



**Research Article**

**A PERSPECTIVE ON AVARICE AND LECHERY AS A MODERN POLITICIAN IN THE  
PLAY OF ASIF CURRIMBHOY'S *THE DISSIDENT MLA***

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**ARTICLE INFO**

**Article History:**

Received 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2018

Received in revised form 24<sup>th</sup>

February, 2018 Accepted 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2018

Published online 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2018

**Key words:**

Social and Political consciousness, paramount significance, Political events, historical facts, resentment

**ABSTRACT**

Asif Currimbhoy has been prominent writer of the plays and that some of his plays are based on certain social issues and political events of our country. Currimbhoy's social and political consciousness is of paramount significance to us as he is able to show through it his deep-rootedness in the Indian in the ethos, his sense of 'belonging' to the soil. In Currimbhoy's Plays colonial differentiation among human beings on the basis of skin color comes in for sharp criticism. The Dissident MLA and Goa are is devoted to socio-political themes. Goa has also some historical facts. The playwright explores the socio-realistic world to the fullest to move his point. These plays distinguish themselves by their unflinching social realism and satire.

Furthermore, they are essentially topical, but not without a touch of universality. The Dissident MLA presents a sordid world of politicians while Goa deals with the Indian takeover of Goa in December 1961. The Dissident MLA, the playwright focuses on the real incident in an Engineering College in Ahmedabad in 1974. The play effectively voices the resentment of the students who, in a state of utter confusion and disillusionment, aim at impractical and unreal ends through the means of strikes, loot, arson and violence.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The colleges and universities which are the centres of knowledge and learning have been transformed into the virtual platforms from where the politicians try to launch their disciples and followers into active politics. The students, for whom, education should have been their primary objective, are easily beguiled and betrayed by shrewd and cunning politicians. Thus the budding scholars and talents are nipped in the bud, and their potential is wasted.

*The Dissident MLA* is an important play of Asif Currimbhoy because the playwright transforms a topical event into a work of art. The play is about Manu, a *dissident MLA* of Gujarat, who makes use of students to get the assembly dissolved. The play opens with the conversation between Manu and his wife, Shanti, about their son Ramesh, a students' leader who puts forth before his father some of the problems confronting students.

The play opens with Manubhai restlessly pacing up and down in his living room awaiting the arrival of his only son Ramesh. He is a *dissident M.L.A.* in his mid-forties, who has gulped down several times from the half-empty bottle of Scotch, to spend the tension filled night.

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He keeps grumbling and cursing his son who has not arrived. Meanwhile voice of his wife could be heard uttering evil of her husband- "That useless father of yours, Ramesh, grows up and disgrace him. He will try to shine through you, my noble, beautiful boy.

But, you, down! He sucked the life out of me. Don't let him escape!". Manu expresses his disgust for her wanting his son never to listen to her, a frustrated, brainless woman. Her taunting voice can be heard, deriding her husband who she predicts will be wrecked in his political career. Manu, ignoring her wretched nature, writhes in frustration, longing for his son's return.

Soon he could hear Ramesh call him out from the dark, refusing to come to light if his father doesn't agree to his demands. Based on the political events that took place in Gujarat in 1974, *The Dissident M.L.A.* centres on the evil designs of Manubhai to topple the Government. The play depicts various incidents such as students' protest against raise in mess bill at the Engineering college hostel, tough examinations, corrupt Government etc.

The agitating students gherao the Vice Chancellor and publicly humiliate the Home Minister, shaving his head, blackening his face and parading him riding on a donkey. The events finally lead to dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly. The play is a social criticism in which the playwright satirises politicians who are corrupt and greedy.

Currimbhoy explores universal human predicament through his social, moral, religious and political concerns in his plays. He is a voice of universal revolt and anguish. And it is compassion that unifies his plays. Sensing conflicts everywhere he says, 'conflict in theatre, conflict at every level physical, mental, emotional because from the time really you meet with other people, what is called human relationships'.

All his issues, though local in colour, are of universal appeal, drawing attention to problems of man everywhere such as denial of human rights, justice and freedom. This is evident from the appreciation he has received from theatres across the world, where the plays have been successfully staged. The conflicts presented are internal as well as external in nature, rendering them superb psychological studies.

Ramesh doesn't want his father take advantage of him with his tricks for his political gains. Manu assumes that his son has come to consult him on their strategy to continue with the student agitation. Ramesh counts the various reasons for the student unrest such as raise in the mess fees of L.P. Engineering College and the rampant corruption in the examination system. Manu is also told that since he is the *dissident M.L.A.*

That the students need his direction as he is well versed in his old tricks in the trade. He, on his part, also advises Ramesh to go for the big ones in the system like the Dean, the Principal and the V.C. He instigates - "Try a gherao. A simple gherao. One of those innocuous non-violent ones. I will guide you. Listen to my whispers. Follow what I say".

The scene shifts to gherao the V.C. by the students as Manu continues to direct them from behind the scene, telling them in whispers what they ought to do. He prompts them to break V.C's will and shame him until he gets his pants in sheer shock. Manu as a dissident M.L.A is shown how he masterminds to bring about political instability in the state, with the agitating students, through his son.

When he returns home, heaving with unspent passion, Manubhai, goes straight to his astrologer to force out a lucky forecast of his political future. He is advised to control his passion for food, wine and women. But a reckless Manu has set his mind on his planned insurrection in the Legislative Assembly the following day.

Scene IV brings to focus proceedings in the Legislative Assembly, where the Speaker is unable to control a rude and agitated assembly. Manubhai imposingly speaks out with suddenly screaming profanities, "This Government needs to be pulled down, and this Assembly dissolved, none of you would get re-elected and you know it!".

In his anger, he throws his chappals at them causing a general pandemonium. As Manubhai returns home, the episode exposes his sexually perverse life, having an affair with Sona, the servant girl, rescued from the Rescue Home where she used to be molested by the Minister for Social Welfare. The condition of Rescue Homes for women is portrayed ironically by the dramatist as centres of sexual exploitation by politicians in the name of social work, though set up with social concern by Gandhians like Kantibhai.

In act II, donning his Gandhian outfit, Manu visits his political mentor, Kantibhai. He appraises him of the way the agitating

students and the women, continue to spearhead, with devotion and self-sacrifice, like the Salt March by the Mahatma. Kantibhai hails it as done with moral courage in national interest. Manubhai sympathises with his mentor, being shabbily treated, though he was a force in the old party.

He points out how moral courage has slackened, generating strikes, gheraos and morchas instead of nation building, which was the prime motive of freedom fighters like him. He terms violence generated by the students merely by a bunch of hooligans. When he questions Manu about the recent happenings in the legislative assembly, he fumbles for a suitable reply. Kantibhai reminds him of the need for moral rectitude and Brahmacharya to generate moral fibre in society.

Manu tries to wind up his courtesy call, flattering Kantibhai, who led selfless non-cooperation movement through fasting and peaceful ways. Returning home, Manubhai gulps down scotch to drown his shame, exposed by Kantibhai. He turns grumpy and curses the old man for his moral fibre when the Government has been corrupt to the core.

Meanwhile, Sonal comes in to clean the floor, making sexual signals to him. Putting off the candle, he tiptoes towards her and indulges in sex. Hearing the braying of the donkey and the presence of his wife around, he abruptly stops it, telling her to be off. Moments later Shanti approaches him with a peg of whisky and tries to make love to him. He desists her passionate approach wanting to have sex with him.

He makes excuses saying that Kantibhai had advised abstinence. Following morning, as Manubhai wearily drinks a glass of milk, Ramesh comes in with a group of students, wanting to have a private meeting to discuss their further strategies. They plan to begin their clean movement called Nav Nirman Samiti with "no interference, no trade unions, no opposition parties, no money-businessmen".

They assess their success in gheraoing the V.C and making the Minister ride on a mule. Manubhai keeps exhorting the students to continue the agitation with a little more organised action and a tinge of violence to make it effective. He wants a total bandh to paralyze the state aiming to bring down the Government and the Chief Minister.

The episode moves to the pandemonium created by the students crying in the streets with Manubhai yelling, "Burn the fair price shops, Catch the food-grain sellers, Beat up the black marketeers. The only language they understand is fear, Hijack those buses, Bring the trains to a halt, Burn those milk-booths down".

Being provoked, the students go about burning and looting in the streets. When things go out of hand, some students begin to question the movement. "What are we doing? Have we ever stopped to question ourselves? Or are we just getting caught in a madness". But Manubhai keeps inspiring the students not to lose sight of their main objective of getting the downfall of the corrupt body.

When Ramesh tells his father that things are getting out of control, blaming him for using the students for his selfish mad motives, Manubhai merely blames them for asking for his help. He continues to justify his stand- "We are not offenders. We are creating new laws in a free society by breaking old ones. Killing? We have had nothing to do with it. They have killed one of mine. We won't take it lying down. We will kill

too. Rally around. Attack every Government building. Burn every Police Station! Burn! Loot! Kill!”.

The sequence shifts to meeting of the Congress High Command that condemns Manubhai being guilty of indiscipline and anti-party activities. He pleads not guilty being a committed party worker. When he questions corruption and price rise and political rivalry, he is dismissed from the party. Next sequence leads Manubhai in the house of Kantibhai, seeking sympathy for having encouraged the use of violence as a means to an end.

Kantibhai tells him of God’s conscience besides man’s conscience - “And God’s conscience is greater: it forms the basis of Natural Law. Man’s law may be broken, but not the Natural Law”. The scene ends as Ramesh returns home to inform his father that the Ministry has resigned and the C.M. has stepped down. But his father is not satisfied with the news, as he wants the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly. Act III introduces the scene at the Legislative Assembly where the Governor reads in the house the Presidential Order.

Manubhai misbehaves in the Assembly and objects to the suspended animation of the Assembly. He demands dissolution of the house. As the Governor disregards the demand, all the opposition M.L.As walk out making it appear like a voluntary dissolution, though the Congress High Command had warned party M.L.As not to leave.

The students, on their part, take full credit for their movement without the politicians, trade unionists and mill owners’ involvement with their vested interests. Their heated discussions wind up with an introspection by Ramesh - “Comrades, we have revolted against corruption. And it seemed to us corruption came only with politicians and business men, hoarders and black-marketeers. Well, there is another kind of corruption coming in too.

## CONCLUSION

The corrupt, unethical, power-hungry student. And what are you doing to stop that?”. Scene three further depicts Manubhai’s attempt at gathering more and more M.L.As to resign from the Assembly. He tells his wife how he has got 45 out of 108 members tender their resignation. He keeps on calling several M.L.As on telephone to get their resignation. Finding resistance from some, he becomes more abusive on phone. Meanwhile Shanti tells him about Kantibhai’s announcement of his fast unto death until the Assembly is dissolved.

Hearing the news, Manubhai becomes very crazy and starts laughing hysterically. Finding him going mad, Shanti slaps him to bring sanity. The comical section brings to focus how political ambitions can lead to such mad behaviour in people. Manubhai keeps grumbling about his mentor Kantibhai who has gone crazy, “Can’t believe it! That decrepit old moralist going on fast unto death! Who does he think he is? Gandhi? What times does he think he’s living in? Gandhian? The old fool! They will let him die. He is a spent force”.

Immediately, he goes to meet Kantibhai to stop him from his fast unto death as it would be only seen as his taking revenge for having been thrown out of the Government. The scene shifts to Manubhai snoring on the couch, humorously presenting him shouting, while apparently asleep - “You let that old man die and I will see to it that you all fry in Delhi!”. Sonal walks in with her bundle planning to go back to Kantibhai, to look after him in his old age.

Since his wife died she wanted to be with him to give some comfort in his loneliness as if to pay back her debt to him for having put her in the Rescue Home. Manubhai lusted to have her for a last time to satisfy his lust. When she refuses the M.L.A. sighs uttering that “I guess all good things come to an end. Good bye, love. Look after the old goat, the old man.

If there is any trouble, call me”. Ironically, the sequence presents how corrupt both the men prove themselves to be, exploiting women in their own subtle ways in the name of humanitarian service. In scene 7 Ramesh finds his father fully intoxicated, lying in his smoky room. He announces the happy news that the Assembly has been dissolved. But Kantibhai had not called off his fast in protest against Manubhai’s call to protest in the streets.

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### How to cite this article:

Podalappalli Babu (2018) 'A Perspective on Avarice And Lechery As A Modern Politician in the Play of Asif Currimbhoy’s The Dissident Mla', *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 07(4), pp. 11443-11445.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijcar.2018.11445.1980>

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