

A MARXIST APPROACH TO ASIF CURRIMBHOY'S PLAY *INQUILAB*

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Asif Currimbhoy, as an Indian dramatist of post-Independence time, is highly influenced by changes and turmoil in socio-political scenario of newly Independent India. He is deeply influenced by the new currents of violence that erupted in the country during the sixties. The Independence filled people with high hopes and ideals. However, in many parts of the country a general discontent prevailed due to failure of a number of promises of the administration. Many schemes and land reform bills which were given a lot of publicity by the government were poorly implemented. Hence there emerged several discontent political groups which attempted to achieve their aims through force and intimidation rather than through democratic procedures. Even in the field of education, there was a big gap between expectation and satisfaction. Too much of the democratization, the lack of aptitude and objective among students, incompetence among the teachers, crises of conscience and culture among the guardians crippled the educational system. The students were thoroughly disillusioned when they knew that their degrees would not get jobs at all. So, they often indulged in violence. (Reddy in *The Plays of Asif Currimbhoy* in 1985: 24)

This post-Independence frustration finds ample expression in Currimbhoy's four major plays viz *Inquilab* (1970), *The Refugee* (1971), *Sonar Bangla* (1972) and *Goa* (1964). These plays resonate with the undertones of violence and revolution for socio-political change and the demand of equal rights. *Inquilab* is totally Marxist in its approach where the proletariat want to bring down the bourgeoisie from their high pedestal on the ground. They want to bring the landlords and rich people on the common platform with common people.

Currimbhoy's plays resonates the Marxist project to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and change. He shared with many other intellectuals of the time a view of Marxism as "a materialist philosophy . . . looks for concrete, scientific, logical explanations of the world of the observable fact... Whereas other intellectuals merely seek to understand the world, Marxism (as Marx famously said) seeks to change it" (Barry in *Beginning Theory* 2004: 156-157).

In *Inquilab* class-conflict has been shown through the clash between Jain, a landlord and the poor peasants whose much of the lands is in the landlord's grip. This tussle between landlord and farmers is dramatized on the Marxist lines of argument. Professor Datta, industrialists of the urban areas and politicians like Devdas and Big-Wheel are also part of the bourgeoisie class in the play. The proletariat class is represented by the peasant leader Shomik, many manual workers, and Amar and Ahmed, the two sons of Professor Datta. Amar confidently announces the aims of the communist movement in front of the landlord Jain: "Land to landless. Collective farming. Community holdings. A distribution of surplus land to be done immediately" (Currimbhoy in *Inquilab* 1992: 18).

The seeds of revolution begin to grow in the heads and hearts of peasants and other downtrodden people in the play *Inquilab*. The wind of discontent starts blowing in universities, factories, farms and fields. The atmosphere is so charged up that the echoes of exciting and provocative slogans like 'OVERTHROW BOURGEOIS! FILTHY BOURGEOIS LANDLORD UNIVERSITY! BOURGEOIS LANDLORD GOVERNMENT! REVISIONIST EDUCATION! REVISIONIST PROFESSORS!' (76-77) can be heard anywhere. The anger of students and peasants is at the very point of bursting out. The students are fed up with abstract theories being taught by professors like Datta in universities. They realize very well that their college degrees are not going to provide them with jobs or any other economic support. After coming out of the universities, they expect white collar jobs but end in becoming either menial workers or agonized terrorists. Peasants are forced to work like labourers and slaves in their own farms. Most of the income produced

by their hard labour is gulped by greedy landlords like Jain. Their condition is getting worse and worse and they are subject to a host of physical ailments and mental sufferings. All this is evident in the aggressive speech of a young revolutionary leader who is addressing farmers:

You get what you deserve: disease, hunger, want and death. You give your children an even a larger share: scurvy, slavery, deprivation and death. Every *bigha* of *zamin* you toil for, you will make them toil harder. For whom? For whom, I ask? (a rustle of discontent among peasants; shouting) For the damned, bloody, greedy *zamindar!* who never worked a day in his life! Who sucks your blood like a leech, grovels in food and luxury: What gives him the right to own and you to suffer! (26).

Here in this speech the Marxist-Leninist passion seems to possess this young leader. His speech is informed with the spirit of iconoclasm. The peasants must awaken themselves and commit themselves to their emancipation from an oppressive system. Martin Luther King, the American clergyman, activist and prominent leader in the American civil rights movement, also announced: “Never forget that freedom is not something that is given by the oppressor. It is something that must be demanded by the oppressed” (Margnsee in *The Hindu* 6 April 2008).

In fact, a number of basic problems like poverty, unemployment, injustice, refugees, corruption, filth, etc. are the root causes of discontent and subsequent revolution among the people. On the other hand, politicians, diplomats and intellectuals are trying to pacify and suppress this revolutionary spirit in order to maintain the status quo. In other words, they are also serving the basic ends of capitalists. In the terms of Louis Althusser, they are “ideological state apparatuses” that function as interpellation and subtly force the individual to take a pre-established “subject position”, that is, a position as a person with certain views and values and which ultimately serves the interests of the ruling and the dominant class (Althusser 1971: 152). Cultural materialist Raymond Williams is optimistic about the

possibility of change as he thinks that ideology is resisted by an individual's "lived experience" (quoted in Abrams 2009: 163). In *Inquilab* the politicians like Devdas and Black Wheel are not able to convince the people as their promises have proved to be hollow in the past as well. This unrest becomes so intense in the play that even the administration is unable to control the violent and unruly multitude. The cry for 'ORDER, RATIONALISM, SANITY, REASON' (Currimbhoy in *Inquilab* 1992: 77) by a professor like Datta has no effect on the discontented students. This anger and cry for change can no longer be suppressed by the ideological forces of the privileged class. Amar enthusiastically attempts to count the host of problems and points to the insensitive and exploitative nature of upper class:

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. ...And you talk of education, father! Institutes of education that have shackled us for generations and generations. What for? WHAT FOR I ASK? So that there can be more unemployed millions? So that there your bourgeois hierarchy remains intact!... You can have it, father, you can have it, but don't stuff it down our throat! You were the Gods that Failed, father! (13-14).

Therefore, it is inevitable for the underprivileged ones to adopt the unusual and unconstitutional ways to achieve their objectives. Students like Amar and peasants like Shomik invite the Naxalites and get themselves involved in all kinds of protest and violence. Professor Datta reminds them of the democratic system of India; but he finds it impossible to make them understand that non-violence is an active philosophy. Ahmed, the eldest son of Professor Datta and a leader of the Naxalites, is of the opinion that parliamentary democracy is not an effective medium for socialist revolution; rather an armed struggle is inevitable. He thinks that terror and violence are most effective apparatuses for the egalitarian cause of social and economic change. He is a follower of Karl Marx, Lenin and Mao, as it is evident in his following speech to students:

Gentlemen ... or should I say my 'rowdy' comrades ... (snigger from students) ... remember: revolutionary theory without revolutionary practice means nothing. Everything that you learn here, must be put in practice outside. Marxism-Leninism holds that 'force is the midwife of every society pregnant with a new one' (25).

Amar, Ahmed and Shomik are the dreamers of a communist and classless society. They want to turn this dream into reality by 'collective farming, community holdings. A distribution of the surplus land' (18); they want to give equal share to the landlord Jain too if he is prepared to work with his own hands. Though distribution of the land is one of the declared objectives of the government policy, Jain does not approve of this at all. Although he works hard like other farmers, he is possessive by nature as he does not want to give the farmers their lands. Amar, a staunch supporter of peasants' cause, gives him an open warning:

Time's changing Jainji, time's changing. And you'll be swept with the change unless you change too. Listen, listen to me. It's no longer a question of distributing surplus land. ... (with deadly earnest) we'll grab the land, old man, because young like us are impatient and hungry. Then there'll be no distinction between good and bad landlord, because being landlord is bad enough! (19).

When the revolutionary group of peasants arrests the landlord Jain, they treat him as a class-enemy. But Amar is against this as he tries to prove the landlord only as an individual. His argument is that there is no such thing as system; there are only individuals that find themselves caught in it. Shomik and other peasants are so full of zest and violent passion against the Establishment that they do not accept Jain as individual. Ultimately Jain is beheaded as he does not confess his guilt. Professor Datta also gets killed by his own Naxalite son Ahmed. Here Asif Currimbhoy seems to point an accusing finger at that form of Marxist ideology which generates a kind of bigotry wherein ideologues, instead of performing the role of saviours, finish themselves into becoming demons.

In the basic framework of class-conflict Currimnhoy has successfully touched the human aspect of the problem in his play *Inquilab*. Obviously the poor condition of peasants and proletariats is pitiable; but the destruction and chaos the revolutionaries cause is equally pitiable. Hundreds of innocent people including old men, women, and children are killed in this struggle. The voices of Shomik's wife Sarala and Amar's fiancée Suprea are the calls of humanity and life. Both women simply want to live a happy married life without being much ambitious; they want to run their household peacefully with whatever facilities are available to them. Sarala says to her husband Shomik, "You seem to have forgotten your dream. When it all started, all you wanted was a small piece of your own land. Now you want to lead the whole nation into revolution. That makes me unhappy" (73). Likewise, Suprea is agonized at the brutal murder of her father Jain. All that she wants to know is whether the revolutionaries have done justice to the man and the father that he was. Amar admits that Jain had the right to live his life as an individual and he regrets, "There's something wrong in our society, our teaching- just as there was something wrong in the way your father . . . was killed" (75).

Thus Currimbhoy locates the root cause of *inquilab* (revolution) is some disorder in the mental-set up of socio-economic system. The revolutionaries like Amar, Ahmed and Shomik who want to eradicate this evil from society at any cost, seem to be inspired by the spirit of the French Revolution and the socialist thinking of Marxism. Other big revolutions like the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Indian Struggle for Independence etc. also brought a great social, economic and political change in their wake. This dream to bring a classless society is not just Indian but universal. This communist desire has always been in the hearts of every troubled society. The *inquilab* in this play ends in chaos and destruction; but the nature of struggle is a continuous one. As it is evident from the conversation between Ahmed and Amar:

Amar: Do you think I've betrayed the cause...

Ahmed: No, Amar. The cause is longer than either of us.... We were all caught

in the vortex of a struggle... the struggle for birth, for survival, where one has to kill to live again ... (81).

Inquilab also re-enacts the clash between Gandhian philosophy of non-violence and the Marxist-Leninist ideology of reformation by means of bloody revolution. Professor Datta has a firm belief in the non-violent and peaceful ways of resistance espoused by Gandhi whereas the young men of new generation are fascinated by the violent and revolutionary ideas of Lenin and Mao. Influenced by radical ideas of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) Leninism holds that capitalism can only be overthrown by revolutionary means and any attempt to reform capitalism through non-revolutionary forms of democratic socialism is doomed to fail. These ideas were later developed into Maoism which openly declared the inevitability of violence for socio-economic change. In *Inquilab* the Naxal leader Ahmed quotes a statement of Mao Tse Tung, "It is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area. Learn to combine persuasion, terror and aid ..." (26). Amar is the connecting link between the contradictory principles of Gandhi and Mao. In the beginning he gets himself aligned with the radicals and considers himself a rebel who should fight for the proletarian internationalism. But in the end he realizes that the violent means adopted for this purpose are in no way good for humanity and Naxal shortcut is no solution to any problem. Ultimately he realizes that his father Prof. Datta's vision that every society should follow certain norms of law and order by adopting the non-violent means of resistance was right.

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