

Jimmy Porter Our Contemporary

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The 21st century has become an age of chaos. It is not solely because of the corona pandemic, the reasons behind it are numerous. The corona pandemic has only aggravated the gangrene further which was already prevalent in hamlets, cities, countries and continents. Before the induction of the corona pandemic, people were fuming with rage, growing impatience with the rules, regulations and norms of society around the globe. The entire human fraternity was tremored and nonplussed with fear, seeing a mad race for procuring destructive nuclear weapons, growing tensions in the middle east, sabotage and bullying of Iran, China's rise and aggressive policies, India and Pakistan's confrontation on the fringes, gross human rights violations in Palestine and many others. While the main agendas of the entire world should be the eradication of poverty and upliftment of the poor, preservation of human rights, conservation of nature, and economic betterment of every dweller on earth. To add insult to injury the corona pandemic has left no stone unturned. People are losing their lives, loved ones, jobs and homes on a regular basis to this pandemic. In John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* we get an identical picture of a war-ravaged society filled with dissatisfied, discontented and disappointed 'angry young men'. Taking a cue from Polish writer Jan Kott's title of a book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary (1961)*, my paper titled "Jimmy Porter Our Contemporary" will relocate Jimmy porter, his anger, his desires, and aspirations in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Jimmy Porter, anger, angry young men, pandemic, contemporary time

Look Back in Anger is a kitchen sink drama written by John Osborne at the age of 26 during the post-world war era. It was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956, leading the path of the rebirth of the British theatre from its slumber. It was an epoch-making play that shook the English theatre and took the literary world by storm. *Look Back in Anger* is the ne plus ultra of the

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"Angry Young Men" movement of the 1950s and earned Osborne a reputation as captain of a group of "Angry Young Men". He became the face of the "Angry Young Men" group. The literature of the post-world war era during the 1950s reflects the anger, frustration, disillusionment, disappointment, discontentment of the working-class or lower middle-class people against the privileged and elite sections of the society. Kenneth Allsop in *The Angry Decade* (1958) defined the "Angry Young Men" as "irreverence, stridency, impatience with tradition, vigour, vulgarity, sulky resentment against the cultivated" (Ousby, 1992, 29).

The main protagonist of *Look Back in Anger* is Jimmy Porter and the entire play revolves around him. He is the most lively and exuberant character of the entire play except all others who are in a state of hibernation. Jimmy Porter is an abusive husband and a co-owner of a sweet stall in Birmingham market along with his tried and true friend Cliff despite having graduated from a redbrick university. Jimmy is a bully and never misses a chance to abuse his wife, who is tired of his tirades, is passive and silent, never hits back at her husband. As Jimmy belongs to a working-class family and Alison to an upper-class, a certain class-conscious animosity exists between the two. Alison never holds a grudge for Jimmy but circumstances force her to leave the house and go back to her father. Alison's actress friend, Helena who has come to see her friend received the same abusive treatment and tirades from Jimmy. Jimmy and Helena who are at loggerheads suddenly become very close, and she fills her shoes after Alison retires. Alison's miscarriage serves as the *deus ex machina* and brings the reconciliation of the hero and the heroine at the end.

John Osborne through the mouth of Jimmy Porter expresses the rotten and decomposed state of the societies in post-war England. Alarmingly, this sorry state realises us the same pitiable condition currently we are going through. All over the world governments are left with no choice but to implement lockdown in an unhygienic manner without proper planning and infrastructure to break the great chain of the pandemic. Before the pandemic induced, the condition of the companies and factories were not excellent either, they were struggling to make both ends meet. Due to pandemic, the economy has collapsed and companies and factories are forced to cease production, leaving millions and millions of youths at the hand of fate. We also see a vast migration of diasporic people who were well settled on foreign soil, are left with no choice but to leave their jobs, education, and second home, and return to their motherland. Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), a voluntary body, declares its shocking findings in its report that approximately 121 million Indians were thrown out of their jobs after the first month of lockdown. The

International Labour Organisation (ILO), an agency of United Nations to monitor labour standards globally, and Asian Development Bank, dedicated for the growth and development of Asia and the Pacific, jointly in its report suggests a whopping number of 4 million Indians under the age of 30 are terminated from their jobs due to lockdown. “The hit is largely among young people who are below 30 years. Companies are retaining experienced people and the axe is falling on younger people” (Biswas, 2020), Mahesh Vyas, managing director of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) promulgates in its interview to BBC. He even predicts dire consequences for future young generations. He proclaims, “When the next batch of job seekers graduate in 2021, they will join the army of unemployed” (Biswas, 2020). The worst nightmare we can dream about after the pandemic.

In *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter is the driving force. He behaves and reacts like a man possessed. His anger, aggressiveness, abuses and love all are extreme in nature. His tirades reflect his dissatisfaction, disillusionment, disappointment and discontentment with the society. He studies in a redbrick university. Despite having a university degree, Jimmy Porter runs a sweet stall with his friend Cliff. He is an all-knowing man, one who has knowledge about everything from religion to politics, literature to science, colonialism to contemporary matters. Alison's father is stupefied to see Jimmy Porter languishing in a sweet stall: “Sweet stall. It does seem an extraordinary thing for an educated young man to be occupying himself with” (Osborne, 2012, 56). Nobody is spared from Jimmy Porter's wrath, his wife Alison, his friend Cliff, Alison's friend Helena Charles, Alison's parents and brother Nigel etc. He believes except him nobody thinks, talks or cares about anything, seeing the lethargy and corruption of society his anger aggravates. In Jimmy's words, “Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm” (Osborne, 2012, 14). He wants everybody to be honest, bold, alive and enthusiastic like him. It gives him great pain to see Alison as a meek creature without any zeal and urge, doing washing, ironing, cooking all the time. Several of Jimmy's statements put forth his intense wish and desire to see Alison changed into a normal, energetic, enthusiastic and alive human being. In Jimmy Porter's words, “There's hardly a moment when I'm not-watching and wanting you. I've got to hit out somehow. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you, night and day, and I still can't stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing- something as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board” (Osborne, 2012, 28).

In the contemporary time, we have seen a significant rise of yellow journalism or one may call it fake news. The term 'yellow journalism' was popularised during the 1890s when William Randolph Hearst of the *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer of the *New York World* sling mud at each other in their respective journals. So, yellow journalism is the glamorous and exaggerated way of presenting misinformations, fake news or scandals of trivial importance, just like food porn these are eye candies. In the recent decade with the advent of social media, we see an increased number of fake news circulated on social media handles like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp etc. We have witnessed many such instances of fake news when people take social media circulated news as true and take law into their own hands and beat up innocent people, doctors, nurses. In *Look Back in Anger*, we have seen that Jimmy Porter is tired of reading the same news and book reviews again and again: “Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week's. Different books-same reviews” (Osborne, 2012, 8). Jimmy Porter detests these papers filled with trash news and garbage. In one of such articles, Jimmy Porter reads out loudly the hypocrisy of the Bishop of Bromley who is seen earnestly requesting all the citizens of the country to give their hands in the production of the H-Bomb. The lovers of peace and harmony have morphed into the lovers of anarchy. It is revealed that the Bishop is pained to see his association with the upper-class which he terms a blatant lie, spread and fostered by the working-class. Media which is assumed as the fourth pillar of democracy is now serving us what the snobs and hypocrites want us to serve. They will remain mute on corruption, how the rich are becoming richer and poor are becoming poorer, the sabotage of the working-class people at the hands of the upper-class people, the pathetic condition of thousands of university degree holders and the miserable state of the farmers and factory workers.

Music and protests are interlinked with each other. Strangely enough, Jimmy Porter likes and uses Jazz music as a way of protest. Jazz had long connections with protests. According to Jimmy Porter, real Jazz music brings people closer to each other and helps them to understand each other. In Jimmy Porter's own words, “Anyone who doesn't like real jazz, hasn't any feeling either for music or people” (Osborne, 2012, 44). He employs jazz music as a weapon against Alison whom he thinks as a representative of the upper-class society. Jimmy also expresses his loneliness, frustrations and aspirations through jazz music. Jazz songs flourished in America during the 1920s and 1930s. African Americans avail it to express their emotions, longings, desires and rights. They use it as a reaction against the horrors, atrocities and gross injustices aimed at

them. In India, we have seen time and again protesters are using songs to reach a wide number of people and justify their deeds. In *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy expresses his anger through jazz music. Helena has discovered the root cause of Jimmy's anger that "It's very simple really. He was born out of his time" (Osborne, 2012, 79) and should have lived in the French Revolution. Alison, Cliff and Alison's father Colonel Redfern are of the opinion that Jimmy Porter's anger is just. For Alison, Jimmy Porter is a knight in shining armour who has rescued her from the wicked clutches of her family.

With *Look Back in Anger* the British theatres get a new lease of life. It is also a groundbreaking drama in terms of its theme, approach and language. The above analysis bears the testimony of the fact that the implications of *Look Back in Anger* are universal and timeless, and it is still relevant in contemporary times. It validates the fact that Jimmy Porter is not an alien or outsider but a contemporary angry young man with dreams, desires and aspirations like millions of angry young men of the present era who are disillusioned, disappointed, dissatisfied and discontented with the present system. This drama is abhorrent and detestable on feminist grounds and Jimmy Porter's misogyny. For this reason, solely the drama has been slammed with scathing and blistering attacks by the critics and reviewers. But it is a revolutionary drama in the sense that it strikes the minds of the audience and forces them to feel and think. Jimmy Porter is the only one in the play with the ability to feel and think, the rest are like dead souls. In Nikolai Gogol's words in *Dead Souls*, "Nothing will be successful until each one of us feels that, just as in the epoch when people took arms and rose up against the enemy, so he must rise up against falsity" (Gogol, 1951, 248). In 2020 the pandemic wreaks havoc all over the world. It has vandalised the world economy and subsequently put the whole world into slowbalisation and recession of an unprecedented scale. The youths are losing their jobs, and factories and companies are forced to cease production due to pandemic led bankruptcy. In view of this we can expect a re-emergence of the "Angry Young Men" who can feel and think and lead a revolution in the post pandemic era.

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