

**:: STRUCTURE ::****11.0 Objectives****11.1 Act-wise and Scene-wise Summary and Analysis****11.2 The Major Themes Depicted in the Play****11.3 Jimmy Porter as an Angry Young Man****11.4 Let Us Sum Up****11.5 Key Words****11.6 Books Suggested****❖ Answer**

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**11.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, we shall

- Understand the plot of the play
- Understand major themes of the play
- Understand the character of Jimmy Porter as an Angry Young Man

On the completion of the unit you should be able to

- Discuss the plot, theme and characters of the play
- Discuss the formation of identity of Jimmy Porter as Angry Young Man

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**11.1 ACT-WISE AND SCENE-WISE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS**

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**ACT I****Summary**

*Look Back in Anger* begins in the attic apartment of Jimmy Porter and Alison Porter. The setting of the play is mid-1950's small town England. Act I takes place on an evening in April. When the curtain rises, Jimmy Porter and Cliff Lewis are seen seated in shabby arm chairs. Jimmy is about 25 years old. Cliff is Jimmy's friend and is about the same age as Jimmy. Alison, Jimmy's wife, is ironing in a corner of the room. Jimmy and Alison share their apartment with Cliff. Jimmy and Cliff both belong

to the working class, though Jimmy is more educated than Cliff. Alison belongs to a more prominent and privileged family. Jimmy and Cliff run a sweet stall.

Jimmy is a disgruntled young man who tries to provoke Cliff and Alison with his unsavoury remarks. He regards Cliff's working class background with disdain and makes fun of him for his low intelligence by calling him a "peasant". Cliff is a good tempered man who takes Jimmy's remarks in his stride and remains calm. Jimmy also tries to provoke his wife by making fun of her family and her privileged background before she married him.

Jimmy is interested in reading newspapers but is upset about the content of the newspapers. He complains that all the book reviews sound the same and that the papers fail to provide any intellectual stimulation. He discusses about some articles in the newspaper regarding H-bomb and class distinctions. His ranting continues about several other articles and he finally declares "Nobody can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth" (Osborne 15).

Jimmy then begins to ponder over the state of England. He remembers an old saying about England: "...we get our cooking from Paris (that's a laugh), our politics from Moscow, and our morals from Port Said" (Osborne 15) Jimmy is angry and upset about Alison's family. He calls them "sycophantic, phlegmatic and pusillanimous" (Osborne 21). Alison tries her best to control her anger and does not get provoked.

Jimmy now wants to listen to a concert on the radio. He complains that he cannot hear the music because of the noise as Allison is ironing. He then begins to shout about how loud women are and again derides her by comparing her with "a dirty, old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle" (Osborne 24). When the church bells start ringing, Jimmy gets more upset about the noise.

Cliff tries to maintain peace between Jimmy and Alison. Cliff and Jimmy wrestle and it ends up with Alison burning her arm when Jimmy pushes Cliff into Alison and they both fall to the floor. Jimmy feels sorry and apologises but Alison asks him to leave the room and give her some peace. Cliff helps Alison in washing and bandaging her wound. Alison tells him: "I don't think I can take much more... I don't think I want anything more to do with love" (Osborne 27).

Alison confides to Cliff that she is pregnant with Jimmy's child though she has not yet informed Jimmy about it. Cliff advises her to tell Jimmy the news. When Jimmy re-enters the room he finds Cliff and Alison touching and close to each other but he does not react. Cliff leaves and Jimmy and Alison become intimate with each other. They play a game of bear and squirrel where Jimmy calls her a squirrel and she calls him a bear.

Cliff comes back to inform Alison that her old friend Helena Charles has called her on the phone. When Alison goes to take the call Jimmy fumbles in Alison's purse and finds a letter from her mother. He is angry because Alison and her mother write to each other but never mention his name because it is a "dirty word" to them.

Alison comes back with the news that Helena is paying them a visit. Jimmy expresses his dislike for Helena and becomes furious. He starts cursing Alison and wishes that she could have a child only to watch it die.

### **Analysis**

The opening scene of the play introduces each character through an analysis of their physical traits and their psychological disposition. Jimmy is a complex character and is full of contradictions. He is angry and bitter and yet tender and passionate. Alison has accepted her situation and has fallen into a rut. Cliff is the opposite of Jimmy. He is a good tempered man who suffers Jimmy's verbal attacks with equipoise. The sparsely furnished apartment is a reflection of the characters inhabiting it. Like some old furniture kept away in an attic, Jimmy, Alison and Cliff have also been kept away from the sight of the upper class.

Jimmy is angry about the content of the newspapers. He is concerned with enthusiasm and living. At the same time he is nostalgic about the political and social supremacy of the British Empire in the past. He accuses Alison of being cold and unemotional. He accuses her of carrying "The White Woman's Burden", a phrase that was used to suggest British imperialism and exploitation of the non-white people. Jimmy tries to exercise control over his wife and friend. By insulting Alison in particular, he wants the power that the upper class has but does not know what he would do with this power.

Jimmy is disillusioned by his routine. He says that he hates Sundays, "Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing... Our youth is slipping away" (Osborne 15). He bemoans the fact that his youth is not full of excitement but of mundane chores. He wants to have a little "human enthusiasm" and suggests a game: "Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we are actually alive" (Osborne 15). He considers himself to be more alive than others.

Jimmy's verbal attack on Alison's friends and family highlights the inherent conflict between the upper classes and the working classes. He thinks that Alison's brother, who wants to be a politician, is foolish but he will become successful because he has learned to "plunder" people through his high-class education. Jimmy expects some reaction from Alison after these accusations but is denied any. He is frustrated because his education has come to a naught and he considers himself to be a misfit.

Cliff's flirtations with Alison in the presence of Jimmy suggest the unconventional nature of their marriage. Unlike Jimmy, Cliff is kind and considerate towards Alison.

Jimmy's trumpet playing refers to the twentieth century British fascination with Black American jazz culture. Osborne's implication is that black jazz culture is the quintessence of a natural humanity. Jimmy's anger stems from his inability to live in such humanity.

## **ACT II - Scene I**

### **Summary**

Two weeks later Helena comes to stay with Alison. She is the same age and size as Alison but has a "sense of materialistic authority" and "makes most men who meet her anxious not only to please but to impress" (Osborne 39) She is an actress and leads a carefree life. Alison discusses her relationship with Jimmy. She narrates how they met and how in their younger days, soon after their marriage when Jimmy had no job and money, they used to crash parties of the rich with their friend Hugh Tanner. When Hugh left to travel the world leaving his mother behind, Jimmy got annoyed and angry with Hugh. Jimmy has a soft corner for Hugh's mother and is affectionate towards her.

Helena urges Alison to inform Jimmy about the pregnancy or else leave him. Alison points towards the squirrel and teddy bear placed in the corner of the room. She tells Helena about the game they play in which she pretends to be a squirrel and he pretends to be a bear. "It was the one way of escaping from everything... We could become little furry creatures with little furry brains. Full of dumb, uncomplicated affection for each other" (Osborne 47)

Cliff and Jimmy return and Helena informs them that she and Alison are going to the church. This provokes Jimmy and he starts his anti-religious rants. He also insults Alison's family and friends by calling them: "sycophantic, phlegmatic, and of course, top of the bill – pusillanimous" (Osborne 49). Helena gets angry on hearing this and Jimmy is pleased that he has been successful in instigating her. He tells Helena how he watched his father die for a year when he was ten years old. His father had come home from the Civil War in Spain where "certain god-fearing gentlemen there had made such a mess of him, he didn't have long left to live" (Osborne 57). Jimmy narrates how his father was abandoned by his family and he was the only one left to listen to his father's babbling: "the despair and the bitterness, the sweet sticky smell of a dying man" (Osborne 58). He further adds: "I knew more about love...betrayal... and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know all your life" (Osborne 58) Alison gets ready to leave for the church and Jimmy feels betrayed by his wife.

Jimmy leaves the room to attend to a phone call. Helena informs Alison that she has called Alison's father to come here and take her away from this humiliating life. Alison gives in to her suggestion and agrees to go with her father when he comes to pick her up the next day. When Jimmy returns he informs Alison that Mrs Tanner, Hugh's mother is sick and she is going to die. Jimmy decides to visit her. He tells Alison whether she

wants to go with him or with Helena. Alison picks up her things and leaves for church. Jimmy is stunned by Alison's decision.

### **Analysis**

Helena Charles is introduced in this scene. Just as Cliff is the opposite of Jimmy in the earlier scene, Helena is the opposite of Alison, though both of them belong to the upper class. Alison is more unnerved and domesticated because of her marriage to Jimmy whereas Helena is more outspoken and sophisticated.

While explaining her relationship with Jimmy to Cliff, Alison admits about the lack of passion in their married life. Slothfulness has entered their life which Jimmy keeps on complaining about.

This scene also throws some light on the reasons why Alison falls in love with Jimmy. In Alison's recounting of the stories of meeting Jimmy and party crashing with his friend Hugh, Jimmy becomes a knight in shining armour though Alison admits his armour never shone very brightly. His paradoxical nature is seen here when he charms his way to win Alison's heart but acts like a ruffian in storming the gates of the refined culture of Alison's family friends. Jimmy is thus linked to the British past that he detests and repeatedly says that the past is gone.

In this scene Alison also explains the symbolism of the bear and squirrel game. She explains that by impersonating these stuffed animals, they both are able to have "dumb, uncomplicated affection for each other" (Osborne 47). Their game of squirrel and bear shows how the only way they both can truly love each other is to disengage themselves from the real world. The condition of their real lives is difficult to bear. This game offers them a chance to escape into childish happiness that was denied to both of them while growing up.

Alison's declaration that she is attending church with Helena comes as a bolt to Jimmy. For the first time in the play he expresses genuine surprise and shock at his wife's actions. Alison's church going clashes with Jimmy's beliefs. Alison says that Jimmy is a fiercely loyal man. He expects that those in his life will also be loyal to the same viewpoints – be it political, religious or social. Alison's decision to go to the church is regarded by Jimmy as a breach of allegiance to him. This is the reason why he further humiliates Alison.

Jimmy disgraces and insults Alison's mother because she hired private detectives to stop Alison's relationship with Jimmy. Jimmy's hatred for all such upper class women stems from this incident. He then begins to abuse Helena about her character and her world view. Jimmy accuses her of living in a dark age because she goes to church and looks respectable. He believes that traditional morality has no place in the modern world. He considers church to be a puppet of political and social power.

Jimmy then bares his heart open by telling others about his personal suffering, of how he watched his father die at a young age and how his family did nothing to help him. It is this initial suffering at a tender age that haunts Jimmy and prompts him to feel superior to others. Jimmy believes that since both Helena and Alison have not suffered like him, they have not truly been born into the world. With Hugh's mother on her death bed, Jimmy begs Alison to come with him to visit her. Alison, knowing that her father is coming to pick her up the next day chooses to go with Helena. Jimmy is distressed by this choice.

## **ACT II - SCENE II**

### **Summary**

The following evening Alison is seen packing her suitcase. Her father, Colonel Redfern who is in his late sixties is a soft spoken man. He fails to understand the love between Alison and Jimmy and thinks that he and his wife are partly responsible for the split between Jimmy and Alison. The Colonel was a dedicated soldier for forty years in the British Army. He spent the best years of his life in India and feels nostalgic about it. Alison discusses her life with Jimmy with her father. The Colonel tells her about how her mother hated Jimmy and believed that he was a criminal. The Colonel admits that they should not have interfered with their daughter's life. Alison informs him about what Jimmy said about him and her mother. She tells him that Jimmy called her mother an "over privileged old bitch" and the Colonel a plant left over "from the Edwardian Wilderness that can't understand why the sun isn't shining any more" (Osborne 66).

The Colonel admits to Alison that Jimmy is right in calling him an old Edwardian. He tells her about his past and how he left England in 1914 to command the Maharajah's army in India. He loved his stay in India until 1947. On returning to England he found that the England he had left was no longer there. He recalls his happy days in India and fondly remembers the "last day the sun shone was when that dirty little train steamed out of the crowded, suffocating Indian station... I knew in my heart it was all over then" (Osborne 68). Alison thinks about the two men in her life. She tells her father: "You are hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it" (Osborne 68).

Finally, Alison packs her bag and leaves with her father. Helena is going to stay in the house as she has a job interview the next day. Jimmy enters in a foul mood. He shouts at Helena because the Colonel had almost run him over with his car and Cliff had almost walked away from him in the street. Helena throws Alison's letter at him and he reads it. Helena then informs Jimmy about Alison's pregnancy. He is shocked by the news but soon recovers and tells Helena he doesn't care. He starts ranting about Alison's indifference to Hugh's mother. He tells her how he watched Hugh's mother die and is sure that he will attend the funeral alone because "that bitch won't even send her a bunch of flowers."

## **Act II Scene II**

### **Analysis**

This scene introduces Alison's father Colonel Redfern. In spite of his military background he is a soft hearted person. Jimmy has always considered him to be rigid and unyielding in his attitude but he appears to be more relaxed and caring.

Jimmy is right in his assessment of the Colonel represents the past. When Alison tells her father about Jimmy's insults to him, calling him a left over from the "Edwardian wilderness" he shows exemplary understanding. The Edwardian period in England was marked by the influence of the elite British culture in the early twentieth century. This period also saw the ebbing of the prominence of Britain as a great power which ultimately resulted in the death of British colonialism a few decades later.

The Colonel symbolises the diminishing importance of British culture. The Colonel is resigned and withdrawn which reflects the attitude of the entire British society. Jimmy says the Colonel's generation was the last generation that believed in fighting for great causes. Now the Colonel is bewildered by the world around him. He fails to understand the new generation.

Alison's comment that Jimmy and the Colonel are alike in many ways provides an understanding into their characters. The Colonel is upset because the present is not like the past and Jimmy is upset because he does not see any difference between the past and the present and finds his future bleak.

## **ACT III SCENE I**

### **Summary**

This scene takes place several months later. Jimmy and Cliff are sitting in armchairs with newspapers. Helena's things are scattered around the apartment. Jimmy complains about the content of the newspapers. Jimmy and Cliff continue with their banter. He is highly critical of Helena's religious tendencies. He believes that traditional religion has no place in modern society. He goes on to deliver a long speech lamenting the present scenario. He believes that there are no worthy causes to die for. He finds poverty of ideals in the modern world. Compared to the modern generation, the earlier generation believed in sacrificing their lives for their ideals. He is thus caught between nostalgia for the past glory and the situation in the present world.

Cliff then expresses his desire to move out of the house. Jimmy receives the news calmly. Then Helena expresses her love for Jimmy and they both embrace each other. There is a knock on the door and when Jimmy opens the door he finds Alison there looking very ill. Jimmy walks out of the room.

### **Act III Scene I**

#### **Analysis**

This scene mirrors the first scene of the play. Once again Jimmy and Cliff are in their same places. Jimmy is complaining about the lack of imagination in the papers. Instead of Alison, Helena is seen ironing. The scene suggests that things have not changed much in their lives indirectly suggesting the unchanged world outside. Jimmy has not changed much from his relationship with Helena. He is critical of her religious leanings. He considers traditional religion as a thing of the past which has no place in modern society.

This scene also includes Jimmy's famous harangue about no worth causes to die for like the previous generation. He finds lack of ideals in the modern world. He is caught between his nostalgia for the past and the grim present. This nostalgia allows Jimmy to accept Cliff's desire to leave. Cliff has accepted that present has changed beyond his control while Jimmy still clings to the past, unable to move on.

### **ACT III Scene II**

#### **Summary**

Jimmy is now in Cliff's room, loudly playing his trumpet. Alison has lost her baby and looks sick. Helena tells Alison that she would be upset with her for what she has done. But Alison tells her that it was a mistake on her part to come back to the apartment and that she does not want to come between her and Jimmy. Helena tells her what is wrong with Jimmy "He was born out of his time" (Osborne 90). She then tells her that things are over between them. Alison begs her to stay for Jimmy as he will have no one look after him but Helena is firm in her decision. Helena shouts at Jimmy for playing his trumpet very loudly and calls him to come in the room.

Jimmy shows some concern for Alison as she has lost the baby. Helena informs him that she is leaving. She says that she has realised that what they were doing was wrong. Jimmy tells them that they both are trying to escape from the pain of being alive and that one cannot fall into love "without dirtying up your hands" (Osborne 93). After Helena leaves, Alison also attempts to leave but Jimmy stops her. Alison tells him that she has undergone the mental and physical suffering that he wanted her to experience. He realizes that she has suffered much and has become like him. He kneels with her and tries to comfort her and then, with a "mocking, tender irony" (Osborne 96) begins to tell her that they'll be together as a bear and a squirrel. The play ends with Jimmy and Alison embracing each other.

### **Act III Scene II**

#### **Analysis**

This scene brings closure to the earlier emotional upheaval experienced by the characters. Cliff's decision to move out suggests that he wants to

move on in life. He has possibly tired of Jimmy's obstinacy and relentless tirades. He has realized Jimmy's inability to change though he is living with another woman.

Helena and Alison come to a better understanding of Jimmy. Helena's remark that Jimmy is stuck in the "French Revolution" indicates how Jimmy's emotional outbursts create havoc in his own life and in the life of those around him. Alison understands him as an "Eminent Victorian" meaning that he is sticking to an idealized past.

Helena's decision to leave is emblematic of her morality. Her sense of wrong doing in stealing Alison's husband from her proves her moral uprightness.

In the concluding scene Jimmy is presented as a helpless man. Alison begs Helena to stay as he will have no one to take care of him. Her remark shows Jimmy's vulnerability and precarious position. But Helena is firm in her decision. Both these women understand how forlorn and desolate Jimmy is.

At the end Alison makes Jimmy realise she has become the person he wanted her to be. Jimmy considered Alison to be a lesser human being because she had not undergone any suffering like he had at his father's deathbed. Now with the death of her unborn child, Alison has got a new insight into what suffering is. Jimmy finally finds solace in her embrace. They return to their game of bear and squirrel. They apprehend that the only way to get away from the suffering of the real world is to create a fantasy world that can provide them a safe haven.

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## 11.2 THE MAJOR THEMES DEPICTED IN THE PLAY

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- **Inertia in British Culture:**

Jimmy Porter feels that the world he sees around him is empty and hollow. It lacks passion and intensity of emotion. He has disdain for those who lack authentic expression of feeling. He lashes out at Alison to evoke some emotional response but does not get it. It is the complacency of whole society that infuriates Jimmy. Jimmy has also slipped into a world of passivity. The same, boring routine of Sundays, the lack of emotional attachment between Jimmy and Alison points out the slothfulness and passivity in their lives. Jimmy's lines, "No one can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth" (Osborne 15) aptly sums up this inertia in British culture.

- (b) **Class Conflict:**

Jimmy comes from the working class background and although some of his mother's relatives are pretty posh, he hates them as much as he hates Alison's upper class family. The class system with its preferential treatment reserved for those at the top and the blatant disregard for those at the bottom of the rung makes Jimmy's life miserable. He has a university degree but it is not from the 'right' university. It is Alison's

brother Nigel, “the straight-backed, chinless wonder” who went to a prestigious university, who is already a Member of Parliament, who will “make it to the top”. Alison’s mother is also portrayed as a class conscious person who employs all kinds of tactics to prevent Alison from marrying Jimmy. Jimmy loves Hugh’s mother because she comes from working class and helps him in setting up his sweet shop. Jimmy has regards for Cliff for the same reason that he is “common”.

**(c) Alienation:**

Jimmy Porter is a spokesperson for a large segment of the British society in 1956 when he rants about his alienation from a society in which he was deprived of any opportunity in spite of having education from a ‘white tile’ university. He is not able to make any meaningful use of his education. The newly opened universities in England kindled hopes for a better way of life for the young. However, the real power and opportunities were reserved for those born into privileged class. This privileged class restrained itself from showing any strongly felt emotions. Jimmy’s alienation from Alison springs from her ‘cool’ temperament and her reticence to feel deeply. He berates her to evoke any response from her, to strike at him. He wants her to “stop sitting at the fence” and feel some sort of passion for life. Jimmy wants to lead a passionate life but the complete disregard to his emotions shown by others including his wife alienates him from those around him.

**(d) Real Life:**

Jimmy firmly believes that the only way people can experience real feelings that are not controlled by society is through undergoing shattering experiences. He campaigns vigorously for political, social and religious change. He complains about the lack of authenticity in human interactions. His abuse of Alison is based on the perception that he does not know what it is like to suffer and experience pure pain. His burning desire is to live a more real and full life. For him anger is a real emotion and that expression of anger makes him feel alive. His perception of real is expressed in his own words: “One day, when I’m no longer spending my days running a sweet stall, I may write a book about us all. It’s all here. Written in flames a mile high. And it won’t be recollected in tranquility either, picking daffodils with Auntie Wordsworth. It’ll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood” (Osborne 54).

**(e) Loss of Childhood Innocence:**

The Post-World War II generation was grappling with the loss of childhood innocence. A theme that is deeply concerned with the characters of Jimmy and Alison Porter is the loss of childhood innocence. Jimmy loses his childhood when as a frightened ten year old he witnesses the painful death of his father. This experience has left an indelible imprint on his mind and created a feeling of estrangement with the world. Jimmy’s anger is rooted in this unforgettable experience of suffering and loneliness in his childhood. From an early age he knows what suffering is and that leads him to vent his anger on everyone around him. Alison is

also forced to grow up too fast by marrying Jimmy. Her youth is wasted in the domestic life of working class. She says that she has forgotten what it was like to be young and carefree. The game of bear and squirrel that Jimmy and Alison play at the beginning and at the end of the play is indicative of their desire to find refuge in childhood fantasies, away from the grim realities of the world.

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### 11.3 JIMMY PORTER AS AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN

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The protagonist of the play *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter, is a character of contradictions. He is a university graduate who lives in a tumbledown attic flat in a drab Midland town and earns his living by running a sweet stall in the market. He is dissatisfied with everything in life and the tone of his conversation is always one of irritation and complaint. He makes many cutting remarks about contemporary society. He lashes out at his wife Alison and friend Cliff and the world at large. He cannot forgive his wife for her upper-class background and he chooses to remain poor. He constantly torments his wife to extract some reaction from her. His world view is coloured by his irritation and frustration over the English class system. This frustration has put his marriage on a shaky ground and his wife bears the brunt of his anger. He is tormented by the intellectual inertia of those around him.

Jimmy contemptuously rejects the contemporary world and severely criticises the validity of the moral and spiritual aspects of the British Welfare state. His anger is directed towards a society which has developed a kind of moral apathy or disinterestedness towards dubious values and practises. He is a representative of the rebel youth challenging the validity of the moral values of post-war Britain. He is the voice of a large section of British society that could not find its place in society. His deeds and ranting are deliberately aimed to shock. He is full of paradoxical opinions. He lashes at Cliff both for not reading the 'New Statesman' and for reading it; he finds fault with his wife for her education and Cliff for his ignorance. He is convinced that he is the only one who really knows what suffering is.

Jimmy is an idealist fuming and frothing against the evils of man and the universe. His apparent cruelty is perhaps the result of his realisation that he is a misfit in a group of normal and well-disposed people. He exerts his revenge on society for being happy and contented with wrong things with his morbid cruelty, acidic comments and by making those around him uncomfortable. He derives perverted pleasure in making others unhappy about their life, thinking this might bring them closer to his point of view. He has come to spite and resent society so much that he slips into complacency and does nothing about it. He feels completely helpless and crumpled down in his situation that he gets totally dejected and resigned.

Jimmy's resentment towards upper class social status results in his diatribe against the social class and caste system. He does not miss a

single opportunity to abuse Alison's parents and their higher upper class social status. He is torn between two ideologies. He oscillates between sexual passion and loathing. On the one hand he cannot do without carnal desires and on the other he detests this passionate side of him. Such conflicting ideas do not allow him any peace of mind. His inability to come to terms with reality makes him fall into despair. He wants to escape from the clutches of reality that torments him and pulls him apart. This internal conflict leads him to his harangue on contemporary values. He expresses a sense of hopelessness in life in the following lines:

I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New nothing-very-much-than-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. (Osborne 84)

Such invectives made Jimmy a cult figure, a hero of a generation that found itself on a shaky ground – a generation that wanted to protest but had no idea what to protest about. Jimmy's anguished remark "No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth" aptly expresses the static state of affairs. The young people's conviction that their protest was unlikely to have any desirable effect on the course of events left them high and dry. In the blind anger and frenzy of Jimmy Porter, the post-war generation discovered the realities of its own circumstances. Jimmy became the spokesperson for this whole generation famously dubbed by journalists 'angry young man'.

Apparently Jimmy's outbursts and vituperations seem senseless, irrational or incoherent but gradually his berating takes shape and we realise that they are symptoms of a character that is lost and is in search of his identity. Jimmy's description of himself as a "lonely bewildered little boy" of ten listening to the talks of his dying father who returned broken hearted from Spanish War provides us with some understanding and insight into the background of his anger. His sense of futility may be subscribed to the despair and helplessness of his dying father. This was his initiation into suffering:

Every time I sat on the edge of his bed, to listen to him talking or reading to me, I had to fight back my tears. At the end of twelve months, I was a veteran. All that feverish failure of a man had to listen to him was 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. And I can never forget it. (Osborne 58)

He bears grudge against the world for treating him badly resulting in fits of rage. However, his anger is not confined to his own self, his barrage of

criticism goes beyond personal frustration and embraces larger issues of the contemporary society. He questions the ills and evil practises that bear the stamp of approval of society. Jimmy feels isolated in a society that prides itself on outwards success. For him suffering is a solitary experience. He says to Alison, “The heaviest, strongest creatures in this world seem to be the loneliest. Like the old bear, following his own breath in the dark forest. There’s no warm pack, no herd to comfort him. The voice that cries out does not have to be a weakling’s, does it?” (Osborne 94) However, his dissatisfaction with the world does not prompt him to take any constructive action. He merely goes on cursing and lambasting everything around him.

Through the character of Jimmy Porter Osborne has effectively chronicled the case of the young who were leading a marginalised existence, torn between economic and spiritual crisis and the demands of an affluent society. The play forcefully projects the hollowness of the one-sided development. The impotent rage of Jimmy intensely expresses the bitterness and indignation of the youth during the 1950s.

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## 11.4 LET US SUM UP

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Thus John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* is a representative play of the “Angry Young Man Movement” depicting the anger and frustrations of the post-World War II generation in Britain. It is a milestone work in the category of Angry Young Man theatre which gives voice to the lower class of the society of England.

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## 11.5 KEY WORDS

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<b>Edwardian Age</b>	The Edwardian Age refers to the pinnacle of the supremacy of the British empire and colonial expansion at the beginning of the twentieth century.
<b>H-bomb</b>	It is a short hand term for Hydrogen bomb.
<b>Half-crown</b>	It is a denomination of the British currency.
<b>Liberal</b>	A liberal is a member of a British political party named the Liberal Party that is in opposition to the more conservative Tory Party.
<b>Port Said</b>	It is an Egyptian shipping port on the Suez Canal which was a very important British shipping territory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
<b>Pusillanimous</b>	A person who lacks courage or determination.
<b>Sweet stall</b>	It refers to a small shop that sells candy and other confectionaries.
<b>Welsh</b>	A Welsh is a person from the country of Wales, often denoting a working class background.

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## 11.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Q.1 Answer the following questions.

1. Examine how the post-World War II British culture is reflected in the play “Look Back in Anger”.

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2. Consider the character of Jimmy Porter as an Angry Young Man.

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3. Discuss, in detail, the major themes in the play “Look Back in Anger”.

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4. “‘Look Back in Anger’ reflects the mood of anger and frustration in the post-war, younger generation”. Comment

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5. Show how the characters Jimmy, Cliff, Alison and Helena are presented as each other’s foils in the play “Look Back in Anger.”

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6. Analyse critically the plot of the play “Look Back in Anger”.

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- 10) Jimmy considers himself superior to Alison and Helena because \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) he is more knowledgeable  
 (b) he was introduced to suffering at a tender age  
 (c) he owns a sweet shop  
 (d) he participated in war
- 11) Where did Alison's father live and work before retiring to England?
- (a) Germany (b) France  
 (c) Thailand (d) India
- 12) Jimmy calls Alison's father a/an \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Victorian (b) Elizabethan  
 (c) Edwardian (d) Puritan
- 13) Jimmy loses his childhood innocence when he witnesses \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) the painful death of his father (b) people die of hunger  
 (c) a horrible accident (d) his house collapse
- 14) Jimmy laments about \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) lack of facilities in the house  
 (b) the changing weather  
 (c) the way people dress  
 (d) no worth causes to die for
- 15) What is the root cause of Jimmy's anger?
- (a) His not getting education  
 (b) His inability to run successful business  
 (c) Not having loving people in life  
 (d) His experience of suffering and loneliness in his childhood

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## 11.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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- Taylor, John Russell (ed.) *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger: A Selection of Critical Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1968. Print.
- Choudhuri, A. D. *Contemporary British Drama: An Outsider's View*. New Delhi: Arnold–Heinemann, 1976. Print.
- Brown, John Russell Ed. *Modern British Dramatists: New Perspectives*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984. Print.
- Stephen, Martin *English Literature*. New York: Pearson Education Limited, 1986. Print.
- Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Burgess, Anthony. *English Literature: A Survey for Students*. London: Longman, 1974. Print.

❖ **Answers:**

Q.2 Choose the correct option and answer the following:

1.	<b>c</b>	9.	<b>c</b>
2.	<b>b</b>	10.	<b>b</b>
3.	<b>a</b>	11.	<b>d</b>
4.	<b>d</b>	12.	<b>c</b>
5.	<b>c</b>	13.	<b>a</b>
6.	<b>d</b>	14.	<b>d</b>
7.	<b>a</b>	15.	<b>d</b>
8.	<b>c</b>		