

A comprehensive review of Asif Currimbhoy's The Doldrummers: Post-Independence Disillusionment and the Battle for Identity.

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Abstract:

Asif Currimbhoy's play *The Doldrummers* (1960) investigates the lives of four Anglo-Indians embroiled in a worthless struggle for survival that eventually results in their unhappiness with the society they live in. It is divided into two acts and four scenes.

These characters' lives have been influenced by an ever-present colonial hangover that prevents them from constructing their own identities as individuals. A sense of discontentment and despair were brought on by their inability to succeed in both their personal and professional lives. Their unethical lifestyle—which stems from a lack of direction in life—is the cause of the downward spiral that unfolds. In the Bombay suburbs, shack dwellers lead a life marked by poverty, disagreements, minor indulgences and loves, all of which are masterfully shown by Currimbhoy, who successfully conveyed the true essence of humanity. Basic human emotions and relationships are the focus of the play. In *The Plays of Asif Currimbhoy*, P. Bayapa Reddy writes in her diary, "It (*The Doldrummers*) deals with the problems of youth in today's western-oriented society and depicts a life of sex and illicit drinks through a set of degenerate characters." After rearranging the word "doldrums," which describes a state of passiveness, Currimbhoy produced the term "doldrummers." The word "inactivity" in the play's title corresponds to the main characters' state of being comatose. Since the shack dwellers are fundamentally human, Currimbhoy acknowledges that the main reasons they have are sex and food, two basic human needs. Despite Rita's intermittent emotional eruptions, they follow their gut sentiments.

Keywords: India after independence, love, sex, Satyagraha, aimlessness, inactivity, disappointment, stagnation, and misanthropy.

Numerous individuals hold the opinion that Asif Currimbhoy, who was born in 1928, was the first noteworthy Indian English dramatist. His plays, which number over thirty, investigate social and political themes of the day. He generates dramatic works as a result of his sensitive observation as well as powerful feelings in response to what he witnesses. "I think the trigger was life itself, of what I saw around, of how I reacted to it, in other words, an emotional reaction," he understands, indicating that there was a trigger (Currimbhoy, Commentary 39). Hurt deeply by India's 1947 split and the subsequent violence, Currimbhoy uses several of his plays to bring attention to the political situation of people in post-independence India. In his plays, among them *The Doldrummers* (1960), he brilliantly illustrates the agonizing pain and loss of human values which characterized the post-independence era. According to Peter Nazareth, Currimbhoy "interweaves the public event with personal events to create exhilarating drama which asks moral queries regarding humanity in the cataclysmic period of independence" (Nazareth 18). This is one of Currimbhoy's trademarks. The Indo-Sino conflict serves as the primary subject matter of Currimbhoy's 1963 play *The Captives*. The topic of Goa's independence by India is discussed in *Goa* (1964). The story of an Indian lad who develops in love with a Goan female native is demonstrated in this two-act play. The issue of immigration is dealt with in *Monsoon* (1965), while Mahatma Gandhi's internal conflict is portrayed in *An Experiment with Truth* (1969).

The issue of the 1971 Indo-Pak War will be addressed in *Sonar Bangla* (1972), while *Inquilab* (1970) concentrates on the rise of the Naxalite revolution in Bengal in the 1960s. The tremendous immigration of Bangladeshi nationals into India is a topic explored in *The Refugee* (1971). The Dalai Lama's flight to India and the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet are the subject matter of *Om Mane Padme Hum* (1972), while the Indo-Chinese theme is covered in *Angkor* (1973). Political satire *The Dissident MLA* (1974) is based on the contemporary student uprising which took place in the state of Gujarat. The theme of *The Miracle Seed* (1973) is Maharashtra's famine and drought. The 1959 film *The Tourist Mecca* tells the story of four travel participants that stop in Agra. Intercultural interactions are the main topic of *Darjeeling Tea?* (1971). In *The Hungry Ones* (1965), Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, two American poets, visit Calcutta, and the story investigates the city's state between riots and impoverishment. Currimbhoy's play seeks to demonstrate the parallels between American beatniks and Indian yogis, as well as between Bengali Muslims and Black Muslims in the United

States. This Extraterrestrial Native Land (1975) highlights the sense of confinement that an Indian Jewish family encounters.

The play *Thorns on a Canvas* (1962) was written by Currimbhoy as an answer to a ban on the previous play, *The Doldrummers* (1960). The drama is a lampoon of institutions and cultural academies that are funded by the government. In the 1961 drama *The Dumb Dancer*, a Kathakali dancer "who so completely identifies himself with the character of Bhima that it leads him from one misapprehension to another, one disaster to another" is the subject matter of three acts. One-act drama *The Clock* (1959) revolves on Henry's life, which is torn between idealism and the harsh realities of humanity. A shelter near Juhu Beach in the suburbs of metropolitan Bombay (Mumbai) functions as a background for the 1960 film *The Doldrummers*. Tony relaxes in a hammock connected to two coconut trees at the very beginning of the play. Tony is singing while Rita and Joe are also there. Joe starts performing a different song when Tony finishes his song, one that emphasizes his dissatisfaction with this world. Joe's displeasure and disgust are evident in his words and actions. His persona says a lot about the disenchantment of young people in the years following independence. Joe in a humorous way expresses in the song "The significance of Satyagraha and Its Misuse":

JOE: *Satyagraha, Satyagraha, Hurrah for satyagraha This passive resistance Tickles our existence ...day we just...no-cooperated Sat around and merely waited Others came and waited too Not knowing what, where or who.*

Joe, a misanthrope and a nihilist, skewers the custom of just introducing the premise of satyagraha. Joe has come to feel that the people of independent India do not understand why they are here. They conform to satyagraha like an automated device, without understanding the real significance of it. Before Independence, this was not the case. Though the Indian Freedom Struggle encouraged people from many casts, classes, and religions to come together to battle for a shared goal, a vacuum was left behind when independence was accomplished. Every one of the play's four main characters considers that there is no meaning to existence today. The fact that Joe is a biological child clarifies even more the cause of his misanthropy. Because her spouse was not present to accompany her, the request by her mother to give birth to Joe ended up being turned down at the hospital. Joe becomes the embodiment of Currimbhoy because he exemplifies the identity conflict that illegitimate children born into relationship or through extramarital affairs experience. Furthermore, Joe is an Anglo-Indian, much like every other character in the drama. Several British males went away India temporarily after its independence, leaving behind women, some of whom had been planning babies at the time. Joe's persona emphasizes the importance of challenge.

The future of Eurasians—not basically their future, but also their social standing—became a major concern succeeding their independence. They were not taken seriously or acknowledged anymore. They were also seen as immigrants. Joe tells how miserable he is about this current situation. As he assimilates into the community, his survival becomes harder to accomplish. This is among the many problems that colonialism bringing forth. Joe uses these words to put into words his agony:

JOE: *We became monsters. Reptilian. With scales insensitive. With breaths of fire and venomous spittle. Since the mirror showed everyone the same, they all thought they were the humans, and we...we...the half ones. Those with hands human and bodies like monsters. We...we...became the still-born ones. Partial monsters all the more horrible because we still retained the basic elements, was the natural distortion, on the distortion the natural? Nobody quite knew. But because we were different, and we were few, we had to be wrong.*

Since illegitimate children must be legitimate with the goal to live an honest existence, Currimbhoy illustrates this struggle in his representation of Joe and his suffering. Misanthrope Joe speaks on the dead feelings that are prevalent in people. It can be a reflection on his soul or an impersonation of the culture that made him a nihilist. Some things within us also pass away, he explicates. Because something in the living can pass away, but nothing in the dead can live. Rita said that Joe saw nothing different between sex and love. Joe believes that the world dismisses him because he is an intellectual and is therefore considerably above their level, making it unattainable for them to understand him.

Like Joe says, the songs in this play analyze political and societal issues, even if the characters in question don't seem to have anything meaningful to talk about. The issue of peace among nations in the atomic era will be addressed in the first song in scene two of the first act:

Better still let's shoot
Like an as-tro-naut.
Suspended in space
In this doomsday race.
We'll eat atoms for breakfast

Hydrogen for lunch

And when it's time for dinner

We'll chase gals like the old sinner.

In addition to being a PhD, Joe is a bastard. With Tony, he consumes most of the time. He communicates his opinions on present society and the other characters through lighthearted remarks. Joe doesn't think sentiments and interpersonal interactions occur. He characterizes himself as :-

JOE: I'm the little man with the large pair of scissors. I'm kill-joy and kill-truth put together, and when I can't cut any more, I cut my own nose to spite my face. I'm the public that has no opinion, because I can't bring myself to care a damn. I am spineless, because it is easier to crawl around that way. Damn you! I'd like to spit in your eye... [then weakly] only I don't salivate enough [giggles]. But I've got a pair of scissors...and with this little axe, I can lop off all the big shady trees in my Papa's Garden.

The play's primary subject matter are love and sex, which Currimbhoy uses in order to emphasize the animal passion without any feeling of responsibility. When Joe, the "intellectual," gets upset about a particular thing, Tony and Rita just let their passions run wild. Joe says that it is "no fun having one" and that his thoughts "get deeper and deeper" in the wake of Tony's recommendation that he "get a girl." Here, Currimbhoy seems to be expressing the point that there are no legitimate passionate relationships in modern society—only artificially created relationships.

Joe demonstrates to Rita the monolithic routine of today's LGBT youth who comply with the zoo's parameters with "the red bottoms and the curly tops." This brought to mind the Wasteland, primarily the everyday mechanical livelihood that T. S. Eliot represented.

JOE: They wear hats and ties and carry umbrellas and work from ten to five. I see them in tram-cars with their long snouts buried in the papers. They blow their noses in clean handkerchiefs and pay four annas to the boot-polish boy. All neat and tidy...Their bloodshot eyes are full of murder and rape as they read the cheap papers.

The drama looks like it suggests that a struggle for survival will unite people and compel them to share a passion for a common cause. That's what Indians' liberation struggle made possible. However, a void was left remained after independence was attained. No admirable objective existed for which people could fight. Joe's comments reaffirm his dependence on the past and his discontentment with the present. He makes the analogy that the flag is like a massive tree that was once a fragile plant. It was a remembrance of the blood of the martyrs.

Joe claims that after independence, identity became apparent and people were content. And he says,

JOE: But something was still missing. A distortion in the seed. They chose to ignore it, resting on past laurels. Gradually, unknowingly, the tree decayed, the landscape changed in to desert, and the fight for survival... was inverted. We became monsters. Reptilian. With scales insensitive. With breaths of fire and venomous spittle.

Joe uses his devious schemes to ruin Rita and Tony's relationship and illustrate his point that there can never be true love in the physical world. Joe encourages Rita to transform herself into a slut in order to take control of her life because, as a bastard, he had been despised by society. As long as a woman is open to sexual relations, Joe views them all identically. He claims,

JOE: Love! Respect! Love! Respect! What does it mean? I get sick hearing people talk about it all the time. And what does love have to do with respect anyway? They are the very opposite. You think of the word love something from a fairy book, patented and germ-free. Like it had to have respectability. Well, it's not. It's love that the whore dispenses around the street corner, and it's the most respectable that pays its price.

Joe's decisions and outlook on the world convey his disapproval and disillusionment with it. India, after independence and the arrival of humans, is his globe.

His persona conveys a great deal about the disappointment of young people in India after independence. He misleads people and fabricates conditions to fit his agenda. He has excellent timing, location, and strike mechanics. He succeeds after patiently waiting for the right moment to alter Rita's perspective on life and love. To him, there is no distinction between business and acquaintances, love and want. When Rita calls him insane, he cites examples that demonstrate his beliefs. He says:

JOE: No more than anybody else, Rita. It's just that I get crazier than most. I see how their minds work, and bloat it on a screen. Sure it looks ugly, like little Gulliver noticing the warts on the breasts of the female giants, but it's there. It's large as life, wearing the shackles of the original sin. So why blame me?

Joe is a scholar who has grown into cynicism, as we can see. Joe demonstrates patriarchal as well as misanthropic traits. His utter contempt for women comes to light. He views all women equitably. Rita or Liza, you're all the same to me. That is the only thing that unites them and designates them as female. Ladies that have a nice little something between their legs. Not any longer. Still, Joe's generosity for women who are subjugated by men is unchanged by this comment. "A woman is always pinned underneath a man," Joe remarks. As beautiful and exquisite as a butterfly, connected and carried forth. A woman needs to go through crucifixion. By persuading Rita to become a prostitute and giving Tony suggestions about Rita's interactions with other men, as well as by getting him into a fight with a competitor, Joe seems to be testing human values and interactions. His efforts are beneficial, and further evidence validates his belief that these sensations are all illusions. He explains to Rita:

JOE: *We started a game, don't you remember? As long as it was a present and it came from a friend of Tony, it was mutually acceptable. Tony wouldn't mind...you saw for yourself he didn't, right in the face of it. So, we started the game with one party, and now I offer myself as another candidate. There's no difference, Rita. It's my right, as much as it is his as long as we are not Tony*

"Rita, put on the ring," he continues. It carried the human witchcraft. But wear it for just a few minutes only. It must be communicated to others for the reason for everything stillborn to be involved in its transfiguration. Rita states that:

RITA: *Sometimes I think Joe never existed. That he was only part of you and I. Something evil hidden within us. That it appeared one day as an apparition, and called himself Joe. That his absence does not mean that he has been exorcised, like the devil, because he's already set into motion a train of events...and knows where it will end.*

With no independent thinking, Tony is a character. As dumb as a banana, that is. Wearing only his shorts and a musical instrument that is a fundamental component of him, he is pictured in the hammock (10). As much as he agrees with Liza and Rita, Joe is the one who most impresses him. Tony loves receiving gifts from other ladies, even if Rita is in love with him. According to other characters, Tony hasn't worked for a year of Sundays, which shows that he is unemployed. Liza presents gifts to Tony when he visits her every Thursday.

Liza is one of the people who Rita, who is in love with Tony, objections to Tony receiving gifts from. How come you done that, Tony? she demands. For whatever reason did you do that?

My love for you is it not enough? Everything I have given you. I should expect nothing short of perfection from you, why not? Ladies and men are the same. That's why Rita hates Liza the most—because she is jealous at. Rita is sympathetic and adheres to traditional romantic partnerships, however Tony is a self-centred whore who doesn't have a job or feel the same way about Rita.

However, he is given costly luxuries like a watch or a silk garment, which allows him to live a menial circulation and squander his youth drinking and singing. He is more in love with his guitar than with Rita, the woman who helps him out by feeding him and housing him while he sews articles of clothing for nothing in return. Joe convinces Rita to become involved in the flesh trade after Tony states that he won't object if Rita accepts gifts from other guys. At Joe's request, she consents to earn gifts on her own in order to defend Tony from other women. The Fat and Bald individual, who used to be Tony's boss, is the primary person who Joe introduces Rita.

As the narrative goes on, Rita turns into a professional sex worker, and Joe is one of her clients. But Rita doesn't stop appreciating Tony and strives so hard to make their romantic connection blossom again. "We three, like blind mice, or better yet, like three monkeys, see nothing, hear nothing, do nothing," Rita describes to Joe their situation after a few months. When Joe explains to Tony that Rita had an affair with the Bald and Fat Man, Tony became irate. Joe prods Tony to stop Rita and the Fat and Bald Man in their tracks, but Tony shows his identity to be a coward when he challenges his previous employer.

When it is discovered that Rita is pregnant with Joe's child, Joe is not present with Tony and Rita. Despite a doubt, she still loves Tony just as much as ever, but Tony is depressed and has his hands clasped behind his head as he looks up at the sky. Tony suffers from severe jealousy and a sense of ownership and he finds it offensive when Rita received gifts from other men. Tony, on the other hand, smacks her, knocks her down, and rushes away because he can not disregard reality. Shaken into a state of agony, Rita confides in Liza about her pregnancy and recoils at the thought of an abortion. Rita was shocked to see her gorgeous Tony returning a few months afterward with Moron Moe and asking her to face him.

Tony, who is not the swimmer, races after her in a frantic attempt to save her as she collapses under the overwhelming stress and dashes into the sea. Rita turns into Tony's saviour once more when she stops Tony from drowning. The policeman tells Liza on the following day that Joe's body washed up on the coast the night before. At precisely the same moment that Rita fled towards the sea to end her life, he disappeared.

A number of unforeseen developments occur in the play's swiftly final scene, including Rita saving Tony, Joe taking his own life, and Rita carrying Joe's child in her womb. As the curtain down, Tony, who appears to have comprehended "something," performs a song lamenting the state of the doldrums. The dramatist thus takes aim at youngsters of today and their lack of orientation in life. He makes fun of today's youth for lacking fearlessness and energy. Currimbhoy launches an attack on the younger generation and their degrading treatment of women.

Liza describes the brutal treatment of Rita by Tony and how the dog-the-monkey accomplishment that that behemoth of a man performs—which I previously told you about—has an unbelievably powerful effect on her. He gives her a slap and then tells her he's going to go. The author of the play unveils the characters' death-in-life circumstance. One is reminded of *The Wasteland* (1922), a classic novel by T. S. Eliot, which portrays the death-in-life state of postwar European culture. The waters underlying the London Bridge and the people who cross it are both perfectly human, as defined by Eliot.

Liza confirms to the police that Rita saved Tony. Tony disappears inside the hammock upon learning of Joe's departure. A guitar music radiates from the hammock. It's Tony, appreciating the air while lounging in the hammock. Tony's withdrawal is a big deal. First, Tony knowingly consents to the Fat and Bald customer's meeting with Rita. Knowing that his previous company is the customer, he just remains silent like a stupid animal. His face is almost completely obscured by two layers of skin. His body experiences seizures in an incomprehensible manner, emitting the misery of someone who feels but cannot express themselves. Rita feels she believes the man who was singing like an exquisite bird is a helpless victim of this continual mental turmoil. The struggle that exists between him and Rita is also accompanied by this internal conflict. She shouldn't turn into a "open house," in his opinion. She rejects his offer and flees when he asks her to meet with someone he knows. To save her, he follows her as well. The play's core theme is enhanced by the idea of an inside battle sitting with an external inconsistency, the two communicating.

It seems because Rita is the only character in *The Doldrummers* whose heart truly develops with genuine love. However, this love comes appear as naive and intolerant. Though the reality is the contrary, she constantly endeavours to portray herself as a self-sufficient and independent personality. It is Rita who persistently wants to put Tony above everybody else, in order to put him on a pedestal, and to aspire to him. She expected Tony to show her the same truthfulness and affection. She is the picture of sincerity, but unfortunately in order to please Tony, she turns into a wench. Joe recommends her to use Tony's model. But in full disclosure, Tony is the one who generated the change in question.

He is a parasite that focuses his pleasure and survival over all additional variables. Tony tells Rita, "You smell like two dozen different types of sweat" (73). Rita can't tell the distinct distinction between love and possessiveness.

After a bit of contention, she followed Liza's example and morphs into a doll after taking Joe's hint. In order for Joe to pay cash for the services she does, Rita returns his ring and explains him that it is now a business. Nevertheless, even after Joe's passing, his ring and child have remained there. Rita disdainfully behaves, "You're back-dated on your news, Liza, or don't you know," when she is questioned about the father of her anonymous child. Catch up on the graphic details by visiting by the Circus Inn at some point. There, they must be placing bets on "which one done it."

Since Liza is a reality person, it would seem that she lacks emotions and sentiments throughout the play. She understands Rita very difficult well as a woman, subsequently when she finds out that Rita is during her pregnancy, she reacts differently. Liza is a perfect instance of how to fully live life. She has the ability to control both situations and individuals to suit her needs. She never says she loves anything. She differs from Rita in this regard. She recognizes that Tony never truly belonged to her. He had a deep need for something that Rita possess. She additionally speaks about how culture has contributed to her unique personality and way of life in her observations.

LIZA: Look Rita, I've got a far more practical solution. Listen to me. I have a friend. He kept reassuring me that I was completely safe with him because he claimed to be doctor. At first I thought he mean safe the other way...know, a platonic friendship...until I found out that he meant otherwise. It turned out he really was a doctor...and what's more a practicing doctor. He told me if I ever knew anyone in trouble, he could fix her up...you know...

Conclusion

The play's four main characters—Tony, Rita, Joe, and Liza—never genuinely transcend in life. They are unsuccessful in their careers or in their connections with others. As the play opens, Tony and Rita's relationship appears innocent and loving, but it is ruined by Tony's deepening envy of Rita's acquaintances with other men. At the start of the play, Rita is in love with Tony; at the end, she is a registered prostitute. She loses Tony's affection instead of getting into an institutional relationship. She gets pregnant with Joe's kid, who doesn't even

give any consideration about his own life. She complicates her life instead of gathering anything, and as a result of her job, she ultimately ends up with Joe's child. If her child cannot have a legal father, they will be regarded to as bastards. Rita demonstrates her emotional foolishness by using the money she earns from sewing garments to lavishly spend Tony. She gives up her meagre prospects of raising her profile in the community and turns become a professional prostitute in the process. The lives of the lead characters can be described as being without ambition. Joe, a young man with higher education, never discusses looking for work. However, he simply squanders time discussing the mistakes made by others. Tony, who can play the guitar and has a "magnetic aspect to his singing" doesn't bother going out to play live to make a living. Liza, who displays herself as a knowledgeable woman, is disinterested and complacent. As a result, all four individuals live lives of convenience that prevent them from moving on. They lead a life of idleness while staying in "doldrums."

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