

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SENSITIVE THEMES IN JOHN OSBORNE'S *LOOK BACK IN ANGER*

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John Osborne was born in a suburb of London in 1929. It was during a nightmarish spell of unemployment he worked on *Look Back in Anger* and soon submitted the script to the newly formed English stage company. He joined the English stage company as an actor in 1956. The same year on 8th may *Look Back in Anger* was performed. No other play in living memory created such a tremendous impact on its first performance as did *Look Back in Anger*.

The first thing that strikes about Osborne is his concern about a new feeling. He found that the old, overworked and irrelevant themes of the English drama were a boring stuff. They did not announce any emotions, so he changed the drama to the extent of attacking new situations which were wholly characteristic of the post-industrial capitalist society. The new situations gave him freedom to exploit new feelings and that created new language, which is Osborne's language. Osborne himself Says : “ There is room for many kinds of theatre, but the one that matters the most is one that offers vital, emotional dynamic to ordinary people, that breaks down class barriers, and all the many obstacles set in the way of feeling. What is most disastrous about the British way of life is the British way of feeling, and this something the theatre can attack. We need a new feeling as much as we need a new language. Out of this feeling will come the language.”(Verma 4)

The contemporary industrial society of Britain in the fifties was a society deeply divided against its self. The World War II reduced Britain from its imperial position and power to that of a second class power and its impact on the British society was deep. The conservative party gave way to the labour party in 1945 and brought a great hope for a new brave Britain among the working classes that is to the middle classes or young people. They wanted a new society , a society not dominated by class system and class culture but a society complete with its values and material needs of the entire population. The concept of the welfare state was heralded as a real revolution with a promise of distribution of national wealth and welfare among the people. The growth of industries chances of free education up to the highest levels, organization of the health services and insurance schemes was emerging. On the other side there was a neglect of

odd and sick of the health people, jobs were only open to the exclusive groups of classes, these conditions arouse bitterness and brought frustration among the unprivileged youth. They felt that they had been cheated and given false hopes and found themselves as a members trapped into a frame of class and hierarchy. Osborne's strength completely relies on his power to give a convincing structure to the contemporary feelings of the frustrated post-war generations. Through the play Look Back in Anger he explored the realities of the circumstances through the language of protest and anger.

John Osborne is the play wright who brought the English theatre up to date with publication of Look Back an Anger, a dramatist of outstanding promise was discovered: a man who can write with searing passion. He demonstrates a remarkable capacity for dramatizing the dilemma and the sense of inadequacy felt by the younger generation in the fifties. He shows small group of young people of the very present day living in a sorry state of emotional and physical squalor. His writing is the very penetrating truth. In 1957 Osborne wrote: "I do not like the kind of society in which I find myself. I like it less and less. I love the theatre more than ever because I know that it is what I always dreamed it might be: a weapon". (Verma 1)

The nation spent millions of pounds on the gadgets and entertainments, but there were no hospitals during 1950-60. Almost fourteen percent of total population of the great Britain were submerged in poverty. Poverty did not only affect the poor and neglected groups but it also attacked the old aged pensioners and sick, there was hardly any complete minimum wage policy. The christain economic and social research foundation reduced the increase in drunkenness during 1956-60 among the youth under twenty one. The criminology indicated the possible links between a changing society of this kind and the increase in juvenile offenders, prostitution and drug-taking. There was a strong dislike to the traditional values among the youngsters, and they were in quest of new values. A very high propotion of young people were fighting hard to adjust themselves in an out-dated, socio-moral convention. Even the rich who enjoyed the material comforts did not cultivate a sense of communal belonging and experienced lonliness in the mass society.

The community and large human area left uncared was bound to have an impact on the drama. The great promises of the welfare state remained unfulfilled and the expectation of the people resulted in disappointments. The dissatisfaction over the space between the expected and the surviving were provided the inspiration of what is known as the "New Drama". The economy failed to concentrate on education. In the earlier system of education the upper class was profited and the new 'Social Welfarism' activated the educational system of the state, many schools were explored, many other educational institutions developed the minorities gained assistances

through the new educational set up. Besides this educational mobility, the society did not have any kind of change, they continued to remain stuck up in the same class to which they were born, similarly like Jimmy Porter, he rose as an university graduate from the working class origins and remained a working class graduate, his education did not help him in any terms. The stall in which he was working could have been handled by even an illiterate. There was a complete absence of freedom in occupational structure.

There had been so many problems in the working class taking new dimensions. The academic success relied on the social class of the parents. Even if there were clever and deserving students from a poor family the public schools were closed to them. Education did not provide equal opportunity in Britain, and those who had the capacity to purchase private schooling had a back significant advantage towards the Oxford and Cambridge institutions. The social and political back ground is very much reflected in LBA as Jimmi Porter outlines all these situations in one of his speeches: "I Suppose people of our generation are not able to die for a good cause for any longer, we had all done for us; in the thirties and fourties, when we were still kids. There are not any good brave causes left". (LBA 84)

America emerged to be a great capitalist power. Britain shorn of its greatness and had to remain content with the common wealth, playing a minor role. The World War II also witnessed the emergence of the USSR as the most powerful socialist state. Egypt defeated the British aggression with the help of society union. One of Osborne's theme is the decadence of English society. The social values has been presented to give us the idea of frustration. He portrays the agony of a lonely individual rejected by the society as Jimmy Porter lamented. Jimmi Porter spoke for a large British population experiencing alienation from a society in which he was denied. Although he was well educated at university, the real power and opportunities were reserved for the children of the establishment, those who were born to previlage. Jimmi's alienation from Alison is due to her strong denial to feel deeply with her husband. Jimmy is trapped in his problems of social identity.

In Osborne's plays we have the theme of the sensitive man's predicament in a hopelessly complicated industrial society. The main character of the play Jimmy explores in a sense of isolated, subjected to an individual society. The typical qualities of Osborne's heroes are non-conformational and rebellious. They protest against the society of their time and continuously struggle. But they remain unsuccessful, to create a possible world to which they are comfortable. Osborne's deep sympathy with their struggle for self-relationship is in reference with the contemporary society which separates them from the rest of the people. From his choice of themes one could see the central English dramatic output as a working class orientation. He has invented new situations and these new situations brought the exact feeling that he wanted.

Osborne in his plays makes an individual suffer and finally allows him to attain spirit in him through the hardships of life and stirs positive energy in him. As Jimmy shapes himself as a positive human being from a negative perspective of life. Osborne himself has characterized *Look Back in Anger* as a “Formal, rather than an old-fashioned play” it is a play with a climax situations, proper setting and clearly a solid realistic tradition. The term angry young man was coined with direct reference to this play and it had a truly deserving remarkable success and credit. (Osborne)

Look Back in Anger is also a period-piece Kenneth Tynan says: LBA presents post youth as it really is, with special emphasis on the youth as it really is, with special emphasis on the non-unintelligent who live in bed-sitters and divide the Sunday papers into two groups, ‘Posh’ and ‘Wet’. To have done this at all would be a single achievement; to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle. All the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing and the stage the drift towards anarchy, the instinctive leftishness, the automatic rejection of “Official” attitudes, the surrealist sense of humour, the casual promiscuity, the sense of lacking a crusade worth fighting for and underlying all these, the determination that no one who dies shall go unmourned. (Verma 152)

Osborne has shown the conventional theatre with its emotional appeal, as a service to humanism. His main aim is to produce the missing elements of the period and through his emotional concepts he wants his audience to react immediately. The play is a mirror of Osborne’s life rather than the outer world; it is more personal than universal. There is no distinction between Osborne and Jimmy Porter in many aspects. They belong to the same background and fight for the class divisions of the English society. The play depicts the powerful realized possible human being. The play is autobiographical, based on Osborne’s individuality and personal agony; the manner in which he faced the society is reflected in his work. The personal element revealed by Osborne is his unhappy marriage with Pamela Lane. Lane was a practical and materialistic woman who did not take Osborne’s ambitions seriously. Lane is the image of Alison. Madeline the lost love of Jimmy is the image of Stella Linder, an old actress who inspired Osborne to write.

The concept of Osborne’s play relies on an affected young man. He wanted to flourish his own life experiences to the outer world in order to awaken the young generations of the time. When Osborne’s play first opened, the audience responded very badly to Jimmy’s Character; but some recognised the emotional condition of the young men in the post – world war England. The term ‘Angry young man’ was meant to describe the men in England who were identified with Jimmy. Those people like Jimmy had to find a way to reconcile individuality. Sure young men had to investigate a way to make a place men had for themselves in a world of class distinctions. They wanted to establish their identity in a world where the upper class on

subordinating, by imposing rules and placing price controls on goods. Jimmy can be society that is bearing him and as an emotional intellect. Jimmy like Osborne himself, and many man of his class is revolutionary sprit who wants to put an end to poverty and other economic crisis; but they are the deeply frustrated by their inability to find means to do so.

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