

The Female Companions of the Angry Young Men: A Comparative Study of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Bratya Basu's *Hemlat*

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Abstract

In the world of theatre or literature, in general, female characters have been portrayed from different perspectives – sometimes as docile, passive, sometimes as energetic and active and sometimes as game-changers. However, with the advent of the First World War, the projection of female characters has witnessed a paradigm shift irrespective of territorial boundaries and cultural barriers. The magnitude of agitation and anger among the young men was so intense that the remarkable roles of their female companions could not be overlooked. Most of the writers, in the post-World War phase have brought forth the female counterparts of the angry young men onto the stage to serve a unique purpose. Be it John Osborne in English stage or be it Badal Sircar in Bangla theatre, angry young men had keen listeners to their frustrated life stories. Additionally, the absence of female companions in their lives could have led them to become insane or to commit suicide. This proposition may be defended by arguments, but we should explore their contributions in the lives of angry young men.

*To delve into the said study, I have preferred John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1957) and Bratya Basu's *Hemlat* (2006) so that I can substantiate my proposition despite the spatio-temporal variations. From the critical lenses of post-modernism and feminism, I have studied characters like Alison and Shefalia, who hardly express their desires rather give importance to their angry young male partners. However, this study may appear to be challenging to the pro-feministic agendas. Nevertheless, this article simply observes the contributions of female companions and also argues that the role of a gender is not often preceded; sometimes, through docile or submissive appearance, female*

characters can execute the desired changes for their counterparts as well as for the society.

Keywords: *Female Characters, Angry Young Men, Post World War Theatre, Feminism.*

The projection of anger of the young men came onto the stage as well as page very dramatically with the angry young movement, and thereafter it turned to be a worldwide phenomenon. The rising issues of the young generation, especially in post-independent countries, gave it different shapes. But the problems of the angry young men remain exclusively the problems or crisis of the 'men' – the voice of the women remains unheard at least in the projection on the stages as well as pages. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the condition of the female companions of the angry young men of the West and East with a time gap of five decades. We know that Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is a most celebrating prototype of the Angry Young movement, but the resonance is still prominent in Bratya Basu's *Hemlat*. *Hemlat*, which is the adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, brings forth the crisis of Bengali young man named Hemlat, who has lost his job and showcases disgust regarding the contemporary socio-political scenario. Interestingly, this young man has a female companion, who listens to him patiently and also acts as a safety valve for his anger and outrage. As it can lead him to be a traumatic one, but Shefalia saves him being a keen listener to all his words. Likewise, Jimmy Porter seems to be frustrated with everything and keeps nagging at Alison. But Alison listens to Jimmy uncomplainingly, and her decision to visit her father's home is also an outcome of a fall out initiated by Jimmy. Finally, it is Alison who comes back from her father's home after having a miscarriage, whereas Jimmy is having a normal course of life with Helena. Thus, the extraordinary zeal to encounter challenges and the capacity to be with frustrated and dominative characters turn these female characters to be fascinating ones.

If we minutely observe each of these characters one by one, we can get a clear mindscape of them that helps their male companions to survive even in tumultuous situations of their lives. Throughout the play *Hemlat*, we observe that most of the time, Hemlat is accompanied by Shefalia, especially when the

protagonist expresses his frustration. It is Shefalia who tries her best to control the outrage of Hemlat and dares to speak to her father that she wants to marry with him. Although the playwright posits Hemlat in front of a window while expressing his troubled mind, Shefalia stands over there and acts like a metaphorical window—an outlet for her beloved's anger. In case of Osborne's protagonist, who is also agitated with various reasons, especially due to the common pattern of life, at the same point of time, Alison appears to be ironing some clothes and does her job calmly. When Jimmy considers the newspaper to be unworthy of reading as it consists of similar headlines each and every day, Alison seems to be much more respectful to her regular work. Here, we can differentiate the state of mind of these characters. In no way it can be claimed that the characterisation of the female counterparts is intentionally made to be docile and passive rather such kind of scenario could have resulted in to violent outbreak of the anger. As per Freudian psychoanalysis, the role of the listener is very important one as s/he channelises the distress, frustration and outrage of the sufferer; the absence of the listener may lead the patient to insanity.

In the post war generation, it reflected the painful dilemma of the young people who found the traditional loyalties like patriotism, family manners, public services and so forth to be ridiculous in their own lives. The selected plays have created an atmosphere where the working- class protagonists feel alienated in the squalid, hostile environment and seek release out of it. In this process, their inner frustration gets channelized in to the search and quest for a true life, which they lack in each moment of living. Thus, it represents a clash between loneliness and love. Thus, it starts to challenge the familial relationships of the characters and also dramatically affects their personal life. These plays reiterate the conviction about the nexus between a healthy human relationship and as a society through the relationship of the male and female protagonists. Each play shows an endeavor to steer away from the multidimensional shackles of the rigid convictions and strike a harmony between the individual and the society. Besides all these negativities, they still search for some latent qualities in the quest for rejuvenating factors. Both the male protagonists of each play are cynical about everything and seem keenly dissatisfied with life in general. They embody the anguished helplessness of living in the complexity of modern society, and they know that they are in sufficiently equipped to meet the challenges. They love

their partners, but they also fall short of their expectations. A poignant cry over the agony of the impossibility of being happy within a conventional domestic situation suffocates the relationship and stifles their love for one another. They show no emotions but rather seem to be ruthless, and yet on certain situations it is surprising to find their emotional and sentimental outburst. Hemlat practically attempts what Jimmy has said at the final end of the play, that everybody wants to "... escape from the pain of being alive." (Osborne, 2016, p.82) They have declared war against the rotten society and have been unfitted by the existing parameters of the higher education to accept their normal place in the world. They suffer an inner conflict and suffer more because of their inability to act. They want to change the whole social fabric, and as they are unable to do so they give vent to their anger by hurling abuses on and to others, and here, their female companions become the primal target of their outburst. It also shows the male superiority over the female. As their male ego got hurt and they feel the inferiority within the larger scale of the society thus, they channelize it into the passive female figures within the family. On the one hand, Jimmy was frustrated with the commonality of his life and the complacency of those around him; on the other hand, Hemlat was frustrated with the corruptive world and its poisonous rules and regulations. They channel their rage into scathing monologues and bitter confrontations. They are like a pressure cooker about to be bursting with the unfulfilled aspirations and disillusionment of post-war Britain and capitalistic globalized India. The playwrights have truly captured the pulse of an era through the protagonist's behaviour and treatment towards their constant partners. They are more than a characters, rather a voice for a generation, and the perfect epitome of an 'angry young man.' They are disillusioned, frustrated, and brimming with pent-up anger against the societal constraints and personal disappointments. They lash out at the world around them – their friends, their wives, even to themselves. Both the couples suffer in isolation, and their relationships verge on breakdown. As they cannot find themselves a place, they must compensate it by making fun of all those who can.

Angry young men, like Jimmy and Hemlat, often have partners who serve as foils to their turbulent emotions. Alison and Shefali are present a stark contrast to their partner's volcanic rage. They are more reserved, patient, and silently suffering. Their relationship is like a battleground, where Jimmy's and Hemlat's anger

clashes with Alison's and Shefalia's subdued demeanor. It's a complicated dynamic that showcases the strain societal pressures put on personal relationships. This dichotomy between the aggressive, disillusioned men and their often more stoic, enduring partners is a recurring theme in literature. This complex relationship with their partner can be analyzed through a psychoanalytic lens. Their anger and aggression towards the female companion might be seen as a projection of their unresolved internal conflicts and a way to externalize their own frustrations and insecurities. Alison and Shefalia, on the other hand, represent the passive, nurturing figures that absorb and endure their partners' outbursts, perhaps reflecting a subconscious need to balance their chaotic emotional state. Their dynamics highlight a power struggle, rooted in deeper psychological issues. Jimmy and Hemlat's constant need to assert dominance and superiority over their female companions could stem from feelings of inadequacy or impotence. At the same time, Alison's and Shefalia's passive suffering might indicate a form of masochism or a subconscious attempt to maintain a resemblance of order and control in their boisterous relationship. It is also important to note that how the protagonists are interwoven with the past and present idiosyncrasies; a secret is hinted and thus, its outcome effects on their relational status.

Jimmy and Hemlat's constant rage and aggression can be seen through the lens of Freud's id, ego, and superego. Their id, which is the primal and unconscious part of their psyche, driven by basic urges and it often seems to dominate their actions. They lash out, driven by their deep-seated frustrations and desires for something more meaningful. Their ego, which we generally believe as the rational part of the mind that deals with reality and struggles to manage these impulses in a socially acceptable way, are often failing and resulting in explosive outbursts. The superego or the so-called moral conscience might be seen in their moments of guilt and self-recrimination, reflecting societal and parental expectations. Alison and Shefalia, in this framework might be viewed as representing the ego, trying to mediate between their partners' destructive id and the demands of reality, which is served by ego. Their stoic suffering and attempts to maintain harmony could be seen as their effort to manage their partner's overwhelming id impulses while grappling with their own emotional turmoil. Freud's theories can illuminate the underlying psychological dynamics at play,

adding depth to our understanding of these complex characters and their interactions. Alison and Shefalia's pliability with their relationship with their partners is pretty striking. The women endure their revilement, emotional volatility and even the cruelty with a remarkable degree of patience and silence. Some might see this as a kind of survival mechanism. Alison and Shafelia's responses are partly shaped by their unconscious drives. They might find some comfort or stability in their role, even it is painful. At times, they seem to carry a quiet strength, absorbing their partner's fury like a buffer. However, it can also be found that in the case of Alison, it is complex because her endurance is not without limits, and eventually, she leaves Jimmy. Her attempt shows her ability to recognize that at a point, self-preservation demands a change. This could be seen as a breakthrough and a moment of reclaiming her agency and identity back. The dynamic is a dance between endurance and self-protection, often seen in such turbulent relationships. What is more striking is that, while we are talking about the male protagonist's relationship with their female companions, we must understand its backdrop, which is the parental relationship of the protagonist. Such kind of behaviour of them with their partner is the outcome of their disturbed parental relationship. This manifests into their attitude with their companions, which on one hand, signals their guilt and, on the other hand, their fear for not to repeat the same. Both plays represent a situation of father-daughter and father-son duo, which represent the intricacies of each relationship. Both these dual relationships are on the verge and the incidents are evolving around these. The absence of the parental love makes the protagonist more vulnerable towards the person they love and care about, and ultimately, it is their female companion. The couples are always in a situation of emotional mess, which creates such violent relationships with each other.

On a surface level, it seems that the protagonists are psychological deviants, who have tended to shatter the integration of their personality and thus have disrupted their social relationships. Freda Fordham, in her *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (1966), tries to argue that the individual's behavior depends on considerable measure on the extent to which his wishes and aspirations are adequately attained. Jung has coined a term called 'analytical psychology', which argues that the psychological journey of any individual is an individuation process and it is not only of healing but also of developing, thus, the analyst

should also share the suffering of the person. Here, Alison, Shefalia and Helena could have been like analysts in the life of Jimmy and Hemlat, and they could have shared their suffering and healed their minds. They look back with anger at life, and the miseries of the death of their fathers make them restless. Through this, the repressive or the forgotten memories make a shadow land within them. For them, this memory remains static and that at the end always keep the month everge of death. Jimmy and Hemlat find that people of their generation are not able to die for any reasonable cause. They have not shown any vision to regenerate the world. Both Osborne and Basu did not offer any direct optimism in their plays, but at the end they hint that something is coming at the next, it is not the ending instead a sequel of the beginning. Their conditions finely represent what Eliot has said "There is only the fight to recover what has been lost/ And found and lost again and again." (Eliot,1942) Jimmy and Hemlat's metaphysical anguish has shown the nothingness of life with a greater force. The cry of nothingness that has been explored here has a resemblance with Edward Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893). The protagonists cry, but it reaches in avoid through their constant listeners, that is their female companions. Above all, it can be said that the active presence of these companions prevents the angry young men from being insane. Osborne and Basu on the large canvas have desired to explore the truth of the situation over the moral reflection on it. To conclude what can be added that these plays are not only a documentary on youth and poverty rather these are intensely involve passion and personal cries in the dark. Through the protagonists, the plays represent a reality which is the very real but still the contemporary people are skeptical towards it. To represent it, both the plays require the characters to entrap in an isolated room. The ending of the both the plays symbolically represent hope while leaving a certain degree of ambiguity so that it can keep the continuity of the life.

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