

Coarsely Indecent and Perverse Sex in Asif Currimbhoy's 'The Doldrummers'

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***Abstract:** Asif Currimbhoy is the greatest Indo-English dramatist of our times. He began his career of play-writing in 1959 and he has written more than 30 plays. Variety and versatility are two prominent qualities of his plays. He has written one - act plays like *The Clock* and *The Refugee*, two- act plays like *Goa* and *The Doldrummers*, three -act plays like *Inqilab* and four-act plays like *Sonar Bangla*. He chooses his subject matter mostly from a distinctly Indian experience and weaves various threads from the myths, folklore and other public events of the contemporary society into it. He handles with ease all forms of plays whether Farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy or history. To keep the play alive on the stage, he employs many theatrical devices and this dramatic scene is generally considered his forte. He is just interested in impressing and controlling the minds of the audience but, as Meserves say, "He has something to say, something he must say, message to deliver, a vision to fulfill". *The Tourist Mecca*, *The Doldrummers*, *The Darjeeling Tea* and *This Alien ...Native Land* are categorized as his romantic plays. They are not romantic in the conventional sense and most of the characters are aliens or Anglo - Indians. Sex and wine play a great part in these plays and it seems that in such plays, Asif Currimbhoy's pen touches the boundaries of indecency.*

Key Words: Versatility, perverse sex, Forte, Farce., romantic, Melodrama, Conventional.

Asif Currimbhoy's 'The Doldrummers' is grouped with his such plays as *The Tourist Mecca*, *The Darjeeling Tea* and *This Alien Native Land*. All these are categorized as the romantic plays. They are not romantic in the conventional sense and most of the characters in them are aliens or Anglo- Indians. Throughout these plays dexterous use of sex has been used as the main dramatic technique and there is more explicit sex in Asif Currimbhoy's 'The Doldrummers' than in any of his other plays. All agree that the play 'The Doldrummers' is not devoid of realistic flavour as the play sympathetically ridicules the modern youth for spending an aimless life. But for an average spectator, the play for all its potential aims, for all its dramatic techniques, for all its audio-visual effects is overburdened with obtrusive sex images. Each page of the 70 pages of the close printed play is full of words and actions which smell foul, coarsely indecent and surcharged with perverse sexual details. The play was published in 1960 and is supposed to have been written in late fifties, a time when we do not find such coarse sexual details in any Indian film. At the end of 1950's such a generosity of sex display would have put to any film director to shame. At the most we can say that Asif Currimbhoy was ahead of his

times and he only visualised the coming events. Faubian Bowers thinks that the very word 'doldrummers' is a clever clever word coined by Asif Currimbhoy to indicate the doldrums which settle over a group of hip young people, who have not worked for a year of Sundays.....who are too close to reality and whose idealism turns to cynism." There had earlier been an Actors' Studio tryout of The Doldrummers where 'audience of the theatre folk was chilled by this hot tropics of a drama'. It happend in America but then the play had already been banned in India almost at its very birth in 1960 by the State Censors and it was in 1969 that the ruling against it was revoked ,when writers like Khuswant Singh and Mulk Raj Anand pleaded in favour of the play, why had the play been banned?Simply because people at the helm of affairs found the play unreasonably sensual and indecent.

This short play comprises of two acts with two scenes in each act .The story revolves round a group of four young people ,two men and two women, living in a shack on the Juhu Beach in the suburbs of Bombay. The local inhabitants are an English speaking community and the environment is colourful but poor. Here the action of the play begins and from the very begining upto the virtual end of the play, we are to prepare ourselves to see the sex perversity and misconduct, as well as, to hear the foul language of this group.In the hammock tied to two trees, there lies a man in shorts and nothing else, except for a guitar that forms very much part of him. His name is Tony and a young girl, Rita is fondling with his hair. Giving her description the author says, "She is a young thing, fully physical and very much in love."

The third person present here is Joe. He is sitting at the foot of the opposite tree ogling at Rita's legs and things. He is a small young man with ratty intelligent eyes. Tony is singing a song and when he finishes the song, Rita claps enthusiastically. He wants to sing another song but Joe snatches the guitar and begins to sing himself. Now the dialogue turns from music to kissing business instantly:

Tony:.....but I certainly can understand music

Rita: [To Tony] I'm one step ahead .I understand You, honey.

Tony: That's 'cause I hear music when we kiss.

Rita: Let's kiss [They kiss]

Tony : Ho-hum.....again[They kiss again]

Rita: Not bored are you?

Tony: [Grunting negatively, in-between kisses] Huh-huh

.....

Joe: You both sicken me. You are as messey as two children with a single lolly pop.

Rita: And we don't intend to share it with you either.

Joe: Go on. Make pigs of yourselves.....till surfeiting the appetite may sicken you and so die.

None can make out anything out of this sexy dialogue. The wild merry-making is nothing but sex-orgy. They again take to drinking and begin to talk senselessly. Meanwhile Joe gives some philosophical comments which hold a mirror to socio-political conditions of the times.

Now enters Liza. She is described as a technicolour doll and everything about her is painted. At her request Joe and Tony start on one of their duets. The comic song brings tears of laughter to Liza's eyes. Philosopher Joe suggests that they should tickle each other. He jumps upto her like a monkey and begins to tickle her. What follows next is sufficient to expose this sexually incited group. Liza seems not to feel satisfied with Joe's tickling and so a dialogue begins between them:

Liza: Oh, stop it, silly boy. That is not the kind of tickle that amuses me.

Joe: [with a mischievously quizzical eye] No?

Liza: No. Decidedly not.

Joe: TONY, What kind of tickle do you think would "amuse" her?

Such a meaningless conversation only shows us the sexual gossip in which these characters are indulging. More than that nothing comes out of it. It seems these characters have nothing more to speak of. Tony is physically tall while Joe is a small man. Liza and Rita compare these two young persons though indirectly and implicitly.

Liza: Well You know, Rita ,Tony's such a big man.

Joe: I'm a small one. So, what ? It does not prove anything.

Liza: [Bursting out spontaneously] Because Tony is man ,that is why !that is why! (pause)

Joe : (Quietly) I think that answers it adequately.

Rita: (Unusually intense) No, I don't think it does. It's whose man he is that matters. And he's mine . Mine ! She looks defiantly at Liza, who can not face her burning look)

Liza : (Casually) Oh, You can have him ,Rita. I have got too many admirers. More than I can handle.

Joe: Try me baby .I have a good grip.

Liza: They shower me with presents.....

In the lines extracted from the text of the play , the playwright is not only comparing the captivating power of the two girls but also giving us a measure of their sex perversity . Each one presents itself as a maniac .we feel we are witnessing a scene from a brothel .One fails to understand the real aim of the author, if at all there is one .The two girls come close to fighting when LIZA points to a watch on the wrist of TONY that too in presence of RITA .The other girl feels hurt as she can not bear to see TONY getting presents from the other girls. She asks LIZA to go out of the room but LIZA remains cool says:

LIZA : Cool down ,honey As TONY says ,it is all in the game.....you know.....fighting loving.

LIZA leaves the scene and RITA calls explanation on.

TONY by saying:

“Why did you do it TONY ? Why did you do it ! Is not my love enough for you ? I have given you all of it. Why should not I expect all from you? Woman is no different from a man .Why did you go for her? Was it for her or for the watch?

TONY tries his best to pacify RITA and says to her, “SO,what if I got a present. I would not object to your getting a present”. He says that he would do anything to get a present .A woman does it ,so why not a man .RITA dislikes all this logic. She is jealous of LIZA. Apart from that it gives us a glimpse of the working of this sex –racket. One is wonder- struck and dumbfounded to hear Rita pleading her case.

RITA (Tearfully) Don't you TONY, it is not the present that matters. It is what you have done to get it.

According to FAUBION BOWERS, these are the people who are “too close to reality to live the life of imagination” and whose “idealism has turned to cynism”.Their idealism has just taken the form of idleness.The playwright attacks their purposelessness in life and lack of courage. The theory of ideals denying the existence of matter is misconstrued by these young men and women which leads them to heavy drinking and sex-perversity. Out of this group of four, philosopher-looking Joe is always trying to ‘reach out to ideas’ whether or not they were idealists, this much is certain that they are turned to cynics. All these people are exhibiting the passions which are necessarily to be displayed shamelessly. Here Faubion Bowers’ words ‘too close to reality’ seem to be vaugue. We see these people living the life of wild bears. If we call it real life, what should we mean by an un-rael life?. If we just take into consideration their sexual life, we better say that their attitude is rather pig-like. This animal well represents them in their actions. Joe and Tony call each other dirty ‘swine’ and this name befits them well. As we go on further and further with the play ,we find more and more un-wanted sexual details. To console RITA,TONY uses very persuasive language and says:

“You are tops, Rita, really you are. You are passionate without being dirty or pretending. And you give me all, the way I want it....I never get that feeling with anyone else.....I squeeze you tight when I am ready and I know you are ready too. That takes doing. On both sides.”

This shows Rita's doing and for the same thing she calls the other girl, LIZA, a strumpet .Joe in one of his philosophic utterances admits to Liza, “Don't you think .We'd made wonderful schizophrenic lovers?” and himself explained to her that schizophrenic means split personality. It shows that the members of this group suffer from a mental disease marked by lack of connexion between their thoughts and their actions. Jar now talks express his sexual passion for her. Meanwhile there comes a new comer. He is Uncle Lollypop, a fat bald man. Ostensibly he comes there to get Tony signed for some music performance but the truth is that he too wants to enjoy sex with Rita. Rita is to conduct all business on the part of Tony with Uncle Lolo. Tony is dead drunk but this time Joe is careful not to drink too much. Addressing drowsy Tony, Joe says,” Rita is a great gall. She can handle most everything..... and everyoneyou and Uncle Lolo”. Joe makes Tony understand that Rita is a good girl who buys toys and other things for him. She never forces Tony to go to work. There is nothing she would not do for him and she would even whore for him. Tony's body goes through mute conclusions, in the agony of one who feels, but can not speak. Joe continues to speak mercilessly and tells tony that he knew everything about Rita's doings all along but he was not man enough to do anything about it . Now Joe uses a double edged sword which cuts both ways. On one hand, Joe charges Rita of sexual perversity and on the other hand, it exposes the whole sexual atmosphere prevailing over there. Joe continues with his speech unabatedly and says to Tony ;

“What makes you so sure that Rita is not

.....enjoying herself. If you can enjoy yours Thursdays with Liza, What makes you think she does not enjoy her Man Thursdays. Don't look so surprised, Tony. Just because a man's fat and bald head does not mean he is not a man.”

In a single mouthful of words, Joe exposes the sexual activities of Tony, Rita, Liza and bald-headed Lollypop. Tony wants to cut the fat and bald man into ribbons and wants to break open the door where the fat man is sit along with Rita. But soon the fat man comes out of the room and warns Tony not to bother the young lady(Rita). Rita pretends to be angry with Tony for not having killed uncle Lollypop. Joe asks her if she wanted to kill the goose that laid golden eggs. Joe takes out a ring and asks Rita to wear it for a while only as it is to be passed on to others so that everything still-born may live in its transfiguration. Rita tells Joe to lay his money on the table. It is not to be a present anymore and it need not come from a friend either. Tony never minded such a thing and would not mind even now. She invites Joe to get down to sexual performance instantly and he does so passionately. In the second act we find Joe missing and we see Tony lying in the hammock. He bears a shabby look and his clothes are crumpled, unkempt

and dirty. Here a drunk is introduced. As the door of the shack flings open, the drunk topples over the stairs and falls to the ground. Rita is standing in the porch and one can notice the imperceptible changes that have come over her in the last few months. Rita wants him to go away at that moment and come there again after he has slept off his drunkenness and put on some nice smelly lotion. None can forget the details of the conversation which occurs between the two:

Drunk: My friend told me you were cleanup to the time he knew you. Then he palmed off the address to mesecond hand, but not loose yet

Rita: What are you about? Which friend?

Drunk: (giggling again) You know, or have you lost the count since. He told me you thought he made lollypops (Giggles).....He said you were not over yet, but speeding down the hill just the same.....

It is clear enough that the drunk too sails in the same boat. He is drunk but his speech is a sexually meaningful speech. He advises Rita that she can not trade by saying 'now and then' and she has got to be available at his convenience .He goes away and conversation turns upon Joe's absence. Tony wonders why Joe had left the place so suddenly. Rita tells Tony that Joe had said something about having started a situation in motion and that his presence was no longer necessary for its natural conclusions, hence he could be dispensed with. There is a veiled hint of Rita's pregnancy by Joe and Rita knows it well where the trains of events set into motion by Joe will end .After some time we see Rita engaging Tony in a passionate love talk and she attempts to kiss him even, but he turns his face away and slaps her with a heavy hand. She lies prostrate on the ground and then Liza comes and helps her to sit down. When Liza asks Rita what was wrong with her, she quietly replies that she was getting with a baby. When Liza asks Rita as to who had done it. Rita replies shame-facedly that she was back-dated on the news and she should visit the 'Circus Inn' to catch upon the gory details. They must be betting there on 'which one dun (done) it'. There remains nothing to be said more. It reads like a diary of sexual doings of this group of young men and women. To add to the authenticity of these details the playwright has included the old and bald Lollypop, the Drunk and the young school boys in the list of this sex revelry. To crown it all, drunk Tony comes to the place leading his more –drunk friend like a dog. Tony calls himself Joe and his more-drunk friend as Tony. He says to Rita , "I am not Tony any more. I'm Joe. This here is Tony. He'll serve you well..... And he is the hottest thing in bed". The last scene shows how Rita jumped into the sea because of the mistreatment of Tony and how Tony jumped into water to save her. He did not know how to swim and it was only because of her that he was saved. A policeman comes and informs Liza that Joe's body has been washed ashore. Liza runs upto Rita to inform her of Joe's death. Rita does not take the matter seriously and informs Liza that Joe's presence was no longer necessary as she carried Joe's child in her womb.

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