

Interplay of Love, Sex, and Politics in Asif Currimbhoy's Play *Goa*

Satya Paul

Associate Professor of English, Govt. National P.G. College, Sirsa, Haryana
Email ID: satyapaul73@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Asif Currimbhoy (1928-94), an eminent contemporary Indian playwright has written plays on a wide variety of themes. His play *Goa* weaves themes of love, and sex along with the political theme of invasion of Goa in its texture. The love stories in the play run parallel to the story of Goa in such a way that the two mingle symbiotically. The present paper emphasizes how Currimbhoy has entwined interplay of love, sex, and politics in a single tapestry. It brings to the fore how the playwright draws a parallel between the love stories in the play and the story of invasion of Goa. In this paper the artistic skills of the playwright, who presents his thought by implication, indirection, and innuendo, rather than by direct statement, have been highlighted. Apart from this, Currimbhoy's stylistic improvisations, allusions, and associations have been discussed with the help of appropriate quotes from the text of the play.

Keywords:

Goa, Love, Sex, Politics, Invasion

Asif Currimbhoy (1928-94), a famous contemporary Indian playwright, has carved his own place in the arena of Indian drama with his voluminous production of twenty-nine stageable plays which are substantial in content and rich in theatrical appeal. An eminent critic Faubion Bowers suggests, "Currimbhoy's plays reveal him to be India's first authentic voice in the theatre"¹ Renowned practicing writers such as Graham Greene and Arthur Miller too have applauded Currimbhoy's work while discovering in him "a forceful playwright"² besides considering his play *Goa* to be "a most remarkable piece of work."³

Observed closely, Currimbhoy's dramatic creations seem to possess the diversity of themes drawn from a wide variety of fields such as contemporary politics, history, social and economic

problems, psychological conflicts, metaphysics and art encompassed in forms like tragedy, history, comedy, farce and melodrama. During his sixteen yearlong literary career from 1959 to 1975, he produced noted plays such as *The Tourist Mecca* (1959), *The Doldrummers* (1960), *Goa* (1964), *Inquilab* (1970), *Darjeeling Tea?* (1971), *Sonar Bangla* (1972), and *This Alien . . . Native Land* (1975).

Out of the plays authored by Currimbhoy, *Goa* (1964) has been really popular among theatre lovers. Besides its thematic richness, the stylistic improvisations introduced in the play add to the mellifluous tapestry of Asif Currimbhoy's dramatic art. The present paper endeavours to analyse the theme of love, sex and politics in the play *Goa*. It also attempts to establish how not just

thematically but stylistically also Goa assigns to Currimbhoy a place of pride in the galaxy of other outstanding Indian playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani.

In *Goa*, Currimbhoy chooses to employ an intriguing strategy weaving the apparently diverse themes of love and sex along with the political theme of invasion of Goa. The love stories in the play run parallel to the story of Goa in such a way that the two are one while the reader is hardly aware of this fact. The only hint to the parallelism is in the key sentence "Rose is Goa. Goa is Rose"⁴ which is repeated several times in the play. The seemingly simple love story of an Indian boy yearning for a Goan girl subsumes metaphoric allusions culminating finally in a superb allegory. In *Goa*, Currimbhoy chooses to delineate characters that are not just allusive but elusive as well - character that stand for abstractions, characters that are two bodies but one mind—there is God's plenty in Goa.

There are two 'love' couples in the play - Maria and Alphonso, and Rose and Krishna. The love bond between Krishna and Rose is romantic, passionate, and emotional. Their irresistible passion for each other in the opening scene of the play is reminiscent of the proverbial togetherness of Romeo and Juliet:

GIRL (ROSE). . . It's getting dark now. I can see your lips no longer. I do not know what you say... But my heart is full of love: the more for you are unknown to me and I would love...this secrecy... (Boy climbs upto balcony and gives her a rose) Yes...that's my name how did you know? ... No, don't touch my hand don't touch me touch me not stranger (G9)

The youthful lover is eager to touch

the shy beloved. But the evening is fast enfolding the lovers in its darkness. The 'darkness' naturally rouses a question in the minds of the spectators—is this darkness symbolic? The question enlarges as the lover makes a bold declaration of his love for Rose in the presence of her mother:

KRISHNA. Nobody's going to stop me, Maria...I've waited for her too long. It took care and patience, and long years of understanding. You see, we had something in common. It rhymed. It matched...I love her, Maria. She's tender to the touch, though I never touched her... terrified that my hands should hold the uncrushed flower...so pure...and fragrant. (G 33)

However, Senhora Maria Miranda has an intrigue in her mind. She wants to whore Krishna in the bargain. She demands: "No one's going to stop you Krishna...but you'll have to pass by me first..." (G 33-34). Alarmed, he resists such a weird overture. As his frustration grows; he resorts to malevolence, slapping Maria, raping Rose and murdering Alphonso before eventually sacrificing his own life on the altar of the passion of love. Thus, a yearning heart is forced to turn to beastly lust, scheming malevolence, and frenzied violence.

Viewed retrospectively, Maria herself seems to be a victim. Before running into Alphonso and Krishna, she has had been racially abused. As the antecedents unfold before us, we get to know that she had been raped by a dark-complexioned man. It is this shocking incident in her life that seems to have left an indelible mark on her psyche. It puts in perspective Maria's hatred for the dark Rose - an unwanted offspring of this violent and undesirable copulation between her and her rapist. Tossing between her natural love for the child and a seething contempt on account

of her unnatural breeding, she continues to deprecate her because of her colour – a painful reminder to her agonizing experience at having been raped – and stoops to avenging her when another black boy Krishna falls in love with the girl.

While representing love and sex, Currimbhoy embraces the device of juxtaposition for creating proper effect on the stage. Love affairs have been brought against each other to find out their respective significance in the life of the characters. The nature of love affair between Krishna and Rose is idealistic, passionate and emotional, whereas the liaison between Senhora Miranda and Alphonso is purely sexual. The love affair between Maria and Alphonso is not only a source of animal satisfaction but also a strategic tool to challenge the dark coloured people whom Maria hates. She tosses up her head in pride and admiration for her man Alphonso while the ‘regulars’ on the benches watch his drunken entry into her house. Sexuality and lust seem to dominate her mind the way Maria receives her lover:

SENHORA MIRANDA. (Throwing herself in his arms) Alphonso! (She kisses him long and tenderly) You smell of drink but kiss me again ... (They kiss) and have another... Girl ...I am your girl...I’m your mistress and your wife. (G 16)

Again, the manner in which Senhora Miranda takes the long ‘patio’ walk in the opening scene, with her body movements, and pride in her person under the forceful vulturous eyes of the natives, stands for three things—one, it denotes her strong sexual appeal as well as desire; second, it stands for the challenge that she offers in a non-verbal language to the natives that are against her aberrant style of life, and finally it underscores her love for the Portuguese whites along

with the hate for the ‘dark’ natives.

Maria, the fair-looking woman of around forty, splendidly dressed in the latest Portuguese fashion and with a colourful parasol in her hand crosses the ‘regulars’ on the benches hushing their conversation with her movements: “But her walk is the same: a slightly exaggerated movement around the hips, a tone of feminine self-consciousness mixed with artful coquetry which SHE obviously enjoys” (G 8). The ‘stare’ of the society (in the form of bench-watchers) on the coquettish beauty Maria creates not only a tense atmosphere suited for a good play but also a presentiment of sexuality in the play. Her strong sexual desire is also represented in the way she behaves. This is how she knows and weighs men: “I measure them first, from tip to toe, from circumference to height. Then I look at the stuff they are made of...are they made of air...or beer? Then I multiply the two, and pronto, I get their weight” (G 41). Her filthy and mucky nature is well expressed in the language she uses. She needs Alphonso because “He’s got the instinct of a horse” (G 46) to satisfy her carnal desires. For him, she uses animal images that stand for sexual power like a ‘horse’, ‘bear’, ‘beast’, ‘bull’ and ‘dog’ thereby underlining his sexual capabilities as well as her detestation for him. She designs a competition between him and Krishna, using her daughter Rose as a bait, and instigates violence between the two resulting in the murder of Alphonso at the hands of the otherwise “peaceful boy” Krishna. But the similarity between these two contrasting love affairs is that they culminate on a similar note as Alphonso is killed leaving behind the wailing Senhora Miranda while Krishna is dead as Rose embraces darkness and silence as the permanent companions of hers.

The conflict between the purity and impurity of sexual relationship gathers tremendous force in the play. The love of the

first couple comprising Krishna and Rose is based on peace, passion and non-violence whereas that of the second one has animal instincts and animosity inherent in it. Whereas the former involves commitment and sacrifice, the latter involves exchange of hot arguments, demeaning warfare and even violence extending to the murder.

Observed thus, Currimbhoy's ideology appears to be in consonance with that of Vijay Tendulkar, another formidable figure in the echelons of Indian playwrights in English. Tendulkar's belief that violence is an essential part of human nature and it surfaces as soon as the circumstances demand it; seem to run through the tapestry of *Goa* by Asif Currimbhoy. Currimbhoy's characters, essentially human, are mentally weak and they are easily prone to victimisation by forceful circumstances. Even their virtuous nature cannot deter them from degeneration. They are capable of both extremes: they can be noble, sensitive and loving besides being indifferent, violent and destructive.

In *Goa*, people are hardly conscious of the society or its customs. Their desire for sexual relationship and the consequences it breeds, especially how the passion of love 'consumes' an individual in struggle itself, is a spectacular sight. Alphonso is murdered, Maria is left dejected, Rose is raped, Krishna gets killed, but the hurdles of society cannot be blamed for the ill-fate of any one of these characters.

Currimbhoy's accomplished craftsmanship comes to the fore in his strategic use of unique dramatic techniques. Sex, for example, a recurrent motif in his plays, has not been used merely to exploit the emotions of his audience, but to make a point. In *Goa*, the gulf between the Indians and the Portuguese is symbolised by strong sex. Rose, the beautiful girl, who symbolises the mellifluous poetic grace of Goa, is raped

by Krishna who represents the crude Indian aggressiveness. In political dimensions, Krishna's rape of Rose becomes symbolic of the Indian military assault on Goa.

The saga of Goa, from romance to fiasco runs, though implicitly, parallel to the love stories of Rose and Krishna. Symbolically speaking, Krishna is India, Rose is Goa, Senhora Miranda and Alphonso are the Portuguese colonizers who do not allow Goa to be one with India. "Krishna's waiting for fourteen years for Rose . . . symbolises India's waiting for fourteen years (1947 to 1961) for Goa to become one with it."5

While trying to understand Krishna, Maria asks, "Why are you so full of opposites Krishna? Soft and hard. Love and hate. Young and old. Peaceful and violent. Yes, you have potential. You cover the full range of the known and the unknown" (G 43). Here, in speaking about Krishna, she appears to speak about India. Again, the challenge that Krishna throws at Alphonso at the end of Act II scene (i) "We...meet...tonight" (G 51) comes on the night of invasion of Goa (18th December 1961), when Goa is liberated and Alphonso is murdered. Another evidence of such parallels comes to the fore when Krishna is seen challenging Alphonso for Rose. It is through his assertion that the Goan Nationalist seems to be challenging the Portuguese Administrator for Goa. In a sense the Goan Nationalist and Portuguese Administrator are other halves of Krishna and Alphonso respectively.

Further, in the act of invading Goa, the "innocent and peaceful and moral image of India was blemished with her first act of violence" (G 57) the same way as that of Krishna in killing Alphonso out of necessity. In addition, Goa found itself frustrated and desolate after the liberation, no better than it was earlier, the same way as Rose, an essential part of Krishna, finds herself after being 'one' with him.

In both the cases, the final achievement is silence, darkness and stillness.

After liberation, peace and calm of Goa is replaced with death and destruction, and so also culminates the love affair between Rose and Krishna in desperation and desolation. What the Old Woman in the play says of the fate of Goa is true of this love affair also: “who would have thought this paradisaical island, where love flowed like rain, would form dreadful avalanches of death and destruction...” (G 14). Thus, Currimbhoy’s socio-realistic plotting in Goa “expands into allegory. where rape, the most violent personal abuse, symbolises the final suffering and disintegration. The beauty is gone; only harsh reality remains, no one wins” says Ruth L. Meserve.⁶ If Rose escaped from the possible use of filthy physical force by Alphonso, she got raped by Krishna; if Goa was liberated from the Portuguese clutches, there came her own people in the form of political leaders to disgrace and exploit her.

Currimbhoy presents his thought by implication, indirection and innuendo rather than by direct statement. Use of allegorical mode and devices like verbal echoes, visuals, ellipses, gestures, symbols, parallels and contrasts, and above all a language true to the life of the characters and the situation in hand appear to form an all-encompassing paraphernalia of stylistic assonance to achieve the desired effect on the stage.

Currimbhoy usually draws on parallelism and contrast for achieving the required dramatic effect in a play. These two devices are the tools that help him achieve completeness of plots in his plays. A contrast inherent in the comparison of people and situations what they were in the beginning of the play and how they are poised at the end of it, gives a sense of culmination at the end of each of his plays.

In *Goa*, the love affairs in the play involve a lot of violence and hate; the play that begins with picturesque Goan scene and a romantic lover, ends with despicable scene of death and desolation; friends are turned into foes; the passionate lovers change into violent rapists, and sharp and clever users of language are transformed into staggering hysterical people grappling with words and situations. Moreover, there are characters in Currimbhoy that have been contrasted with each other to foreground the virtues and vices in the nature of these characters: Maria, the clever ‘white’ whore has been put against Rose, the innocent ‘dark’ girl; the lustful and dissipated “ruddy brainless bull” (G 47) Alphonso presents a total contrast to the passionate, peaceful and emotional lover Krishna, and the Portuguese Administrator is different from the Goan Nationalist ideologically as the former supports colonialism, while the latter stands for the spirit of nationalism. Further, the playwright has placed poetic language of Krishna against the violent actions of Alphonso.

Currimbhoy’s characters are broader than what they appear to be. Sometimes they stand for abstractions; the smuggler in *Goa*, for example. Characters, situations, gestures and movements of the characters appear to carry additional meanings. Apart from this, imagery has been used superbly. Currimbhoy uses animal images repeatedly to underline the bestial instincts of his characters—‘horse’, ‘bull’, ‘dog’ and ‘bitch’ which occur and reoccur in the play to represent strong sexual desire as well as sexual power of human beings. ‘Vulture’, ‘cow’ and ‘swine’ are other animal images used to embody censure, acquiescence and hatred in human behaviour respectively.

Similarly, even the smallest possible instance in an amorous discourse is symbolic. Krishna takes one spoon of sugar in his tea, Maria “always take(s) two” and

Rose three; thereby meaning that Krishna is monogamous by choice, while Maria is a prostitute who likes more than one at a time, and she wants Rose to go farther than her (it is Maria who speaks for her daughter that she will take three). Maria later confirms the meaning when she says, "...Its not going to be easy, Krishna. (Softly) You see, Krishna, I come first, like two spoons of sugar before three. No one's going to stop you Krishna... but you'll have to pass by me first..." (G 33-34). Here Currimbhoy conveys the vilest thought through symbols, without hinting a speck of obscenity. Again, deep symbolic significance has been conferred upon the gestures used in the play. Maria's holding the cross that she wears in her neck is a notable gesture that recurs in the play. Whenever she is confused and is in trouble, she holds the cross in her hand (G 24, 55), thus perhaps asking for the Omnipotent help. However, she also appears to have lost faith in Him. The gesture expresses the conflict in her mind. She is unconsciously torn between 'faith' and atheism. A similar gesture involving the 'cross' and the sinner is there in *The Doldrummers*. Rita makes it when Liza asks her to abort the illegitimate child in her womb. The gesture reveals Rita's sense of justice for the one who is not at fault; she does not want to kill the child in the womb. Again, in *Goa* Rose and Krishna's quivering lips under the stress of strong emotions, when they find tough impediments in the way of their being 'one', is another gesture appropriately used by the playwright, a gesture that speaks volumes about the depth of feelings and emotions in the heart of the lovers otherwise inexpressible with verbal signifiers.

Currimbhoy bestows his characters with suitable dialogue. Dialogue in *Goa* is marked with passion, agitation, insanity and hate. Use of a device like ellipses underlines and suggests the 'unsaid' perfectly. Ellipses represent diverse temperaments like angry eruptions, clever

and witty intensions, perturbed mental state at the time of crisis and hysterical and emotional outbursts of the characters. The change in dialogue travels parallel to the change in the temperament of a character. Maria in the beginning of the play is a clever whore who makes diplomatic use of language but in the later part of the play her talks become barmy as she drifts towards insanity. Alphonso, the drunkard, does not change much from the beginning to the end and so his language also remains the same. Krishna, who is the only moral character in the play, is peaceful and contented in the beginning while at the end of the play, he is frustrated and agitated and the words that he utters undergo a change accordingly. His sense of loss at his degeneration and the resulting pain is visible in his words when he talks to Maria and Alphonso: "... closing, shutting out, killing that one instinct of pure love which had to be whored in order to get to pure love, staining itself on the long long way, leaving me no better than both of you . . ." (G 48). To represent Krishna's sense of loss after his transformation into a tyrant, his uncontrolled anger over Maria's bad intentions and his failure to win Rose, Currimbhoy attributes him a superb speech towards the end of the play where he addresses and questions Maria:

Who took your innocence,
in that night fertile with horror...
innocence reminded only...by
Rose. Bringing back that memory;
constantly reminding. Rose... Rose.
Who was born of your original sin.
Rose. Rose. Dark Rose. Who was
colour of blood that broke out when
she was conceived. Rose. Rose. Dark
Rose. WHO RAPED YOU? Rose.
Rose. A man, dark, stranger, colour
of Rose, who raped you. Who was
it? Rose! Rose! Who reminded you
of Rose? Understand me, Maria,
now.... Why was it Rose? Why was
she innocent? Understand closely.

(*MARIA closes her eyes in delirium, in part-consciousness, yet with mind conditioned to his compulsion*) Why was it Rose? Why was she innocent? When you were fair and blemished yourself? If Rose was he, and he was Rose, what would be the best vengeance? A nail for a nail, and a tooth for a tooth, Maria. That which cannot remain innocent any longer if blemished. (*MARIA is praying to herself*) So, you, Maria, not I, started the game. Dangled Rose before us, not through competition for you, but for her. Made us, whore with you, not for yourself, but for her. Used us, not to rape one who had already been raped, but to rape one who had not been raped! (*She stops praying*) Who constantly reminded you of your former self. Whom you wanted also on your point of equalization. Who was taught not to be touched so that experience of the rape would be a real one. (*He pauses*) Rose. Rose. Maria, it is Rose. Single your intentions. Use me a step further. Pour your hate not on me but on Rose. Relieve yourself of the guilt through Rose. For she was the cause of it all. Then remember; did she scream like you? Feel your pain and horror. For then only she becomes you. (*He stops dead and looks at her penetratingly...*) (G 55)

Here the perfect mixture of questions, surprises and rebukes is a superb example that shows Currimbhoy's maturity as an artist in expressing the psyche of his characters. The repetition of 'Rose' (Krishna repeats it 25 times in a single speech) serves various purposes—it questions Maria's identity vis-à-vis Rose, demands

explanation for her racial reservations, reveals the lover's strong and passionate emotions for his beloved, portrays his stressed and perturbed mind in the true sense of the term, expresses his strong desire for possessing his unrealised love Rose, is a perfect 'objective co-relative' for his tortured soul, and succeeds in expressing his anger and frustration along with deriving Maria to a guilty conscience who has been responsible for his degeneration. Finally, it explains the reason for his being violent and the extent to which he is violent. As a result, Maria helps Krishna in raping Rose immediately after this outburst.

Currimbhoy's characters are essentially good people but they are found caught in intriguing situations. However, it is not just that they have to counter man-made intrigues in their endeavours, but also to come to terms with God-made mystique which is permanently embedded in human existence. Caught up in adversities, aspirations and frustrations, and yet in pursuance of nudging ahead of the other, they poetically bring to the fore the complex and multi-layered intricacies of human realities. It is this intriguing nature of human existence that engages Currimbhoy's creative attention an artistic manifestation of which we get to see in Goa.

In unravelling such complex characters, Currimbhoy weaves a rich thematically tapestry that draws our profound concerns and serious attention in his memorable play *Goa*. Adroitly blended with it are the stylistic improvisations, allusions, and associations that seem inseparably interwoven in the soul, structure and substance of this uniquely haunting play.

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Dr. Satya Paul (M.A., NET, M. Phil., Ph.D.) is an Associate Professor of English, at Govt. National P.G. College, Sirsa, Haryana. In an academic career spanning over twenty years, he has presented over twenty research papers in various international and national seminars and conferences. Apart from this he has the credit of publishing a dozen research articles in reputed journals.