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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERPRETATIONS OF REALISM IN TWENTIETH CENTURY DRAMA IN CONTEXT OF “JOHN OSBOURNE’S -LOOK BACK IN ANGER”, “HAROLD PINTER’S- THE BIRTHDAY PARTY” AND “ARNOLD WESKER’S- CHICKEN SOUP WITH BARLEY”

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Abstract

This paper is written to interpret study of realism in twentieth century British drama. This period succeeded the middle ages. The modern era is closely associated with the development of individualism, capitalism, realism, urbanization. Radical changes in many areas of human endeavors, scientific discoveries such as the Theory of Relativity and quantum physics drastically changed the world view of scientists causing them to realize that the universe was fantastically more complex than previously believed and dashing the hopes at the end of the 19th century that the last few details of scientific knowledge were about to be filled in. The brutal war and other problems emerged in the era that led to many reactions against modern development. This work depicts the true sense of realism in context of three plays “Look back in anger”, “The Birthday party”, and “chicken soup with barley”

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Introduction:-

It is noticed that twentieth century writer John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker are the social playwrights not in the sense that they show working class lives or cry out for social betterment, but in the sense that they comment seriously we live in to understand the movement of realism of each plays of these writers are looked beyond. Osborne, pinter and wesker had their first London production in their twenties usually by twenty four or by twenty five. Pinter and Osborne was both actor before they turned to be dramatists. All the three dramatists have done work for television, radio and films but returned to theatre again and again. Arnold Wesker became a dramatist after numerous jobs- much of the time he was pastry cook but since writing plays he became the administrative head and chief fund raiser and propagandist.

Twentieth century saw many social, political, and religious changes because of world war II. These social, political, economical and religious changes after world war brought insecurity, temper, frustration in youth. Twentieth century writers collected all the points together and created an integrated picture of Britain in their plays. Realism in twentieth century plays in context of “look back in anger”, “the birthday party” and “chicken soup with barley” can be interpreted under category

Theme:-

John Osborne’s play “look back in anger” is based on the psychology of modern romantic young man who behind all his toughness and rudeness is perpetually building idealized images of people and things which they are unable to

live up to which then turn to bitterness within him. His situation is made worst by the fact that in the present day world there is no cause to which he can give himself whole heartedly. No centre on which he can concentrate his adolescent dreams.

Harold pinter's birthday party's full of disjointed information that defies efforts to distinguish between reality and illusion. The theme of the play is absurd which the entire century was suffering from. For example despite the presentation of personal information on Stanley and his persecutors, who or what they really are remains a mystery. Though Goldberg provided all sorts of information about his background but he offered clues as to why he has intruded upon stanley's life. The play is a neurotic study of the pressure towards conformity brought to bear on a second rate young artist, who was opted out of material success and responsibility.

Arnold wesker's chicken soup with barley is based on the exploration and challenges of socialist ideologies, as the family theatre with domestic settings and traditional, naturalistic form. The theme of the play is political apathy, disenfranchisement and familiar disintegration. The play highlights the importance both of human faith and political ambition.

In these three plays the theme is obscure, politically and psychologically rude and tough. All the three plays are based on the failure in the lives of people whether it is failure of marriage of jimmy Porter or it failure of Stanley as a second grade artist or failure of social ideologies of Khan family.

Setting:-

In look back in anger the action of the play takes place in time in one bedroom flat in Engilsh midlands. Jimmy was reading a newspaper making a lot of fuss. This flat is shed by jimmy and Alison (husband and wife) with cliff (friend of Jimmy). The furniture is simple and rather old, a double bed, dressing table, book shelves, chest of drawers, dinnig table and three chairs, two shabby leather arm chairs. The drab setting of the play emphasizes the contrast between the idealistic jimmy and the dull reality of the world surrounding him.

In "the birthday party" the action of the play takes place in single setting, the living, dinning room of a seaside boarding house somewhere on the coast of England. Its anonymity contributes to a sense of place as symbol, especially in allegorical interpretation of the play. Although door permit characters to enter and exit the room, but the settings suggests that room is isolated from the world outside. The walls separating the rooms from the kitchen has hatch allowing characters in the kitchen to peer into the room like jailors peering into a prison cell. There are windows also that permit characters to see into the room but they never gave glimpse of what lies beyond.

In "chicken soup with barley" the action takes place in the basement of khan's house in east end of London. The room is warm and lived in a fire is burning. There are doors at the back and left of the room. The windows are also there which are left open to look up to the street. In every scene there is a description of kitchen. People coming in and going out of kitchen has special reference in terms of their life. In wesker's play every character's life is confused and demand change. The fire burning in the room signifies the agitation and fire in the heart of people.

Overall the setting of the plays is east England and the environment in which the action of the play takes place has special significance in terms of realism of twentieth century. In every play there is someone coming from outside because of whom the problem begins, symbolizes that the outer war disturbed the lives of people in England. The setting of the plays is the serious comment on the lives of people living in microcosmic world.

Character Portrayal of the Protagonist:-

In the play look back in anger the character portrayal of protagonist is undoubtedly _concerned with world of twentieth century jimmy porter who has been regarded as a hero of the play has been described as a tall, thin, young man about twenty five with disturbing mixture of sincerity and malice. Jimmy has been regarded as a spokesman of the post war generation in Britain. Jimmy's character is sketched in accordance with the young people in Britain suffering from the disappointment of the hopes which they cherished and nursed in the years following the end of world war II. Jimmy's long speeches gave the expression of frustration.

In "the Birthday party" petey's wife Meg boles is a protagonist. She is a good natured woman in her sixties. She lacks in only offspring of her own thus she fills the charm in her life by turning the bole's boarding house tenant

Stanley-webber into a child of her own. At the same time Meg flirts with Stanley. The mother-son, man-woman relationships are rapidly sketched in one movement by this ambiguity.

In “chicken soup with barley” mother sarah khan is the protagonist, her perspective drives play and its political debate. sarah is sketched in a way that she provides warmth and chicken soup nourishment to her comrades, always looking after the family. She is a small, fiery woman aged thirty seven jewish and of European origin. her movement in the entire play indicates great energy and vitality. Towards the end of the play sarah retained much other energy but showed signs of age and her troubles.

All the three protagonist presented the general mood of the people in Britain in twentieth century. This genre was of frustration, disillusionment, cynicism, rebelliousness and even despair. Each protagonist whether he is jimmy porter or Meg boles or sarah khan reflected ambiguity in their character. At one moment they were hard then in another they were tender. Their change or shapes in character reflected the actual mental imbalance of the post war youth Britain. Our reactions depend on what we think in the present day conditions of life to be. If we feel optimistic about the future then these protagonist lost their relevance, but if we in our mood hopeless and disillusioned then theses characters will find and echo in our bosoms.

Cruelty and Violence:-

In the twentieth century plays there is a common theme of cruelty and violence not only physical but temporal. Even in look back in anger, the birthday party, and chicken soup with barley shared this nature of violence in the story.

In Look back in anger every speech of jimmy porter is violent. He reflected his violence and cruelty towards every man and everything of the society. This state of dissatisfaction brought kind of insensitiveness in his behaviour. when he got to know about Alison’s pregnancy he was not happy, on the contrary his reaction is that of anger. Jimmy’s image of angry young man who is keenly the dissatisfied with life in general and who is unable to reconcile himself to so the environment and to the people around him throughout the play made him violent, outrageous, insensitive and cruel.

In “the birthday party” Stanley however does not respond but he is consistently rude, and one terrifying cruel scene is which he brain washes Meg into believing that they have come to cart her away in a wheel barrow. In this play the game of blind man’s buff is transformed into a maniacal witch hunt with an attempted murder punctuated in the darkness by the staccato beating of a toy drum.

In chicken soup with barley if we talk about cruelty than in words of Arnold wesker “my people are not caricatures and though the picture I have drawn of them is a harsh one, yet still my tone is not of disgust” to an extent it is true that his characters are not cruel but if we say violent then it will not be wrong because that was the era of casualties, class distinctions, and middle class morality. there was an agitation to dismantle British empire by voting in labor government. This violence is reflected in the voice of Ronnie, Monty Bhatt, Dave Simmonds, prince silver(the commandes).

Over all the violence and cruelty which took the place in literature of twentieth century were actually the agitation, frustration, insensitiveness and violence of people especially youth that belonged to that age. Young people were though highly educated but because of political ups and downs led them nowhere hence brought rebellious attitude in them. Also the middle class people were victim of this political, social and religious change.

Denouement (Culmination):-

In look back in anger the play ends with a major surprise highly sentimental reconciliation between jimmy and Alison. They revived an old game they used to play, pretending to be bears and squirrels and ultimately we the readers are left to assume that they lived happily or not even after.

Theatrically a peaking the birthday party is absorbing and witty. The end of this very absurd if interpreted as a reader because all through the play the identification of Goldberg and Mc. Cann is not disclosed though few clues are given but they are inapt and towards the end with monty they took Stanley in car. It Is again left to readers to decide or keep interpreting about what happened to Stanley? Who actually were Goldberg and Mc.cann, did they took Stanley to asylum? Questions keep arriving in the readers mind according to the perception.

In chicken soup with barley the play ends with the monologue of Sarah Khan in which she concludes "if you don't care, you die." Which is again left for readers and the story is continued in the other two parts of this trilogy roots and I am talking about Jerusalem.

All the three plays have an open ending which means readers are free to decide, to interpret, to understand the complexities and inner meaning of the story. They are not bound to grasp the meaning or not dominated by the dramatists to perceive their thinking. The end of these plays is ambiguous confronted with real suffering and degradations. All the possibilities are left open for the readers. These plays remind us of what our rebel moralists are apt to be like and the strange mingling of sensitivity and cruelty, insight and willfulness, idealism and cynicism which can make life terrible for those who know them and yet offers rewards as well.

Conclusion:-

These three English dramatists John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker of twentieth century have dominated the era with their realistic style of writing. John Osborne who originated the new movement and remained its most showy figure is unquestionably a born dramatist and his vocabulary of invectives is simply stunning. Osborne has his unruly in all his works but look back in anger became the period piece and social document of twentieth century.

Harold Pinter's naturalness had led critics to class him with the social realist among the new wave of British playwrights. The affinity of his work with his group of playwrights is very superficial one. Pinter is not realist in that sense, though he is not concerned with social question or political cause but he is concerned with communicating a sense of being Pinter. He communicates the mystery, the problematic nature of man's situation in the world and contemporary society.

Arnold Wesker is a writer who seems to exaggerate all its worst faults. His plays are good deals, more complicated and hammer on irresponsible impulse of social and political problems. He uncorks a theme which is both convincing and deeply felt. But towards the end of this research presentation one thing can be said that there are light stories with comic touches and heavy stories that bring us closed to tears but all these works of realistic fiction are designed to enlarge our sympathies and our understanding through the analysis of this text, it could be concluded that end of realism is compassion.

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