

The Paradigm of Post- Colonialism in Asif Currimbhoy's Selected Plays

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ABSTRACT

Currimbhoy raises his eyebrow at the dense concept of political ideologies, making an imminent attack on the fundamentals of humanity. Asif Currimbhoy in his plays had used “conflict” in a powerful way. The paper portrays the major issues with other problems like communalism as it is also led by other issues. Most of the themes and plots of Asif Currimbhoy have their sources in contemporary Indian problems. For instance, *Inquilab* deals with the Naxalite movement of Bengal. *The Refugee* was inspired by the arrival of the Bangladesh refugees in India. Currimbhoy explores universal human predicament through his social, moral, religious and political concerns in the plays. He is a voice of universal revolt and anguish. And it is compassion that unifies his plays. The paper depicts the problems faced by India due to the influx of 9 million refugees from East Pakistan.

Keywords: Naxalites, Problems, Poverty, Hunger, Political, Violence, Refugee, Human and Revolt

INTRODUCTION

Asif Currimbhoy (1928–1994) was an Indian playwright who wrote in English. He was among the very few Indian dramatists writing plays exclusively in English. Asif Currimbhoy is an outstanding name among the playwrights of the Post-Independence period. He was a great talented playwright who appeared on the literary horizon in the mid of 20th century. He wrote over thirty plays in several genres incorporating various creative elements. His achievement in the field of drama is both impressive and distinctive, and touched with the hallmark of significant achievement. Though several plays have been written in India dealing with a variety of social issues, there are very few who have written plays which can be stage produced.

Inquilab (1970) is one of the plays, which falls under the heading of Bengal Trilogy. It is a political drama. It deals with the Naxalite revolt that battered Bengal in the 1960s with West Dinajpur District in West Bengal as its background. Though Asif Currimbhoy is not a political man but he has taken this political theme only to represent his pains when he saw the terrorism created by the Naxalite. This play is a direct response to the Naxalite revolt in West Bengal where the agrarian communists opted for violence. The play explores in depth the Naxalite revolt, and is a no non-Pakistan and honest account of the violent events that overtook Calcutta in 1970. The playwright gives the setting of *Inquilab* in a classroom of a college of Calcutta. A majority of the college students are the supporters of Maoism. They scrawled on the wall many communist slogans.

There was also a red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle is drawn. Prof. Dutta is a famous professor. The people regard him as a distinguished scholar of law. But he has a conservative outlook. He has a British traditionalist approach. He does not like the indiscipline in the college. Moreover, he is worried about the “dying city” affected by processions, strikes and violence and is equally perturbed by the “revisionist” students questioning the holy institutions of learning in general, and his lesson on the freedom of thought and speech in particular. He reminds the days of country’s freedom when it was fought under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi with the weapons of truth and non-violence. It was a noble fight against the tyrant foreign government. But Naxalite violence is destroying everything. The younger son, Amar, who is also the student of the college, pleads for proletarian internationalism and wants his farther to ponder the problems of poverty, hunger, dirt and inflation. His eldest son Mr. Ahmed, on the other hand, belongs to the group of Naxalites and his friends think that “Parliamentary democracy is not an effective weapon for socialist revolution: an armed struggle is inevitable.... A revolution in backward countries can only be brought about by peasants: start organising peasants for militant action.

The students seem to have been tremendously influenced by revolutionary ideas of Ahmed. They make a strong protest against Prof. Dutta’s lecture because he was quoting a few articles from the Indian constitution and was favouring democratic system of India. They were against it and were feeling that the peasants were being exploited by the landlords.

They made a holocaust in the class and wanted “socialist revolution” by the Naxal shortcut. Thus the play is a social realism. Landlord Jain stands for the rich landlords who exploit the poor peasants. So Amar tells Mr. Jain that “Land to the landless, Collective farming. Community holdings, A distribution of surplus land to be done immediately”(*Inquilab* 45) Prof. Dutta comes under the Gandhian impact early, and now realises the relevance of Gandhian thought. He also wants socialism but with the philosophy of non-violence. The Naxalites do not appreciate him and Ahmed, an angry young man, wants to put his Naxalite theory. He and Shomik do not care for the members of their family and want to change the constitution through “cruelty and revolt”. The murder of landlord Jain is the result of it. Thus the dramatist indirectly suggests that some selfish politicians are root cause to create disharmony in the country for their political gains. So there should be a proper education to the students to channelize their power to bring up the society in a healthy way.

Inquilab while depicting the Naxalite struggle in Bengal, probes into the way violence breaks loose. The play focuses on Prof. Dutta who finds his students resorting to violence propounded by the Marxists. Dutta finds it impossible to continue persuading his students with his Gandhian ideals. His son Amar tries to convince him of the Marxist ideologies when he affirms –‘This is my passion, my poetry, my cause. 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. It’s true, the city is dying, your old beloved city of the privileged’ (*Currimbhoy* 13). The revolution takes its toll. Dutta is killed by his own elder son who is a Naxal extremist. Jain the landlord is another victim of violence. Finally Amar comes through the will of the majority... expressed through a free vote... I’ve found my path...and it will be the same as that of my father’ (*Inquilab* 80-1). The play ends symbolically with Ahmed confirming his stand of pursuing his Marxist revolution, while Prof. Dutta’s wife observing Ahmed, picks up healthy rice seeds from a tray and flings into fertile soil. The play pictures the futility of Marxist ideology bringing destruction through revolution.

His second play *The Refugee* is about Yassin. He is a young refugee from East Pakistan, and is in search of conscience in the confusing world of politic standards. Sen Gupta also comes in India as a refugee but in this country he works hard and soon becomes prosperous. The play brings out the morose and cold attitude of Sen Gupta towards the refugees. Sen Gupta invites Yassin to his house. He welcomes him because he is son of his childhood friend Rukaiys. Yassin is inspired by Mita who is an intelligent daughter of Sen Gupta. His son Ashok also inspires him to work for the liberation of the country. The play concludes when he goes to the cupboard and takes out the Mukti Fauj uniform and the rifle to join “Mukti Bahini” to liberate his country from the clutches of West Pakistan. *The Refugee* is full is full of conflicts and the main conflict is between Sen Gupta and his son, Ashok. The former is selfish, cold, and hypocritical and suffers from a crisis of conscience. The latter concerns himself very much with the refugee problem. There is a conflict in the mind of Yassin too. It is between action and inaction. All is not well with Mosin too. No doubt he is one of the most distinguished teachers, but he is at a toss to understand what he should do for the refugees. Thirdly, he has his own doubts about Pakistani Muslims. These conflicts have a coherence which emphasises the underlying idea of the play which is the concern of man for humanity. It is this conflict between idea and action-between conception and execution-which forms the central dialectic of the play.

The Refugee is a drama of social realism portraying the misery of the Bangladesh refugees in the 1970s. The story revolves around Yassin, a refugee from East Pakistan who gets involved in the liberation of his land joining Mukti Bahini. Coming to Bengal as a refugee Yassin is given shelter by Sengupta who was himself a refugee. Inspired by Sengupta’s children Mita and Ashok, Yassin takes up the challenge to liberate his people. Mita tells him.

Oh Yassin, touch me! Can’t you see I’m a human being? Can’t you see I’m real? Aren’t you moved? The refugees exist the same way. They’re alive. Only too real, they bring tears to my eyes, their suffering touches my heart. I can’t bear to leave them alone.

All of life draws me. The human condition, if all of us were to ... abstain the way you do, we’d be doing harm.... done through neglect (*The Refugee* 29).

Yassin cannot continue anymore to life in his comfort zone as he is emotionally determined to join the freedom struggle. “I almost said “nothing” through force of habit. But something has. The inevitable, Man really has little choice in life. He is often forced into a situation.... where there is no way out. A decision, an action.... gets destined, almost involuntarily (*The Refugee* 40).

The play is a superb analysis of the human predicament that the central characters face in the wake of the refugee crisis in Bengal. More than the refugee-rehabilitation programme, the play portrays the ideological conflict in the various characters who are caught up between the forces of nationalism and humanism. Finally Yassin lunges into action setting aside his non-committal attitude (577) Srinivasa Iyengar rendered the characters and actions of the play universal when he opined that the

“Refugee” is Yassin he is also Sengupta-he is any refugee, he is all refugees (Currimbhoy 1993 :vi). Reflecting on the refugee problem Currimbhoy himself stated, “A mistake committed at a particular point of time seem to have a cumulative effect, and one inevitably gets drawn into it all (Currimbhoy 71). The third play of the “*Bengal Trilogy*” is *Sonar Bangla*. The play gives a vivid account of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1971. Again in this play Asif Currimbhoy has taken the problem of refugees and the emergence of the nation of Bangladesh. The play opens with the slaughter that took place in East Pakistan on 25th March, 1971. Some intellectuals like Mr. Hussain, Prof. Aziz and a few students of Dacca University are unhappy because the West Pakistani troops are preparing a big “military build-up” The talks between the two leaders Yaha and Mujib have failed, and former appoints Tikka, the Martial Law administrator. He orders him to cleanse East Pakistan. Tikka is a cruel man and makes slaughter of the intellectuals and others in East Pakistan.

Sonar Bangla is built around both external and internal conflicts. External conflicts consist of those between: East & West Pakistan: Hindus and Muslims in East Pakistan; Bangali Muslims and guerillas. All these in the backdrop of the refugee crisis lead to indo-Pak war and the emergence of Bangladesh. The internal conflict is shown through characters like Hussain and Mujib. When the war breaks out Hussain articulates his fears, ‘But I was just thinking.... of the pain and scars that’re going to tear my Bangla once again. (Currimbhoy 87) Mujib when he returns to Bangladesh after his release from solitary confinement gives vent to his internal conflict in the final soliloquy, I never wept during all those months in solitary confinement. I never wept when they put me on trial. But I wept when I arrived back here and saw my wonderful Sonar Bangla’ (104). Currimbhoy himself was agonized by the war and wrote, the war is a tragedy. Can’t understand why others don’t see it the same way. The blood flows – the hysteria grips all opponents (Bowers 171)

The above graphic account of the slaughter of 1971 in East Pakistan is heart breaking. The play deals with the problems of the refugees. Their story is full of pains and problems. The only way to solve the problem is to raise the liberation force in East Bengal. “Mukti Bahini” is only the way to solve the problem of these deserted people. The Pak army is helpless before the Mukti Bahini and at last there is final war. The Pak army is defeated and the East Bengal gets liberation and becomes a free country with the new name of Bangladesh. Mujib, who has been sentenced to solitary confinement for nine long months at Minawali, is released. He weeps when he sees desolation, destruction and bloodshed in his *Sonar Bangla*. The play concludes with Hussain hearing the sound of Tagore’s “Golden Bengal”:

“My golden Bengal, You are my love!
Your heavens and your atmosphere
In my heart lay the flute.
In the month of Falgun your mango woods
With fragrant honey make me mad...” (Sonar Bangla 44)

The play is built on conflict. The main conflict is between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Then there is conflict between the Hindus and Muslims in East Pakistan resulting in the conflict between Bengali Muslims and the Bengali guerillas. The conflict reaches its pinnacle when the refugee problem ultimately results in the war between West Pakistan and India; there is also an internal conflict which is in Hussain’s mind as well as in the mind of Mujib. The dramatist through these internal and external conflicts gives the contemporary events in East Bengal. These three plays-*Inquilab*, *The Refugee* and *Sonar Bangla* are essentially topical. They touch the Universal appeal. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar observes about these plays in these words: “Asif Currimbhoy has been able to touch his situations, characters and actions with the balm of University.” (Iyengar, 201)

Inquilab, *The Refugee* and *Sonar Bangla*, clubbed together as Bengal trilogy, are set in the background of the Naxalite revolt that haunted West Bengal; the refugee problem faced by the state in the wake of unrest in the freedom struggle for Bangladesh; and the indo-Pak war. In these plays K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar finds that the playwright has scrutinized the basic human condition and portrayed the agonized expression of his social conscience (Currimbhoy 1993;iii). In *Inquilab* Currimbhoy affirms that the Naxal shortcut is no happy solution to any problem and that evil and hatred can be overcome only through love and understanding. In *The Refugee* he portrays refugees of all times in the struggle of Yassin. *Sonar Bangla* is symbolic representation of the eternal struggle of humanity against suppression and oppression (Reddy 52).

CONCLUSION

Currimbhoy plays reveal the every minute feature of post-colonialism. He reveals the pitiable circumstance of the contemporary society in his plays. His representation is visual artist as a subject of postcolonial identity and issues. He has presented the themes like violence, Refugee, Marxist problems and racial discrimination. His plays enhance the political

violence and tribal insurgency in which, the minority people or the naxalites stir the whole country for their demands. *Inquilab* portrays human nature with the zeal of representation of humanity over the fated system of injustice

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