

**SOCIAL PURPOSE AND VISION OF ASIF CURRIUMBHOY IN
*INQUILAB AND THORNS ON A CANVAS***

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Abstract

Rightly hailed as the India's first authentic voice in theatre, Asif Curriumbhoy pioneered the drama of serious realism. His plays are microcosm of Indian life with all its predilections, delusion, fantasies and capacity to live in past. He highlights the dehumanizing aspects of Colonialism by focusing on the influence of capitalism in all walks of post Independent Indian life in his plays. The present paper aimed at the representation of Asif Currimbhoy's Social purpose and Vision in Inquilab and Thorns on a Canvas and consequent rendering of complexities of socio-political issues related to India and neighboring countries in the cataclysmic period of decolonization. The present study is an attempt to analyses that man is not independent even in the postcolonial India. He is mentally colonized in the decolonized India. This colonization still manifests itself in the form of many social evil prevalent in the society i.e poverty, terrorism, corruption, favoritism and politics.

Keywords: *Theatre, Microcosm, Colonialism, Capitalism, Cataclysmic, Decolonization, Postcolonial, Poverty, Terrorism, Corruption, Favouritism.*

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Introduction:

Indian creative writers have occasionally attempted drama in English for nearly a century but seldom for actual stage production. In this connection Venogopal also comments:-

If Indian drama in English has had a significant breakthrough of late, only a handful of playwright can take the credit for it. Among these few, Asif Curriumbhoy most definitely figures prominently for sheer fecundity as a playwright he has no equals (262).

Asif curriumbhoy (1928-94) laid the foundation of modern India drama in 1950's. He emerges as a playwright of tremendous energy having thirty successful plays to his credit. He discovered theater to be the most appropriate medium for expressing his innermost thought. He gave more importance to the performing aspect of drama. He is rightly hailed as 'India's first authentic voice of theatre' (Bower 7). He chose to write for the theatre because he thought that this is the art from which allowed him most to show the complexity of the society he lived in. His plays are undertaken as a subject of study and staged in India and abroad. The dramatic group of American universities, repertory companies and the off Board way theatre had staged his plays.

Asif Currimbhoy belonged to a family of industrialist who were awarded the title of baronetcy by the British Government. His father was a liberal minded arm-chair intellectual and his mother was a veteran social worker and naturally this intellectual back ground might have creatively influenced his dramatic career. His early schooling at Bombay

High School and his later education at Wisconsin University helped him attain mastery in English language. As a student he was a great admirer of Shakespeare and witnessed a number of his dramatic production. This went a long way in shaping Asif as a 'Man of theatre.'

Asif Curriumbhay is definitely a distinguished playwright of social consciousness. He considered it his prime duty to employ his literary talent in exposing his national pride to conceal anything ugly in it. The incongruities and aberrations of society force him to articulate them in terms of literature. He has taken unusual themes from contemporary Indian society and woven them into plays of artistic excellence. Peter Narazeth also said 'Asif curriumbhoy interweaves the public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of decolonization' (18).

Social Realism is the specialty of curriumbhoy. He is one such playwright who can feel people: their hopes disappointment and disillusionments. The themes curriumbhoy has chosen are based on human suffering caused by a variety of factors such as social, political and cultural. He did not hark back to the past and visualize the departed glories of his land but tries his utmost to depict the post-Independent Indian society besetting with all kind of ills and evils.

The proposed paper aimed at the representation of Asif Curriumbhays's Social Purpose and Vision in *Inquilab* and *Thorns on a canvas* and his consequent rendering of complexities of socio-political issues related to India and neighboring countries in the cataclysmic period of decolonization.

Currimbhay is a dramatist of Indian Ethos. His plays are rooted in the contemporary postcolonial Indian situation. They certainly endorse the marxist symbiotic relationship between base and superstructure in Indian context. According to walter Meserve,

Currimbhoy's plays are concerned with the problem of man everywhere. He lends breath to this thought...even when he deals with India, he becomes the voice of Universal revolt and anguish screaming itself hoarse at the seemingly immovable societies around the world (Ix).

Inquilab (1970) means 'Revolution' is based on the Naxalbari uprising in 1971. It is non partisan and honest account of the violent event that overtook Calcutta in 1970. It exposes the degenerated rules of Indian masquerading as the archetypal of the people against the backdrop of Naxalite movement that has its roots in the unbridgeable rift between the rich and the poor. He has written *Inquilab* when he was staying in Calcutta. The main conflict in the play is the conflict between Ideologies i.e the Ideology of the constitutionalist and the Naxalites. Currimbhoy, put contrast between two opposite streams of view i.e Gandhism and Maosim.

Prof. Datta is a distinguished scholar of fifty with "a conservative air". A symbol of British traditionalist approach, he is an advocate of democracy, law, order, right to property and free economy, according to him, constitution is most important in a free country and nobody has the right to violate it. 'A free economy, socialistically oriented ownership of private property a fundamental right protected by law, enforced by law enforced by police, and if necessary, by the Army' (11).

He wanted that everything should be solved on the democratic pattern. Where as both his son Amar and Ahmed belonged to the Naxalite cadre. Shomik, a landless peasant also belonged to the Naxalite cadre. They object the cause of the poor. The exploitation and plight of the poor peasants touched the heart of these characters and turned them into moist revolutionaries. They are extremely dissatisfied with the prevailing condition such as hunger, injustice, corruption and stratified social structure. Amar even says, 'Look around, father, open your eyes: the poverty, the terrible poverty, people dying of hunger, father, look at the gap between rich and poor. It's growing, father, dangerously and unfairly'.

They feel that the laws in the constitutions patronize the inequality in the society directly or indirectly. The injustice and cruel treatment of the poor fill their heart with wrath and they get obsessed to redeem the poor from the clutches of the landlords. They are ready to adopt any strategy to bring change in the society. According to them the constitutional and democratic ways to achieve equality have badly failed. It is evident when Ahmed say, 'Parliamentary democracy is not an effective weapon for socialist revolution and armed struggle is inevitable... a resolution is backward countries can only be brought by peasant' (23).

He pleads for 'proletarian internationalism' and organizes the peasant union by exhorting them that greedy landlords never work but like parasite suck the blood of the poor. He gives importance to the Red Book of Mao and suggests them the strategy of protracted war and says, 'It is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area (26). Shomik served as vanguard in organizing the peasant union. He inspires the peasants with the following words:

You get what you deserve: disease hunger want and death, you give your children an even larger share. slavery deprivation and death. Every *bigha of zamin* you toil for you'll make them toil harder for the dammed bloody, greedy zamindar!(26).

Ultimately peasant along with vanguard revolted against Prof. Datta and Landlord Jain. They killed Prof. Datta and landlord Jain and put their naxal theory into practice. Thus the bourgeoisie capitalist i.e Prof. Datta and landlord Jain are targeted as class enemies. They are tried and executed in the 'Summary Justice' that is tantamount to attack on the judicial system that failed to provide justice to the common people. In the beginning Naxalites fight to get land to the landless but in the course of time it assumes political face and become the sheer war for 'Political powers.'

Throughout Inquilab, Curriumbhoy shows the effect of what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel in the communist manifesto call 'class consciousness.' In the play several characters grow aware of themselves oppressed class in relation to the powerful ruling

class and when this class consciousness becomes so burdensome. They see no other option but to revolt. Shomik is also one such character who stirs the men into communist frenzy. Thus Inquilab exposes the Naxalite movement when moist revolutionary were thirsty for the blood of so- called bourgeoisie. Procession strike, bombing and killing were the order of the day. Curriumbhoy also exposes the political degeneration in India through the character of Devdas, a minister in the state. He adopts a dual policy by not taking strict measure against the Naxalites because that would tantamount to losing the peasants vote nor does he want to alienate the landlord because they provide him with money and muscle power- both are essential ingredients of political power. His only motive is to retain power and position. He hardly bothers about the terrorism and violent grabbing of the land of rich landlords.

Thorns on a Canvas depicts the relationship between a upper class patron an some artist who belong to the lower strata of society where the distinction between classes have been perceptible in the pattern of bourgeoisie and proletariat relationship. It was partly a reaction against the banning of the *Doldrummers* and more directly a screaming protest against all established sponsored art.

In *Thorns on a Canvas* the patron of the academy where action is centered, is an old leader wearing Gandhian cap. He wanted to establish studio for her daughter Malti, trained from Ecole-de-beauxe art. He considers himself as the Badshah of the art world. Both father and daughter meet Yakub and Nafesa. Yakub is an unshaven young man who has a rose flower in his hand and Nafesa is also seated besides Yakub. She is shown as blowing soap bubbles.

Asif curriumbhoy is a deft cameraman who projects the reality follies and foibles of mankind, the character created by him are not just carbon copies but life like character reflecting the problems of contemporary India. At the very outset, it is mentioned that the affluent man of the establishment manage to seize the position of the state patron of the Academy. Due to the influence of her father Malt is able to have her own studio, '...a studio

all to myself... Galleries and exhibitions...Like irresistible fruit easily within reach' (17). But the entry of true artists like Yakub and Nafesa is even restricted in the Academy because of their marginalized position. This must be made fairly obvious to the audience that Malt's father want to organize the exhibition of Malt's painting and that work has been entrusted to Yakub. Yakub is playing the role of Malti's secretary. Bukay enters in the meantime. He is neat and tidy wearing horn rimmed glasses. He bears a distinct and strange resemblance to Yakub, the fact is that Bukay is no other man but Yakub, he is of course acted by Yakub, who does a quick artist stunt and returns as 'Bukay'.

Bukay, the working hand for the patron is the mirror image of Yakub and his name itself is the true 'inversion'. *Thorns on a Canvas* delineates how in Yakub, the poor artist has been suppressed and his artistic power has been channelized by the corrupt politician in another way therefore in Yakub, the true artist, and in Bukay, the hard working secretary, the slave like figure are controlled by the capitalist for his self-centered benefits. Marks also proclaim that in bourgeoisie society, 'Capital is independent and has individuality while the living person is dependent and has no individuality' (534).

Under the influence of patron, Yakub changes a lot and get transformed into commercialized organizer from his earlier personality of an emotional and caring artist. K.R Srinivasa Iyenger in his book also says.

Father is the typical foresyte- Blimp his life in epic of self-seeking, his mind an echo, and his soul deadened and an utter slave to things. He would, if he could, re-make Yakub in his own image, and half succeeds in his attempt. His whole "gentle art of patronage" is directed towards turning Yakub the flame-pure artist into an efficient functionary adapt at manipulative organization, a resourceful factotum, a soulless machine. (17-18).

Thorns on a canvas depict the plight of an individual in a modern mechanized world, the vested interest behind the glittering façade all the pretence of the poor quality and self interest of the bourgeoisie behind such establishment. Marx in his book *On Art and*

literature also says, 'Capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production for example art and poetry' (14).

Their art is divorced from reality. It has no originality and become a boring and monotonous routine that offers no fascination to the spectator. That is why to Malti the artist of the Academy seems like robot, doing the same job over and over again. Nela, the agonized artists. She says 'sometimes I feel a puppet does... attached to string... Dancing to a time ... like the compulsory national anthem in schools to which we had to march, and I hated it so...' (17). The true artist in her has been suppressed and these Academies train people like her to produce only 'Artifact' but not the true artist. A true artist needs no training he/she is inborn genius. A true art is always the reflection of the society and it attracts everyone whether he is a saint or a sinner.

In the play, the academy of Art serves as a breeding ground of corruption suppression, humiliation and deprivation of the proletariat and the supremacy of the central over the peripherals in the system. The economic and social justice is deemed to the peripheral they are compelled to live in sub-human conditions. Dr. Asker also says,

Currimbhoy's socio-realistic plays offer the institution like the Academy of Art which serves as a device to execute the suppressive and oppressive policies of the ruling predatory politicians like the landless tribal peasant, old Dada, Shomik, the hungry farmer, the marginalized artists like Yakub, as subaltern or Dalits of the society, finally turn insurgents, waging 'Peoples war' the Naxalism, resorting to violence and vandalism in order to overthrow 'the laws of dragnet' i.e, the prevalent social system that awakens the subalterns to the consciousness (Asker173).

The class issue manifest themselves in currimbhoy's play in the binary opposition of the ruler and the ruled, the colonizer and the colonized and the rich and the poor.

Though written or produced in sixties and seventies, Currimbhoy's social plays will continue to claim the significance and relevance irrespective of time and space for years to come. Viewed collectively his socio-realistic plays could possibly be looked upon as an

‘exciting national allegory’ of our times. Social realism of Asif Curriumbhoy’s plays stands as an antithesis to Nehru’s legendary narration of postcoloniality: ‘A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old age to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance . . .’ (Rushdie 116). Curriumbhoy brings to light that socio-political scenario in the post-colonial India testifies to the fact that the soul of nation, long suppressed, could find no articulation, no sigh of relief at all even after the end of British colonial era.

Like Arnold Wesker, Asif Curriumbhoy is a playwright with a social purpose. He not only seeks to present men and things as he sees them but offers an artistic assessment of them. He pioneered the drama of serious realism with uncompromising honesty and exposed it to new vistas of freedom with his use of variety of themes and techniques. He has attempted almost every genre - comedy, tragedy, farce, melodrama, history and fantasy. His plays spring from his ‘emotional reaction’ to what he sees around him.

Curriumbhoy emerges as a successful playwright of international stature with social purpose and vision in order to diagnose the multiplicity of maladies of the post independent Indian society. His Socio-realistic plays are a strong urge for the society, based on the constitutional culture of a truly democratic society that can be realized only through the dual adoption of the moral and the political values both in Individual and social life. Like Sartre, it seems Curriumbhoy ‘wishes to be read and judged in his own time. He has never written for the benefit of posterity’ (Sartre viii). He offers human society a ‘guilty conscience’ and motivates the humanity to tackle with the problems that threatens the nation and nationalism.

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