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SOCIAL PREDICAMENT IN ASIF CURRIMBHOY'S 'THE DISSIDENT M.L.A'

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ABSTRACT

Asif Currimbhoy is a notable Indian English playwright of the post independence period and has been called "India's first authentic voice in the theatre" by Faubion Bowers. Currimbhoy presents bold themes and contemporary social issues, his extraordinary art of characterization and plot construction, and the use of new theatrical techniques and devices that assisted him to lay the foundation of Indian drama in English. His plays reveal the every minute aspect of post-colonialism. AsifCurrimbhoy has in a roundabout way mentions how the colonialism still dominates in India by the name of politics, lust etc. He applied different versatility in his plays. He has presented the social issues that are reflected in our society in our day to day life. *The dissident M.L.A* depicts political degradation in our society. It clearly displays how the innocent students become agitators by opportunistic politicians.

Key words: post-colonialism, social issues, political degradation, opportunistic politicians, society

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INTRODUCTION

The play created by the political events that took place in Gujarat in 1974. After Chimanbhai Patel became the chief minister of Gujarat in 1973, he drew dispute from students and teachers over widespread corruption prevalent in the state. Student protests grew owing to high mess bills and poor quality of food in hostels, sparking off agitation in Ahmedabad in December 1973. The clashes between the police and students led to the formation of a students' committee known as 'the NavNirmanYuvakSamiti.' Based on this incident, Asifcurrimbhoy has written this play. He is an intellectual to present the issues that are happened in the society. He also believes literature which represents society. As Peter Nazarath rightly observes:"AsifCurrimbhoy intervenes the public

event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of decolonization".

The present play exhibits political deterioration. It centers onthe depraved designs of Manubhai (main character in this play) to depose the Government. The play portrays various incidents like students' protest against raise in mess bill at the Engineering college hostel, irrelevant examinations, corrupt Government etc. The play represents a sort of social criticism in which the playwright satirizes politicians that are corrupt and greedy. The donkey is also given a position as a character, which is symbolic of the dense life he lives.

Manubhai is the dissident M.L.A in the play. He is about mid fifties and ordinary looking man who moulds the students in many cases. . The

student is like wet clay ready to be moulded, the politicians take advantage of this situation and mould the clay to suit their requirements. It is exactly proven in the play.

In the beginning of the play, Manubhai is waiting for his son Ramesh (ghost) in the midnight. He has been pacing around his room like a mad man and calling his son when Shanti, wife of Manubhai interrupts and against his willing. She makes complaint on Manubhai's attitude and his behaviour to her son Ramesh (ghost). She also suggests him not to support him. The words of shanti appear in the play..

That useless father of yours, Ramesh. He smelt of bad-breath every time he kissed meand the rest was worse. Grow up and disgrace him, son. You know what he'll do? He'll try to shine through you, my noble, beautiful boy. Butyou....down...him! He sucked the life out of me. Don't let him escape!
(TDM.....9)

After listening the words of Shanti, Manubhai gets angry and expresses his opinion on women community. He opines that it is useless listening women remarks and words. It reflects his attitude towards women. He even doesn't consider his wife as human being instead he compares with long tongued bitch. The emotional expression of Manubhai is in the play.

Hah! Don't listen to her, my man-son. Woman's frustration, Woman's talk. Their brains ooze down into falling flesh, and then it's nothing but carping, carping, carping.....mine?. (TDM.....9-10)

While making complaints each other, Manubhai hears the voice of his son, Ramesh but not visible. He is very anxiety to see his son and calls him many times. Finally the voice of Ramesh demands him to remember the past but Manubhai is unable to remember it. The continuous compulsion of Ramesh (voice) Manubhai remembers the past. The words of Manubhai and Ramesh in the play.....

Ramesh's voice: Remember.....?
Remember.....?
Manu: I can? I can.
(TDM.....10)

Ramesh is also reminding the past, while doing his graduation, Students are faced many problems like the raising of mess bill, the irrelevant exams, no job opportunities etc. in L.P. Engineering college so they approach Manubhai. As a politician, Manubhai creates a sort of political issues by students' problems. Unfortunately, students are unable to guess it. He motivates the students to involve strikes, gherao etc., and getting solution of their problems. The young innocents have done what he tells like a key doll. He also motivates the students to create non-violence in the city. It is in the play.....

Hot and excited, aren't you all. Try a gherao. A simple gherao. One of those innocuous non-violent ones. I'll guide you. Listen to my whispers. Follow what I say. AND YOU'LL SCARE THE SHIT OUT OF HIM!
(TDM.....13)

The students in their ignorance, and in many cases in their lack of knowledge, can also be a live bomb in the hands of the veteran politicians like manubhai ready to be detonated at their own convenience. Manubhai plans to create nuisance in the legislative Assembly for the sake of self and political benefits. In presence of the students even his son, He acts to work or fight for students. The students' agitation and strike reflect in the assembly. A few M.L.As opine that it is maneuvered by political parties. It is a reaction of rightist or part of economic unrest which is the opinion of others. The speaker of the assembly is unable to control the members in the assembly. The discussion leads personal comments on one to other when Manu acts to convincing the people. The purpose of this action brings him good name from the speaker. Finally Manubhai opines that the dissolution of the assembly is the only solution to solve the agitation, strike etc. It is in the play.....

MEMBER1: It was maneuvered by political parties.

MEMBER2: It was a mere spontaneous student revolt, nothing more.

Manubhai gets up imposingly, takes out his chappal, and bangs it on the desk, louder than that of the speaker, to restore order.

MANUBHAI:(with quiet authority and tension):Gentlemen, gentlemen, is this the way to behave? Is this what the British, nay Gandhi taught us too?
(TDM.....17-18)

Manubhai gets so happy that his dream comes to be true. While drinking alcohol, his eyes start to focus around the room. What he sees is the sexiest bottom a woman ever had. It is working woman, Sonal, rescued from rescue home, swabbing the floor. His eyes focus her sexy appearance. His intention is to get her. By his magical words, he tries to attract sonal. In their discussion she speaks about the social welfare minister who molests woman like sonal in the rescue home but the outside of the world they are in the name of the mahatma. She also speaks about women social workers who pretend to weep with rescue women. While listening the words of Sonal, Manu gets surprising. The emotional expression of sonal is...

It was dreary and hypocritical in the Rescue Home. When it wasn't the attendant molesting us, it was the minister for social welfare..... (Manu giggling and slapping his thighs in sheer fun and exuberance of her frankness).....all in the name Mahatma.

(TDM.....20-21)

Manu tries to change his son with his words because the students' decision like involving strikes, other agitations etc. depends on Ramesh's opinion. In this connection, Manu deliberately motivates him to follow his ideas creating problems in everywhere. Students follow his direction and involve such unethical activity towards the minister. Due to this creation, Manu gets political benefits. The motivational words of Manu are in the play.....

That's right. Strap him down. Look at his eyes roll in fear. Just like the donkey. JUST LIKE THE DONKEY.....make the eunuchs dance around. Wilder and wilder. YOU SALA MINISTER, I'VE CUT YOURS OFF THE SAME AS THOSE HIGRAS AROUND YOU.....) You did well, boy. You did well. It's time you learnt.....to hate me a little.
(TDM.....25)

Manubhai gets disappointment with Kantibhai. Kantibhai, the faded old congress man and great moralist of the Gandhian era, astute and dignified even in his old age. Manu praises Kantibhai's familiarity and his great service which did in the past. Manu remembers the great freedom fighter Gandhiji because Kantibhai also participates in the freedom movement. Their discussion proceeds moral courage, moral rectitude, dignity of students and the things are happening in the legislative Assembly. Manu worries about students' problems and politicians' behaviour in the Assembly. He pretends that he is genuine in front of Kantibhai. Kantibhai has rich experience in politics and others so he does not believe manu's words. He determines that he knows very well about all.Kantibhai's response gives disappointment to Manu which may spoil his political benefits. It is in the play.....

.....You would have been proud, Kantibhai , proud at the dignity with which students conducted themselvesand as far as the wives were concerned, never was there a more blessed, touching scene , of devotion and self sacrificeit reminded me of the salt march. Your salt march: with the great, great leader.
(TDM.....26)

Manu: But, Kantibhai , after independence the national movement was bound to break up into political parties. (TDM.....27)

Manu takes Scotch whisky and scolds Kantibhai continuously when he is attracted by sonal, the working woman of his house. He wants to sex with her so he starts speaking with her. Due to his magical words, Sonal is ready to accept his desire. She too enjoys it. Shanti enters the room consequently Manu gets alert and remains calm. She makes an enquiry about his silence by posing a few questions. In this regard, she expresses her worrying s and feelings about the status of woman. Particularly, Manu doesn't treat his wife well so she lost her freedom in the house. Owing to his unethical attitude, she has been suffering a lot. She delivers her feelings in the play.....

You make me mad. You think you're the only person with the right to be mad. What

about a woman? Woman's pain....and woman's pleasure.....goes deeper. (TDM.....31-32)

Ramesh enters Manu's room and informing him about meeting with students. They require his guidance to start strikes against the government. Manu feels very happy to direct them involving such agitations or strikes. He also gets political benefits to direct them. Students follow his instructions innocently and start their strikes against the government. Manu motivates students to do the strike a tinge of violence for getting solution of the problem. They make agitation on ministers and the chief minister. Ramesh and his friends follow the same. The expression Manu, Ramesh and other students.....

MANU:A BUNDH!A TOTAL
BUNDH!PARALYZE THIS STATE!
AIM FOR THE DOWNFALL....UP
THERE.....(pointing high).....UP
THERE....OF THE MINISTRY,AND OF THE
MINISTRY,AND OF THE CHIEF MINISTER
CHIMANLAL
(TDM.....34)

While seeing this agitations and strikes, Manu feels very happy. He thinks his dreams come to real when Ramesh suspects his father attitude. He asks Manu why he directs the students into a wrong path. Ramesh has been observing his self intentional attitude since the strikes begin. While questioning this, Manu simply diverts Ramesh's questions instead telling the fact. A few students suspect Ramesh because he is not involving in the strikes much. Unfortunately, the students believe Manu's words and done everything. Ramesh disappoints a lot that may lead them into a wrong path. There is an argument between Ramesh and Manu. Then Manu approaches Astrologer to know his luck in politics. The astrologer tells him that his dream doesn't come to be true instead he handles problems. He also declares that he is in troubles until his death. Besides the continuous agitation of the students, the goondas take part in the strikes. They create violence everywhere in the city. Due to this, A few people are killed, rally around the city, destroying every Government building, burning every police station etc. while seeing this Manu

satisfies a lot. What he expects that are happening outside exactly.

Then the high command points out Manu's mistakes that he motivates the innocent students to involve in the violence and anti-party activities. Then they call him to talk. Manu utterly refuses the complaints of high command. He has shown that he is genuine. As the high command collects all information about him, they make an enquiry with him. He argues with them instead of express anything about the violence. Finally they dismiss him from the party. It is in the play.....

H.C. 1: Of course.

MANU: How far is too far? Was the corruption....Acceptable? The price-risemoderate? The political rivalry.....healthy and democratic? Answer me, gentlemen. It's not I who am in the docks. It's you.....

H.C. 1: Dismissed. This session stands dismissed. And so are you from the party. (TDM.....38)

Later Manu meets Kantibhai, the old congressman. He wants to know Kantibhai's opinion about the party high command. He opines that he has been recognizing since the beginning. He also gets the news about Manu and suggests Manu not to encourage such unethical things in future. Manu implicitly creates a few negative things on the high command so as to get opinion of Kantibhai. He has shown his positive attitude towards the high command and suggested Manu to realize. The words of Kantibhai and Manu are in the play.....

MANU: But you said it was a matter of conscience.

KANTIBHAI: There's divine conscience besides a man's conscience. And God's conscience is greater: it forms the basis of Natural Law. Man's law may be broke, but not the Natural Law.

MANU(shaking his head): I must confess, Bapu , I'm not so sure God exists. (TDM.....39)

The continuous strikes and agitations change the city like a war field. People are unable to do their function promptly. As per the presidential order, the army charges over the city. It gives a sort of relief to

the people. Particularly, Housewives get relief after a long gap. The army has given complete protection to people. They are not permitted to stay outdoors after 7. Due to the heavy protection of army, the students get alert. They determine not to continue the violence then the chief minister has stepped down. It gives a great success to the students whereas Manu does not satisfy the news. He expects to dissolve the assembly. It is in the play.....

STUDENT4: Wait. I think there's some news coming. Hold on.

RAMESH : The ministry has resigned. Orders from the centre. The C.M. has stepped down. Congratulations.

MANU : That's not all I wanted, Ramesh. Not just the resignation of the ministry. I want the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly! There'll be more M.L.A.'s.....dissident or otherwise.

(TDM.....41)

There is general restlessness and consternation. The Governor reads the presidential order in the legislative assembly. Governor opines that the resignation of the ministry places very heavy and grave responsibility on the president and the governor. He pledges to maintain law and order when Manu and a few M.L.A.s ask continuous questions on him. Due to this, he gets irritation and angry. Then he tries to control them however no one accepts his words. Manubhai is also motivated other M.L.A.s creating issues in the assembly. His intention is to dissolve the assembly simultaneously gets new elections. The continuous arguments and personal conflicts, many opposition party M.L.A.s walk out from the assembly. Manu also does the same when he interrupts by an old congress M.L.A. Finally he leaves from the assembly. It is in the play.....

GOVERNOR: This I intend to do through ensuring that the Army remains here.....("boos")... for as long as it is necessary.

SECOND M.L.A.(interrupting): Are you tempting the Army to take over the nation.

MANU: Why, keep the Assembly in"suspended animation". Dissolve it.

GOVERNOR: It is not the Central Government's intention that the local Assembly be dissolved.

(TDM.....42-43)

The students obtain victory because the assembly suspended. They have recognized by the people so they decide not to continue the violence. They also plan to form 'The Nava Nirman Samiti' which is called a sort of student union or party. Then their discussions go on the fund and others to maintain the union. On the other side, Manubhai counts the walked out M.L.A.s in the Assembly when Shanti goes around like a steam engine which gives a sort of disturbance to Manu. She starts to speak with Manu about Ramesh. He does not take care of his health and qualms a lot when Manu does not listen her words instead gets information about the present status of Assembly from Umakant, the M.L.A. of the same party. He does not leave from the assembly which gives a great tension to Manu. So Manu scolds Umakant with hazily.

Manubhai persuades Kantibhai to call off the fast. He has compared the situation between Gandhian era and the present but Kantibhai doesn't change his decision. He strongly believes the principles and not the words of persons like Manu. He also knows very well about the cunning nature of Manu whereas Manubhai's intention is to interrupt people's sympathy towards Kantibhai. It displays in the play.....

MANU :Kantibhai, times have changed.....

KANTIBHAI(interrupting) : Ah, but principles don't change. I feel I deeply feel. That the people want the Assembly dissolved. This is their protest against the failure of the Government. And the Government are resisting the dissolution. I must therefore fight the Government.

(TDM.....48-49)

Manu wants to know the status of Assembly. Ramesh passes on the Assembly has dissolved but Kantibhai doesn't call off the fast. Kantibhai remarks the part of the protest is against Manu's agitation on the streets when Manu refuses the remarks of Kantibhai. He pretends to be genuine. Here Ramesh also finds out the culprit mind and cunning nature of

Manu that may lead to get self political benefits. It reflects in the play.....

MANU: I don't know May be it was to liberate myself. To make you do all the things I failed to do myself in life.

RAMESH: But I'm sure you thought it made a man out of me. (TDM.....54)

Then Manu reminds his past life. Because of his mistakes, he lost his innocent son. He prays to God to bring back his son, Ramesh. Finally Manu realizes and gets perfection.

Bursting out in grief he cries out "Ramesh! Ramesh! Yes, I see you there! Oh God, I've seen him! I'm certain now! And he's coming home!" (TDM.....56)

The play portrays the various issues that are hazards to social fabric, such as political corruption, student unrest and sexual parody. In the final analysis, corruption continues in spite of change of guard in administration. Through the play Currimbhoy points out how idealistic students are directed towards the wrong path by deceitful and corrupt politicians. He has also included violence and sex so extensive in our society, adding zest to the story.

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