

The Representation of Humanity in Asif Currimbhoy's *Inquilab*

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, mankind has been progressing towards the advancement in the name of technology. At the hand of advancement and development, the elements of basic humanity are doomed under the hypocrisy in society. There is a need for the insurgence of humanity over inhumanity to save mankind. Every human being, in the interaction of self and society, tries to accommodate the soul for the best of human nature. If this is the element to be drawn for the artistic play, Asif Currimbhoy has the advantage in every manner to make use of the elemental psychic drama molded into an excellent play. The present play by Asif Currimbhoy, *Inquilab* portrays human nature with the zeal of representation of humanity over the doomed system of injustice caused in society. It tries to pave a way to bear the torch towards humanity over adversity of the human psyche in the name of feudalism. Finally, it also searches for the redressal of mechanisms in the human behavior, as the Naxalite way of life is not a short cut, nor a sole way out for many filthy problems of society and does not bring the wanted means of democracy.

Keywords: *representation, humanity, injustice, Naxalite, democracy.*

Introduction

The contemporary Indian drama in English has many noteworthy playwrights to its credit. Only a few writers have a keen eye for the dramatic artistry and technique to be proved onstage. Among all the Indian English playwrights, Asif Currimbhoy has been given a special identity for his varied interests in choosing themes. He is a playwright with no less than thirty plays with quick succession and experience to his credit. He has a particular interest in putting his credibility onto his canvas which is the most noteworthy aspect of Currimbhoy, and it is his intentional preoccupation with the socio-political events of the times in which he grew up together. Those were the hard times to the nation; the catastrophic disaster had arrived in the

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name of fateful partition by the advent of independence to India. It has really caused the profound problem of partition especially in Bengal and Punjab. The social, cultural and psychological damages which were caused by the occurrence of the Independence of India were the sole responsible for the disintegration of human values and the immediate failure of the spirit of ethics and national integration. Asif Currimbhoy has been very much influenced by the sudden failure of brotherhood which he has seen personally, and this aspect of social problems has touched the writer in the core, and it has served as the source material for most of his plays. The sudden thrust of violence has provoked him profoundly to react to the contemporary social problems and to reinvent his plays.

As a close follower of the social situation and contemporary life, Currimbhoy is deeply concerned with the inner world of human beings, their turmoil, upheavals in their family affairs and social environment. Drawn to human condition in life everywhere, Currimbhoy authored his plays with compassion and truth. More than anything else, he speaks for the man, and his plays represent his thought. Most of his themes are generated in conformance with the realities and social situations associated to the human condition. The second period of his literary career, which is ranging from the year 1968 to 1975, the author was so conscious in bringing his ideas into a new thrust of seriousness. When he stayed in Calcutta for some years on his official work and in the plays of his Calcutta period, he portrayed a special interest of the human predicament of anguish in the means of social conscience. Among all the plays, the plays of Calcutta period are very much concerned with the exploration of the certain human predicament in a realistic way. The characters are very selective, and they are placed in such a careful situation, and they are expected to convey certain views which are to be explored the views of Currimbhoy's own point of view. To put these words from his mouth: "...the essence of the theatre in my opinion is conflicts. To have conflict you have different point of view which come head on...This clash forms the most vibrant factor of the theatre itself...My approach to all my plays is that there is an essential conflict of attitudes." (Rajinder Paul)

Currimbhoy is a close follower of social situations, and he makes use of the particular conditions to stimulate his creative imagination. In the present play *Inquilab* (1970), Currimbhoy aims almost exclusively at the representation of contemporary life. It has been the playwright's search for identification of his own soul in the writings of his plays with concrete idealism of what he has deliberately seen in the society in and around him. The predominant part of the play tries to explore the idealism of the playwright in terms of his execution of the

theme towards the reality, which is most prevalent in the recent times. Prof. P. Bayapa Reddy critically analyses the play as follows:

Inquilab is essentially a play of social realism. Social realism is the acute awareness of the social forces that surround the individual, their power to influence the lives of men and women and the overall interaction of individual and society. (Bayapa, 35)

Social realism as a theatrical stylization is attractive to Currimbhoy because it provided material to his dramatic art and infused his work with the breath of life. It also allowed him to reflect on himself in terms of his view of life.

Inquilab is the representation of his thought in terms of humanity and explores in depth the aspect of humanity in the form of turbulent socio-political events that took place in Bengal especially in Calcutta in 1970. The Naxalites feel that the revolution alone can solve all the problems. The contradiction of ideas is personified in the form of Amar, who realizes in the end that the methods of the Naxals would not bring about any change and only the feelings of love, and compassion towards humanity will yield the desired change.

The play deals with the Naxalite revolt that shattered Bengal in the 1970s. The social disorder of the society made Currimbhoy to a painful thought. When the playwright was in Bengal for some short years as an executive on his official work, he happened to see the things which are very much depressing towards the restoration of faith he has in the humanity as a whole. At the times, Calcutta has been in such condition, where there was more suppression of humanity not only in the countryside but also in every nook and corner in the very great city it is called, Calcutta. He is in a dilemma to cope with the things that has just been witnessed outside and what he has really thought of the order of the day. It is the time when his ardent faith and composure towards the society is totally shaken by the reality outside. Commenting on the social conditions of Calcutta, Currimbhoy bemoans:

The proximity of bloodthirsty violence rent the air, and before you know it, it had pervaded the countryside, the classroom, the revolutionary, the intellectual, the deprived...and fear crept over the entire city...Indiscriminate killings followed, terrorist appeared under the guise of Maoist reform, and law and learning lay shattered...(Currimbhoy, iv)

The play explores in depth the aspect of humanism in the form of disordered socio-political events. It is a non-partisan and honest account of the violence that took place in Calcutta in 1970. The Naxalite revolt, the consequent violence, and the socio-political hostility are portrayed in the play in a more realistic way by the playwright. The play opens with the setting

in a classroom in one of the colleges in Calcutta. The classroom is not only filled with the students who are a little bit worried about the present-day education system and seem to be more aggressive but also scribbled on the four walls that are drawn with many communist slogans and a red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle. Here the classroom is not a mere form of representation of a traditional one, with the students filled with a deep urge to learn. The students in the classroom are completely out of thoughts towards their future and career. Datta, a distinguished Professor of Law, is about fifty years old with a conservative outlook. He is a man of thought, and he is with a British traditionalist approach. He is the representation of himself to the old colonial days when Calcutta and the Bengali aristocracy bore the stamp of the old British Capital with its cultural and political values. He is much worried about the present situation in Calcutta, about the ‘dying city’ affected by processions, strikes, and violence. He is also worried about the fact that the degeneration of the classrooms in the present situation may spoil the education system and the society as a whole. He is for the cause of the prevalence of social order in the society by all means of the democratic path. He passionately appeals to the students to understand the reflection over the past. He alarms over the present situation:

Let us not get carried away, young men. Difficult times, I admit. Calcutta, my Calcutta a ‘dying city’? Processions? Strikes? Gheraos? Violence? Bandhs? Breakdown of law-and order? Revolt? Naxal revolt, my friends? Slogans of Gandhi or Mao? Are there bombs in your head or brains, gentlemen: I hear...there are some amongst you...the tyranny of the minority I call it ...who questions these holy institutions of learning...(Currimbhoy, 14)

He recalls how he fought for the freedom of India and how it would be difficult to make people understand that non-violence is an active philosophy, which is applauded by many in the world. But the present generation of students in the classroom rejects his ideology which they really think it is rotten and not up to the means to prevail the justice in the society once again.

The trio presented in the play with the young blood, Ahmed, Amar, and Shomik are the representation of the violent Naxalite ideology. These young people always try to vanish the past with their zeal of doing something new to the present system for its restoration. The young men chose the way, and they become violent Naxalites to redress the miseries of the people dwell in the cities with urban chaos and the peasants in the countryside, who are exploited by the greedy landlords. In the wake of the exploitation of the landlords, there is a rule of hunger and starvation in the countryside. The youngsters are immediate impulse of the situation and

this moving poverty of the peasants has touched them and turned them into Maoist revolutionaries.

Amar, a student and the younger son of Professor Datta, is unlike his father in the wake of conservative outlook of the society. He wants the immediate change to be affected and he always pleads for the proletarian internationalism. He passionately wants his father to ponder over the problems of poverty, hunger, dirt and inflation prevailing everywhere in the society:

Look around, father, open your eyes: the poverty, the terrible poverty. People dying of hunger, father. Look at the gap between [the] rich and [the] poor. It's growing, father, dangerously...and unfairly. It's true, the city's dying. Your old beloved city of the privileged. Do you feel the stranglehold? The bustees growing, enveloping the city with the stench of faces and dirt. (Currimbhoy, 17)

Here, we find that Amar feels a warm sympathy for the victims of social injustice and especially for the poor peasants.

His struggle is against hunger, injustice, corruption, sin, and ugly stratified social structure, which is all filled with inhumanity. He is a man with a social cause, and he earnestly makes a passionate appeal, "We're drowning under Hooghly, silting up with doomed humanity. The processions will grow, like nightmares, death processions of the 10 million around the funeral pyre of the burning city." (Currimbhoy, 18) Amar is deeply pained because of a great proportion of the population is suffering from hunger, poverty, and social oppression. He is also worried, why the people around him, like his father Prof. Datta, are not even touched upon and concerned of the social problems in the society. He tries to get a new change out of the situation and he always wants it to be known by others like his father and other landlords.

Landlord Jain is a childhood friend of Professor Datta and his only daughter Suprea is to be engaged with Amar. When Suprea tells Amar that they have to think of their future, he does not care her words. He is the young man who does not want to be carried away by the name of love and his personal choice. He tells her that he has a serious mission in his life, which leaves no room for other things. His feelings for the poor are most appealing. He says to Suprea:

"I'm possessed, Suprea, don't you see! My heart and soul goes out to everything I see in life. The poor, the needy, the drown-trodden. I walk the streets of Calcutta and the hands of the beggar tear at my insides." (Currimbhoy, 25)

Amar is completely dedicated to and concerned with the poor. He considers their problems as his own problems. The deep feeling of humanity makes him to open his eyes towards the

problems of the millions, the poor and down-trodden. But Suprea wants her life with him, which is not simply meant for sacrifice, and it should not be lost and wasted too.

Ahmed, the elder son of Professor Datta, emerged as the guru of the Naxalites, who had disappeared earlier in the Mizo hills when he was a child. He holds the secret meetings with the students in their own classrooms. He believes that the revolutionary theory without revolutionary practice means nothing. Ahmed asks the students, everything that they learn there, must be put into practice outside. He thinks that Parliamentary democracy is not an effective weapon for the socialist revolution and an armed struggle is inevitable. He is always with a strong feeling that a revolution in backward countries can only be brought about by the common people. Ahmed is also a complete antipode to his father in terms of his views about the society. Shomik is the other character in the play he is also with same concern and spirit for the oppressed. He is a peasant himself and he knows well about the problems that are concerned with the countryside. He is “a leader who wants liberation through revolution. Basically a peasant, he decided to furrow the land with fierceness.” (Pushpa, 74) He is the firebrand among the villagers. He is also most rebellious and his commitment to the revolution is high. He strongly feels that his cause of liberation through revolt is the only cause that matters.

Shomik says to his wife, Sarala about his growing worry. He worries about, being a peasant in the fields of landlord Jain, he has to use his strength to furrow the ground, plant the seed, grow the food and finally, he has to give most of it to his landlord. Sarala simply rejects his idea as to be their leader and she cares for him, she wants him to protect his house not of others, bring safety for his own children and himself. But the great leader in him does not want to make to sit him idle. He says that the hunger that consumes him is not food; it is his self-respect and his thought of freedom. He strongly wants to take revenge. He argues fervently with his wife: “Do you know most of the peasants still live almost in a state of cruel slavery? I can speak for them. Ours is a common cause. I must show it.” (Currimbhoy, 34) Shomik also has a strong desire to take revenge for a common cause he believes in. He feels that the Naxalite leaders in the city believe in him and they really need his services. At a point of time, he strongly argues with Amar that there is nothing peaceful in the countryside too. Both Shomik and Amar are really concerned with the revolution and the common cause of humanity. One is concerned with the problems of the peasants in the countryside, and the other with the problems and situation of the city dwellers. Ahmed searches for the ultimate identity in the obsessive human ideals of the

future, the uncontrolled struggles of the peasants made him think for a broader definition of human life. He always fights for the poor, and he tries to give the ultimate freedom to poor from the clutches of the rich.

Ahmed, Amar and Shomik are disgusted with the cruelty of the landlords. They are seriously concerned with their revolution in the rural areas where they can find the problem of inhumanity. Amar tells them that the real unrest is there in the industrial complexes in the city. Amar sympathises with the city dwellers that need the concern of their problems. His involvement in the problems of people in the stratified social structure is undoubtedly executed by his real deeds.

Professor Datta disapproves of the violent struggle of the Naxals. In the classroom, when he is lecturing to the students, he expresses his unhappiness over the present day events at the holy institutions of learning which have strongholds of Naxalite activities. He is a student of Sir Asutosh, the former Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. He takes pride in quoting Article 31 Section (A) (I) and article 19 of the Indian Constitution. He believes in strongly that the constitutional democracy is quite capable of eradicating the social inequality. He disagrees with the Naxal view that the land of the rich should forcibly be grabbed. He thinks that the constitutional methods should be adopted to remove the social anomalies.

Here, Currimbhoy tries to depict the character of Professor Datta in a more conservative and idealistic manner. Under the Gandhian impact early, Professor Datta strongly believes that our constitution guarantees all the citizens the right to hold or dispose of private property, including land. Being Professor he is an authority on constitutional law, and thinks that the dignity of democratic methodology should be upheld while fighting for the poor peasants. That is why he robustly condemns the ways and violence of Naxalites. The students in the university are much worried about their ideas and they are quite fed up with their studies. When Professor Datta lectures the students, who are disillusioned with their studies, raise the slogans impatiently, saying 'Inquilab Zindabad.'

The students are very much attracted to the Naxalite revolution, the seeds that are sown in the universities the then. They are actively involved in the Naxalite revolution for the cause. They believe in that being a Naxal sympathizer is not being a Naxal anymore. A girl student feels herself whether she is an activist or a sympathizer, and finally she assures herself that both ways are right and both are for the same cause. She also thinks to overthrow the present rotten

system of oppression which is clear evident in the society. The students are now thrown themselves into the deep thoughts and ideology. The thought provoking ideas which are arisen among the students of the universities show that they are deeply moved and they are emotional towards the present rotten system of education. At the other hand, the policemen are also too much worried about the present type of situation worsening with the effect of the rebellion Naxals in the state. They also show the signs of irritation towards the violence done to the society by the Naxals.

The Naxals have a mission and they want to save the suffering humanity. Therefore, they stepped up their practicing of all terror and violence. They think that the leadership can only come from the intellectual few to stir up the masses into the revolution. The Naxals feel that the time is ripe, and they must actively be involved for the purpose. In the night, the inner sanctum meets with the peasants, and decides to proclaim a summary justice to the landlord Jain, who is already captured and tied in the center. Ahmed nominates Shomik as the prosecutor and Amar as the defense for the proclamation. Shomik accuses that Jain is guilty and to be punished. Amar pleads for the trial, and he feels that Shomik alone has nothing to do with it. He also pleads with the council not to be misled by Shomik's cleverness in this regard. Amar thinks that Shomik is from the privileged class, and he tries to show loyalty to his own people. But Shomik feels that for them, the hatred burns for generations. Shomik strongly suggests that Jain must be judged as a class enemy and not an individual and that the Constitutional change did them no good at all. They are humiliated and deprived of the will to oppose. Amar asks Jain to plead guilty to seek his release. However, Jain declines to plead guilty, as he strongly condemns their act of punishing him, and he feels that he does not do anything wrong.

After the holocaust of the explosion of the bomb at the university building, Amar meets Suprea, both of whom have been searching for each other. After witnessing the incident, Suprea is totally distraught and disillusioned. After witnessing the dead and injured, which was happened in the broad daylight just next to their college building, she is upset and she feels that it is terrible. Suprea, comes to Amar's arms with her head protected by his chest, says:

“Suprea: I'm worried, Amar, I'm worried sick. I want you to protect me like this...always. Amar : It will pass. It will pass.

Suprea: Oh you should have seen them, lying in the pool of blood, Moaning with pain...

Amar : ...the risks of being a policeman...

Suprea: What are you saying? Amar...they're human beings...” (Currimbhoy, 58)

Suprea is totally worried and moved deeply with the incident. A spirit of humanism is marked through the dialogues of Suprea. She feels that it is not fair because it is inhuman, and the innocent ones are dying whether they are police or public. Amar's composure is shaken for the first time. He is involved in it deeply for the sake of the cause of humanity, but he has seen it in a different way as it is out of his hands now. He always feels that he is for the sake of justice in the means of aggressive protests for the restoration of the right kind of order in society. But the things, which go wrong, have made him think that the cause which he practices for justice is going to be in the wrong direction. Suprea has alarmed his inner thoughts to be conscious of right deeds, which he thinks are for the best of the society.

Professor Datta is contemplating the books fondly in the library and carefully rearranging the statue of his venerated Sir Asutosh. He finds a sudden violent invasion by a band of Naxal students, who are well organized and planned with their leaders Amar and others. Professor Datta is amazed at their arrival. They started shouting against the present university education system. Professor Datta raised a protest:

“BOYS! BOYS! ORDER! ORDER! DEMOCRACY! DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM! PROTEST WITHOUT VIOLENCE! RATIONALISM! SANITY! REASON! CONSTITUTION! THE ULTIMATE! MAN'S LAW IN SOCIETY! LAW AND ORDER!” (Currimbhoy, 81)

The students are very aggressive, and they are not in a mood to listen to the Professor. They are completely vexed with the rotten system of present-day education. They started to ransack and burn the library books and try to tar and break the statue of Asutosh. The Professor tried hard to protest their acts and got hurt. Ahmed slowly comes in, buries a peasant's sickle deep into the Professor's back, and the Professor falls down lifelessly.

After the death of Amar's father, Amar wants to give up the cause. He tells Ahmed that he still believes in the socialist revolution. But he disagrees with their methods. He opines:

“I...I think...my father was right. I mean...his approach was right. That...that change should come through the will of the majority...expressed through a free vote...that society...such as we live in, must follow certain norms...of law and order...to make such democratic expression possible.” (Currimbhoy, 84)

Amar tells Ahmed that he has found his own path, and it will be the same as that of his father. He strongly feels that, yet he struggles for the great cause of humanism.

CONCLUSION

In fact, Amar was a radical rebel in the beginning, begins to realize that the constitutional democratic norms are the best to compensate for the pains of the poor farmers. Through the character of Amar, Asif Currimbhoy tries to convey the idea that the practice of Naxalites is no solution and that we should cherish the feelings of love, compassion, harmony and pity for one another.

Thus, Asif Currimbhoy shows his enduring faith in humanism in portraying the characters. Currimbhoy is a humanist in philosophy, and ponders over the problems and ills of the society around him. His play, *Inquilab*, speaks for the humanity, which is prevalent in the human society, and he strongly advocates the need of order and justice, which are to be prevailed as strong pillars of democracy. Though concerned with contemporary events of the Naxalite revolt, the present play *Inquilab* has the relevance and a meaning for all times. In the end, the play reveals that the Naxalite shortcut is no happy solution to any problem. Currimbhoy portrays his own social understanding and experience in society to suggest that it is not violence but humanism which can bring about the change for an egalitarian society.

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