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THE FORMATION AND NATURE OF NEUROTIC TRENDS IN MODERN MAN

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ABSTRACT

In the previous chapter "The Theatre of Society", the focus was on the burning issues of Osborne's period like the individual and society, class-conflicts, conflicting ideologies, social prejudices, the impact of Government policies, war and human suffering in general. But in those plays one basic theme emerges and that is the lonely individual who is deprived of the freedom to realize his own 'ideal', and 'self'. The tragic hero was the victim of his social and family inheritance which mainly determined his 'action' on the stage and accounts for his suffering.



KEY WORDS: Formation and Nature of Neurotic Trends , Theatre of Society'.

INTRODUCTION

Thus the main causes of his suffering lie outside the 'self' of the character. In other words it is the sick social order and its inherent evil which is the real villain in those plays. The characters were made to suffer on account of their perversion and degeneration brought by the imperfect social order which they belonged to. Further the element of anger which was the mood of the plays of the first group. But gradually the frustrated outbursts of the 'angry young man' boiling with resentment against an outmoded social system have been replaced by the bickering of prosperous, privileged individuals living in fastidious isolation from the masses. As Anderson noticed it "We must as always, beware of reading autobiographical material into the utterances of a dramatist's characters, but there can be little doubt that, as Osborne himself has climbed up the social scale, his characters have traveled with him, reflecting his new circumstances and surroundings and to some extent his changed opinions. As the social conscience diminishes, so the sense of 'play', or of freedom to explore opinions, ideas and characters without any sense of duty or obligation other than to his talents, has been enlarged"(1). The enlargement resulted in the portrayal of characters from different spheres of society and the plays which can be grouped under this category are - "Inadmissible Evidence" (1964), "A Patriot for Me" (1965)(2), "A Bond Honoured" (1966)(3); "Time Present" (1968)(4); and "Hedda Gabler" (1972)(5). The major causes for the suffering of the protagonists in these plays are sharply distinguished from the heroes of the early group of plays.

The neurotic tragedies are not melodramas nor "slices of life" - because each of its protagonists is partly responsible for his own destruction and partly a victim of society. In melodrama the assumption is that man is totally responsible for his actions and that there is a simple eye-for-an-eye justice in the universe which rules that he will be punished if he is wicked and rewarded if he is virtuous. In the

naturalistic drama the assumption is the opposite one - the man is the victim of forces utterly beyond his control -society. The lamentation of the tragedy of the present common men is that they are struck down not only by the villainy of society but also by their own mistakes, rooted in their own characters, in the inner realms of their mind. And it is an attempt on the part of the author to reveal this 'inner darkness' of the human soul for the 'vision' of modern man cannot see anything beyond that.

Thus the 'psychic' condition becomes predominant in the choices of men modern men under discussion. The 'inner disparity' of the common men denies them a satisfactory life outside and often becomes the fundamental cause in shaping their ultimate destiny. Nevertheless, the suffering or solitude results from the interaction of the private guilt of the character and the hostile conditions of the public life in which they are planted. But before we actually enter into the examination of the 'intra-psychic' struggle, we shall see how far the living conditions of modern man could be responsible in deciding his present state.

The history of social evolution shows that consequent upon incessant advancement in civilization, culture has always been under constant strain to adjust and cope with the latest conditions of life, and hence the 'cultural-lag'. The technological sociological and psychological discoveries highlighted the incompatibility of the new civilization and the old culture. One by one all cultural values stood discarded necessitating a cultural reorientation of an almost radical nature. But though the old culture has been discarded, the new one is yet to be born. Consequently modern man's society has become one-dimensional, a civilization without culture. Then it should not be a wonder that modern man has been feeling alienated, sickly, scared of the future and, therefore, neurotic. Spiritually he is not capable of faith in anything because it is a 'godless universe'; morally and emotionally he is an outsider, alienated and rootless. And herein lies the root cause of all neurosis. Fearful of future, modern man is suffering from a nightmarish anxiety. In order to protect this basic anxiety he uses various devices which we call the symptoms of neurosis. The more unbearable the anxiety, the more through the protective means have to be. Karen Horney believes that there are in our culture four principal ways in which a person tries to protect himself against the basic anxiety: affection, submissiveness, power and withdrawal (1). And this is how an inner disparity arises between his basic need and the protective measures he adopts which ultimately give rise to "irreconcilable conflicts in modern man". It must be noted that the protective measures are prompted not by a wish to satisfy a desire for pleasure or happiness, but by a need for reassurance which is lacking in the modern world and consequently in the irreconcilable conflicts. In this inner - conflicting stage of mind the common man becomes passive in action and meekly surrenders to the pressures of social conditions – A choice without any logic behind it.

The Thoughts of Adler and Freud, and findings of the 'Neo-Freudians', like Karen Horney and Erich Fromm form the basis to the understanding of Neurosis. These followers too have turned to humanities for insights to be applied in their clinics. However, Freud has been the first to point out the driving forces in a neurotic which are compulsive. He regarded these drives as instinctual in nature, aimed at satisfaction and intolerant of frustration. Consequently he believed that they were not confined to any individual neurotic but operated in all human beings. Freud's pessimism as regards neurosis and the treatment arose from the depths of his disbelief in human goodness and human growth. Man, he postulated, is doomed to suffer or destroy. Freud saw man as the victim of animal drives which at best could be sublimated to constructive ends.

Had this been the case, Horney would have nothing to say on the contemporary society. She is not pessimistic like Freud. She never lost her faith in the graceful existence of man and all her struggle and efforts through her theories are directed towards one thing : to bring back the lost dignity of man. This in no way sounds like the pessimism of Freud. That is why we have earlier noted that the 'Neo-Freudians' have a positive thinking towards life. Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, the prominent figures in this group, though they revere and use Freud's insights and techniques, see man as a free and dignified being capable of creating his own destiny. Horney, after having realized the significance of social factors in psychoanalysis (during her association with Erich Fromm), reacted against Freud's theory. She feels that "neuroses are brought about by cultural factors - which more specifically meant that neuroses are generated by disturbances in human relationships"(2). Horney sees man as capable of creating his own destiny. Later, she

proceeds to explain the compulsive drives that are specifically neurotic - "... They are born of feelings of isolation, helplessness, fear and hostility, and represent ways of coping with world despite these feelings. Their aim is primarily not at satisfaction but at safety; their compulsive character is due to the anxiety lurking behind them"(3). Two of these drives are neurotic cravings for 'affection' and for 'power'. The work of Neo-Freudians, the most effective school of modern psychology, both reflects and illuminates the pattern of human behaviour which Osborne presents from his own observation and experience. If Horney's theories seem more convincing than those of Freud, her analysis of the neurotic personality in modern times and her accounting for the condition of such neurosis also is very much in keeping with the vision of modern playwrights. Both the artist and the specialist believe in man's progress towards an ever increasing perfection but at the same time they hold the present living conditions as responsible for the decline and downfall of our culture. Both of them point out the breakdown of human relationships, loss of faith and even the meaninglessness of life as the root causes for such conditions. When the dramatists carry the same situation into their plays, and the characters are staged against this background, we do not fail to observe the same sense of isolation, helplessness, fear and hostility lurking beneath their action. Still paradoxically they seem to have been driven by an irresistible passion to live, a will to live. But what is celebrated is waste, incompleteness, frustration - a struggle with non-existent obstacles. It is a 'soul-stifling' struggle for survival, in an insecure world. Their compulsive character, as Horney said, is due to the anxiety lurking behind them. Their passions are not instinctual as Freud said but culturally determined.

In fact, the contradictions embedded in our culture are precisely the conflicts which the neurotic struggles to reconcile. They are his tendencies towards aggressiveness and his tendencies towards submission; his excessive demands and his fear of never getting anything; his striving towards self-aggrandizement and his feeling of personal helplessness. And the difference from the normal is only quantitative. While the normal is able to cope with the difficulties without damage to his personality, in the neurotic all conflicts are intensified to a degree that makes any satisfactory solution impossible.

Reviewing all these considerations, let us try to examine the nature of neurosis. Even though a well-rounded definition is not given, we can come to an understanding of neurosis as Horney describes it : "A neurosis is a psychic disturbance brought about by fears and defences against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies" (4). Conflicts born of incompatible attitudes constitute the core of neurosis, the dynamic centre from which neurosis emanates. And the characters of this type attempt to solve these conflicts or, more precisely, to dispose them off by following two principal ways. One of these consists in repressing certain aspects of the force; the other is to put such a distance between oneself and one's fellows that the conflicts are set out of operation. Both processes induce a feeling of unity that permits the individual to function, even at considerable cost to himself. A further attempt to be described here is the creation of an image of what the character believes himself to be, or of what, at the time, he feels he can or ought to be. Usually unconscious, this idealized image is always in large degree removed from reality, though the influence it exerts on the person's life is very real indeed. Now if the focus is laid on the realistic self, which by comparison with the idealized image is highly despicable, self derogatory criticism is in the foreground. Since the picture of the self that results from such disparagement is just as far removed from reality as is the idealized image, it could appropriately be called as the despised image. If, finally, the focus is upon the discrepancy between the idealized image and the actual self, then all the character is aware of and all we can observe in his action is his incessant attempts to bridge the gap and whip himself into perfection. In this event he keeps reiterating the word 'should' with a considerable frequency. More evidently, if we observe, he keeps telling us what he should have felt, thought, done. He is at bottom as convinced of his projections as the naively 'narcissistic' person is, and betrays it by the belief that he actually could be perfect if only he were more strict with himself, more controlled, more alert and more circumspect. As such, these neurotic characters do not feel weak or turn depressed in a vacuum, but they think they are in a world of people with enemies ready to humiliate, enslave and defeat them. They must, therefore, constantly measure and compare themselves with others, not for reasons of vanity or caprice but by bitter necessity. And since at bottom they feel weak and contemptible - as we discuss them in

the following pages -they must search for something that will make them feel better, more worthy than others. Whether it takes the form of feeling more saintly or more ruthless, more loving or more cynical, they must in their own mind feel superior in some way regardless of any particular drive to excell. For the most part such a need contains elements of wanting to triumph over others, because, as Horney said it "... there is always vulnerability and a readiness to feel looked down on and humiliated. The need for vindicative triumph as an antidote to feeling humiliated may be acted upon or may exist mainly in the neurotic's mind"(5). The desire for success itself becomes a driving force in the neurotic need for superiority. In this manner, the competitive spirit of our modern civilization is not only conducive to fostering neuroses in general, through the disturbances in human relationships it creates, but it also specifically feeds this need for preeminence.

Thus the 'intra-psychic' struggle with the self, which is the actual conflict of all neurosis. Horney sees the struggle as arising from self-hatred- with the projection of an idealized image of the self as one of the neurotic solutions to self-hatred. In fact, this neurotic process is perfectly parallel to that very process of striving for the 'ideal' world which accounts for all the forward movements of the tragic heroes. The difference lies in the neurotic's need to direct all his energy against his hated 'self' rather than against the outside world. In contrast to authentic ideals, the idealized image of the neurotic has a static quality. It is not a goal towards whose attainment the neurotic strives but a fixed idea which he worships. Ideals have a dynamic quality; they arouse an incentive to approximate them. Whereas the idealized image is a decided hindrance to progress because it either denies shortcomings or merely condemns them. Genuine ideals make for humility, the idealized image for arrogance. These distinctions and the condition of a neurotic character can be more clear when we see the analysis of the 'self' by Horney.

Horney distinguished between three aspects of the self: The 'actual' or 'empirical' self; 'ideal self' and the 'real self'.

The 'actual self' is - "an all-inclusive term for everything that a person is at a given time: body and soul, healthy and neurotic"(6). The 'ideal self' is an unattainable ideal image, set up in response to "tyrantic shoulds" - the compulsions of the self-hater to deny what he is and to become what he thinks he should be. This kind of pride, to be sure, may drive him forward to success, but its basis is unreal, and the man may crumble when consciously or unconsciously he perceives the truth. Having placed himself on a pedestal, he cannot tolerate his actual self and starts to rage against it, to despise himself and to chafe under the yoke of his own unattainable demands upon himself. He wavers than between self-adorations and self-contempt, between his idealized image and his despised image with no solid middle ground to fall back on. But ultimately, the shame of his inevitable failure to achieve his 'idealized image' may cause him wilfully to punish or destroy himself or seek asylum in apathy. The third and most vital of the selves is the 'real self' which is not conceptualized as an image, but felt. In Horney's words: it is "that alive, unique, personal centre of our selves; the only part than can, and wants to, grow" (7). It is from this 'self' that the neurotic has become estranged -or alienated - by his self-hatred, and which he has deserted in pursuit of false or idealized images. The effort of the real self to assert itself against the whole 'pride system' (struggle of the neurotic between conflicting tendencies), is what Horney considers as the "central neurotic conflict".

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