Asif Currimbhoy As A Dramatist Of Public Events And Common Man’s Struggles - Both Out And Out Real And Contemporary In All Respects : An Appraisal

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An Abstract

This paper depicts the writing of Asif Currimbhoy who brings out the real and contemporary life of man and also the public events in his works. Most of his plays throw light upon some of the features like relationships, things happening around, bitter experience in life, mythological and philosophical inclinations, day-to-day life events which all inspired him to write all his plays. All his works are based upon real life incidents that happened around him, to his friends and family. This paper highlights and reveals how as a dramatist, he beautifully portrays the present life events and incidents, which act as mirror to the readers.

Key Words: Struggle, reality, relationship, events, social realism, public

The vast gamut of the imagination of the Indian playwrights shows that India has a long and glorious dramatic tradition of her own Indian drama can be traced back to the classical Sanskrit Drama, probably originated from the folk theatre of the country, as a sophisticated instrument to propagate religion and culture. After Kalidasa, dramatic theory of India came to be rather overlaid with multiple categories and meticulous rules. Music, dance and drama survived in varying forms and occasionally these local expressions achieved a striking individuality and distinction as in the Kirtaniya of Mithila, the Kathakali of Kerala, the Kuravanji of Tamil Nadu, the Yakshagamas of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and Ramalila of the North India.

With the impact of the Western civilization on our life from the nineteenth century onwards, our arts came to nourish a Renaissance and the art of drama too participated in this stir of new life in the nation. “A Russian musical director by name Labedoff is said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta towards the end of the 18th century” (Iyengar 4). English and Italian drama troupes toured the Bombay Presidency and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare’s plays, some of which got frequently translated or adapted, they were Othello, The Comedy of Errors, The Merchant of Venice and Hamlet. The late nineteenth century did witness some pioneering spirits boldly using the mother tongue as the medium for creative dramatic expressions. While T.P. Kailasam’s Tolu-Gatti shocked the Kannada stage into vigorous and fruitful activity, P.Sambanda Mudaliar effected the transition of the Tamil stage from the medieval to the modern. P.V.Rajamannar in Telugu, N.Krishnapillai in Malayalam and C.N.Annadurai in Tamil were among the many other prominent practitioners of drama.

Though Indian dramatic writing in English was not so rich in quantity, Indians essayed dramas in English for stage production. R.K.Singh rightly observes:
“While Indian fiction and poetry in English have drawn world-wide attention, Indian English drama has not been so fortunate” (P 161)
Tagore’s *Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice* and *Red Oleanders* are familiar to English audience. However, Sri Aurobindo’s *Persons the Deliverer* and *Vasavadutta* were written as original dramatic creations in English. Truly speaking Sri Aurobindo’s writings bear testimony to his profound knowledge of Eastern and Western thought and his plays are mostly constructed on the Elizabethen model. In all such plays as *Persons the Deliverer, Vasavadutta Rodogune, Viziers of Bassova* and *Eric, the King of Norway*, Sri Aurobindo indirectly projects the relation of the contemporary world by taking the audience to a distant past, thereby displaying a great exuberance of thought and language with a tremendous appeal to scholars, whereas the plays of Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam (1855-1946) popularly known as T.P.Kailasam, breathe out and out a deep reverence for our ancient culture and value of life. While the plays of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were chiefly known for their literary interests, such notable plays of Kailasam as *The Burden* (1933), *A Monologue* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933) and *The Purpose* (1944) exhibited a better stage sense and great success on the stage for he did his best in highlighting the greatness of the tragic heroes of the epics. Compared to the plays of the Pre-Independence phase, those published during the Post-Independence period were greatly successful in stage production. Plays like Das’s *Mira*, Pratap Sharma’s *A Touch of Brightness* and Asif Currimbhoy’s *The Hungry Ones* shows a greater influence of the west. They were found to be experimental in employing all new models and techniques including those of mini-plays.

To his credit, Asif Currimbhoy has twenty-nine published plays in which he does display a variety themes. He has attempted almost all genres – comedy, tragedy, farce, melodrama, history and fantasy. His play can even be grouped theme wise as Romantic plays, political plays, social plays and plays of Religion and Art. Even in his school days, he developed profoundly disturbing psychological nuances which later on became the moving spirit behind his plays and his school education exposed him to the English language and to some extent western culture. In an interview To commentary, he states his basic education thus:

“These were of course pre-Independence days and the colonial influence was felt full blast. It meant going through schools under the institutions that existed at that time for which I have my own sense of preparation and, perhaps, criticisms, the family environment was centered around English; we were literally brown sahib as – as they call it, with a sense of humour and a sense of frustration” (P 38)

Despite the fact that he studied in a Christian missionary school, he did not miss the grassroots of an indigenous culture. He made a thorough study of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. He also read *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* and his dramatic concerns are said to be drawn from some of these classics. His university and college life too has a bearing on his dramatic career. His college stays in the U.S.A. had such a deep psychological impact on him that “when he speaks of them, he sounds more enthusiastic” (Rao 3). As a student, he loved and admired Shakespeare, witnessed numerous dramatic productions and was quite alive to the various trends in drama in the U.S.A. This must have gone a long way in shaping him as “a man of the theatre”. Asif Currimbhoy is a keen observer of men and manners, for as a marketing executive in Burmah-shell, he toured throughout India and acquainted himself with different locales and various problems of the people. In an interview with Rajeinder Paul and Paul Jacob he says:

“The place had always been a considerable fascination for me and dialogues always appeared to me especially when they incorporated a feeling of diverse opinion. In other words, a conflict in theatre, conflict at every level – physical, mental, emotional – because from the time you really meet with other people, what is called human relationships, its striking sparks with each other that brings about a feel of life” (Paul, 25)

From this, it is understood that Asif is a keen observer of people and their expressions. It is also given to understand that he views conflict as the basis of life as well as the base of the theatre. All these influences have left, no doubt, unmistakable impress on the dramatic career of Asif Currimbhoy and he has taken unusual themes from contemporary Indian society and woven them into plays of artistic excellence. As Peter Nazareth rightly puts it, “Asif Currimbhoy interweaves the public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of decolonization” (P18). He himself says that his plays spring from his “emotional reaction” to what he sees around him:

“There is a sense of trigger – I think the trigger was life itself, of what I saw around, of how I reacted to it, in other words an emotional reaction” (Commentary 39).
Generally speaking, Asif’s plays are concerned with the problems of man everywhere. For instance, *The Miracle Seed* contrasts country people with townspeople only to show how the miracle seed offers some hope and encouragements for the future generation. Currimbhoy is rather undoubtedly a playwright with a social purpose, for he is attached towards social realism as a dramatic mode. He “explores point” (Reddy 103). His four significant social plays *Thorns on a Canvas, The Hungry Ones, The Miracle Seed* and *The Dissident MLA* show in a great measure their social realism and satire. *Thorns on a Canvas* is a affirmation of the artist’s faith in man and man’s creative work, while *The Hungry Ones* seeks to dramatize the great reality of hunger and love. *The Miracle Seed* is an eloquent affirmation of faith in the resurrection of life. While *The Dissident MLA* presents a sordid world of politicians. Asif’s Social plays spring from his belief that inspire of endless arson and hopelessness, there is scope for value like love, peace and understanding.

Asif Currimbhoy has done quite a commendable work by writing about the public and historical events such as the Indian take over of Goa, the Naxalite movement in Calcutta and the Pakistani War that gave birth to Bangladesh. While dramatists like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and T.P. Kailasam wrote plays that provided the audience with symbolic significance and lyrical excellence, Currimbhoy has succeeded in producing ‘actable’ plays. The credit of taking Indian English drama to worldwide attention goes to Asif Currimbhoy “who has created true drama by bringing life to the theatre and the theatre to life” (Reddy 35) and whose plays have been staged by dramatic groups of American Universities and Repertory companies. The University of Michigan staged his *Goa* in 1965 and The Theatre Company in Boston exhibited *The Hungry Ones* and the most powerful play of his, *The Doldrummers* was successfully staged at Actor’s Studios. Thus, among the modern Indian playwrights, none has the international reputation as Asif Currimbhoy whose plays have been approved with laud applause in foreign countries. “For western audience and students of modern Indian drama, Currimbhoy is a playwright of social purpose and, as Faubion Bowers once wrote, the authentic voice of India” (Walter 423).


Asif Currimbhoy was always inspired by the day-to-day life around him. While he working in Agra in 1958, he wrote *The Tourist Mecca* which deals with the tourists bound for Agra. It was during his stay in Agra that he faced some problems in his job and his inner tension found an expression in *The Clock*. He wrote *The Doldrummers* portraying the lives of the urban youth living in a shack on the fashionable Juhu Beach. He also delved deep into Indian mythology and Indian mythology in his plays. He wrote *The Dumb Dancer* and *OM*, the former being a psychological play with its theme from the Mahabharatha and the latter reflecting the playwright’s obsession with the fear of death. *Thorns on a Canvas* was written as a personal rebellion against the bitter experience he had in the banning of *The Doldrummers*. The second period of his literary career gave Asif a new thrust of seriousness. During this stage, he was grappled with the human condition and social conscience. In 1969 which was the Gandhi centenary year, he wrote *An Experiment with Truth* covering the whole life of Gandhi. During his stay in Calcutta, he witnessed the revolt of the Naxals and wrote *Inquilab* which deals with the Naxalite Movement. His tours in the tea gardens in the hill station of Darjeeling made him write *Darjeeling Tea* which depicts the lives of the planters. The influx of the refugees and the impact of the abysmal poverty and revolt within the city of Calcutta, made him write *The Refuge* while the plight of the rural society during the drought in Maharashtra in the seventies formed the background for *The Miracle Seed* and the riots in Gujarat resulting in the dissolution of the Assembly in 1974 provoked Currimbhoy to write *The Dissident MLA*.

As a realist, Currimbhoy does not hesitate at all to give a realistic account of the Bengal setting for the play *The Refugee*. This play brings out the morose and cold attitude of Mr. Sen Gupta towards the refugees. His description of the house of Sen Gupta and the refugees’ camp where the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity set in, is really picturesque:
“The refugee scene grows with early dawn or evening shadows like an ominous prehistoric beast’s death pangs. Groans and waits, Skeletoned men and sunken eyed babies sucking on to Shrivelled breasts. Maimed human beings reduced to dignity and essential life” (The Refugee 77).

In *The Refugee*, Currimbhoy has used an effective language adding much to the theatrical value of the play. The following passage may be cited as an example in point. When Cholera breaks out in the refugee camp; Mita says how the conscience of the world is roused:

“The conscience, The conscience. What a word, Oh my God, what a meaning. Don’t tell me it escaped us all along. The morality of it all. Here we are talking about politics and rescue and refugees and war and even taking sides. It’s not the lack of commitment that matters it is the lack of morality that does. And we must …. both aggressor and giver of shelter …. search for our own conscience” (The Refuge 29).

Currimbhoy’s *The Doldrummers* is a powerful and highly moving play, exploring human relationship. With a focus on the predicament of the sophisticated modern young men and women. The affairs of the ‘Big men’ with the ladies in the Juhu Beach, the weakness of the subordinates with their executives, the poverty and misery of the dwellers in the Juhu’ Beach etc., are rich in details from the contemporary society which are beautifully reflected here. Asif also attacks the modern youth and their purposelessness in life and ridicules the lack of courage and vigour of the modern youth.

Currimbhoy is always drawn towards the incidents, major or minor, taking place near him. His family background, education at reputed institutions both in India and abroad and his appointment as a company executive at various places – all helped him a lot to have materials for his dramatic creations. Above and more, Asif has an ability of putting what he experiences into excellent English. It is his power of portraying reality into words that took him to the world’s attention.

To conclude, it may be said that Asif Currimbhoy is a dramatist of public events presenting life as it is and his plays are nothing but a mirror reflecting the day-to-day life of ordinary people and their struggle. His themes are out and out real and contemporary events stirring the minds of both Indian and foreign audience.

Works Cited:
Building on the underlying premise that identity work and the experience of meaningfulness are theorized as a fluid/ever-changing process (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), we developed a dynamic model. The two main constituents of the model are identity work and meaningful entrepreneurial experiences and their corresponding themes. This research focuses on identity work and agency of university start-up managers. Prior research on university start-ups provides knowledge on university researchers' entrepreneurial traits and behaviour but there is little research on how managers with researcher backgrounds interpret their situation when working in between research and business. Refer to Figure 11-1. The more Jane uses good x, the less of that good there is for other people to use. Neither Jane nor anyone else can be prevented from using the good. Good x is an example of the type of good that belongs in a. Box A, which represents private goods. b. Box B, which represents common resources. c. Box C, which represents common resources. d. Box D, which represents public goods. c. Box C, which represents common resources. Refer to Figure 11-1.

His 'History of the English People' is an admirable representative of the modern historical spirit, which treats general social conditions as more important than mere external events; but as a narrative it vies in interest with the very different one of Macaulay. Very honorable mention should be made also of W. E. H. Lecky, who belongs to the conscientiously scientific historical school. As a dramatist of public affairs and events, he wants his plays to be almost a mirror for reflecting, day-to-day life of ordinary people and their struggles in life. His themes are real and contemporary events. The drought in Maharashtra led him to write The Miracle Seed (1973), the youth in Gujarat and the subsequent dissolution of the Legislative Assembly provided him with material for The Dissident MLA (1974) and his experience in Calcutta and Sympathetic attitude towards the platform dwellers inspired him to write his remarkable play. Asif Currimbhoy interweaves the public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of decolonization.