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Art and Artist in Asif Currimbhoy's Thorns on a Canvas

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Abstract- In this play Thorns on a Canvas Asif Currimbhoy tries to show the relationship between an elite patron of the Art academy and the poor artists like Yakoob and Nafisa. He also depicts the pathetic condition of the artists, especially of those who are true and honest in their work. Through some characters he reveals the same. He has also written about the Art academies which are alike a shop now a day. Through this play he shows the relationship is a variation of colonizers/ colonized syndrome.

Keywords: *art and artist.*

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Art and Artist in Asif Currimbhoy's Thorns on a Canvas

Anshika [α], Seema Siwach [σ] & Barkha [ρ]

Absract- In this play Thorns on a Canvas Asif Currimbhoy tries to show the relationship between an elite patron of the Art academy and the poor artists like Yakoob and Nafisa. He also depicts the pathetic condition of the artists, especially of those who are true and honest in their work. Through some characters he reveals the same. He has also written about the Art academies which are alike a shop now a day. Through this play he shows the relationship is a variation of colonizers/ colonized syndrome.

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I. Introduction

The present play Thorns on a canvas is a reaction against the banning of the play The Doldrummers. This play is a satire on Art academies, which were basically established by the government support, nurture and promote real artists but these art academies have become the centre of favouritism, nepotism and corruption.

The Patrons of the Art academies themselves do not have the knowledge of art. They are appointed as Patron on the basis of their political contacts. They have not even touch the surface of the art.

In this play the Patron of the Art academy, where the action is centered, is an old leader wearing Gandhi cap and who is terribly short sighted. He thinks that he is the Badshah of the Art academy who doles out charity to those artists who obey his will and those who have become his slaves. He himself describes the method of subduing the artists.

Bukay is one of those artists who have been trained like a dog by the patron. Having lost his artistic soul he works as a secretary to the Patron of society. He is mechanical like a robot, totally under the control of the Patron. But these fake artists are conferred medals and honors. He shows the medal and says;

> " Ah! Don't they glitter like diamonds? This one is Padma Shri award, and here the Sangeet Natak award... this one came from Sahitya Academe and... and that one was given by the lalit Kala Academic..." (30-31).

Another important aspect of the play is favouritism. Malti, the daughter of the Patron. She is being offered a tour. No doubt her paintings are technically correct but they lack soul and life. The Patron arranged exhibition for her with the help of Bukay both of them are commercially political:

> The exhibition, set for January the 10th, a propitious day for travel, marriage and money will be inaugurated by the minister of culture and cultural affairs. After seven minutes of fruit juice drinks and several toasts, he will introduce. His excellence, the Ambassador from France who will speak of your daughter's many splendored careers at the Ecole de Beaux Arts. The occasion will be graced by dignitaries from all walks of life. There will be congress men, patrons, critics, editors, art-dealers and the...The twenty families... (27).

Asif Currimbhoy spots at the way in which these types of art exhibitions are organized. He also spots at the commercial purpose of these exhibitions. These exhibitions generally have the high society people and cocktail. He says these Art exhibitions help the Patrons to make their contacts with politicians. The influential people, who hardly understand the Art, take the honours of Art academies also have been exposed by Currimbhoy. It ravels falsity, fakery and ignorance Art.

Asif Currimbhoy highlights in this play, the very ignorance of patron towards art and artists. Currimbhoy reveals the patron's ignorance when he praises Malti's paintings unknowingly and says that she produces different kinds of paintings and many paintings.

Yakub watches all this show and knows the real purpose of these exhibitions. He accuses the establishment of not recognizing his talent because he did not sell his soul to the devils of the establishment of the Art academy. He says;

> Come! Come with me. Come to where Art speaks for itself. Where it is not wound like a mechanical clock nor dances like a puppet on strings... I'll show you cooler and line... forms that betray truth... for master pieces can only be fashioned... within themselves!(47).

Role of the Art critics is also satirized by Currimbhoy. According to Currimbhoy, they also possess shallow knowledge of Art but try to show off their knowledge. The critic's thinking is very important because he can make or mar an Artist's career through his criticism. Interestingly enough the (father) patron drops indirect hints of his close connection with the crop writers of the Art magazine for which he works just to influence him.

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The way he starts trembling like a dry leaf just on the mention of the name of crop writer is ironic. Yakub exposes the real meaning of Art and the kind of Art which these Art academies serve:

Art for the sake of saints above art for the sake of sinners below act for the sake of... sweet fanny Adams act for the sake of the beauteous virgin. Act for the social security act for the she of posthumous fame act for the sake of grandiose uniformity.(46)

But in his Art of Arts Malti can still be saved from the clutches of the devils, she has a pure heart full of true feelings. Yakub drags Malti to teach her what real Art constitutes.

"Yakub almost drags Malti into a sort of nether world to obtain of and show her the true definition of art. This is the world of reality."(48).

The place where he takes Malti is the world of poverty squalor, dirt and disease. This world, however, ugly it may seem to Malti, who has never experienced this kind of world is the place where true Artists grow. Because according to Yakub, pain and suffering constitute the very basics of Arts. Here, there is an old man playing music on an empty cistern, and Hunk dancing beautifully. In such an atmosphere, Yakub the real Artist cannot control his feelings and emotions and starts singing in his own way. He sings as artistically as does a Nightingale late into the night. The last couplet which he sings sums up what real art means and signifies. He says,

"If I am lonely as a rose it is an inferno i am ugly as a thorn It is a paradise where I grow."(56)

This is what he wants to teach Malti. He deliberately invites Malti to come to his room at dawn just to make her realize, what pain, suffering and deprivation mean and signify. At this, Malti's eyes open wide shock and horrors. Gradually, her face turns to indescribable rage as she comes face to face with Yakub's impassive expression, and understands:

y...y...you. You! Yakub!H...h...how dare you!How dare you! You...you...called me at dawn here, now... on purpose!.(60)

So in this way Yakub makes Malti aware of the pain, sufferings and deprivations of life.

After all this, there is a transformation in Malti. She becomes an agent of change, which is very much evidence in the way she starts singing and Nella starts dancing. Malti says:

Oh come with me, Bukay. I have so much to show you. A new line, a new colour. I'm no longer tired or sad or hurt. I feel... a change. It must express itself... urgently. It's like an unknown experience, so full of fear and expectation that it is. I must share it... realize it... with you come ... won't you please? (68).

Besides being a protest against the mindless censoring of works of Art by the establishment. The play is a clear statement of Asif Currimbhoy's artistic vision. He is against all kind of fakery and artificiality in the realm of Art. The play diagnoses the ills afflicting the world of Art in India.

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