CHAPTER VI

BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL, RE-ASSERTION
AND RE-ANIMATION

The crisis which the British youths had to face in the Post-War era was unprecedented. The problems—social, political, economic, moral and ethical were such as were hitherto unknown. Nobody knew how to cope with the new situation with the old tools. The old philosophy of life could neither offer any satisfactory interpretation of life nor give any consolation nor provide any sustenance to the British youths bewildered and non-plussed as they were. Though the War was over, the new battle had begun—the battle for the survival of the young men in the Post-War crisis. In ‘Look Back in Anger’, we come across a youth named Jimmy Porter who is the very epitome of the Post-War British youth standing on the cross road without knowing where to go and what to do. In spite of his university education, he does not get any job to run his home. When he was a student, he used to run a Jazz band to support himself. Later he opened a sweets stall with the help of the mother of his friend. He does not know whom to curse for his miserable plight. He often frets at religion and...
politics. He also frowns on his wife and in-laws. He is angry with the Post-War scenario but he does not know whom to blame for his ill-fate. He could not fight with the unseen forces beyond his control. He fights with those who are round about him. His anger is impotent as he cannot do anything against anyone. What he can do to relieve the pressure of his anger is to torture his wife. We are told by Alison that Jimmy Porter and Hugh often discussed how to face the new crisis. They were of the view that England was too small an Island for them and they had to seek refuge in a new land. But Jimmy Porter was not prepared to leave his country. Hugh went abroad to take a chance to brighten his fate leaving behind his mother under the charge of Jimmy Porter. Alison tells Helena how Hugh and Jimmy Porter were worried about their future and how they broke away to wage battles for their survival in their own ways:

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. All the old gang was back—Dame Alison’s mob, as he used to call it. The only real hope was to get out, and try somewhere else. He wanted us to go with him, but Jimmy refused to go. There was a terrible, bitter row over it. Jimmy accused Hugh of giving up, and he thought it was wrong of him to go off forever,
and leave his mother all on her own. He was upset by the whole idea. They quarrelled for days over it. I almost wished they’d both go, and leave me behind. Anyway, they broke up.¹

Alison further tells Helena how Jimmy Porter and Hugh started inviting themselves to people’s houses, friends of Nigel, and friends of Alison’s daddy after Alison’s marriage, and how they went on plundering her parents, her brother, her relatives and friends like wolves prowling for their food and drink:

They were too well-bred, and probably sorry for me as well. Hugh and Jimmy despised them for it. So we went on plundering them, wolfing their food and drinks, and smoking their cigars like ruffians. Oh, they enjoyed themselves.²

Jimmy Porter was so much full of anger for things round about him that he wanted to relax himself but he found no way out. He married Alison because he thought she possessed the spirit of relaxation and the strength of consolation but after his marriage, he discovered that she could not possess the spirit of relaxation at all. He thought that in order to relax, one had first to get to sweat his guts out and suffer. Since Alison had not shed any drop of sweat or suffered in life, Jimmy Porter could not seek any consolation from her. He tells Alison:
You seemed to have a wonderful relaxation of spirit. I knew that was what I wanted. You’ve got to be really brawny to have that kind of strength—the strength to relax. It was only after we were married that I discovered that it wasn’t relaxation at all. In order to relax, you’ve first got to sweat your guts out. And, as far as you were concerned, you’d never had a hair out of place, or a bead of sweat anywhere.³

By the end of the play, Jimmy Porter’s passion of anger and hatred are exhausted. He seems consoled and pacified when he hears from Alison that she has suffered a lot and has also lost her child. It is then that both Jimmy Porter and Alison decide to re-animate themselves and begin their life afresh singing songs, eating honey and nuts and playing like bears and squirrels and at the same time escaping steel traps lying around them.

We’ll be together in our bear’s cave, and our squirrel’s drey, and we’ll live on honey, and nuts—lots and lots of nuts. And we’ll sing songs about ourselves—about warm trees and snug caves, and lying in the sun. And you’ll keep those big eyes on my fur, and help me keep my claws in order, because I’m a bit of a soppy, scruffy sort of a bear. And I’ll see that you keep that sleek, bushy tail glistening as it should, because you’re a very beautiful squirrel, but you’re none too bright either, so we’ve got to be careful. There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere ............. ⁴
Thus, in the battle for their survival, Jimmy Porter and Alison are seen by the end of the play coming to a reconciliation with each other and getting ready to re-assert and re-animate themselves to face life lying ahead them.

Like Jimmy Porter, Archie Rice laments in ‘The Entertainer’ the lack of genuine human emotions in the humdrum life of the Post-War era. Like a surgeon giving a postmortem report, he explains to his daughter, Jean:

You see this face, you see this face, this face can split open with warmth and humanity. It can sing, and tell the worst, unfunniest stories in the world to a great mob of dead, drab erks and it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter because—look at my eyes. I’m dead behind these eyes. I’m dead, just like the whole inert, shoddy lot out there. It doesn’t matter because I don’t feel a thing, and neither do they. We’re just as dead as each other.5

Jean Rice who has left Graham comes to stay with her aunt Phoebe. In the meantime, Graham also comes and proposes to Jean Rice to live with him as they too could make their life worth living. He asserts himself to come to terms with Jean Rice saying:

You’re no different from me. You were in love with me, you said so. We enjoyed ourselves together. We
could make a good thing of it. I’ve got quite a decent career lined up. We would have everything we want. Come back with me, Jean.  

Jean Rice also realizes that in this wide universe, she is all alone and she has to make a go of it. She tells Brother Bill:

*Here we are, we’re alone in the universe, there’s no God, It just seems that it all began by something as simple as sunlight striking on a piece of rock. And here we are. We’ve only got ourselves. Somehow, we’ve just got to make a go of it. We’ve only ourselves.*

We also hear from Brother Bill that he has got the tickets booked to Canada for Archie Rice, Jean Rice and Phoebe. Brother Bill has already settled in Canada. Now he wants the other members of his family to leave Great Britain as it is too small for them and try their luck in Canada. He tells Archie Rice:

*Look, Archie. This is the last time for you. It’s got to be Canada. You and Frank and Phoebe can all go out together. Your passages are all booked. I’ve got them in my pocket here. There’re yours. You can go out and start a new life, the three of you.*

In Harold Pinter’s play, *The Birthday Party*, Stanley Webber fights a losing battle for his survival. He escapes to save his life from the hired killers for betraying their
organization. He comes to stay in Meg’s boarding house by the sea side but he is soon discovered by two unidentified men. He is threatened and whisked away by them in a van to an unknown destination.

In ‘The Caretaker’, Davies who is a rootless man is trying to put his foot down to root himself but on account of his dishonesty and hypocrisy, he is allowed to float on the surface of water like a floating plant. It is Aston who is trying to struggle for his survival, establish himself and re-start his life. He is so much re-animated that he wants to stand on his own legs independently of his brother.

In ‘The Homecoming’, we are told that Teddy has left England and settled in the United States. Those who are left behind are also struggling to establish themselves afresh. Max, though pretty old, is trying to re-assert himself with his two sons, Lenny and Joey.

In Wesker’s ‘Trilogy’, Ronnie Kahn was inspired by the ideals of Communism cherished by his parents, Sarah Kahn and Harry, but the irony of his fate was that he had to work in a book shop at the age of fifteen and later he had to work as a cook in Paris and Norwich for his survival. But when he read
in newspapers how the freedom fighters in Hungary were crushed by the Soviet Union and how the Jews were put to death by Stalin in the name of cultural purges, he lost his faith in Communism and accused his mother of hammering a wrong political ideology into his head. After leaving his job as a cook in Norwich, he moved to London and during his stay there from 1956 to 1958, he tried to win over his mood of despair. He no longer worked for the party though he always talked politics. He began to write again and fostered his natural love for art and beauty. He was now more concerned for humanity. He put human beings before politics. He evolved a belief in private joy and endeavour which he shared with other people. He developed his own theory of socialism which he passed on to his first disciple, Beatie.

Ronnie admired Dave and Ada and also drew inspiration from their life. When Dave and Ada moved in to their cottage, Ronnie helped them. Throughout the play, ‘I’m Talking about Jerusalem’, Ronnie relied upon the ideal life that Dave and Ada were leading. Though he himself failed in jobs and in loves yet he always comforted himself that his thoughts upon how life should be lived were good with Dave and Ada as a living proof of their validity. By the end of the play, his self-pity was gone.
Like Beatie, he found strength in desolation. When his mother asked him if he had finished crying, Ronnie shouted to the sky in a loud voice, ‘Cry? We must be bloody mad to cry, mother.’

The war persuaded Dave that international socialism was an illusion and that he and Ada must live their politics at an individual level. As his relatives and Libby Dobson so firmly point out, his disillusionment with an individual society leads to a negative gesture, the putting back of the clock to nineteen century socialist experiments. ‘The city is human beings. What’s socialism without human beings?’ challenges Sarah. ‘Nothing’s wrong with socialism Sarah, only we want to live it—not talk about it’. For Dave, the ten years between 1936 and 1946 were unbridgeable. By volunteering for the International Brigade in Spain, he was talking and living Socialism, but the World War made such idealism hopelessly remote. It soured Dave and tired him and sent him into another idealism; when it was only soft and flabby’, far more out of date than the crusading spirit of ten years ago. Dave and Ada’s experiment was impractical because it was entirely unrelated to anyone else. In Act 2, Scene 1 of ‘Chicken Soup with Barley’, Ada turns on her mother and father:
You have never cried against the jungle of an industrial society. You’ve never wanted to destroy its values—simply to own them yourselves.¹²

Her fury suggests that she and Dave are not merely being negative, but also want to replace the wrong values with the right ones. Twelve months after their move to Norfolk, however, Ada denies any sense of mission.

LIBBY. You can’t change the world because it smells of petrol.

ADA. Who’s talking about changing the world?¹³

Later, Dave becomes an employer; he is powerless to fight for his apprentice’s soul against the lure of money and factory. Socialism ebbs sadly; the Youth Hostel becomes an unsuccessful guest house. Dave as a craftsman furniture maker is not free of commercialism. He is rather a victim of rich capitalist customers whose bad taste he has to satisfy. When he cries: “God! I’m learning to hate people!”¹⁴ He is already admitting spiritual defeat, even though the retreat from the country does not come for another three years. Dave is defeated by hatred, where Harry was beaten by his own indifference.

Thus, in Wesker’s ‘Trilogy’, Ronnie, Dave and Ada are seen engaged in a battle for their survival against the
values of industrial society of Great Britain. They are also seen re-asserting and re-animating themselves to cope with the new challenges posed by the British Industrial society.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid. P.44.

3. Ibid. PP.94-95.

4. Ibid. PP.96.


6. Ibid. P.84.

7. Ibid. P.85.

8. Ibid. P.84.


10. Ibid. P.155.

11. Ibid. P.154.

