart and lung diseases. In Industrial areas, factories polluted the air as well as the waterways. The degraded industrial environment of the post war era was the cause of public anger. The outcome of Second World War was the cause of public anger. National Health Service did not enable to fulfill the public needs.

**Key Words:** Anger, rebel, frustration, alienation, disillusionment

Jimmy's anger in *Look Back in Anger* has deep roots. He is a type of man to whom, in the words of the poet Keats, the miseries of the world and misery and will not let them rest. Jimmy is able to suffer on the side of others, and of living in other people's lives. As a boy he had endured beside of his dying father. He recollects that experience with bitterness. All time he had resided beside his father's bed, to pay attention to his father's taking. After the conclusion of twelve months of that sort of thing, he turned to a "veteran". This condition had given him the lesson of despair and bitterness. At that early age, this condition stirred his anger and made him helpless. Consequently, we observe Jimmy's remorse for Hugh's mother, an old woman "going through the sordid process of dying", as he puts it.

Jimmy feels that such imaginative suffering becomes a vividly solitary experience. The heaviest, strongest creatures in this world, he says to Alison, look like to be the loneliest, like the old bear, imitating his own breath in the dark forest. There's no warm pack. The voice that cries out doesn't have to be a weakling's does it. He enquires Helena not to dispossess Jimmy's suffering from him because he would not be lost without it. But Alison's declaration is literally true. Jimmy becomes unfulfilled without his suffering. Yet, at the sametime, and quite naturally, he resists the capacity for the self-torment with which he is adorned. He rebels against the pricks, observing all around him people who are without worries: "They all want to escape from the pain of being alive" (Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, P.93), he says and, he desires for Alison to be initiated into the enduring too. He preferred her to have a child that dies,

"Let it grow, let a recognizable human face emerge from that little mass of India rubber and wrinkles" (Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, Race and National Identity*, P.87), indicating to her body. Such outbursts tending on hysteria, portrays the strain in which his sense of the

difference between himself and others inflict him. Alison, by retreating behind an arrival to separate indifference creates communication between him and herself impossible: “That the girl there can twist your arm off with her silence” (Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, P.59), is his bitter remark on her reaction.

Verbal speech in *Anger* of Osborne’s heroes was largely a reaction against apathy and excessive pride that characterized post war England. The burst of excitement and enthusiasm which pursued the Labour Victory in 1945, condensed in the period of economic austerity and imperial decline that imitated. The great hopes for a new better society lessened in to absorption on material goals. Two social welfare organizations – Nationalization of industry and health insurance did not bring about the extremist changes in social structure advocators had visualized. As England had reached the threshold of the 1950s, national indifference had become a remarkable development. It was apparent in almost every aspects of life : in the decay of the economic growth rate , diminishing attendance at the trade union meetings and church services, lack of interest in political events , prank in the arts.

However, the Post war revolution brought divisions inside the upper class. Although the upper-class members were generally rich aristocrats, after the war many successful businessmen or politicians were regarded to belong to the highest classes well. These differentiations in the class were sensed solely by its members, while from the stand- point of the citizens of the lower classes it was still regarded to be a cohesive level. Nevertheless, this shift was not typical exclusively for the Upper- class. On the contrary, this featured seemed in the two remaining strata as well.

Indeed, Jimmy is a “tiresome young man” (*Look Back in Anger*, P.50) with only purpose of being repulsive and worst of all his purposeful effort to do so. As Michelene Wandor puts it:

*Alison’s family represents all that despises in ruling class, which no longer any good cause to die for. The anguish is ironic, since while Jimmy may despise their cause, he has none of his own.*

And Ronald Hayman avers:

*Not that ‘anger’ is really the right word. Osborne used it in his title and it had come to stay. It was a catastrophe for a long time....Jimmy is himself negative in that he has no alternatives to offer. He’d like to see things changed but he has no ideas about what they ought to be changed.*

*Osborne is no latter day Shaw with a program of social reforms. His basic feeling seems to be that if there aren't any good brave causes left which are worth dying for then there can't be any causes that are worth fighting f it's very comfortable to identify with him on this score and thousands of people have taken him to their hearts who in ordinary life would find such a man boorish, arrogant and tiresome. (Hayman, Evening News, quoted in Casebook Series, P.46)*

So here was Osborne desperately attempting to mention a cause to his raging hero when there was none in sight. This was partly because of his near complete recognition with him. In his autobiography *A Better Class of Person* speaking of his marriage to Pamela, he mentions one of Jimmy's speeches:

**“Jimmy:** The last time she was in a Church was married to me. I expect that surprises you, does n't? It was expediency, pure and simple. We were in a hurry, you see. (The comedy strikes him at once, and he laughs.) Yes, we were actually in a hurry!”

*(Look Back in Anger, Act 2, Scene-1, P.54)*

And then he asserts,

“Apart from the references to Daddy and the Indians Princes, It is a fairly accurate description of our wedding”

*(Look Back in Anger, Act 2, Scene-1, P.54)*

*Pamela's refusal to be drawn was the power of sphinx paw.....Author and protagonist are mirror opposites. Whereas Jimmy mistakes loving selflessness for unfeeling passivity, Osborne interpreted (Pamela's) bland complacency for the complaisance of a generous and loving heart.*

*(Innes, Modern British Drama, P.98)*

There is a resemblance between Pamela Lane, beloved of John Osborne and Alison in the fact that both had become pregnant, suffered and had left her husband. Parents of Pamela just like Alison's had firmly opposed their marriage and as the autobiography describes were so troubled that even went so far as to innovate a private investigator to hold an eye on their son-in-law. These facts taken from his own life would undoubtedly incite the dramatist to make out his protagonist and the phrase "Angry Young Man" was used to represent both. It is not surprising then, that Jimmy has his creator's compassion, whereas Alison is the outsider never comprehend and always subvert.

Again and again it affirms that he is superior to her all but become a habit with him. David Hare in *Theatre's Great malcontent* seeks to protect Jimmy Porter by declaring that John's subject is failure and that "John's characters, vibrating with life, have no clue how to put the nightmare away, how to talk the bloody thing to death. These are people for whom the fear always returns". But David in his brilliant essay becomes unsuccessful to observe what such a character would sum to. Jimmy mentions a case of rejoice for himself out of his father's death and damns Alison on that score too:

**JIMMY:** Anyone who's never watched somebody die is suffering from a pretty bad

case of virginity. His good humour of a moment ago deserts him, and he begins to remember.

For twelve months, I watched my father dying- when I was ten years old.

He'd come back from the war in

Spain, you see.....

.....

I knew more about love.....betrayal ....and

death, when I was ten years old than you will probably

ever know all your life". (Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, Act-2, Sc.i, P.57-58)

Osborne applied bitter feelings and his sympathy for his father. Though Osborne's father did not work to the war in Spain, it is true that like Jimmy Porter's father Godfrey was ill and lost his hope to be a copywriter due to his ill- health. Osborne in his first volume of autobiography,

*A Better Class of Person* remembered it:

In the Summer of 1938 my father was compelled to give up  
his job through ill- health. He was a copywriter in an  
advertising agency in Shoe Lane, right  
beside the Daily Express. ....  
Even I knew that the trappings  
of glamorous departure were taking him  
to an exile of pain of some sort and  
little hope of comfort whatsoever.

(Osborne, *A Better Class of Person*, P.50)

If we read both the play and autobiographies of Osborne quite perceivngly we do comprehend that Jimmy's hostility towards the Church depicts Osborne's own antagonism towards it. In the play "Look Back in Anger", when Jimmy and his friend Cliff are conversing with each other, "Church bells start ringing outside". For the first time the audience devotes attention about Jimmy's hatred towards the Church: "Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started!". "He rushes to the window" and shrinks in pain and anger:

**"Jimmy:.....**Wrap it up. Will you? Stop those bells! There's  
Somebody going crazy in here! I don't want to hear  
them!" (Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, P.25)

Later when Helena convinces Alison for going to Church without knowing that her husband does not like the Church, he accuses Helena for exciting his wife in going to the Church and thus resisting his beliefs and convictions:

**Helena** : ( steadily). She's going to Church.

*He has been prepared for some plot, but he is as genuinely surprised by this as Cliff was a few minutes earlier.*

**Jimmy**: You're doing what?

*Silence.*

Have you gone out of your mind or something? (*To Helena.*)You're determined to win her, aren't you? So it's come to this now! How feeble Can you get? (His rage mounting within) When I think of what I did, what I endured, to get you out---- .

*(Look Back in Anger, Act-2, Scene-1, p.51)*

This hatred towards the Church is a fixation in the mind of Jimmy. Like Jimmy, Osborne disliked the Church of England. But the origin of feeling of disapprobation lies deep in his childhood days. From his earlier childhood, Osborne had hatred towards it. And the origin of this antipathy is his family. In his childhood while existing in Fulham Palace Road, he beholds a Church which looked like to him “a most depressing red- brick church”.

The Entertainer, 1957 projects a vision of contemporary tragic frustration and decline in Britain. Its hero becomes a failing comedian and Osborne utilizes the decline of a nation's vitality. The actions of the play regard the fate of a “Showbiz” family. Drawn by waning talent and the widespread decay of the music hall, Archie Rice is mainly attempting to regain his

fortunes by running a nude show. But even this fails and he has more creditors than audiences. Actually, the dramatic changes in Archie's life are a depiction of the changes in Archie's life is a depiction of the changes in the field he is working in. Having uplifted to the height of its popularity in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, the music hall was "in decline and by the beginning of the second world war it was virtually extinct". (James J. Nott, P.117). The description of the house and the town is significant. What is obvious in the description, Joseph affirms, is "The ugly aspect of neglect. There is nothing prettified about Osborne's setting. He brings to the audience, with shocking recognition, those aspects of society they will prefer to leave uninvestigated" (Agrawal, *The Early Plays of John Osborne*, P.10). It is against the background noises of the trolley buses and of vulgar brawling from other apartments that we first confront Archie's father, Billy who is portrayed as spruce, with an old-fashioned dignity of speech and manner. He serves as a symbol for "that house and town with its recollection of grander days and his very appearance is a rebuke to the vulgarity both of his neighbours and of the times" (Weiland, P.95). So here as throughout the play he is depicted as a nostalgic figure; a man who exists in the past and whose role is fixed as a kind of chorus that criticizes the action. He sticks desperately to a bygone time when people worked with grace and charm. As a music hall entertainer, Billy is fully conscious of the sour fact that "...it's dead already. Had been for years. It was all over, finished, dead when I got out. They don't want real people anymore" (Bhoi, *The Rhetoric of Resistance*, P.110). In *Death of a salesman too*, Willy Loman wants to be a successful father and husband as well. But he has failed. Biff regards Lowman his ideal. But later he discovers him corrupted, immoral, indifferent towards his family and above all a man with loose character. He is unsuccessful in fulfilling his desire to a good father and a good husband because of his act of moral offence. He is forced to commit suicide in order to reaffirm in his self-confidence and his family integrity. The above statement suggests that the hero Willy Loman fails to bear the burden of modern day's cutthroat competition and always longs for simple life.

The dying music hall insinuates hollowness. This hollowness which Archie often becomes unsuccessful to properly handle incenses him and prepares him in a desperate and incessant search of a way out. Rather, he portrays the music hall as a depiction of the state of debasement and disintegration, which the whole English society is enduring. It is the tragedy of a nation rather than specific persons that makes curious Osborne most. In his introductory note to the play, Osborne comments:

The music hall is dying, and with it a significant part of  
 England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something  
 That once belonged to everyone, for this was truly a folk art.

*(The Entertainer, Preface)*

The trouble that Archie faces is that he becomes a failure as an entertainer. He attempts to be successful as his father was in his vocation, and he cannot, as a result he represents himself as a comic persona which has complete control over him. Archie's wife, Phoebe, utters that Archie's is a case of "professional jealousy" (P.50). The aim of using this comic persona, according to Taylor (1968) is to "ward off anyone who may want to look [Archie] straight in the face" (Taylor, *Anger and After Great Britain*, P.47). In this sense, comedy does not assist to lessen the sense of isolation and dissatisfaction which Archie knows.

Archie's performance serves as a standard comedian routine. His jokes are wearied and his reliance heavily on the obscene innuendo to arouse an early laughs. These jokes symbolize decline in the artistic tradition of the music hall. The stage setting of Archie's portrays itself as an index of the extent to which his life and career has gone down to bitterness and frustration. It comprised of "ordinary, tally backcloth and draw tabs. The light is the kind you expect to see in the local Empire – everything bang on, bright and hard, or simple follow- spot. (*The Entertainer*, Preface, P.11)

Archie's songs, however, earn attention for the kind of satiric comment they depict on social affairs. They are intended to express the "very mixed feeling of most English men's distrust of jingoism, distrust of the more hysterically self- righteous sort of liberality, a feeling that carpet had been whipped from under one's feet". As in Osborne's other works Archie manifests his psychic distemper through anger and this anger serves as the key- note of his creator's remark on the moribund state of post war England. Archie's feeling of anger and desperation is obvious in the staging of song 'Thanks God I'm Normal' which makes the audience question not only his claim, but their own presumption of normalcy:

**Archie:** .....

He sings.

.....

Thank God I 'm normal,

I am just like the rest of you chaps,

Decent and full of sense,

I am not one of these extremist saps,

For I'm sure you'll agree,

That a fellow like me

Is the salt of our dear Old country, (*The Entertainer*, P.60)

This song is meant to be pungent and ironic attack on the putrid state of affairs in the mid-twentieth century England and on the satisfaction of the people who look like indifferent to what is wrong in their society.

In *The Entertainer* Jean discusses her brother Mick's death with her father Archie and her brother Frank, divulges her venom on the non-descript Politicians , whom she opines responsible for the death and suffering of the youth of her country:

**Jean:** You don't need to look at me! I have lost a brother too.

Why do people like us sit here, and just lap it all up why do

boys die, or stoke boilers, why do we pick up these things , what

are we hoping to get out of it, what is it all in aid of –is it really

just for the sake of a gloved waving at you from a garden

coach?

(*The Entertainer*, P.78)

More, it is Alison who informed that Jimmy's friend Hugh goes to China because he considers that "England was finished for us anyway. All the old gang was back- Dame Alison's mob."

*(Look Back in Anger, P.46)*

This has a period ring which indicates the Comeback of Conservatives to power guided by Churchill. Although Churchill intended to maintain the coalition even after the war within Germany, the Labour Conference refused it because the general election was needed on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1945. In that General election the Labour party was conducted by Clement Attlee obtained majority and the Conservatives were powerless. It was a big challenge to hold power by a party. The change of hands in on way assisted the poor and un- privileged. So people began to perceive that it did n't really subject which party one voted for because it was only selecting between evils. J.R. Taylor alludes to the situation writing:

What, after all was the point of politics if it did not seem to make any noticeable difference, what party one voted for?

Consequently this dissatisfaction with life was aimless and had no obvious focus.....Clearly something was brewing. So much unlocalised, unorganized resentment must find expression is literally and after a brief time- lag , in life , which can be capsulated as cynicism... (Taylor, *Anger and after Great Britain*, P.40)

The dramatist could engage himself to suggest remedies for social ills in his plays, but there is still the risk of didactic intrudes hindering art. The stage is not always suitable place from which to propagate the clues of social reform. The dramatist's art might be keenly prevented for the presentation of such reformist ideas in the theatre. Osborne's main purpose was to invoke attention to social ills by agitating feeling. The Angry dramatist gained a better reaction from his

audience through his shock strategies. Though Osborne was not a politician or sociologist, his dramatic art was not merely limited to purely personal complaints. In his work, he was liberal at exploring aspects of society which was other than those complainants. The dramatist regarded himself with the human conditions and this raised his work into the realm of the universal even though anger might be the prevalent theme and mood of his plays.

### WORKS CITED

1. Agrawal, Meenal. *The Early Plays of John Osborne*
2. Bhoi, Chittaranjan. *The Rhetoric of Resistance*: Autherspress, 2015
3. Hayman, Ronald, *Evening News, quoted in Casebook Series* (London): Heineman  
Hayman, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama*: Routledge Revivals
4. Maschler, Tom, ed. *Declaration*, London: Mac Gibbon
5. Innes, Christopher, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*: Cambridge
6. Osborne, John, *Look Back in Anger*, 1956, London: Faber & Faber  
„ ..... , *The Entertainer*, 1957, London: „
7. Osborne, John, *A Better Class of Person: An Autobiography*: Dutton, 1981
8. Taylor, John Russell. *Anger and After Great Britain*: Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd.,  
1963
9. Wendy, Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, Race and National Identity*, 1954-64:  
Routledge