CHAPTER – II

THE ANGRY YOUNG WRITERS:
THEIR LEGACY AND THEIR WORK
The Angry Young Man Movement produced two notable novelists who did not turn to the theatre but remained pioneers and set the tone of the movement. They were Kingsley Amis and John Wain. Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954), an academic satire aimed at university lecturers and the cultural tastes of education and society, is usually hailed as a precursor to the portrayal of the character of Jimmy. It is about Jim Dixon, a Lecturer in Medieval History at a provincial university, who has gone cynical, suffers from an air of detachment, and indulges in alcohol. The novel has a questioning spirit, which was sceptical of post-war British society.

There emerged a specific literary movement called 'The Movement', which was a term coined by J.D. Scott, literary editor of *The Spectator*, in 1954 to describe a group of writers including Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Thom Gunn and Robert Conquest. 'The Movement' was essentially English in character, poets of Scotland and Wales were not generally included. Kingsley Amis can be viewed as one of the prominent personalities associated with both 'The Movement and The Angry Young Men as he was a member of both of them. His "early novels present us with sardonic vision of British society in the 1950s". *Lucky Jim* can be considered as one of the essentials among the books of the Angry Young Men. Stribný points out that:

Amis' first novel combined exuberant verbal and situation comedy with grotesquely masked satire, attacking stiffness, authoritativeness, hypocrisy, and impotence of both the old academia and of all of the city notables.

Jim Dixon becomes a Lecturer in Medieval History in a University. He has merely specialized in Medieval History as it was a soft option to get a job. A clever boy from Oxford failed in the interview as he opted for the complicated modern theories of interpretation. In reality, on the other hand, Jim has little interest either in the subject or in that job but paradoxically gets appointed. He is aware that the system is wrong and he has to conform to its rules if he wants to
retain his post and be possibly promoted. However, he is disgusted with the way the things are happening around him. The novel mocks at the hypocrisy of the over-rigid university hierarchy and system with its over-rigid professors. Jim’s status in the university depends on the degree of his pleasing the old Professor Welch. He repeatedly fails to please him due to the conspiracies of his fellow colleague Johns. To make matters worse, he gets drawn to a girl Christine Callaghan, a girlfriend of Welch’s son, as a result of which gets seriously warned.

Jim gets drunk before the decisive moment of giving a special lecture on medieval history which would enable him to get ratified. He makes a mess of everything and flunks. Jim thus fails to gain a better position because he fails to meet the standards set by the university and cannot conform to the regulations. However, his messy lecture amuses none but one Gore-Urquhart, who is a rich devotee of the arts. He gives Jim a job of private secretary. Jim becomes ‘Lucky Jim’ as he finally got what he always dreamt of - a position, beloved girlfriend, and wealth. The novel has a humorous and at times a satirical tone and hence it appears to be less serious about painful issues.

However, underlying the humour, the issues still persist. Matters are not presented in an agonizing and distressing manner as it happens in the works of other Angry Young Writers. Jim Dixon, in his own style, is an Angry Young Man because in cutting a sorrowful figure of himself, he is actually mocking at the system. He does not respect the rules of the University and is nonchalant even when the time demands taking stock of the situation. This is merely because he does not like doing what he does not want, a trait of the Movement.

John Wain’s novel Hurry on Down (1952) is about a hero who rejects the kind of respectable employment for which his university degree qualifies him, in a way actually rejecting the patronage that is conferred on him by the State and prefers to drift from job to job (in a way an inspiring model for Jimmy who was due to come four years later from then and who was also like a rolling stone).
Commenting on *Lucky Jim* and *Hurry on Down*, Taylor says, “The heroes of these are shamelessly self-centered, liberated from social responsibility, out for number one. They are sexy, ill-mannered and bent on cocking a snook at social conventions and class limitations.” In a way, the trend that was evident in both these novels got crystallized in 1956 in the play *Look Back in Anger*, which became the representative work of the movement.

Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) is about a working class male protagonist Arthur Seaton who is anti-authoritarian and cynical, akin to the traits of his class. He works ceaselessly at the lathe in a bicycle factory like his father. The novel is divided into two parts- Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. The title of the play itself can be studied as having a metaphorical significance. In order to relieve himself from the drudgery of the week, Arthur gets into a wild orgy and drinks heavily on Saturday Night and sobers down on Sunday Morning. Saturday Night, in fact, stands for the nature of the working-class environment, their manners, their culture and living styles. Sunday Morning stands for the prospects of the next day or the future. True to it, in the end of this second part, it is found that Arthur marries a nice girl called Doreen and settles down. Hilsky, speaking about certain shared characteristics of the heroes of the working class novel, says:

Unlike the “angry” intellectual from Amis’s and Wain’s novels the new working class hero has much closer relation to the present community, which he came from, and lacks the ambition so much typical of the “angry young men”, that is to move a step higher on the social ladder.

Hilsky’s observation implies the difference between the typical Angry Young Man and a Working Class hero though both of them are an inseparable part of the movement. The former one is an intellectual and is full of discontent with his position within the society and wants to scale upwards but the latter is somewhat reconciled with his position, which again does not mean that he is
fully content with it. He has his own set of problems. He too is equally frustrated and angry. Arthur Seaton’s comments on the British Government and politics in general make it clear.

Arthur calls the Conservatives and the Labour Party as “big fat Tory bastards” and “Labour bleeders” respectively and continues to say about the members of the Labour, “They rob our wage packets every week with insurance and income tax and try to tell us it’s all for our own good.” Arthur’s opinion on Communists too sounds interesting. He does not like their idea of “share and share alike” and admits before his friend Jack, “…did I tell yer, Jack, I voted communist at the last election? I did because I thought the poor bloke wouldn’t get any votes. I allus like to ‘elp the losin’ side.”

This is a strange mixture of scorn and pity that he has towards the Communists, in particular and all the other parties in general because he has lost faith in all of them, rather all of them have failed to win his faith in them, typical of the same thing happening with all the other heroes of the “Angries”. He has antagonism towards the Police and army authorities. He is relatively indifferent to the affluence around him. In fact, when his sister Margaret feels happy and proud that atlast she could afford to own a televisor set, Arthur without excitation says,

I’d love it if big Black Marias came down all the streets and men got out with hatchets to go in every house and smash the tallies. Everybody’d go crackers. They wouldn’t know what to do. There’d be a revolution. I’m sure there would, they’d blow-up the Council House and set fire to the Castle. It wouldn’t bother me if there weren’t any television sets, though, not one bit.

This reaction, beyond any doubt is a stern criticism of the consumer society. There is a sense of feeling that the Government, through its technological innovations, wanted to divert the attention of the people from issues which were serious and of vital importance and concern. Alan’s short
story, “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner” (1959) deserves a special mention. It is a wonderful piece of protest and defiance which the angry young men held so close to their hearts. It focuses on Colin Smith, a poor Nottingham teenager from a dismal home in a blue-collar area, who has bleak prospects in life and few interests beyond petty crime. The boy turns to long-distance running as a method of both emotional and a physical escape from his situation. Smith gets clarity in his thinking, establishes his identity, reasserts it mentally through the physical activity of running, “I couldn’t see anybody, and I knew what the loneliness of the long-distance runner running across country felt like, realizing that as far as I was concerned this feeling was the only honesty and realness there was in the world....”

Smith gets caught by the police for robbing a bakery and is sentenced to be confined in Ruxton Towers, a borstal (prison school) for delinquent youth. An important part of the Governor’s rehabilitation programme is athletics as he himself was a runner once upon a time. Smith attracts the authorities for his physical prowess of long-distance running which offers him a welcome distraction from the brutal drudgery of the Borstal regime and he is offered the prospect of early release from Borstal, if he wins in an important cross-country competition against a prestigious public school, Ranley.

Smith, in the race, however, throws victory away by deliberately stopping a few metres away from finishing line even though he is well ahead and could have easily won, thus allowing the Ranley winners to cross. His act is a defiant gesture aimed at his Borstal captors, and the repressive forces they represent. In deliberately losing the race, Smith demonstrates his free spirit and independence though he knows the repercussions of his act. However, looking back on his actions he has no regrets. This act “will confirm him in his belief that he’s a human being, not just a machine for winning cross-country races....” He thus asserts his own class and resists obliging. He desists the false concern and patronage of the Governor and his upper classes. This is what he shares with
the angry young heroes, a disapproval of a certain type of a system that stifles individual liberty and aspires to make them automated machines.

The Angry Young Men often disagreed with the Government and its policies. Smith also disagrees not so much with the Government of Britain towards which his attitude is one of indifference, “Government wars aren’t my wars; they’ve got nowt to do with me…” but he is at loggerheads with some kind of Establishment, in this context the Borstal prison. He points out the inequality between the Borstal establishment and the inmates, “If only ‘them’ and ‘us’ had the same ideas we’d get on like a house on fire, but they don’t see eye to eye with us and we don’t see eye to eye with them, so that’s how it stands and how it will always stand.”

“The anger expressed in the “Angry Young Man” movement as seen in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning and The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, does not come from having lost what one possessed, but from having never possessed what one feels he or she deserves to possess.” The heroes in most of the works of these “Angries” recognize the need for social reform but are cognizant of Government’s reclusiveness to conform to the will of people. The consequence of this is an engulfing despair and through it, an expression of anger, directed against the interests of the Establishment.

John Arden too is vehemently critical of post-imperial Britain. He is an extremely committed socialist. His Live Like Pigs (1958), though might be a play concerning the colourful, amorous semi-gipsies moving into a council house on a new estate outraging the so called decent neighbours, it can actually be considered as an allegory of the place of rebels in society. Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance (1959) has a much more powerful theme as it condemns the horrendous crimes and exploitation of war, colonialism and industrialization.

Arnold Wesker’s trilogy, Chicken Soup with Barley (1958), Roots(1959) and I’m Talking About Jerusalem (1960) and Four Seasons are regarded as Look Back in Anger’s successors as they are inspired by Osborne’s model and
articulated the disgust felt against the class structure in the society. Each play in
the trilogy involves Ronnie Kahn. In Chicken Soup with Barley, Ronnie grows
up in a family of English communists. The first scene is set in 1936, the last in
1956 and the play depicts the change from idealism to disillusionment, from the
Spanish Civil War to the Hungarian Uprising. In Roots, Ronnie educates a
working class Norfolk girl Beatie who is in love with him. He, however, drops
her but she succeeds in finding her own voice.

In I'm Talking About Jerusalem, the difficulties of Ronnie’s sister and
brother-in-law are portrayed as they struggle to produce hand-made furniture
when the production process actually has undergone transition in favour of
modern industrialization. The trilogy has a common conceptual theme of
disillusioning experiments in practical socialism. Wesker was able to portray
working class characters with ease, perfection and with a rare realism of its own
as his characters had a cadence of speech and rhythms of life which were very
different from other characters with the accents and attitudes of the upper-middle
classes who dominated British theatre till then.

Wesker’s Roots is a play about the intense desire of most of the working
families to acquire more knowledge, more culture, more being. His first play The
Kitchen was based on his own experiences as a pastry-cook. The play dramatizes
the hot and noisy routine of work in the kitchen of a large restaurant where Peter
works. It portrays the hectic schedule and the exploitation that upper classes
subject the working classes to. Peter is not allowed even to dream. The
proprietor of the restaurant Marango thinks that a man will be happy with food
and money. However, Peter and his colleagues feel deprived of a happy life even
when they have money.

The impact of Osborne’s work inspired Arnold Wesker and Shelagh
Delaney, among numerous others, to write plays of their own. The English Stage
Company of George Devine and the Theatre Workshop organized by Joan
Littlewood played a vital role in bringing these plays to public’s attention. The
English Stage Company in particular became the "...habitat of new drama in Britain"\textsuperscript{13} The critic John Heilpern wrote that "Look Back in Anger expressed such "immensity of feeling and class hatred" that it altered the course of English theatre."\textsuperscript{14}

Shelagh Delaney considered as Angry Young Woman wrote her first play *A Taste of Honey* (1958) which has a working class non-conformist in the form of a young seventeen-year-old Jo who lives with her mother, Helen, who is crude and sexually indiscriminate. Helen leaves Jo alone in their new flat after she begins a relationship with Peter, a rich lover younger than her. At the same time Jo is impregnated by Jimmy, a black sailor who proposes marriage but then goes to sea, leaving Jo alone who finds lodgings with a homosexual acquaintance, Geoffrey, who assumes the role of a surrogate father. Helen returns after leaving her lover and the future of Jo's new home is put into question. The play is an intrepid inquiry into the class, race, gender and sexual orientation in mid-twentieth century Britain. It became known as a "kitchen sink" play, part of a genre revolutionising British theatre at the time. Shelagh hoped to revitalize British theatre and address social issues that she felt were not being dramatized.

Dorris Lessing who was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007 wrote her first novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950) which had actually been an angry portrayal of the attitude of white males in Rhodesia towards women and blacks.

The year that feminism entered British literary fiction is a debatable one: some refer to the watershed moment in 1962, when Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* dramatized women's interior conflict between work, motherhood, love and sex as well as the hitherto taboo drama of the menstrual cycle. It broke such new ground that its author was labeled as Angry Young Man, in line with the literary movement of the day. It was, infact, a
prototype feminist novel at the vanguard of the Angry Young Women’s wave of fiction that drew on centuries of unrecorded domestic servitude.15

Jonathan Bowden, regarding Bill Hopkins observes:

“Bill Hopkins was one of the ‘Angry Young Men’ group of writers who emerged in the 1950s. He was the most prominent of the ‘Outsiders’ trio amongst the ‘Angry Young Men’ — a groupuscule which consisted of himself, Colin Wilson and Stuart Holroyd. His most outstanding contribution was asuccès de scandale with the novel, The Divine and the Decay, published by MacGibbon & Kee in 1957 — and his artistic credo, “Ways Without a Precedent,” contained in Declarations, the manifesto of the ‘Angry Young Men’. Doris Lessing, in the second volume of her literary autobiography, Walking in the Shade, says that Bill Hopkins revealed a great talent at this time....”16

There was another groupuscule within this large group of ‘Angry Young Men’. They were the New University Wits, a term applied by William Van O’Connor in his 1963 study The New University Wits and the End of Modernism. This term actually referred to Oxbridge malcontents who explored the contrast between their upper-class university privilege and their middle-class upbringing. They included Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin and John Wain, all of whom were also a part of the poetic circle known as ‘The Movement’, a term coined by J. D. Scott, literary editor of The Spectator in 1954. These Movement writers were against romanticism.

John Braine’s novels Room at the Top (1957) and Life at the Top (1960) also portray the life of Joe Lampton who has working class origins. The first novel deals with his attempts to ascend the social ladder. Joe Lampton, in Room at the Top had served in the army during World War II and wants to break the rules of the class restrictions in the post-war society. Joe knows that he will
merely end up as a worker in mills or factories and his dreams will not be fructified if he stays in his hometown of Dufton to which he refers as “Dead Dufton,...Dirty Dufton, Dreary Dufton, Despicable Dufton.” and leaves it to go to a city called Warley. This, he does, also to prevent himself sharing the same fate as his sincere and industrius father had, “He was a good workman; too good a workman to be sacked and too outspoken about his Labour convictions to be promoted.”

Joe meets an upper-class young girl, Susan Brow at the amateur theatre group and begins to court her though he already has a secret love affair with a middle-class, married woman, Alice Aisgill who is older than him and towards whom he is genuinely attracted as she is more woman-like than the girlish, inexperienced, innocent Susan. However, the prospects of inheriting wealth, power and social prestige drives him to make Susan stay tuned to him. He makes her pregnant and her father, Mr.Brown, an industrialist gets them married, providing a lucrative job and a car for him. Joe, thus fulfills his dream through knave means but it is like paying back in the same coin to the upper classes. Joe Lampton is an angry young man because he is one of those who disagreed and is deeply aggrieved with the prevalent social system as it had made an unwritten law that the working class origins should some how be deprived of an opportunity to better their social position or marry a decent girl from the top rungs of the society’s ladder. It is for this reason that he adopts unscrupulous practices to achieve his aim of reaching to the top. Joe may be condemned as an opportunist but the society does not give him an opportunity to advance and hence he generates his own.

It is not just the ‘Class’ but even the ‘War’ which makes its impact on the psyche of Joe as it not only ruined his home but also killed his parents. Joe enters the ruins of his old home and recalls the way in which his parents died, “Father and Mother had gone to bed when the bomb dropped. The siren had sounded but it was unlikely that they’d taken any notice. Dufton simply wasn’t worth the trouble of raiding. They’d died instantly…” Grief hits him afresh at
the site of his bombed, dilapidated house and old memories rush: "... images of pain and distress, more memories of things I'd seen during the war and would rather have forgotten, rose to the surface of my mind."  

Colin Wilson was a self-publicizing philosopher who loudly proclaimed his own genius, and had a massive success with his first book, The Outsider, in 1956. "Wilson became associated with the "Angry Young Men" of British literature. He contributed to Declaration, an anthology of manifestos by writers associated with the Movement, and wrote a popular paperback sampler, Protest: The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men."  

There was a parallel drawn between The Beat Generation of America and the Angry Young Generation of England. "The Beat Generation is a group of American post-WWII writers who came to prominence in the 1950s, as well as the cultural phenomenon that they both documented and inspired. Central elements of "Beat" culture included experimentation with drugs and alternative forms of sexuality, an interest in Eastern religion, a rejection of materialism, and the idealizing of exuberant, unexpurgated means of expression and being." Though certain modernist poets like Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and H.D. Pound were major influences on the Beats, the Beat aesthetic, like that of the Angry Young Men posited itself against T.S. Eliot's creed of strict objectivity and literary modernism's new classicism.  

"Allen Ginsberg's Howl (1956), William S. Burroughs Naked Lunch (1959) and Jack Kerouac's On the Road (1957) are among the best known examples of Beat literature." The protagonists depicted in these works were also non-conformists and were something like hedonistic bohemians. Jack Kerouac introduced the phrase "Beat Generation" in 1948 to characterize a perceived underground, anti-conformist youth movement in New York. The name arose in a conversation with writer John Clellon Holmes, "John Clellon Holmes...and I were sitting around trying to think up the meaning of the Lost
Generation and the subsequent existentialism and I said ‘You know John, this is really a beat generation’; and he leapt up and said, “That’s it, that’s right!”

“The adjective ‘beat’ could colloquially mean ‘tired’ or ‘beaten down’ but Kerouac expanded the meaning to include the connotations ‘‘upbeat’, ‘beatific’, and the musical association of being ‘on the beat’.” The term ‘Beatnik’ was coined by Herb Caen of the San Francisco Chronicle on 2 April 1958, a portmanteau on the name of the recent Russian Satellite Sputnik and Beat Generation. This suggested that beatniks were (1) ‘far out of the mainstream of society’ and (2) ‘possibly pro-Communist’.

“During the 1950s, aspects of the Beat movement metamorphosed into the Sixties Counterculture, accompanied by a shift in terminology from ‘beatnik’ to ‘hippie’ They were restless, jaded men and women, with no aim in life except a new sensation every day - drugs, “way-out jazz”, perverted sex and delinquency.

Osborne’s Jimmy might appear to be a beatnik as far as being irrepressibly expressive and cut-off from the mainstream of the society and representative of the ‘Lost Generation’ but still behind all his rantings there is a genuine, deep, loving concern for society. He does rely on playing jazz as a vent for the pent up emotional strain and disgust; we come to know that Jimmy had his own jazz band as a student and he continues playing it. On finding Jimmy ceaselessly and defeaningly play his jazz trumpet, We find Helena, ponderingly say, “It’s almost as if he wanted to kill someone with it. And me in particular. I’ve never seen such hatred in someone’s eyes before. It’s slightly horrifying. Horrifying and oddly exciting.”

but at the same time, he is not an addict like them, far away from drugs, not even of liquor. Alison, startled on being questioned by Helena whether he drinks, says, “Drink? He’s not an alcoholic, if that’s what you mean.”

There was certainly no delinquency on his part. It was not only he but most of the other central characters in the works of the ‘Angry Young Men’ were not criminals or rogues. They, at times, like Beatniks, were cynical but
never perverted. They were eccentric but never psychotic to the extent of being called mentally derailed. They indeed suffered from disillusion but never from delusion and never clouded themselves in the smoke of marijuana to slip into a state of delirium. It will be wrong then to presuppose that the Angry Young Men Movement drew largely from the Beat Movement. The AYM Movement had its own background, its own socio-political causes, the root origins of which were typically embedded in the soil of England. The topicalities and events of English society have fostered the movement. Some critics confused their longing for individual development with a total rejection of society. In reality, the heroes’ “rebellion is rather quiet: They do not reject all society; none of the heroes leaves England. They ‘dissent’, they run away from what they do not like. Detach, but don’t destroy. If necessary, escape from an impossible situation and find one’s own comfortable niche.”

It was interesting to note the impact of the movement on the political establishment in Britain which certainly felt unnerved and uneasy with the rise of the Angry Young Men. A striking example is the critique that Professor Frederick R. Karl expressed himself against the movement in his book *The Contemporary English Novel* (1962):

> Their protest in the fifties is similar to the American gangster’s revolt in the twenties, as the motion pictures have presented him: a man trapped by social forces which are themselves corrupt. In order to be “honest”, he must deceive, lie, steal, even kill. He must work his way to margins and peripheries. Eventually, he must throw himself against the very structure which will eventually crush him. Nevertheless, in destroying himself, he achieves a certain kind of perverted purity.

Karl’s analysis exposes the fear-driven upper and middle classes and their expectation that the working classes will organize a mutiny. His comparison of Angry Young Men to gangsters is condescending, and in any case it is an
attempt to belittle and tarnish the seriousness of the aim of the movement. “Karl’s reproduction of the hero of the Angry Young Men does not make much sense. He talks about a gangster revolt but in fact the heroes are not revolting, at least not explicitly.” They were certainly ‘protesting’ but ‘Protest’ need not always be associated with violence, bloodshed and mass destruction. Their protest was headed against the rigid pattern of class stratification. Osborne, even in a play like Luther, (setting aside for a moment that it reflected the Spirit of its own Age) even if it is thought to be of the very 1950s did not portray Martin Luther as an usurper, as a commander with the mechanism of coup-de-etat. In fact, contrary to that we find Martin being depicted as the one who withdrew from the movement as it had turned out to be violent. The heroes in the works of Angry Young Men revolted but they were not revolutionaries who believed in armed struggle. We find Cajetan saying to Martin, “You’re not a good old revolutionary, my son, you’re just a common rebel, a very different animal.”

“There was no uniformity among the critics as to the writers to be grouped under this movement. As a catchphrase, the term was applied to a large, incoherently defined group, and was rejected by most of the writers to whom it was applied.” Tom Maschler, who edited a collection of political-literary essays by the “Angries” commented: “(T)hey do not belong to a united movement. Far from it; they attack one another directly or indirectly in these pages. Some were even reluctant to appear between the same covers with others whose views they violently oppose.” There were clusters or groupuscule or species within this large group or genus of writers. Some viewed Wilson and his friends Bill Hopkins and Stuart Holroyd as a sub-group of the "Angries", more concerned with "religious values" than with liberal or socialist politics. Critics on the left swiftly labeled them as fascist; commentator Kenneth Allsop called them "the law givers". Colin later wrote books about the supernatural, mysticism and crime and was more concerned with exploring religious and metaphysical values than with writing political manifestoes or advocating a rush to the barricades.
Alan Sillitoe too, curiously was not an authentic part of the original AYM phenomenon. Late Humphrey Carpenter reviewed his two novels, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1959) and found them to be "respectful rather than ecstatic". It was only when these books were made into gritty, realistic films in the early 1960s that Sillitoe was co-opted into the AYM club. The latter title entered the language as a figure of speech. This is a literary achievement coveted by writers.

The books soon followed where the newspapers led. In 1958, Kenneth Allsop rushed into print with 'The Angry Decade', although it was said that a more accurate title would have been "The Angry Eighteen Months". He argued that although "anger" was used to advertise these emergent talents, a better word for their "new spirit" would be "dissentience", a dissent from "majority sentiments and opinions". Somehow, ‘dissent’ is so much more British than ‘anger’ or ‘revolt.’ This ‘dissent’, the writers expressed towards the ‘establishment’ was perhaps the same as they mutually exhibited towards each other.

The writers in each sub-group or groupuscule tended to view the other writers in other sub-group of the Angry Young Movement with bewilderment and incomprehension. Some critics found that there was no common thread among them all. Osborne, Wesker, Kenneth Tynan were left-winged but John Braine and Philip Larkin were right-winged. Hence the factor of political ideology cannot be taken as a binding or grouping factor. It was not absolutely a movement of male composition because Shelagh Delaney and Dorris Lessing were included in it. Hence gender too cannot be a defining factor. If Osborne, Colin Wilson, Tynan were in their 20s, Amis, John Braine, Larkin, Dorris Lessing were in their 30s and Bill Hopkins, Shelagh Delaney were under 20s. Hence age cannot be taken as a yardstick. However, all these arguments are flimsy.
They were all contemporaries and were not of the upper-class establishment. It should be understood, inspite of all the criticism, that no movement will have all the writers who share absolutely similar ideas. However like-minded they appear to be, they are bound to have differences of opinion or as Allsop said ‘dissent’ in certain aspects. Even the romanticists had their own dissensions with each other. It will be hence ridiculously too ambitious to expect a consensus among them in every sphere of literary activity. It should be reckoned, however, that there was a unifying theme underlying the works of all these writers. Their political views were usually inclined towards the left and sometimes even turned out to be anarchist. They were ever ready to describe social alienation of different kinds and were depressingly vigorous in holding critical views on society.

Skovmand appropriately remarks on the underlying commonness among them when he says, “Although the movement displayed individual differences among its writers, the Angry Young Men did share common ground: they all lived in an age in which Britain was in decay. The end of the Second World War had meant two things: “rationing and poverty in economic terms, and as a result of this economic weakness, a greater degree of political dependence upon other countries, especially the U.S.”39 The works of all these writers yielded the same tone and rage. Their works were affluent bearers of social criticism. “The Angry Young Men were commonly associated with left-wing aspirations. In their works they (implicitly) accused the former political and social situation of Britain, a state being ruled by the Conservative party. Writers as Amis, Braine, Wain and Osborne were generally identified with Left and Center.”40 Amis might have very well resented being called an Angry Young Man, but his anti-hero Jim Dixon certainly railed against the stultifying conventions of British provincial life.

Philip Larkin, whom the critics for their convenience placed in another group by branding him as the ‘Movement Poet’, another journalistic label still shared in abundance most of the traits, set of values and assumptions closely
related to that of the ‘Angries’ and the moods and conditions of post-war England. Many of Larkin’s poems undoubtedly reflect some of those values and assumptions. The prominent features of the work of this group of poets might roughly be described as dissenting and nonconformist. An honesty of thought and feeling was added to clarity of expression. Stylistically the poets of this group share an avoidance of rhetoric; and they employ an austere tone and a colloquial idiom. They tended to rebel against the inflated romanticism of the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties. Their poetry was regarded as a victory of common sense and clarity over obscurity and mystification.

Alvarez dismissed the “gentility” of the poetry of the Movement and demanded the quality of “urgency” in it. With reference to the following lines of Larkin’s ‘Church Going’, “Hatless, I take off/My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.” he remarked:

This, in concentrated form, is the image of the post-War Welfare State Englishman: shabby, and not concerned with his appearance: poor—he has a bike, not a car; gauche but full of agnostic piety; under-fed, under-paid, over-taxed, hopeless, bored, wry.41

We can also find Alison, in a mood of romantic nostalgia, saying to Helena about Jimmy, “He’d come to the party on a bicycle, he told me, and there was oil all over his dinner jacket.”42 The ‘bicycle’ image represented not only scarcity amidst affluence but also stood for defiance, antagonism, indifference, coarseness against the Government in particular and the society it created in general. Larkin was clearly anti-establishment and in this way he was akin to the creed of the Angry Young Man.

A similar comparison can be made between the following lines of Larkin’s ‘Church Going’ and what Jimmy says in Osborne’s ‘Look Back in Anger’,

A few cathedrals chronically on show...
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

40
Or, after dark, will dubious women go
To make their children touch a phallic stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?

Jimmy too at the beginning of Act III, scene (i.) asks Cliff, “Have you read about the grotesque and evil practices going on in the Midlands?” and goes on to say “Startling Revelations this week! Pictures too. Reconstructions of midnight invocations to the Coptic Goddess of fertility.” Both these are ironical lashes at superstitious beliefs becoming rampant in the English society during the post-war years. It also speaks about the failure of the Church in advocating a ‘true religion’ and hence it has ceased to exist as a positive force. Jimmy, in particular is antagonistic to the Church, “Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started! Wrap it up, will you? Stop ringing those bells! There’s somebody going crazy in here! I don’t want to hear them!” Thus, there is underlying uniformity among all these writers of Angry Young Man Movement. They were against class barriers, snobbery of upper middle classes, false religious practices, bureaucratic impotency, hypocrisy, England’s modern social democracy, including the loss of cultural and social prestige that accompanied the end of the empire.

The Movement, which was something like a spokes centre for the new self-proclaimed lower middle-class intelligentsia was forced into an ambivalent position; on one hand, it was opposed to the old order and on the other hand, it was indebted to and respectful towards its institutions. It was this kind of ‘positional ambiguity’ and ‘ideological intricateness’ that made these writers appear to lack that element of ‘militancy’, a prime requisite to bring about drastic change in society. It was this which left the gap between the intensity with which they said something and the resultant effect in the form of ‘action’ of it. Alvarez believed that inspite of its mood of dissent and its anti-establishment attitude, the Movement offered only a token rebellion and did not try to change the prevailing social structure. The Movement’s social and poetical ambivalence
extends to the formal and structural texture of the poetry in terms of hesitations, qualifications, and conversational asides.

Seamus Heaney astutely identifies the political origins and ramifications of the backward-looking, nostalgic pastoralism in Larkin’s ‘Going, Going’. In this respect, he is probably the first critic to acknowledge the shaping effects of postcolonial history on Larkin’s poetry: “The loss of imperial power, the failure of economic nerve, the diminished influence of Britain inside Europe, all this has led to a new sense of the shires, a new valuing of the native English experience.”

These angry writers certainly had in common the idea that they had lived in times of wars and confronted the imbalances and the general malaise which far from providing any happiness gave way to loads of insecurity. Though not in collaboration, they carried on the movement, which came to be regarded as reactionary and that reflected their contemporary zeitgeist with rage and frustration.

The perception of these as “angry” outsiders was the one point of coherence. It all had something to do with English “provincialism” asserting itself, in a world where James Joyce (an Irishman) and Dylan Thomas (a Welshman) had taken the literary high ground. The feelings of frustration and exclusion from the centre and The Establishment were taken up, as common sense surrogates for the Freud and Sartre of the highbrows. In a negative description, they tended to avoid radical experimentalism in their literary style; they were not modernists by technique.

Osborne was like the nucleus of the movement and hence very important because he was the one who became a trailblazer with a distinct voice and distinct style for the new generation of writers who came to be known as the “Angry Young Men”. He succeeded with his phenomenon of creating new awareness of the sociopolitical stimulus that the theatre could be expected to
give. Most of the heroes in the works of these writers were educated for roles which transcend their class identity, or in some cases they were employed well in the industrial arena so as to ascend the social ladder with the help of economic security. “They are displaced persons in English society, belonging to no one, yet wanting to have an acceptable identity compatible with their self-realization.”47 Look Back in Anger was considered an exceptional drama because,

Osborne had the desire to shock, which in turn, for a short time in the late 1950s and early 1960s, put theatre at the centre of popular media attention, and made it a contentious space of representation. With the impact of Look Back in Anger, English theatre was no longer about the well-made play, about formal experiment or even about murders in country houses. Theatre was now about society, about the highly publicized and mythologised changes in English society and culture.48

Aleks Seirz in his Alan Sillitoe: Who are you calling Angry? Views:

The main achievement of the AYMs was to articulate the vague sense of dissatisfaction that the educated youth of Britain felt in the late 1950s and their combination of youth, ambition and restlessness did generate a certain creative energy. Class was important. While working-class boys gyrated to rock and roll, the university lads listened to folk music and jazz; while street kids liked commercial television, rebels watched the BBC; while Teddy Boys fought hooligan battles at seaside resorts, the angries tended to rebel by reading or writing books and poems. If their politics tended to be anti-American and pro the underdog, they were often surprisingly old-fashioned. Even during the Suez Crisis, Osborne blustered in a newspaper article: "What's gone wrong with
WOMEN?" Anger, in the cultural imagination of the time, was a man's game.49

It was significant that the "angry young man" ushered in the modern theatre. The technical intricacies of the play Look Back in Anger did not matter, as Taylor notes that Osborne himself had characterised it as "a formal, rather old-fashioned play"50 but it broke the mould and set British theatre off in a new direction, or new directions, for it opened the door to the new and the different. There was a veritable explosion of the new theatre and theatrical ideas in the sixties and seventies: politically committed theatre, such as that represented by Theatre Workshop, theatre which was surreal and absurd, much early Stoppard; feminist theatre, such as that presented by Monstrous Regiment (a theatre company) and Caryl Churchill; ‘experiment’ in the theatre: to instant theatre, improvisation and the ‘happening’, to the work of self-consciously exploratory, innovating directors and designers.

The new dramatists came up with a sufficient number of commercial successes. The passage of ten or fifteen years since the opening of Look Back in Anger brought about a new generation into the theatre with new ideas and even more influential, new preconceptions. These writers of the Second Wave like Peter Nichols and David Mercer who began to come to prominence towards the middle of the 1960s were not all young – or not, anyway, in comparison with the principal figures of the First Wave John Osborne, Harold Pinter and John Arden who were ‘young’ and had represented their ‘anger’ in their own style. Even Edward Bond, Tom Stoppard, and Joe Orton are still older than such an old stager as Shelagh Delaney. There are several younger such as Howard Brenton, Christopher Hampton, Howard Barker, David Edgar and David Hare, but they are in a minority and hence can be taken as individual phenomena.

The movement in a way also gave birth to the British New Wave, a name given to a trend in film making among directors in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The label is a translation of Nouvelle Vague, a French term. "There
is considerable overlap between the New Wave and the so-called “Angry Young Men”, those artists in British theatre and film such as playwright John Osborne and director Tony Richardson, who challenged the social status quo. Peter Stead, speaking on the situation of the British film before the arrival of the British New Wave says, “By the mid-1950s British cinema had clearly been driven very firmly and decisively into a cultural cul-de-sac. A set of conventions had been established which produced films that were often very polished and entertaining without ever really being significant in cultural and especially social terms.” The Angry Young Men established themselves on the cultural scene of the 1950s. Their works gained wide readership from publication, became theatrically successful, and won critical acclaim, and apart from all these, attracted the filmmakers.

It was in the 1950s and early 1960s that their books were adapted for the screen. Peter Stead says, “Of course the film industry was always ready to turn to well-publicized literary successes and now there was the additional incentive that the young writers had clearly pointed to the existence of a new kind of audience. It was time for British films to reflect the new mood.” "Their work drew attention to the reality of life for the working classes, especially in the North of England, often characterized as “It’s grim up north”. This particular type of drama, centred around class and the nitty-gritty of day-to-day life, was also known as the kitchen sink drama.” This does appear to be slightly patronizing but nevertheless a bold acknowledgement of the fact of how successful these plays were in pushing working class issues to the forefront of English Culture through the new medium of the Cinema.

Lindsay Anderson, a prominent critic who wrote for the influential Sequence magazine (1947-1952), British Film Institute’s journal Sight and Sound and the left-wing political weekly, the New Statesman laid down his theories for the nature and complexion that British Cinema has to assume in his most popular polemical pieces, Stand Up, Stand Up. He developed a constitutional framework for cinema which found expression in what became as
the Free Cinema Movement in Britain by the late 1950s. The conviction of this
movement, as the name itself suggests was that the cinema must free itself from
the class-bound shackles and that the working classes ought to be seen on
Britain’s screens. These films were shot on real locations and with real people
rather than extras, capturing life as it really happens to be. These trends, these
new movements owe their legacy to the ‘Angry Young Man’ and the ‘Kitchen-
sink Realism’ as they served as a perfect source of inspiration and vantage point
for the filmmakers to revive the British cinema and raise its quality in terms of
the sordid realism depicted. To sum it all up, Zuczkowski says,

The Angry Young Men played a considerable role in initiating the
“New Wave” in the English film. The artistic quality of British
films rose for a time at the end of the fifties. Largely out of the
plays and novels of the “Angry” writers, a new generation of film
directors - such as Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, Tony
Richardson, and John Schlesinger, made a number of well-scripted
and sharply observed films: Lucky Jim (1957), Room at the Top
(1959), Look Back in Anger (1959), The Entertainer (1960),
Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960), ...The Loneliness of
the Long Distance Runner (1962), ....

The film adaptations of the works of Angry Young Men have certainly enriched
British Cinematography in particular as also the cinematography of the world, in
general. The “Angries” often discussed, met at, and were nurtured by the Royal
Shakespeare Company, a venue which served as a launch pad for emerging
playwrights such as Edward Bond and Wole Soyinka who were exposed to the
movement directly.

The Angry Young Man Movement might not be an organised or coherent
artistic movement as such, but ideologically, the nature of the work of the 'angry
young men' was characterised by outspoken dissatisfaction with the status quo,
particularly with the so-called Establishment. Reacting against the inhumane and
stifling class distinctions, their work championed the cause of the working classes, with Osborne's Jimmy Porter becoming a figurehead: an intelligent, articulate, university-educated man denied opportunities for being in the 'wrong' social class. Their opinions were usually expressed in direct, straightforward language, rejecting the self-conscious experimentation of the immediate pre-war years. If Jimmy became a folk hero, the spokesman for the younger generation or even a demi-God with his own creed and cult in the 1950s, then certainly he exceeded his own creator Osborne, who became the high priest in that shrine called Look Back in Anger.
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