CHAPTER - I

MAJOR TRENDS IN TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH DRAMA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ANGRY YOUNG MAN MOVEMENT & THE MILIEU
The twentieth century, till the fifties was not forceful enough as far as making an impact on the course of the history of English drama was concerned. There was nothing like a paramount literary movement which could create a sensation in the theatre or convey a change in the socio-cultural and political lives of the people. The Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and the Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw, the major exponents of 'Realistic Drama' began to write serious plays for the consideration of social, domestic and personal problems. Galsworthy and Granville-Barker too did much to create a tradition of natural dialogue. New psychological investigations led to the intensive study of character as distinct from plot. It aimed at the impartial presentation of real, contemporary life than history.

Ibsen's plays are generally considered as 'Problem Plays' as they deeply dealt with severe biting problems which the society resisted to be exposed so as to conceal its wickedness, incapacity and so also unwillingness to solve. His *Pillars of Society* (1877) depicts how rich people are selfish and corrupt and how they escape the punishment. *A Doll's House* (1879) focuses on the ways that women are perceived in their various roles, especially in marriage and motherhood. The play received so much repercussion that Ibsen had to write a second climax for it. The controversy was centered around Nora's decision to abandon her children. It was subsided in the second ending when she decides that the children need her more than she needs her freedom. Although Ibsen would later be embraced by feminists, Ibsen was no champion of women's rights; he only dealt with the problem of women's rights as a facet of the realism within his play. His intention was not to solve this issue but to illuminate it.

His *Ghosts* (1881) is a scathing criticism against the nineteenth century morality. The play was considered abominable as it dealt with the theme of a son being victimized by inheriting his father's venereal disease Syphilis. His *An Enemy of the People* (1882) addresses the irrational tendencies of the masses, and the hypocritical and corrupt nature of the political system that they support.
It is the story of one brave man's struggle to do the right thing and speak the truth in the face of extreme social intolerance. The debilitating point, however, in the new, realistic 'drama of ideas' suffered from the lack of substance to kindle fire in the imagination. It faced the threat of turning out into a mere social photography or documentary. However, Shaw and Galsworthy succeeded in rising above these limitations. It was Ibsen's influence which established the 'drama of ideas' as the popular drama of the early twentieth century.

Bernard Shaw's plays can also be considered as 'comedies of purpose' as the aim behind them is serious and his analysis is deep, though it is masqueraded in gaiety and wit. The plays aim at being as laughable as Congreve's, as stinging as Jonson's and as profound as Ibsen's. Shaw succeeded in creating a new type of drama in which discussion of ideas is as vital as 'action' in the older drama. Hence, his plays are also considered as 'Discussion Dramas'. With a luminous career spanning nearly sixty years and with sixty plays, Shaw could make his 'Shavian Themes' relate to the problems of family, love, marriage, sex, in particular and poverty in general.

His play *Widower's Houses* (1892) dealt with the problem of conscience in a society that does not allow for conscience. The play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1895) dealt with prostitution as a theme and holding the society as a culprit. If his *Arms and the Man* (1894) exposed the glory of war and romantic love, then *Man and Superman* (1903) is a full statement of his conception of the way of salvation for the human race, through obedience to the Life Force. Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1905) is based on the conviction that poverty is the worst crime in the world and is the epitome of all vices. The play is a denunciation of poverty and also reflects the materialistic pessimism of Shaw.

Shaw was the one who imparted literary qualities to the drama. He not only gives more details than are commonly provided concerning the settings of his plays but also goes into the past history of his characters as well. He was the one who conceptualized his theory of 'Life Force' which signifies 'vitality with
a direction' or 'striving for a purpose' to evolve into higher forms, not of beauty
or physical prowess but of intellectual power in life. This theory brought unity
and coherence to his themes. His lengthy prefaces to his plays enumerated
various social and political concerns. He could sermonize and provoke people to
think through his plays. English Drama slogged after the First World War until
the thirties.

The thirties saw the revival of 'poetic drama' or 'verse drama' whose
leading pioneers were T.S.Eliot and Christopher Fry. Eliot wrote verse-plays
between the thirties and the fifties, his first full length play being *Murder in the
Cathedral* (1935), followed by *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party*
(1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954). Eliot wanted a poetic drama of the
modern world and for modern audiences in the way the Greeks and the
Elizabethans had a poetic drama of their worlds: not the individual poet's
evolution as a unique sensibility separate from the community.

Poets continued to write verse dramas but these were essentially 'Closet
Dramas' that did not confront the major problems for a modern verse drama: to
dramatize and speak to the modern world as closely as the best non-verse drama
could do. The revivalists of the verse drama invariably failed to succeed in
communicating with their audience as strongly and as effectively as the
Elizabethan Dramatists could do with their own. W.B.Yeats, through his Irish
National Theatre (Abbey Theatre) in Dublin, made attempts to revive poetry on
the stage more vigorously through his works like *Two Plays for Dancers* (1919),
*Four Plays of Dancers* (1921), *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1934), *The
Herne's Egg* (1938) though he had written some plays like a dramatic poem
called *Mosada* (1886), *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's
Desire* (1894) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1904) even before the Abbey Theatre
was established.

Yeats lacked the essential qualities of the dramatist. Yeats, J.M. Synge,
Sean O'Casey and Lady Gregory looked on the drama as a thing of the
emotions, and reacting against realism, sought their themes among the legends, myths, folklore and peasantry of Ireland. Yeats’ plays were known chiefly only to scholars owing to their intellectual and symbolical complexities. Stephen Phillips (1864-1915) is a more important figure in the history of poetic drama. He wrote a number of blank-verse plays, including *Herod, Ulysses, The Son of David* and *Nero*, but he had little popular appeal. Masefield, too, experimented in poetic drama but had only a limited success, while Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) who wrote a number of quite powerful poetical plays, saw hope for this form only in the amateur theatre.

Christopher Fry’s verse plays *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1946), *The Lady’s Not For Burning* (1949), then a sequence of seasonal plays, *Venus Observed* (1950) and *The Dark is Light Enough* (1954) glitter and scintillate with ornamental words reminiscent of John Lyly’s *Euphuies* or Shakespeare’s euphuistic early comedies. However, even he could not sustain it for long. “The weakness of verse drama of Christopher Fry was his tendency to use verse to decorate a romantic action rather than to touch new dramatic experience.”

W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6* was another verse play.

Eliot’s belief was that a play’s language was most dramatic when it was most intensely poetic. Modern verse drama, including Eliot’s own *Murder in the Cathedral* was a remote historical drama distanced from the banalities of everyday reality. The practitioners of verse drama were of the opinion that in order to delineate full human experience on the stage, dramatic speech should be in verse. However, “it proved to be impossible to write dramatic verse of any intensity to depict the ordinary actions: Such as an actor cannot answer a telephone in a verse, or how could he be asked to speak verse of some intensity while returning an umbrella or pouring drinks.” It was criticized that Poetic drama, instead of speaking to and expressing the sensibility of the modern world, turned out to be an escapist fantasy from it.
Ibsen, who wrote all his early plays in verse form such as the verse tragedy *Brand* (1865) and the folkloric *Peer Gynt* (1876) changed deliberately to conversational prose. It is to be reckoned that:

Poetic drama died more or less overnight. In the 1870's, not long after completing his verse play *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen pronounced that the future of modern drama did not lie with verse and proved this prophecy by inventing a realist dramatic method suited to the modern age that created a totally new and persuasive poetry of the theater. The transition to modern realism was extraordinarily abrupt. The major dramatic tradition till then in Europe considered verse-drama the only suitable medium for serious drama – especially for tragedy. Later attempts to revive verse drama in the modern world have failed to re-establish its central position in the culture.

George Bernard Shaw offered another reason that in the modern times the opera had supplanted verse drama as the vehicle of emotive power. No play could achieve the power of emotional expression of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Therefore, the future of drama lay in the expression of thought; as a drama of ideas, not emotion. And for a drama of modern ideas emerging from modern fragmented life, prose was a more suitable medium.

Graham Greene’s first play *The Living Room* (1953) offered nothing new to the people. There were unusual number of artless musicals seen during the period like *The Boy Friend, Salad Days, The Buccaneer, A Girl Called Jo, Romance in Candlelight, She Smiled at Me, The Water Gipsies, Summer Song* and scores of other forgotten light comedies which did nothing to enhance the reputation of the British Theatre.

Samuel Beckett spearheaded ‘The Theatre of Absurd’, a product of the effects of World War II. They abandoned traditional devices of the drama,
including logical plot development, meaningful dialogues, and intelligible
characters to convey modern humanity's feelings of despair, bewilderment, and
alienation. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) is about two tramps Vladimir and
Estragon waiting ceaselessly and motionless for an imagined Godot. Their
boredom, fear of pain, shreds of love and hate are all a surprisingly effective
version of the whole human condition in a tragic world of uncertainty. *Krapp's
Last Tape* (1953) deals with nostalgia, the contrast between a lost past and the
sour present. The play is more humane, deals with grief rather than with
depression, allows memory its due, becoming vulnerable to the malignant
disease of Time.

His *Endgame* (1958) depicts the internal world of a man like Hamm
suffering from chronic depression. Beckett has created an image of the appalled,
motionless world of catatonia. Hamm speaks of his desolate room as a “shelter”
and says, “Outside of here it's death”, a statement which holds as true for a
nuclear survivor as for a chronic sufferer from depression. However, ‘The
Theatre of Absurd’ of Samuel Beckett which was revolutionizing the French
stage, had not gained firm ground in England by 1956. Harold Pinter, later
through his plays like *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumb
(1975) became the most prominent absurdist playwright.

The musical plays and light comedies had become the order of the day.
John Whiting, with plays like *Conditions of Agreement*, the controversial *Saint's
Day, A Penny for a Song* and *Marching Song* appeared to be the only significant
prose dramatist in England then.

The commercially popular works of Coward and Rattigan had begun
yielding ground to the verse plays which were well supported by the Poet’s
Theatre Guild and these verse plays themselves lost ground in due course. It is to
be noted that “…new drama of sufficient interest was the main problem, and
though new plays by new playwrights did emerge quite frequently, the main
defence offered for British drama when it was compared (unfavourably, of course) with what was being produced in America, France, and elsewhere was that really Rattigan had shown himself in *The Browning Version* and *The Deep Blue Sea* to be a major international dramatist and it was only native British modesty which prevented us from realizing the fact.\(^4\)

The plays of the period appeared to be made only for the properly conditioned audience but nothing was there that could result in a mass sweep and take the entire public by nerves. The legacy says that George Devine’s English Stage Company which took over Royal Court Theatre declared itself as a ‘Writer’s Theatre’ with the aim of acting as a platform to promote new writers and new drama. They produced Angus Wilson’s *The Mulberry Bush* and Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* and were waiting for something larger, more unprecedented to happen. Then, the much awaited revolution came on 8 May 1956 with Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*. Kenneth Tynan’s words are typical:

It all came to a head one May evening in 1956 at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square.\(^5\)

The play’s popular appeal was its immediacy and topicality. “In the launching, accidentally or by design, of any new movement, timing is all-important, and there is no doubt that *Look Back in Anger* arrived at just the right moment....*Look Back in Anger* is the earliest example of a process which has frequently been crucial in the progress of the new drama...”\(^6\) The anger of its protagonist Jimmy Porter symbolized the general condition of Britain’s lower middle class in the 1950s. The first performance of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956 “marks the real break-through of “the new drama” into the British Theatre.”\(^7\)

Jimmy Porter, the central character in the play was young, educated and his origins were in working class. He runs a sweet-stall and feels deprived because of his class, is disillusioned seeing the ‘Welfare State’, an ‘Utopian
dream’ envisioned by the Labour Party getting thwarted, the fading glory of
England as an imperialistic power with its loss of colonies and reduced to
insignificance in the international political scenario with the Suez Crisis and
Hungarian suppression. He has staunch antagonism towards the Establishment,
the snobbery of the middle class, the effeminate church and the unconcerned
society as a whole. These were all the characteristics of the post-war youth of
England and Osborne, undoubtedly succeeded in depicting Jimmy as the cult
figure, a representative of that youthful era which believed but got betrayed,
broken down, bewildered and then finally became bitter. Ironically, Jimmy in the
play has married a girl from upper middle class against whom and against which
he directs all his invectives and caustic tirades. J.Morris, in an article laments,
with an element of caution about the harsh truth of England’s predicament in the
post war period thus:

It is gone. Empire, forelock, channel and All...as the British, shorn
of their ships and vast responsibilities, reluctantly realized the
world has overtaken them. We are getting out of date like incipient
dodos...We have reached a moment of catharsis, either we purge
ourselves, or inertia will stifle us.8

The man and his milieu of Osborne’s Look Back in Anger were then
Quintessentially the mid fifties. The young saw in Jimmy a reflection of
themselves; their own anger, their own frustrations, their own concerns, their
own targets of antagonism. John Russell Taylor views:

...Jimmy was taken to be speaking for a whole generation, of
which he and his creator were among the most precocious
representatives, since it was essentially the post-war generation
they represented, those who had, like Lindsay Anderson, ‘nailed a
red flag to the roof of the mess at the fort of Annan Parbat’ to
celebrate the return of a Labour government in 1945 and then
gradually became disillusioned when a brave new world failed to
materialize. Most of the people who felt this way were inevitably in their middle to late thirties in 1956, but with Osborne as a figurehead they were all cheerfully labeled ‘angry young men’... 

It is essential to know the social and political circumstances prevalent in the then contemporary English society which paved the way for the rise of the Angry Young Men. The issues that contributed to and constituted the climate of opinion in the 1950s were the legacy of the horrendous World War, class stratifications, Welfare State, affluence, consumer society, status of women, the Government’s internal policies and the External Affairs of the Nation. The Second World War devastated the British nation and the society. Allsop observes, “Battered by the war and ten years of filthy food, worn-out clothes and austerity, with grime and drabness rubbed into the pores, the British public was in what GPs call a ‘run-down condition’ ” The ghastly effects of the war were likely to continue until early 1950s. Marwick says, “In the first post-war years almost everything was rationed, with basic foodstuffs on ‘coupons’, clothing on ‘clothing coupons’, tinned foods and dried fruits on one kind of ‘points, and chocolate and sweets on another, more popularly known as ‘sweetie coupons’...Between July 1946 and July 1948 even bread was rationed.”

The Labour Party came to power in 1945 owing to their support of the British Economist J.M.Keynes and willing to implement his “economic ideas of massive financial intervention” as it was one of the prime forces to usher in the promised ‘Welfare State’. Marwick asserts, “Discussing Labour’s general election victory in 1945, Peter Calvocoressi, in The British Experience 1945-75, writes of the electorate hoping and believing “that the Labour would make great strides towards the elimination of absolute poverty and excessive inequality” Keynes wanted that all the impediments in the path of achieving the Welfare State should be overcome.
The people should have social security by way of receiving family allowances, National Health Service (NHS). The problem of education was to be solved by the major Act passed in 1944 which ensured that all children attend secondary schools, industries should be nationalized and diversified to cover all the areas and in a way unemployment should be reduced. He was of the conviction that to achieve the desired ends, the Government's spending should run parallel with heavy taxation, consumer rationing and price controls. In connection with the housing problem, there was,

a wish to re-create the classless villages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (There was a hope) to achieve this by raising the standard size of subsidized housing and ensuring that all houses were provided with all the conveniences of modern living.\textsuperscript{14}

They achieved many successes but could not tide over the nation's worst housing problems and had immense troubles to face the payments deficit and eventually succumbed to it. They were defeated in 1951. In the first half of the 1950s itself, the society had begun to witness consumerist tendencies. Many electronic gadgets and home appliances began to throng in the households of the middle and upper classes. The society became affluent, the family became a fundamental centre of consumption. The biggest technological revolution of the first half of the twentieth century, the Television became a powerful tool to broaden the sphere of marketing strategies. The companies directed their advertisements towards women luring them to buy their products.

Women slowly were becoming assertive and some of them even started going out to work. The Angry Young Men were angry about women in the era of affluence as they felt that the era unjustifiably benefited them by providing the boons of technology in domestic works and encouraged them to adopt a 'posh' culture. Zuczkowski says, "As it has already been mentioned, the "female

\[10\]
consumer" served as a metaphor for the "affluent society." The Angries attacked effeminacy, the sum of those qualities which were supposed traditionally to exude from the worst in women: insignificance, snobbery, impertinence, voluptuousness, superficiality, materialism."\textsuperscript{15} He also goes on to add, "It is in the work of Osborne where this attack on women becomes most extreme. It can be argued that the real subject of the play was neither social injustice nor hypocrisy but the debasement and degradation of women."\textsuperscript{16} John Brannigan's remarks on Jimmy's behaviour towards women strengthen this, "Jimmy Porter's violent outbursts tend to be directed against women, rather than the social or political order..."\textsuperscript{17}

It will be, however, too simple to accept with these views as under the rage directed against women, there is a layer of 'class', which should never be ignored. It is to be noted that Jimmy does not have any antipathy towards his friend's mother Mrs.Hugh Tanner or towards his former mistress Madeline because they are from his own class. It should also be noted that in some of the works of the "Angries" like John Braine's Room at the Top (1957), "the problem of "hypergamy" or "marrying upwards"\textsuperscript{18} from the point of view of men persists. Brannigan himself is found to be saying again, "Osborne's play, indeed sets up a dramatic contrast between the decorum and emotional restraint of its middle-class characters, Alison, Helena and Colonel Redfern (Alison's father), and the rebellious energy and articulate 'anger' of its working-class characters, Jimmy Porter and Cliff Lewis."\textsuperscript{19}

We can even find Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, who already has affairs with Brenda, the wife of his fellow colleague and even with her sister Winnie. However, he is intolerant if his wife displays such weakness in future:

If ever I get married, he thought, and have a wife that carries on like Brenda and Winnie carry on, I'll give her the biggest pasting
any woman ever had. I'd kill her. My wife'll have to look after any
kids I fill her with, keep the house spotless. And if she's good at
that I might let her go to the pictures now and again and take her
out for a drink on Saturday. But if I thought she was carrying on
behind my back she'd be sent back to her mother with two black
eyes before she knew what's happening. By God she would.20

This attitude of Arthur means that the Angry Young Men were apprehensive and
angry with their women as they were feeling insecure about the arrival of
affluence and its impact on women as they found that slowly their status was
changing and women were becoming bolder.

The Conservative Party came to power again and "reestablished itself, its
complacency and callousness, its intensity and ignorance"21 -The defeat meant
an end to the optimism that had carried Labour forward in the first difficult years
after the war. It meant a setback to all those who had believed in the Labour
Government as "their government", and had regarded 1945 as a political
watershed. The disappointment and disillusion that followed in the wake of this
defeat helped keep the conservatives in power for the following 13 years, and
had a crucial influence on the political mood of the decade."22 The themes of
Osborne's plays stirred and caused disturbance because,

...Osborne started to create socially critical plots that characterized
with wrathful eloquence the ruling British society and its class
barriers. He thus became the spokesman of a generation that was
disappointed and embittered by both the reactionary post-war
policy of the Conservative Government, and the compromise and
halfway practice of the Labour politicians.23

The disillusion was further exacerbated when there was a split in the Labour
Party into left and right wings and the Suez fiasco or Suez crisis came as a
thunder bolt for Britain’s lost of prestige at home and so also in the eyes of the international community:

In collusion with the French and Israelis, Britain waged war for one week against Egypt in pursuit of Eden’s (the Conservative Prime Minister at the time) delusion that Colonel Nasser was another Hitler, and vain hope that the Egyptian President could be thus removed from power. Eden’s ‘armed conflict’ lasted just long enough to demonstrate that Britain no longer had the logistic power to mount an efficient sea-borne operation in the Middle East, and for Britain to be branded by the United Nations as an aggressor, before American opposition, Russian threats, and the inevitable run on the pond brought an ignoble venture to a humiliating conclusion.24

The Suez crisis was one of the issues that had embittered Angry Young Men as it sounded the death knell of the empire.

The 1950s was the end of an era with social reforms and the beginning of a period with little state interference. The age of wealth, individual moneymaking and no public commitment nor enthusiasm for political or social reasons caused anxiety and disillusionment, especially among the working classes. The cynicism and resentment of the Angry Young Men is clear evidence of the despondency inflicted by the wretched state of Britain in the 1950s.25

There was the issue of class divisions in the society. The Industrial Revolution had led to the emergence of the working class which was rigidly defined and which replaced the older society of estates and orders. Class became an important factor for creating inequalities in modern society in the areas of
power, authority, wealth, income, job situation, material welfare, culture and lifestyles. Marwick defines working-class of the 1950s England as:

...to be working-class meant performing manual work, most usually under arduous, uncongenial, or just plain boring circumstances. Conditions of work still demanded special working clothes, and still often left definite physical marks - calloused hands, for instance. When it came to ‘life chances’ members of the working class were still at a disadvantage compared with all of the rest of the society. Individual members might move upwards, but conditions within the working class, not excluding working-class attitudes themselves, discouraged educational aspiration.\(^{26}\)

It is to be reckoned that majority of the working class people received only elementary education and thus forfeited the scope to get jobs which were decent and respectable. The middle and upper classes on the other hand got sound education and seized every opportunity to perpetuate their position in every sphere of life. This constituted the fundamental injustice and certainly contradicted the egalitarian aspect of society, so fondly ushered by the ‘Welfare State’. It was, thus, quite natural that the working classes were seriously aggrieved by it. Marwick refers to the definition of the upper class by Sir Ian Fraser who,

shrewdly defined (the upper class) as that ‘reservoir of persons economically free and accustomed to responsibility from early age’ who as a matter of objective fact, turn out to exercise a dominance in the spheres of power, authority, wealth, and income totally disproportionate to their numbers, and who have a distinctive culture and life-style of their own.\(^{27}\)

The ‘Angry Young Men’ were a group of mostly working and lower middle class British playwrights and novelists who came to prominence in the
1950’s. The catchphrase was coined by George Fearon, a Royal Court Theatre’s press officer who abhorred *Look Back in Anger*. He disliked all the anger in the play and called Osborne “an Angry Young Man”\(^28\) and indirectly paved a way to popularize the phrase and promote the play. The phrase itself is thought to have been derived originally from the autobiography of Leslie Paul, founder of the Woodcraft Folk, whose *Angry Young Man* was published in 1951.

Luke Gilleman writes, “The “Angry Young Man” is synonymous with the following: impatience with the status quo, refusal to be co-opted by a bankrupt society, an instinctive solidarity with lower classes, an undisciplined energy and unbounded rebelliousness, and an angry ambition that leads to unsuitable matches with the upper-class”\(^29\) Harry Ritchie, in an article asserts, “No one was quite sure what they were angry about - the class system, perhaps, Suez, or the H-bomb - but they were clearly angry about something.”\(^30\) Zuczkowski in his article “What Did the Angry Young Men Have to Be Angry About?” puts forward two different views on the state of affairs of 1950s. The first one is that of affluence as voiced by the highly placed, prominent people including Prime Minister Macmillan who felt that all was well and there was nothing for anyone to be angry about. Zuczkowski states that in the fifties when,

...war was over, rationing ceased, coal and electricity came back. Almost at once, affluence came. Suddenly, the shops were piled high with all sorts of goods. Boom was in the air. The nation rapidly moved forward from post-war harshness to (Prime Minister) Macmillan’s (quotation that) ‘most of our people never had it so good’\(^31\)

The pleasantness reflected in the words was far from being true and the picture was not so idyllic as depicted. The second view as Zuczkowski himself puts it was, “the 1950s were not a nice time to live.”\(^32\) It marked the beginning of an era of the Cold war and lunatic arms race in which Britain too got involved.
The following quote confirms the concern of the writers, since they are the first to react as they bear the brunt of the societal welfare:

The Angries attacked British foreign policy (Suez) and the post-war English Establishment in press articles. Osborne published one of the fiercest pieces of criticism in the *Encounter*. He regarded the English experiment with the H-bomb in the Pacific the meanest criminal swindle in the history of England.33

It is to be noted that all the grievances which these “Angries” held were articulated through their heroes. Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* is found to be ranting against the support of Bishops to H-bomb. John Osborne himself was arrested in 1961 for his participation in CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) demonstration at Trafalgar Square. It was the beginning from here that he acquired a radical reputation. It was in the same year that Arnold Wesker was sentenced to a month in prison along with Bertrand Russell and others for spearheading the demonstration of the Committee of 100’s against the use of nuclear weapons. The working-class masses found solace that their frustrations are being chronicled and are being articulated through the works of these men. Marwick points out, “Class is a difficult and messy subject, but indisputably neither the upheavals of the Second World War nor the programme of the Labour Government abolished it.”34

“Although the Angry Young Men were a very diverse group, they benefited from two hugely significant political events in the autumn of 1956: the Suez Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Although none of their books or plays is about Suez or communist totalitarianism, their critical attitudes seemed to give voice to those who were dismayed both by the loss of Empire and by the slowness with which the Establishment adjusted to new global realities. So, although Maschler denounced the AYM label as a product of a "lower level of journalism", he did detect an "indignation against apathy" in 1950s youth culture.”35
The seminal success of *Look Back in Anger*, however, made the British newspapers use the label ‘Angry Young Men’ to designate all those British writers, a new species of intellectuals who were mostly of working class or of lower middle class origin, some even educated at the postwar red-brick universities, who, through their works expressed an insatiable raw anger at the stale and stultifying system, lashed out at the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes and at times even became disillusioned. They looked at all the institutions of society, social, cultural, religious, political with contempt and often passed condescending remarks against them. The first major undertaking of the post-war media was the label and the movement which created instant celebrities and a whole cultural phenomenon through savvy spinning and lurid penmanship.

The Angry Young Man (AYM) Movement thus came to be associated with the dominant British literary movement of the decade, which was characterized by disdain for the establishment and its class distinctions. The movement took pride in lower class manners and loathed the phoney manners of the upper classes. It rejected the complexity of modernist literature by such authors as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in favour of a more accessible style. Nothing substantial was happening in the theatre. It was all desolate and barren, creatively and even conceptually. Then, there was a thunder shower which turned the theatre fertile. “What was new and struck the public nerve in *Look Back in Anger*, was the sense of naked honesty that came from the identification between author and protagonist, and the tone of self-lacerating (but generalized) anger.”

Alan Carter attempting to understand the antecedents or causes that prompted the break-through in the theatre and later in the society says:

The movement, if it could be called anything as definite as that, was in its essence an expression of disillusionment. Many people were fed up, they were bored, and had little opportunity for
achievement. They were searching for a world they could believe in, and even get angry at. All they needed was a call to arms. Osborne sounded that call. He did so in the theatre, and from there it echoed round the land. The reverberation was loud because of the emptiness of the theatre.37

The works produced during the movement are considered plays of proletarian literature with lot of ‘emotional protest’ involved in them. ‘Proletarian Literature’ refers to a literature created by the Proletarian or working class writers. These writers have had their upbringing in the working class social milieu which serves as a paradigm for them to depict their characters or themes. Their works call upon all working people and discontented intellectuals, in particular to fight against all forms of exploitation that they are subjected to, consciously or otherwise. Their aim was to redesign, remodel, if not create a new society based on the leadership of the proletariat. “In some respects, the history of theatre in Britain for much of the Post-war period might be characterized as an attempt to break the association of theatre with like-minded middle-class audiences. With the decline of the music hall in the 1930s, theatre became renowned as a predominantly middle-class form of entertainment. Several generations of dramatists since the 1950s have attempted to widen the appeal of drama.”38 John Osborne was the one who pioneered such attempts.

These plays are also called as ‘Kitchen Sink Dramas’, a term coined to describe a British Cultural Movement which developed in the second half of 1950’s and early 1960’s in theatre, art, novels, film and television plays, whose heroes could usually be described as angry young men. It used a style of ‘Social Realism’, which often depicted the domestic situations of working class people living in rented accommodation (as Jimmy in Look Back in Anger does) and spending their leisure time drinking and criticizing and exploring social issues and debating political concerns. Social Realism developed as a reaction against
Romanticism which propitiated lofty concepts such as the “ineffable” beauty and truth of art and music, and even turned them into spiritual ideals. As such, social realism focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working class people, particularly the poor. It was far removed from the realms of the Victorian theatre where the life of aristocrats in their parlours or drawing halls was depicted.

“In the UK, the term ‘Kitchen Sink’ is derived from an expressionist painting by John Bratby, which contained an image of a kitchen sink. The critic David Sylvester wrote an article in 1954 about trends in recent English art, calling his article “The Kitchen Sink” in reference to Bratby’s picture. Sylvester argued that there was a new interest among young painters in domestic scenes, with stress on the banality of life.” The term began to get applied slowly to a then emerging style of drama, which favoured a more realistic representation of working class life. As Chayefsky puts it, this “‘drama of introspection’ explored ‘the marvelous world of the ordinary.’”

John Bratby painted several kitchen subjects, often turning practical utensils such as sieves and spoons into semi-abstract shapes. The works of the ‘Kitchen Sink’ were created with the intention of changing the stereotypic depiction of the working class as observed in Noel Coward’s drawing room comedies or in the ‘well-made plays’, the kind which theatre critic Kenneth Tynan once denounced as being set in ‘Loamshire’ of dramatists like Terence Rattigan. The writers of these ‘Kitchen Sink’ plays held political views which were initially labelled as radical, sometimes even anarchic. Osborne’s Look Back in Anger showed an Angry Young Man, as a graduate, conscious of his class, dissatisfied and distressed with the stifling world around, suffering from social alienation, claustrophobia. He is a personification of the very many frustrations of a provincial life.

Osborne was the first of the Angry Young Writers who wanted to construct a kind of drama that reflected the scenarios as they were. He had a firm
conviction that the theatre had broad role to play. He was at his most expansive when talking about the theatre:

I love the theatre more than ever because I know that it is what I always dreamed it might be a weapon. I am sure that it can be one of the decisive weapons of our time. We, who work in the theatre, have power, and we should never underestimate - as we do - the extent of that power. We may not have the immediate range of those who are in films or in television. Our power is concentrated. The people who work in this mass media look to us. Usually we have been found wanting.41

It was for this reason that J.R. Taylor says, "...‘the Osborne generation’ proved only the first of several waves, 8 May 1956 still marks the real breakthrough of ‘the new drama’ into the British theatre, and Osborne himself remains, one way and another, one of its most influential exponents, as well as representing for the general public the new dramatist par excellence, the first of the angry young men and arguably the biggest shock to the system of British theatre since the advent of Shaw."42
REFERENCES:


21
16. Tadeusz Zuczkowski in his article What Did the Angry Young Men Have to Be Angry About?


18. Tadeusz Zuczkowski in his article What Did the Angry Young Men Have to Be Angry About?


32. Zuczkowski in his article *What Did the Angry Young Men Have to Be Angry About?*

33. Zuczkowski in his article *What Did the Angry Young Men Have to Be Angry About?*

34. Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, p.44.


