

**IGNORANCE AS A COMPONENT OF OSBORNE'S VISION OF ANGER:
PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

The present study is undertaken to explore the very significant component of Osborne's vision of Anger, that is, the phenomenon of ignorance. Ignorance has been the source of all human problems; personal as well as collective. These problems inflict pain to any mature observer who finds its way out in the form of anger. Osborne's Look Back in Anger is an illustration of the reaction of such observations. This paper will trace the instances of the characters' ignorance of socio-political and economic menace in the country, their ignorance of the perception of pain, their insensitivity, indifference and lack of curiosity which are also forms of ignorance. This research is intended to lead us to a conclusion, whether society's ignorance is a reason for Osborne's anger or not.

Keywords: Ignorance, component, personality, Psychological Perspective, Anger

Introduction

Anger is a very important aspect of the emotional image of a personality. Anger is a pivotal role as a basic emotion experienced by every human being to define relationships (Williams, 2017). A psychological perspective of Anger has been defined as a normal transcendental universal feeling that can be a positive or negative but dangerous when burst out in a wild and irrepressible form (Shahsavarani, & Noohi, 2015). It can be a reaction to many explicit and implicit reasons. Injustice, discrimination, confiscation of one's rights, and lack of opportunities are a few of those reasons. Research evidence illustrates that ignorance or lack of knowledge and unawareness becomes a cause of severe anger (Zane, Irwin, & Reczek, 2016). Ignorance has been considered a great sin in all religions of the world. God, in His first revelation to the Last Prophet (PBUH), instructed him, "To Read"(which meant to come out of the darkness of ignorance).

Seemingly literature of every era across the world also explicitly dealt with all forms of human emotions; love, hatred, sympathy, selfishness, cruelty, and anger etc. It is believed that

British drama was surprisingly lifted out of depression by the revolutionary emergence of one of John Osborne's dramas. With the enactment of this drama, critics immediately proclaimed it is the second dramatic renaissance which was presided over by a young queen named Elizabeth, like the first one. "1956 was the year of John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*, which generated considerable demand for working-class drama by working-class playwrights" (Kastan, 2006; pp 152). As it is explicit from its name, the play "*Look Back in Anger*" the main enigma was anger. This was a phenomenon which had never been discussed earlier in any genre of literature in such a forceful and celebrated manner. "John Osborne's fiery blast against the establishment burst onto the stage, radicalizing British theatre overnight" (Rabellato, 2002; pp 1). Youthful, new audiences grouped and moved to the Royal Court to watch and listen to Jimmy Porter who seemed to utter their fears and hopes. At this blow, the old established scriptwriters were shown up as cobwebbed and stale. A new band of dramatists emerged in Osborne's wake; sowing their colorful seeds on British stages, becoming a mouthpiece for a generation who had for such a long period been silent. They launched an adult, living, vital theatre. The **Observer's** prominent critic Kenneth Tynan perceived it as the "first original play of a new generation" (Bond, 1999). The play was labelled with the phrase 'kitchen sink drama' and 'Angry young man' was the title given to the protagonist of the play.

The cultural background of the play is the British Empire's rise and fall. The beginning years of the twentieth century saw the climax of influence and power of British colonialism. By the middle of the century, two World Wars, which ravaged the British economy and heralded the ascent of the United States as the new political and military power of the world made the British Empire's steep decline inevitable. At that time the play portrayed Jimmy Porter as a delegate of an entire culture who was melancholic for its lost glory. "Leading Theatre Critic Kenneth Tynan welcomed its 'anarchy, its 'instinctive leftish-ness' and its 'automatic rejection of official attitudes' (Segal, 1995; pp 14)

Literature Review

Anger or fiery attitude of a person is not without any basis. Osborne's anger which reflects in Jimmy's anger in the play has various sources which can be socio-political issues as well as his domestic ones. In Trivedi and Allen's (2000) point of view, angry emotions and anger are two different but inter-related impressions of one's psychological mind. The former is the milder one and the latter is harsh and unsympathetic. Both have their roots in the external world. "One could put the angry emotions that are often present in Hughes's poetry alongside the anger which is the keynote of Osborne's play and see both as responding to contemporary changes and events(pp 145).The same critics in their efforts to explore the importance of Osborne's anger questioned "Osborne's anger and Beckett's absurdity_ while seeing all these as engaged within the same kind of matrix of ideological and historical issues what then might we see as the particular inflexion offered by Osborne's 'anger' (pp 145).

There are some critics also who do not consider Osborne's contribution a serious and dignified one. They criticize it for its lack of lucidity as Prexl (2007) concluded, "Jimmy's anger

is not directed at a concrete enemy and he does not show a specific potential opinion” (pp 6). Nevertheless, it is admitted that Osborne gives his readers food for thought. Robert Wright, reviewing the first show of the drama *Look Back in Anger* in the *Star*, wrote “He wants to shake us into thinking but we are never quite clear what it is he wants us to think about. Is it the Class Struggle or simply sex?” (Bond, 1999).

Critics give a satisfactory reply to the allegations of non-seriousness in *Look Back in Anger* and elucidate very critical reasons which impelled Osborne to write such a piece of literature which verbalized lower middle class’s frustration and deprivation as: The anger was prompted by a sense of social crisis and change that was particularly relevant to the middle-class_ arising from the collapse of ideologies of imperial Britain, shifts in national identity, the growing assertiveness and economic power of the young but which was projected then onto the working-class characters on the stage (Trivedi & Allen, 2000; pp 145).

The political change in Great Britain and on a broader level in the world brought about a social change which caused the emergence of a very prominent and large-sized middle class; again divided into the upper-middle class and lower middle class. The ruling class of that time claimed to be socialist whose ideology was strictly against class discrimination in the society but the British Socialist government of that time did nothing in this context:

Kenneth Tynan, who referred to the play’s “instinctive leftish-ness” in his Observer review, wrote in a piece on “The Angry Young Movement” that Jimmy Porter “represented the dismay of many young Britons ... who came of age under a Socialist government, yet found, when they went out into the world, that the class system was still mysteriously intact”(Bond, 1999). This was the pure evidence of their psychological misery that ultimately reflected in form of anger and resentment.

The young generation of that period of history was nostalgic for not having an appropriate place in the society in financial as well as political and social terms. They were looking for a platform where their disappointments could be given an outlet. Sierz (2012) writes, “...the audience for the new drama is usually characterized as being young, lower middle class and left-liberal. For this group, the myth of anger offered a radical identity which helped them cope with the insecurity of rapid social change”(pp 145); as they used it as a weapon to combat the class differentiation and neglect of so-called social dignitaries.

The play portrayed the prevalent socio-political situation in England in such a skilful manner that a critic Stephen Lacey calls “it was undisputedly contemporary” (Luckhurst, 2006; pp 165). One can detect a political statement in *Look Back in Anger* while reading between its lines: “What is presented is not the old revolt of the proletariat against a tyrannical aristocracy, but rather the complaint of a frustrated lower-middle-class against the failure of its overlords to

define any code at all, around which the community could conduct a debate about who should inherit England (Luckhurst, 2006; pp29).

Sierz (2012) in his book, *John Osborne's Look Back in Anger*, explored the different reasons for the anger of Jimmy and concluded that "Maybe Jimmy's aggression is a way of concealing his insecurities, doubts and weaknesses" (pp 24). Osborne's deprivations and problems were also reasons for his restlessness to which he gave an outlet in his play under discussion. "Osborne's first marriage was a crucial influence on the play. He married Pamela Lane in 1951 but their marriage was in trouble by early 1954 and fell apart that summer" (Sierz, 2012; pp 29). Jimmy is his incarnation, "Osborne's anti-hero is a fantasy image of himself, a feeling person who can articulate his frustrations in well-written speeches" (Sierz, 2012; pp 29,30).

In literary terms, Artistic anger is another kind of anger which overcomes the personality of a man who remains dejected for his dissatisfied artistic instinct. Sometimes external conditions do not give enough time and space to an artist to flourish in his artistic field, "Osborne seemed to capture that youthful artistic aspiration (expressed offstage in Jimmy Porter's trumpet) as it had been in the New Orleans jazz of the Glass Menagerie" (Goodman & Gay, 2000; pp 127). This was a true impression of psycho linguistically presenting the inner frustration and anger in a form of literary character.

The language of the play is revolutionary. Osborne used the language of real working-class people. "It vividly portrayed working-class characters and disillusioned young people who lived in the grey new world of the welfare state and who realistically spoke in the idiom of their classes" (Dukore, 1988; pp 3,4). Eric Keown, appraising *Look Back in Anger* in *Punch* magazine, wrote that Osborne "draws liberally on the vocabulary of the intestines and laces his tirades with the steamier epithets of the tripe butcher" (Bond, 1999). The language of Jimmy in the play is so bombastic, pragmatic, consequential and eye-opening that critics tag pre- *Look Back in Anger* era as a dark era. "The result as John Elsom has said is to consign everything that went before to a 'pre-*Osborne dark age*' (1979, 74). *Look Back in Anger* marks an impermeable boundary, behind which no one can go. It is a boundary marked '8 May 1956'" (Rebellato, 2002; pp 3)

In conjunction with language and subject matter, *Look Back in Anger* presented the living style of the lower middle class or working class. "In the world, the notion that seriousness might involve showing a woman ironing in a bedsit as in *Look Back in Anger* seemed unthinkable" (Trivedi & Allen, 2000; pp 143). Dukore (1988) comments: "...it realistically depicted their (working class) milieu, including grubby furniture, ironing boards and newspaper is strewn on the floor" (pp 4).

Analysis of the Text

Many reasons for anger of the Angry Young Man in *Look Back in Anger* have been discussed by different critics. Being angry is something very normal. But the problem arises when the anger overpowers the person, rather than the other way around. Anger can be the reaction to many triggers, but very often the trigger is not the root cause of the problem.

Ignorance or unawareness of people can become a trigger in reaction to which anger can overcome the one who is a victim of this ignorance. The renowned philosophers of the history of the human world have advised eradicating ignorance which is the base of all miseries. Foucault writes, "...eliminate the shadowy areas of society, and demolish the unlit chambers where [...] plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented" (Gordon, 1980; pp 153). Ignorance is synonymous to darkness seemingly when one is unaware of his/her problems, he/she is in darkness. Problems get resolved when one knows of them. Caprio (1952) tells us, "We are finally emerging from that darkness of sex blindness, inspired by the conviction that "Ignorance is the mother of vice" (viii). Warth (1952) in his *Evil Men* writes, "people, so often, remain in ignorance of their danger" (pp 6). At another place he writes, "End ignorance, and, at once, a new situation exists in which the vice can be controlled" (Warth, 1952; pp 15). Research showed that when you are unaware of surrounded social forces; that makes you a victim of desires which can lead to anger (Kelemen, 2019) as ignorance is the major element in anger activation.

Lack of knowledge of the society is a very noteworthy rationale of the anger displayed by Jimmy who is the voice of Osborne in *Look Back in Anger*. He thinks that all the socio-political evils could be eradicated if the ignorance of the people of the society is dealt with severely. In the very start of the play Jimmy in his conversation with Cliff says:

Jimmy: I have just read three whole columns on the English Novel. Half of it's in French. Do the Sunday papers make you feel ignorant? (Osborne 10,11)

.....
 Jimmy: Well, you are ignorant (11).

In the same scene when Cliff asks him to be quiet because he was reading, he replies:

Jimmy: Why do you bother? You can't understand a word of it.
 Cliff: Uh-huh
 Jimmy: You're too ignorant (11).

The repetition of the word 'ignorant' by Jimmy in the text testifies his preoccupation with this word and its meaning. He is a person who has very few people in his company. Two of them share his lodging; one is his wife, Alison, and the other is his very close friend, Cliff. They symbolize 'society' around him. His use of the word 'ignorant' for Cliff and Alison and telling them time and again that they know nothing of anything shows his disgust at the ignorance of his society. Jimmy/Osborne was aware of the socio-political crisis which his country, Great Britain, was facing. It was the time when Britain was losing its cultural and economic prominence because of decolonization and world wars. America was replacing Britain and taking over control

of the world. Osborne's country fellows were silently accepting the new world order. They were losing their cultural identity and distinction slowly and steadily. World cultures were creeping and assimilating into the culture of his country. He expresses his concern as:

Jimmy: Oh, yes. There is a Vaughan Williams that's something anyway. Something strong, something simple, something English. I suppose people like me aren't supposed to be very patriotic. Somebody said-what was it-we get our cooking from Paris, our politics from Moscow, and our Morals from Port Said....If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's.....I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American Age-unless you're an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans (17).

Jimmy is irritated on the ignorance of the people why they do not realize how they were being attacked by foreign elements. This is a very important reason for his aggressive reaction to his closed ones and society on a larger scale. Like Hamlet who is restless on the ignorance of his country people as well as his mother who did not know that they were being manipulated by his uncle, Claudius, and says, "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right."(Shakespeare, Hamlet, I.v.189-190) Jimmy expresses his awareness with the prevalent issues as, "I'm the only one who knows how to treat a paper or do anything else in the house."(12).Here the house symbolizes his country. Kenneth Tynan described Jimmy as:

"the completes young pup in our literature since Hamlet" He criticized those who attacked the recklessness of Jimmy's attacks. "Is Jimmy's anger justified? Why doesn't he do something? These questions might be relevant if the character had failed to come to life; in the presence of such evident and blazing vitality, I marvel at the pedantry that could ask them. Why don't Chekhov's people do something? Is the sun justified in scorching us?" (Bond, 1999).

Jimmy yells at the people around him on their being lifeless and emotionless. They are ignorant of the plundering which is going on around them. They lack the enthusiasm for detecting the problems and then solving them. He says that human beings are even ignorant of the reality that they are alive. He mocks this fact and says:

Jimmy:How I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm_ that's all. I want to hear a warm thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah!.....I am alive! I have an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend we're human beings, and we are alive.....it's such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything (15).

Recognition of the problem is the first step towards the solution of the problem. However, the ignorance of the social concerns and scarcity of energy to solve them make people unable to revolutionize their lives and save their national interests. This lethargy brings boredom in life. Jimmy laments on the indifference of society as "Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no

convictions and no enthusiasm” (17). Alison tells her father about the dilemma of Jimmy in these words, “You are hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same.”(68) Jimmy himself asks his friend Cliff that life is slipping away like the particles of sand from everybody’s hands but nobody is aware of this tragic reality so they keep wasting their time of life in repeating the same futile actions. Jimmy himself talks about his problem in this way:

God, how I hate Sundays! It’s always so depressing, always the same. We never seem to get any further, do we? Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours and another week were gone. Our youth is slipping away. Do you know that? (14,15)

Insensitivity is another form of ignorance. Being insensitive is being oblivious of the pains and grieves of the people around. Osborne places that person who is sensitive on a high pedestal. His spokesperson Jimmy highly approves one of the friends of Alison for his being insightful as: “He’s not only got guts but sensitivity as well. That’s about the rarest combination I can think of” (19). Jimmy has a conviction that insensitive people are ignorant of others’ peace and comfort. They are ignorant of the manners and values which add to the sophistication and civilization of a person and a nation. Telling about such ignorance of his wife, Jimmy says, “...You have got to be fundamentally insensitive to be as noisy and as clumsy as that” (24).

Imprecision of knowledge is indeed ignorance of the facts on the part of the beholder. A country’s working machinery is in the hands of its leaders. They can lead it to either progress or decline. When the leaders do not have true knowledge of life and clarity of mind about the state of affairs of their country, they cannot run it properly. Commenting about the ignorance or vague knowledge of Nigel, one of the future leaders of his country, Jimmy says, “... And nothing is more ambiguous about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and human beings is so hazy, he deserves some sort of decoration for it.-a medal inscribed “For Vaguerly in the Field”.(20)

Curiosity leads to knowledge yet unless a person possesses the quality of curiosity (in a positive sense) he remained ignorant. All the discoveries and inventions in the world so far are the result of inquisitiveness and curiosity of human beings Osborne criticizes the society for its not being curious to dig out the reasons of their downfall culturally and economically. Jimmy condemns Cliff for his being insensible and un-inquiring by saying, “What do you want to read it for, anyway? You’ve no intellect, no curiosity. It all just washes over you” (48).

Jimmy’s prime source of anger is his wife Alison’s ignorance of suffering. He keeps letting her know that she has imperfect knowledge of life and human relationships because she belongs to an upper-middle-class which almost remains intact from the agonies of life. Sierz mentions, “Jimmy is an example of hyper-gamy, ‘bedding a woman of a social class superior to one’s own; this is an aspect of the perennial class motif of British fiction’ (Burgess, 1984; pp 64)” (25). He gets angry on Alison for not understanding his bitter approach towards life which he has

developed from the miserable experiences of his life in such a way that he does not feel any reluctance even in wishing her gruesome experiences of life in this way:

Jimmy: Oh, my dear wife, you have got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day. If only something-something would happen to you and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child and it would die. Let it grow; let a recognizable human face emerge from that little mass of indiarubber and wrinkles. Please- if I could only watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognizable human being yourself but I doubt it. (37)

Jimmy himself admits that he would never have such an insight into life if he had not seen his father dying on his death bed. This suffering of watching his father moving towards death inch by inch transformed his ignorance of truths of life into enlightenment. He says, "Anybody who's never watched somebody die is suffering from a pretty bad case of virginity.....For twelve months I watched my father dying when I was ten years old....I was the only one who cared". (57)

While narrating his experience of watching rather feeling his father's death, Jimmy also points towards the indifferent behaviour of her mother rather his whole family. His family felt "Embarrassed and irritated" by the whole business. At the age of ten only he was able to feel that his mother's attitude with his father was not appropriate but his mother was unable to realize this ever at an age of maturity. He says: "My mother was all for being associated with minorities, provided they were the smart, fashionable ones....Perhaps she pitied him...But I was the only one who cared" (57, 58). Watching his father die taught him at an early age, what it was to be angry and helpless" (58).

Jimmy, in the play, tells Helena that a person can't live in the world and remain undamaged by the pains of life. If he wishes for such a life, he should give up the idea of living because it is one of the impossibilities. He says, "And if you can't bear the thought of messing up your nice, clean soul, you would better give up the whole idea of life, and become a saint. Because you will never make it as a human being" (94). This pain gives real learning, illuminates the darkness of ignorance and makes this life worth living. "To be alive is to feel pain. Certainly, the notion that suffering validates human existence is an idea that runs through world drama from the time of Sophocles" (Browne, 2012). In *Oedipus at Colonus* Oedipus comments on his past life as, "My sufferings have taught me to endure" (Sophocles, 2012; line No.4)

Philosophy seeks the answers of the questions; who am I? And how should I live? Both Hindu and Buddh Philosophies have a common interest in the matters of being and living as well as in the matters of knowing and learning. Krishna and Buddha both emphasize that one should adopt selflessness if one wants to come out of the darkness of ignorance. One is unable to comprehend the proper worth and meaning of life and remains ignorant of the pains of life unless one burns in the fire of suffering. This fire of suffering makes a human being pure and shining

gold which never tarnishes. Fire is a symbol of purification in Hinduism. In Bhagavadgita it is written:

The blazing fire turns wood to ashes
 The fire of knowledge turns all karmas to ashes
 On earth, there is no purifier
 As greater as this knowledge
 (Smidt, 1949; pp 187)

When Alison comes back to her husband she is polished and shining as she has got the knowledge of pains of life which she has acquired after burning in the fire of suffering. She has suffered the loss of her child. She gives words to her pains, "It's gone! It's gone! That – that helpless human being inside my body... I'm in the fire, I'm burning (95). Alison does suffer the loss of her unborn child and she does return to Jimmy richer in the humility and pain of living. When she falls on his feet, he feels sympathy for her from the core of his heart and his anger diminishes to almost zero levels as she is no more an ignorant woman.

Sam Shepard's play *Buried Child*, like *Look Back in Anger*, is an expression of his anger against the ignorance of social, cultural and human values on a microcosmic level and against the lack of national commitment to make American dream come true on a macrocosmic level. Shepard has created a narrative which reflected and communicated the disappointments of American people but simultaneously was entertaining and engaging. Set in a background which is with no trouble identifiable, the American farming family, and surrounded by universal issues, the disappointment with the American dream and the conventional patriarch, *Buried Child* gives an idea of the universal dissatisfaction of American people. Sam Shepard's representative character in the play is Dodge. He remained annoyed and kept complaining to everybody throughout the play till his death. His continuous intake of alcohol symbolizes his escapism. His wife's incest with his eldest son is the major cause of his anger. His disgust makes him say that his family's sin has hidden him behind its lethal curtain, "My appearance is out of his domain! It's even out of mine it's disappeared! I 'm an invisible man!" (Shepard 7) At another place he says that "Things keep happening while you are upstairs, ya know. The world does not stop just because you are upstairs. Corn keeps growing. Rain keeps raining." (Shepard 14) These are the lines of wisdom from Dodge....which connote that ignorance of the law is no excuse. If a person is ignorant of the danger of a catastrophe, it does not mean that he will remain saved from that. Dodge bursts out on everybody around and even on a guest girl Shelley who comes to his house with his grandson Vince. He does so because he is frustrated due to the inaction of his sons who could not come up to his expectations and are unable to look after their parents. He has a belief that man can do everything and anything which shows his hidden desire that his sons should do something: "There's nothing a man can't do. You dream it up and he can do it. Anything" But they are ignorant of their power even.

Conclusion

Buddha once said that the “fit disciple is not led by desire, anger, ignorance, and fear”. On similar accounts, Osborne’s Anger was the symbolic expression of inflicted pain he felt due to societal ignorance about one’s miseries and devastations. It helps us to conclude that ignorance provides a fertile land to many problems of the society where they could grow and nourish easily. Government’s, as well as citizens’ ignorance of their duties as well as rights, disturbed the whole social structure paved the seeds of anger and resentments among sensitive persons of the community who also have visionary insight. Osborne, being the sensitive and responsive person of his age thought to choose a platform to convey his anger to all the concerned which he successfully did. His literary creation was the out product of his psychologically perceived socio-political ignorance and prevalent economic menace of that era. His observations about governmental brutal inquisitiveness, insensitivity and ignorance about certain class’s pain; forced him to postulate symbolical representation of all his linguistic behaviour and psychological processes with the help of Jimmy’s character.

Come with us, Larry and me, to the National,’ [Tynan] had said to me earlier. ‘And make history.’ ‘Thank you,’ I replied. ‘I’ve already made it.’

(John Osborne, *Damn You, England*, 155)

(Rebellato, 2002; pp 1)

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