CHAPTER V

THE HYSTERICAL HATRED OF WOMEN AND RELIGION, CRUSADE AGAINST FASCISM, AND DISILLUSIONMENT WITH COMMUNISM

What we glean from the plays of Osborne, Pinter and Wesker is that the Post-War youth was generally a sadist and misogynist. He had a very low-opinion about women. In ‘Look Back in Anger’, Jimmy Porter believes that women are generally noisy, timid, clumsy, phlegmatic, pusillanimous and sexy. He tells Cliff that women are low-minded and sycophantic:

*They’re what they sound like: sycophantic, phlegmatic and pusillanimous.*

Explaining the meaning of the term ‘Pusillanimous’, Jimmy Porter tells his wife that she is the Lady Pusillanimous:

*Here it is. I quote: Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind. From the Latin pusillus, very little, and animus, the mind. That’s my wife! That’s her isn’t it? Behold the Lady Pusillanimous.*
Jimmy Porter tells his wife that women are generally viragos. They jump on the bed as they were stamping on someone’s face. They draw the curtains back with a great clatter. They act in a very destructive way as if they were launching a battleship. He asks Alison:

Have you ever noticed how noisy women are? Have you? The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing tables, dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipsticks?³

Jimmy Porter has a very low opinion about his wife. He thinks that she is so sexy that he has never known that great pleasure of love-making. She has the passion of a python. She sucks him holus-bolus every time with the result that neither she nor he is satisfied:

She has the passion of a python. She just devours me whole every time, as if I were some over-large rabbit. That’s me. That bulge around her navel—if you’re wondering what it is—it’s me. Me, buried alive down there, and going mad, smothered in that peaceful looking coil. Not a sound, not a flicker from her—she doesn’t even rumble a little. You’d think that this indigestible mess would stir up some kind of tremor in those distended, overfed tripes—but not her!⁴
Jimmy believes that women are not only clumsy and noisy but also blood thirsty. They make men bleed for no serious causes. He tells Cliff:

*Why, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death? Have you ever had a letter, and on it is franked “Please Give Your Blood Generously”?*  

Jimmy Porter hates women so much that he hardly entertains any feeling of respect for them. He tells Helena, “I’ve no public school scruples about hitting girls. If you slap my face—by God, I’ll lay you out!” His behaviour with Alison’s mother is highly contemptuous. He calls her an over-fed old bitch good for blowing out for the worms. Alison tells her father:

*Do you know what he said about Mummy? He said she was an overfed, over privileged old bitch. “A good blow - out for the worms” was his expression, I think.*

Though Jimmy Porter spends a sinful life with Helena for a few weeks yet he does not make any complaint against Helena in the same way as he often makes against Alison. His problem with Alison is that while Jimmy Porter makes love with her, she is emotionally cool and she does not respond to him as passionately as he expects from her. If Jimmy Porter is satisfied with Helena, it means that she actively co-operated with him in
love making. But in spite of his emotional satisfaction with Helena, he fails to conceal his hatred for women from Helena. Helena notices a typical feeling of hatred lurking in the eyes of Jimmy Porter. She tells Alison:

“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.”

Before departing, Helena tells Alison about her experience with Jimmy Porter. She tells her that Jimmy Porter wants a woman who is a kind of cross between a mother and a whore:

“He wants something quite different from us. What it is exactly I don’t know—a kind of cross between a mother and a Greek courtesan, a henchwoman, a mixture of Cleopatra and Boswell. But give him a little longer.”

What Jimmy wants is to have a new woman every time. If he loves a woman today, he hates her next day. His philosophy about women is that today’s meal is always different from yesterday’s. If any one does not practise this philosophy, he thinks, he is, bound to be unhappy. He tells Cliff:

“No, of course it’s not the same, you idiot! It never is! Today’s meal is always different from yesterday’s and the
last woman isn’t the same as the one before. If you can’t accept that, you’re going to be pretty unhappy, my boy."

In ‘Inadmissible Evidence’, Osborne exposes how the married women were hated, ill-treated, humiliated and snubbed by their husbands on one pretext or the other. Mrs. Rose was thrashed by her husband for declining to redeem the excessive sexual demands of her husband. Her husband kicked her up the bottom with his heavy gardening boots on, and locked her out of the house all night. She had to sleep in the car in her nightdress with the result that she got pneumonia. Mr. Garnsey was suspected of her integrity by her husband. Moreover, her husband insisted on having sexual relations with her three times a week, which she did not like. The behaviour of her husband became so strange that everybody drew away from him. She told her counsel:

\[I \text{ wish I could help him. But I can’t, and everyone, everyone, wherever, we go together, whether it’s a night out, or an evening at our club, or an outing with the children, everyone’s, I know, everyone’s drawing away from him. And the more people have been good and kind and thoughtful to me, the worse it’s been for him. I know. And now. Now I’m doing the same thing. The children hardly notice him. And now it’s me. I can’t bear}\]

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to see him rejected and laughed at and scorned behind his back and ignored.\textsuperscript{11}

Similarly, the husband of Mrs. Tonks made excessive sexual demands on her. On many occasions, he insisted on having intercourse three times and even four times a day. He made it a practice of everyday. Mrs. Tonks found the conduct of her husband revolting and upsetting. Mrs. Anderson was hated and humiliated by her husband because her husband always doubted her integrity. Whenever her husband was away for a day or two, he always accused his wife of going out with men in his absence. Mrs. Anderson told her counsel:

\begin{quote}
I know I’m no good at all to him. He humiliates me. I know he hates me. I wish I could have done better. That I could go back.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

In Pinter’s plays, women are even in a worse position. They are treated as neurotics, whores and contemptible creatures by people. Whether it is ‘The Room’, or ‘The Birthday Party’, or ‘The Caretaker’, or ‘The Homecoming’, or ‘The Betrayal’, the story of women is the same. In ‘The Room’, the husband of Rose never spoke to her though she pampered and fed him with overwhelming motherliness. She never came out of her room because she felt insecure in the hostile world outside.
By the end of the play, Rose went blind on account of her husband’s neglect. In ‘The Birthday Party’, Stanley Webber stands accused of killing his own wife and escaping his home for fear of his arrest. In the same way we are told in ‘The Caretaker’, that Davies deserted his wife on a very small pretext. In ‘The Homecoming’, there are two women characters, Jessie and Ruth. Both of them are presented in the play as whores. ‘Betrayal’, is the story of a woman disputed by two men. It is the story of an adultery told backwards. The play ends with the question whom the wife has betrayed—the husband or the lover.

It is in Wesker’s ‘Trilogy’ that women are seen replacing the wrong values of life with the right ones. There are three important women characters having commitment to some of the social values and character of their own. They are Sarah Kahn, Beatie Bryant and Ada. Among these characters Sarah Kahn is a woman of a very strong character and firm determination. Her life is guided by the principles of equality, brotherhood and democracy. As a mother and wife, she kept her family united and offered each member of her family all the domestic comforts possible within her means. Even if she was deserted by her son and daughter, she remains committed to
socialism in spite of the fact that most of the people started losing their faith in Communism. Beatie Bryant, on the other hand, was just like shapeless clay. She did not have any idea or belief of her own. All her notions about life were taken on second hand from Ronnie Kahn. Beatie had an appetite for life, a bubbling gaiety and optimism. The time which she spent with Ronnie was of life changing importance to her. Ronnie’s failure to reach Beatie’s home and see her parents ends in a sordid love-affair. Nevertheless, Beatie stands out as a strong character next to Sarah Kahn. In the same way, Ada was opposed to values cherished by the industrial society, which destroyed the family life. She always complained to her parents saying that they had never cried again the jungle of industrial society which destroyed human values.

Thus, it is in the plays of Wesker that we come to discover that the human values which were lost during the War and the Post-War period were being re-stored by women characters like Sarah, Beatie and Ada in spite of their family limitations.

The Post-War British youth was not only critical of women but also of religion and politics, particularly
Fascism and Communism. Jimmy Porter representing the British youths of the Post-War era often fretted about religion and politics. Helena asks Jimmy, “Jimmy, can we have one day, just one day, without tumbling over religion or politics?” Jimmy hates religion and does not like to go to Church on Sundays for his spiritual and moral weight-lifting. Whenever he hears the Church bells, he feels a headache but the problem with jimmy is that he practises hypocrisy. He solemnized his marriage in the Church with the help of a local vicar. He offers his justification for doing so. He tells Helena:

*The last time she was in a church was when she was married to me. I expect that surprises you, doesn’t it? It was expediency, pure and simple. We were in a hurry, you see. Yes, we were actually in a hurry! Lusting for the slaughter! Well, the local registrar was a particular pal of Daddy’s, and we knew he’d spill the beans to the colonel like a shot. So we had to seek out some local vicar who didn’t know him quite so well. But it was no use. When my best man—a chap I’d met in the pub that morning—and I turned up, Mummy and Daddy were in the church already.*

However, Jimmy Porter believes that the Roman Catholic Church is in league with the establishment and is indifferent to the sufferings of the poor. He has a feeling that the
Church is guilty of supporting the rich against the poor. Cliff tells Jimmy that the Bishop of Bromley has made a very moving appeal to all the Christians to assist in the manufacture of the Hydrogen Bomb in spite of the fact that demonstrations were held against the manufacturing of the H-Bomb all over England and a procession was taken out by the public to register its protest against the Bomb.

Osborne revives Martin Luther in his play, ‘Luther’, in the light of Post-War British milieu and makes him a spokesman of the angry British youth of the Post-War period protesting against the corruption in religion symbolized by the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther who protested against the selling of indulgences to give pardon not only for sins already committed but for sins that men intended to commit, questions why churches, kings and fathers asked so much and got more than they actually deserve:

Churches, kings, and fathers—why do they ask so much, and why do they all of them get so much more than they deserve?  

Martin tells Staupitz how a shoe-maker bought a letter of indulgence to send his wife to heaven after her death:
The other day a man was brought to me, a shoemaker. His wife had just died, and I said to him, “What’ve you done for her?” so he said, “I’ve buried her and commended her soul to God.” “But haven’t you had a Mass said for the repose of her soul?” “No,” he said, “what’s the point? She entered heaven the moment she died.” So I asked him, “How do you know that?” And he said, “well I’ve got proof, that’s why.” And out of his pocket he took a letter of indulgence. ¹⁶

Martin has a feeling that if there is anything wrong in religion, It has to be corrected without any delay even if it causes some pain to some people. He tells Cajetan:

A withered arm is best amputated, an infected place is best scoured out, and so you pray for healthy tissue and something sturdy and clean that was crumbling and full of filth. ¹⁷

Apart from hatred for women and religion, there was an all round condemnation of Fascism not only in England but also in many countries of Europe. Oswald Mosley who was once a Labour Minister and who had left the Labor Party over their failure to solve the issue of unemployment had formed the British Union of Fascists under the influence of Mussolini and Hitler. Like these two Fascist dictators, Oswald Mosley also believed that the government must be all powerful in order to cope
with the economic crisis in the country. The movement was nationalist and highly military.

Mosley's party unleashed violence in many of his meetings. The party was to be his instrument of steel that would bring a new and Utopian Society to England. This idealism was accompanied by violent anti-Semitic and anti-Communist outbursts. Mosley felt that the country was a prey to the Red threat—creeping international Communism which would destroy liberty and property. Fascists held that Communism emanated from Russia where it had reigned for twenty years, and that it was financed by rich Jewish business interests. As country after country had persecuted and expelled its Jews, they had become scattered across the face of the world. Nationalist movements could not forgive them for their international links which they enjoyed. The Jewish businessman could speak to his opposite number in the same language. It was felt that Jews controlled too much, and the Fascist movement exploited this suppressed jealousy. Hitler's violent revenge against Jewry took the form of concentration camps and the murder of millions of innocents. Mosley's anti-Semitism took the form of whipping up racialist feeling, particularly in the East End of London. The Jews from
Eastern Europe had poured as exiles into this area at the turn of the century. They formed a community of their own, and they appeared to make money. The Jews were resented by the native East Enders, and Mosley could harness this resentment. Some of the Jewish families had brought communist beliefs with them, for they had fled just as Russia was waking from feudal sleep and revolution was being born. The families which were Communist and Jewish were doubly threatened by Mosley’s political demonstration on their door steps.

Thereafter came the Spanish Civil War which broke out in 1936 and killed over a million Spaniards and crippled the country, but its importance was not merely Spanish. The Spanish Republican Government had tried to bring reforms to a country which was desperately backward, to attack the archaic civil service, the feudalism, and the supremacy of the Church. The Nationalists, led by General Franco, rebelled against this government, and his fight was backed by Church and Army. The Republican cause exacted enormous sympathy abroad. Communists felt sympathetic; Russia gave support. When the international Brigades were formed in Paris in the autumn of 1936, many party members volunteered for the cause. Here was a clear
issue, the Left Wing locked in struggle with the Right; Communism versus Capitalism. That the Nationalists’ politics was basically Fascist could hardly be denied. They were supported by Hitler’s Nazi Party and by Mussolini. The government which emerged victorious from the War and has ruled Spain ever since was based on a dictatorship by General Franco, which depended on suppression both of unions and of the liberty of the press: a rule of the military and the police.

The Republican cause in Spain involved communists and more moderate Left-Wing parties alike. Liberty, brotherhood, the working-class and progress were at stake. Many felt that the War was a crusade. A number of English writers like Arden, Orwell, and Day Lewis fought at or visited the front. During the Spanish Civil War England preserved her uneasy neutrality. The Nazi–Soviet pact of 1939 shocked all communist sympathizers. Hitler’s Nazi party was rapidly racial, and Jewish persecution follow close on its coming to power. Soon Jewish refugees were seeking shelter in countries beyond the German frontiers. As the Jews threatened the purity of German race, the more and more Jews were made to suffer in their million in the gas chambers. It was estimated that some six millions of Jews were
smoked off. The anti-Fascist feeling and sympathies with Communism inspired the British youths to join the Spanish Civil War. In ‘Look Back in Anger’, Jimmy Porter tells Helena how his father participated in the Spanish Civil War out of his enthusiasm for the ideals of liberty, democracy and equality and how he came back home wounded only to die after twelve months:

For twelve months, I watched my father dying-when I was ten years old. He’d come back from the war in Spain, you see. And certain god-fearing gentlemen there had made such a mess of him, he didn’t have long left to live. Everyone knew it—even I knew it.18

Jimmy Porter further tells Helena how he has seen his father as a bewildered little boy suffering from pain, despair and bitterness and how he has learnt at an early age to be angry and helpless:

All that that feverish failure of a man had to listen to him was a small, frightened boy. I spent hour upon hour in that tiny bedroom. He would talk to me for hours, pouring out all that was left of his life to one, lonely, bewildered little boy, who could barely understand half of what he said. All he could feel was the despair and the bitterness, the sweet, sickly smell of a dying man.

You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless.19
In Wesker’s ‘Trilogy’, it is exhaustively reported how Oswald Mosley’s Fascist party which was founded in 1932 tried to rally support for Hitler and his party in Great Britain and how he held demonstrations in London with artillery and guns and how he threatened the existence of the Jews who had settled in the East End of London. The Kahns family headed by Sarah and Harry organized their sympathizers and neighbours to oppose Fascists like Oswald Mosley tooth and nail. They fought a battle with the Fascists, which was known as the Battle of Cable Street. They fought this battle with stones and bottles. When Harry saw the blackshirts marching on the cable street with guns, he shouted frantically for Dave and Monty to post their men and women to face the Fascists:

*Man your posts! Men and women of the East End, come out of your houses! The blackshirts are marching! Come out! Come out!*  

It is also reported in the play ‘*Chicken Soup with Barley*’ that Dave and Monty joined the Spanish Civil War as crusaders against Fascism, and when the World War broke out, they joined the war as crusaders to defeat the Fascist forces of Hitler and Mussolini. When the World War ended and the Labour Party came into power just after the war, all those who had
opposed the Fascists were full of enthusiasm and they believed that a Millennium was about to come very soon. The establishment of the Welfare State by the Labour Party filled them with new hopes but when the Labour Party did not come up to the expectations of its sympathizers and well-wishers, and in-fighting in the Labour Party started, their hopes were belied. When the Labour Party was defeated in the next general elections, and the Conservative Party came in power, the dismantling of the Welfare State was inaugurated. It further disappointed and frustrated the British youth. In ‘Look Back in Anger’, Alison tells Helena that Jimmy Porter’s friend, Hugh went off to find the New Millennium as England was finished for him:

Well, Hugh was writing some novel or other, and he made up his mind he must go abroad - to China, or some God – forsaken place. He said that England was finished for us, anyway............................A few months later we came up here, and Hugh went off to find the New Millennium on his own.  

The frustration and disappointment of the British youth and the sympathizers of the Left-Wing deepened, when it was exposed after the death of Stalin in 1953 that he was responsible for ruthless killing of millions of people, particularly the people of Jewish origin in the name of anti-Jewish purges. Three
years after, the final disillusionment came to the European Communists and the Jews when the Hungarian Freedom Fighters were crushed under the Iron heels of the Soviet Union in 1956. The Sovietization of Hungarian life, in fact, began with the installation of Provisional National Government in Hungary by the Soviets in 1945. Those who resisted the Sovietization were either eliminated or sent behind the bars by the so-called ‘People’s Courts’ in the name of purges. By and by, the Hungarian economy was closely tied to that of the Soviet Union in an imperialist-colonial kind of relationship.

The Post-War elections in November 1945, exposed the popular discontent with the Communist policies. The result was a victory for the moderate agrarian Smallholders’ Party. Following the election, Hungary was declared a republic and a constitution was devised that showed the strong influence of Western democratic traditions. The Smallholders constructed a coalition government composed largely of members of their own party.

The first coalition government was formed by Smallholder Ferenc Nagy. However, some important roles in this new coalition government were given to Communists who worked secretly to pull the Hungarians into the satellite block. Smallholder Ferenc Nagy
committed the political error of allowing Matyas Rakosi, Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, to become one of his vice-premiers. Even more portentous of troubled times ahead for the new republic was the fact that Nagy in March 1946, took as his Minister of the Interior, Laszlo Rajk, whose new office gave him control of the secret police. Early in 1947, Rajk claimed to have discovered a plot against the government. Using this rumoured scheme as an excuse, Rajk launched a series of arrests aimed at the membership of the Smallholders’ Party. As top officials of the Smallholders were arrested, they were subjected to interrogation. Out of these interrogations came numerous reports of confessions, which implicated yet other members of the Smallholders’ Party. The wave of arrests of anti-Communist was launched while Premier Ferenc Nagy was in Switzerland. The purge in Budapest transpired so rapidly that Nagy was forced to resign his post by telephone. A very small man who played in the hands of Rakosi and Rajk assumed the Premiership. From this point onward, the Hungarian system was restructured from above. The government, the constitution, and electoral processes, were remoulded. Those who voiced opposition to the process were purged.
In the meantime, the schools were nationalized. The government removed education from ecclesiastical hands. This was opposed by Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty. The Communists arrested and condemned him as “an enemy of human progress.”

After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Hungarians believed that a more moderate rule might be introduced in their country. Consequently, Imre Nagy, a former Minister of Agriculture was promoted to the premiership. Some of the peasants were allowed to withdraw from the collectives in the hope of enhancing farm production. Some of the forced labour camps were also closed. The increase in consumer goods was allowed in 1955, Nagy was replaced by Rakosi. Land collectivization and emphasis on heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods once again became the national policy. This return to the earlier Communist stance led various Hungarians intellectual groups in 1956 openly to criticize Rakosi. Adding to the discontent was a general atmosphere of unrest created by poor harvests. Feeling of resentment toward the government caused student demonstrations to erupt in Budapest. Rakosi eventually resigned and Imre Nagy became premier once again. At the head of a coalition, Nagy began negotiations with the Soviet Government to withdraw its occupying forces.
In October 1956, Budapest was in revolt. The Soviet crushed the rebellion and Nagy was put to death. Cardinal Mindszenty took refuge in the American Embassy after his release from prison. The failure of the Hungarian Revolution shocked the sympathizers of the Soviet Union all over Europe. In WesKer’s ‘Trilogy’, Ronnie, who is the son of Sarah and Harry was bewildered when he read the news of the suppression of the freedom fighters in Hungary. He tells his mother that a thousand different voices are murdering his mind when he thinks about the tragic happening in Hungary. The following is the dialogue between Ronnie and Sarah about the happenings in Hungary:

RONNIE. I don’t suppose you’ve bothered to read what happened in Hungary.
SARAH. Hungary?
RONNIE. Look at me, Mother. Talk to me. Take me by the hand and show me who was right and who was wrong. Point them out. Do it for me. I stand here and a thousand different voices are murdering my mind. Do you know, couldn’t wait to come home and accuse you.22

Ronnie tells his mother that he is ashamed of uttering words like ‘democracy, freedom, and, brotherhood’.
He further tells her that these words have lost their meaning after the Russian purges and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution. He again tells her that he was going to be a great socialist writer but he is so much disillusioned with the happenings in the Soviet Union that he has almost given up the idea of being a great socialist writer:

_Why do I blush? Why do I feel ashamed to use words like democracy and freedom and brotherhood? They don’t have meaning any more. I have nothing to write about any more. Remember all that writing I did? I was going to be a great socialist writer. I can’t make sense of a word, a simple word. You look at me as if I’m talking in a foreign language. Didn’t it hurt you to read about the murder of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union?_  

After the shocking happening in Hungary, most of the people left the Communist Party in Europe. Those who stood with Sarah and Harry in their fight against Fascism and were devoted to the Communist Party were so much disillusioned that they deserted Sarah who had pinned her full faith in communism. When Ronnie asks his mother what has happened to all the comrades, she tells him that Monty said the same thing as he has said. He left the party and he was running a greengrocer shop in Manchester. Ronnie learns that Dave, Ada, Prince and Uncle
Hymie, and Auntie Cissie who were once devoted to the Communist Party are working in the second-hand shops or wandering from relative to relative:

And Dave and Ada in Norfolk, and Prince working in the second-hand shop, and Uncle Hymie stuck smugly at home and Auntie Cissie once devoted-once involved-wandering from relative to relative. What’s happened to us? Were we cheated or did we cheat ourselves? I just don’t know, God in heaven, I just do not know! 24

Ronnie tells her mother in clear terms that he has lost his faith in communism and he has lost his ambition also:

I’ve lost my faith and I’ve lost my ambition. Now I understand him perfectly. I wish I hadn’t shouted at him as I used to. 25

Thus, the period from 1930 to 1956 was the time of social and political upheavals in Europe. It was such a disturbing period that people could not pin their faith either in family life or in religion or in any political ideology. Since people could not live without faith, they struggled to reach out some values which were imperishable and which could sustain them in the unprecedented crisis unleashed in the Pre and Post–War periods.
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