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Asif Currimbhoyg ives more importance to his women characters than the men characters. He shows his different perspective from the usual characterization of women. Women play a central role in Currimbhoy's plays. His female characters are mainly from the lower and middle classes: housewives, teachers, mistresses, daughters, slaves, and servants. Meserves comments thus: "In Asif's best plays the power of his women characters dominate the action… in retrospect one finds Asif Currimbhoy's women character, whether minor or major, stronger and more memorable than his men". (X-XI) His women characters are more courageous and powerful than men characters. Women in his plays protest against male chauvinism and colonized male minds. However in some of his plays the protest confines to the home with a silent protest.

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# Women in Asif Currimbhoy's Plays

Anshika Panwar

## I. Introduction

Among the most creative playwrights of the Post-colonial era, Asif Currimbhoy is one of the known personalities with his creative pen. He has written and published more than thirty plays. He reveals variety of themes with intelligent characterization in his plays. Social and political issues are the major themes represented by Currimbhoy in most of his plays. His plays are necessarily "Emotional Reaction" of what he feels and sees around him. His plays deal not only with wide ranging of thematic concerns but are also peopled with different characters.

Asif Currimbhoygives more importance to his women characters than the men characters. He shows his different perspective from the usual characterization of women. Women play a central role in Currimbhoy's plays. His female characters are mainly from the lower and middle classes: housewives, teachers, mistresses, daughters, slaves, and servants. Meserves comments thus: "In Asif's best plays the power of his women characters dominate the action… in retrospect one finds Asif Currimbhoy's women character, whether minor or major, stronger and more memorable than his men". (X-XI) His women characters are more courageous and powerful than men characters. Women in his plays protest against male chauvinism and colonized male minds. However in some of his plays the protest confines to the home with a silent protest. His female characters can be classified as submissive or conformist. It is remarkable to note that his each play is dominated by a particular set of female characters.

Being a prolific playwright of the Post Independent era, Currimbhoy did justice to his role. In his plays women try to create their own space for themselves. They don't want to bind themselves in the patriarchal set up of the society. His play "Darjeeling Tea?" represents British women characters who oppose their husbands and consider themselves superior to them. They call their husbands idiotic and illogical. For them their husbands are old fashioned and useless fellows.

Through the character of Jennie in Drajeeling Tea?. Currimbhoy presents the women of western culture, who have experienced queen like life in the initial years of the British occupation of India. She thinks that she is different from other women who always talk about their house and its problems. She is a planter's wife and she feels superior to the others and thinks that she is not destined to live or work like other women. She has all the modern ways of living and goes to club and there she does not like to talk about the house and its problems rather she always talks about fashion and beauty. She is a kind of women who wants to change the men's attitude towards women. Women is the best creation of God and they should not confine within the four walls of house. Currimbhoy also shows the polarized notions about family life which result in a direct encounter between wives and husbands as exemplified thus:

Jennie. (Stung for no apparent reason) Mac, I don't believe in occupying myself like other women do with the house and … and …(changes the word and says) … parties …

MAC. (Cautiously) Whether it is. I like to see you like this.

JENNIE. (again aggressive, self- conscious, nervous for no apparent reason) I mean … I am … somewhat different. Not fully realized … (absently) … as a woman … you might say.

*MAC. (sharply) Nobody says it.*

JENNIE. (equally sharp) But I feel it! I feel cut off from the other women who are all the time talking about the house and … And then I think I'm different. I was, of course. As a model in one of the … (saying with almost a bitter laugh) … leading fashion houses of London, I-I had to be different … Not that I regret it, of course. Unlike most women, I could always go back to modelling … you see, my hips … have remained slander … (22)

She always questions the existing social status of women. Through this questioning to her husband, she protests against the male chauvinism in her house and tries to move out of the conventional life which is designed for them by the society. She always talks about her glorious past of modelling, which had once recognized her identity as an upper class woman in London. She even goes to the developing a physical infatuation for Bunty. Through this she reveals a strong protest against her husband with whom she finds it difficult to get along. For her Mac is an idiotic, selfish and self-centered man who cannot accept a woman's freedom as explained thus:

*Jennie:* Nothing's changed, Mac, nothing's changed. You've gone on and on just the way you started, your own way, always your own way …

*Mac*: (defensively) I don't see anything wrong in that.

*Jennie:* You wouldn't. You're too much man to understand. Too much planter to see over the tea shrubs.

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*Mac:* You chose the way of life when you married me.
*Jennie:* I chose a man Mac, not a way of life.
*Jennie:* True. So like you to say it. Self- contained and self-righteous. (49)

When she says that she chose a man, not a way of life, she is protesting against male chauvinistic tendency. Through the character of Jennie and her strong verbal encounters Currimbhoy exposes the colonization of western women by western male colonizers.

In his play "OM" he shows a different outlook of female character. Through the character of sweeper he brought out the strong feminist voice. Sweeper questions men in general for taking their own decision without consulting women and treating her as an insignificant useless thing. According to her women's life is used for the benefit of men only. Throughout the life woman is always a part of man's life but she doesn't influence man and his decisions. She says that a woman's life is not destined to follow the rules of patriarchal society, where the men are the king of the world. In "OM", the muted voice of woman after her death is portrayed as a strong protest against patriarchy.

Through the character of Swetaketu, Currimbhoy again reveals the major role of women in men's life. He says that without woman, man cannot achieve anything neither in this world nor even in spiritual.

In the play "The Dissident M.L.A." Currimbhoy reveals another pattern of feminism linked with power politics. The play displays how the power hungry politicians treat woman as commodities. The play reveals how badly the politicians treat their wives as animals. "You? (angrily) Who the hell was cursing you, you cow?"(46). The statement reveals that a woman is always being treated as a milking cow for the selfish aims of man. Although she is his wife but he treats her callously and when she tries to give her suggestion or tries to interfere in his thoughts and asks him to lead a simple life with her, he shouts on her and says " Keep quiet", woman. You are disturbing my thoughts". (46) It reveals that woman hasno value and relevance in man's life. They are self-centered with an orthodox mentality. The play exposes the truth that women are thus victimized for the selfish motives of men.

In some of his plays he reveals the existence of a strong bond between husband and wife. He shows the woman's sacrifice for the sake of family. They support their family in every possible way and try to find solution to the problems encountered by men. In "The Clock", Henry's wife tries to console him and instils confidence in his mind thus:

MARY (V). If you don't make the target, does it mean you get fired from your job!

*Henry:* No, but it affects my increment, and my future.

MARY (V). Is that enough reason to resign? You could make it up next year.

*Henry:* fiercely turning to her). …I worry about deadlines and quotas and bigger and better salves drives … Do you know I was told the other day by the boss to fire one of my boys merely because he had failed to keep pace with the others and sold less… I guess he was just unlucky!

MARY (V). Did you firm him?
HENRY. I didn't have the heart to do it….
MARY (V). If I were to hire some help around the house, and the job was not done well, I would not think twice about getting rid of the person. (16-17)

Mary clearly expresses her protest against her husband's carelessness towards his professional life and his laxity in family affairs. She is concerned about her family and its financial conditions. She always questions her husband about the financial support that he should have given to his family. Through the actions of Mary, the only woman character of the play Currimbhoy reveals the silent protest of the woman for her family and also reveals her concern for the future of family. She insists her husband to be more supportive for the family and tries to maintain the house even at the expense of her own life.

*Mary:* You have got the kids to think of now.
*Henry (Angrily):* The kids! The kids! The kids! That's all you can think of…
*Mary:* Then why don't you earn more money? Everyone else does it. Everyone has to do it.
*Henry:* I'm trying my best.
*Mary:* Well, ain't good enough. You have been speaking about yourself all along but have you ever thought of me? Why I never ever bought that dress or that hat I desired. Why I never accepted invitation because we couldn't afford to reciprocate them. I deserve a break too, and every time you throw over a job it goes further and further.
*Henry:* It's not been easy for me to do it.
*Mary:* What do you know how tough it is to be without money? When you run out of money and do without cigarettes and whisky, you feel you've made one hell of a sacrifice. But you just tell me what you know about running a house?

Although Mary is a woman but she has sacrificed her life for her family and her useless husband's role seems to be relatively insignificant. Through her protest she reveals the idleness of her husband in the competitive world. She is more concerned than her husband about" running the house".

Yet another play "Goa" revolves around Senhora Miranda and her daughter Rose. Senhora is the most powerful lady of the play. Though a prostitute by profession but a very bold lady. She is a self-conscious woman and is fully aware of the effect she has created.



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She drives the lives of her daughter and her lover. Her description given by the author itself is an example of her personality. Senhora is a fashionable and fair looking woman of forty. Her fair color complexion makes her over confident and she ill-treats everyone. She is fond of new brand of whisky and new friends with wealthy background. Even she likes to enjoy sex with boyfriend of her daughter, Krishna. Her daughter Rose is full in her youth. She is black but still people want to meet her. Both Senhora and Rose are portrayed as a bold lady in Currimbhoy's play.

In his other plays Thorns on a Canvas, The Miracle Seed and Monsoon, Currimbhoy portrays his women characters on the same platform. Woman has become the center of discussion in most of his plays.Thus women characters in Asif Currimbhoy's plays are given more importance than men with a different perspective.Having different level of outlook on familial, political and social level Currimbhoy opposed the existing patriarchal system of the society.

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