

THE CAPTIVES: A SOCIAL PLAY BY ASIF CURRIMBHROY**Dr.A. Selvam***Associate Professor of English, NMSSVN College, Nagamalai, Madurai***M.P.Ganesan***Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sourashtra College, Madurai - 4***Abstract**

In the Indian English dramatic literature, Asif Currimbhoy has made a remarkable and significant contribution through his plays that are meant for acting, while his predecessors like T.P. Kailasm, Chattopadhyay and Sri Aurobindo wrote plays that are lyrical, symbolic and allegoric in form. Hence Asif Currimbhoy is rightly called as the first authentic voice in the theatre. Asif Currimbhoy has exhibited his various facets of writing through various kinds of plays like social plays, religious plays, historical plays, political plays.

***The Captives** is a social play that depicts the relation between the Indian Muslim and Pakistani Muslim. The play also deals with the Indo-Chinese invasion. Through the play, one can understand the social concern that the playwright has regarding the events that take place around him in his Milieu.*

The Captives is a play sequel to **The Restaurant** and a sense of historic continuity is seen in both the plays. **The Captives** can also be considered a war play. The play gives us the view of the conflicts of various social and political forces in our country today. The play also gives us the vivid picture of the pressure undergone by the Indian Muslim under deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan. **The Captives** is not a very successful play. Currimbhoy finds an opportunity for examining the problem of Hindu-Muslim integration. It deals with the image of an old congressman who dominates the political scene under a self-imposed code of moral values.

The Captives, which first appeared as a companion- Piece with **Thorns on a canvas** boldly takes us to the theatre of war during the indo Chinese conflicts of 1962. This play is conceded with the post partition human psyche in the Indian sub continent. The eruption of October 1962 was a traumatic experience for India. Most cities in India were seized with anti – Chinese hysteria and in this play, we can see Hasan who is an Indian Muslim leaving his family behind, and going to the army outpost where he is appointed in a responsible post. The army outpost is located at the Indo-Chinese border well known as Ladakh.

Hasan is an Indian Muslim who is very loyal and sincere in his duty. According to him, even his wife Raj and his two little children are next to his duty. He gives prime importance to his work of defending his country from the invasion of China and the anti-hysteric Pakistan, though his wife restricts him from going to the outpost he a wants to go for the sake of protecting Mehtab, an old congress man and sincere follower of Gandhi.

Through his character, one can also analyze the plight of the Indian Muslims in general. Though the play is a war play, because of the fight that takes place between India and Pakistan and war between India and China, during the period of independence it is centred on some problem in a linear manner. These two problems form the background of the play. The problem that rises because of the partition is brought out by Pak corporal AREF who has entered the Indian army outpost by mistake, where he sees Mehtab, the great disciple of Gandhi.

While Hasan is much concerned about the safety of Mehtab, the latter says that he would lose the touch with reality, if he does so the remakes, "It would have been safest to have remained in Delhi. So why should I have come here. . . except perhaps to have been reminded how far I was out of touch with reality." (**The Captives 24**) Though Mehtab is a man of nonviolence, he is an adept in handling even a gun which has surprised Hasan. So, we can say that Asif Currimbhoy has clearly brought to light the violence that lies deep within the heart of Mehtab. Though Mehtab believes in fighting without hatred and nonviolence, he also believes in fighting violently, if the need arises. So one can understand that though Mehtab is wedded to the Gandhian principles of Ahimsha and nonviolence, he supports violence which means killing the enemy, if it is the duty of the soldier".

Guard: There's a gun lying next to you

Mehtab: (*clutching on to the sake more tightly*) I know.

Guard: If I am foe, you will need it.

Mehtab: I will not need it.

Guard: You mean you're afraid to use it.

Mehtab: I'm not .you are.

Guard: What you mean?

Mehtab: You're obviously armed. But you won't use it on me until you find me armed too.

Guard: (*laugh dryly*) you mean you won't resist me.

Mehtab: You're wrong. I will resist you, but not violently.

Guard: You will never kill.

Mehtab: No

Guard: Swear it

Mehtab: (*still holding on to his sack*) my faith has already committed me to that oath

Guard: But you would allow others to kill.

Mehtab: If it be their duty to do so. (**The Captives 30-31**)

He also says, "When I leaned on you, Hasan, a short while ago. I was reminded of the Mahatma. He would have quoted Lord Krishna's words: "Realize that pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, are all one and the same and then go into battle. Do this and you cannot commit sin," you know what that means, Hasan. Do not hate your enemy though it becomes your duty to fight." (**The Captives 25**) So, Mehtab continues himself into a circle of ahimsha which means, he remains captives within himself. Like Mehtab, the major character of this plays remain

captives in some way or the other. Hasan, the Indian Muslim, is not only sincere and loyal to his country but also to Mehtab. Hasan knows Mehtab very well from his early days. Though they know each other very well, they play a blind game, as if they don't know each other. One will come to know through their conversation that there is eeriness in the talk and the actions alike of them. While Mehtab is taking rest after the conversation between themselves, a guard with Balaclava comes in and looks at Mehtab and moves away. The guard is none but Aref, a Pakistani Muslim who has come to Indian army outpost mistaking his own. Because of the partition Aref, the Pakistan Muslim is very angry at Mehtab who is the follower of Gandhi.

When Mehtab asks Aref where he comes from, the latter replies as "I once came from the plateau yonder. In the whole world there wasn't anything loftier than my land or sweeter than my people. We lived as neighbors', you and I, respecting each other's sovereignty, trading over the high routes through the mountains, bearing malice towards none, yet depending upon the help of the other. (*Mehtab begins to retreat in the shadows as the hooded man's presence grows*)(*voice grows menacingly*) we were raped! My land was raped! We cried out to you for help. But you deserted us when we needed you most. You talked and talked and talked. About suzerainty and Panchsheel and what always supposed to have belonged to them . . . (*Mehtab is now in the shadows*) Why do you retreat into the shadows, old man? Atone for it in the light! (*Catches hold of Mehtab and swing him around to face the lamp*) They whom you then called friends . . . are now your enemies . . . and all the closer for your having admitted them. . ." (**The Captives 32**) This shows his patriotic feelings towards his country. To Mehtab's eyes, Aref looks different each time he speaks about his people and his native place. Mehtab could not find who he is. It is Hasan and his guard who has correctly found Aref as Pakistani.

Aref is a corporal of Pakistan and also enemy to gorillas such he is arrested by Hasan. Through the dialogues of Aref, one can know the strong religious faith he has in his heart as a Muslim. He is very talented and skillful enough. Through his cunning and mesmerizing talk, he says, "But look what they've done. Look how slow they're about it. They're plodding . . . the bullock-cart way, a government of bullocks. You've got to pull yourself up by your boot-straps. Let nothing come in your way. Look how we formed a Government overnight. Cleaned corruption, the whole mess. We rule with an iron fist . . . knowing what's good for the people. That's being practical, isn't it?" (**The Captives 43**) But the guard is strong enough to face the temptation, and he also remains neutral which shows the partition in the Indians.

So, one can see that there are some people who have the strong urge to defend their country and protect the people. One can also see that most of the character of Asif Currimbhoy have social conscious and wants to live for the safety and protection of their city.

Aref doesn't stop his work of tempting with the guard, but also it continues with Hasan. Aref has even gone to the extent of irritating Hasan, when the former fails in his work. He says, "Naturally. You know very well that I'm stronger in my country than you are in yours. You know very well that I'm freer in my country than you are in yours. What's more, you also know that there's nothing to stop you from coming over if you want to." (**The Captives 45**)

Aref is a very cunning and cruel fellow who may be thought of as a good man, because of his caring conversation with Hasan. Aref addresses Hasan as “minority” in India. Here Aref calls the Indian Muslims as “minority” and he does all this to Hasan against Mehtab. Then he can finish Mehtab easily who will be all alone. Aref says, “Fifty million weak! Fifty million underprivileged! Fifty million who’re afraid to raise their voices? Fifty million who will succumb to their integration . . . idolatrous integration! Remember, Hasan, remember the words . . . “persecution is worse than killing. And they will not cease from fighting against you till they have made you renegades from your religion, if they can. And who becometh a renegade and dieth in his belief; such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and the hereafter. Such are the rightful owners of fire; they will abide there in . . .” Think back, Hasan, think back to the farewell sermon, saying, “know ye that every Moslem is a brother unto every other Moslem and that ye are now one brotherhood. . .” What’s become to all of you! Have you abandoned your faith . . . the same faith that should have made us brothers? If you come with me, I’ll show you three-hundred million strong, stretching from Gibraltar to the Himalayas, from Morocco to the Malacca Strait, all of whom profess the same beliefs, all of whom utter the same prayers, all of whom turn their eyes towards the same holy city . . . In each one of them you’ll find yourself . . . and also Him whom you seek. . .” **(The Captives 46-47)**

This hatred lies not only in Aref, but also in all the citizens of Pakistan. Aref hates Mehtab, because he is also a Gandhian, and has a great contribution in the freedom struggle, as well as in the partition. During independence, because of Jinnah’s Muslim league and to an extent even congress, Indians had to face the worse nightmare of the partition.

The creation of Pakistan in partition was one of the bloodiest incidents of the modern history. As a country struggling to free itself from the clutches of imperialist Britain, India was not ready for such bloodshed and division, especially in the name of religion. This inevitable thing had happened, thus begun the plight of Indian-Muslims those who were migrated and those who were stayed on in India. In this way, Hasan who has earned the trust and belief of Mehtab, has now seemed to lose his loyalty in the eyes of the latter. Mehtab has even called Hasan as a “Traitor!” when the latter decides to release Aref.

The Chinese has surrounded the three directions of the army outpost while Aref, Hasan and Mehtab are conversing. Aref suggests him a thread of chance they have to escape for which Hasan has agreed. Since Hasan is in a state of dilemma. We can see Hasan being taken away by Aref’s words in that critical situation. Slowly those words of Aref are “Hasan, get away quick. They’ve come sooner than they had planned for your own sake, get away quick.” “There’s not much time left . . . for the invasion.” “The China is planning a second invasion into India. I stumbled on their camp, the same way as yours, except that they did not spot me, and I overheard their plans. I wanted to rush back to my outpost and lost my way in the storm. They’ll wipe you out! They’ll wipe all out! At the moment they’ve already outflanked you! They’re at your base camp now!” **(The Captives 51)** He continues “The outflanking armies are closing in from the south. The entire line may not be closed yet. This may be a stray patrol. It’s dark now. A slim chance to the north . . . of escape! Do you follow, Hasan?” **(The Captives 51)**

Being persuaded by these words Hasan releases Aref instead of Mehtab's warning. Through Mehtab is an old man, as a politician, he is able to trace Aref's plan to escape and his effort to make an alliance with Hasan. Through this, Mehtab can be left alone, according to the plan of Aref. Mehtab warns Hasan not to release Aref which will lead to unfortunate happenings and says, "(more excited, more suspicious and more lost) Follow what? Follow what? This is more than military language, Hasan! This must be . . . some . . . alliance . . . to leave me alone! (*Hasan looks at Mehtab with a flash of anger but does not reply. Instead, he takes out his knife and begins to cut Aref's ropes.*) What are you doing! Have you gone mad! What are you doing?." **(The Captives 54)**

As Mehtab has expected, there arises a clash between him and Aref and both are armed now. Hasan who is the poor Indian Muslim and the one who tries to pacify them in that situation has become the victim of one of the two in the dark which means he is shot and Mehtab and Aref also has met their own end later. Hasan has suffered, because of his hasty decision of releasing Aref who is the Pakistani Muslim. We do not know who has shot Hasan and Hasan won't reveal us about the one who has shot him though he knows. Through this, one will come to know that, Hasan also remains Captive in his religion as well as in his country in the name of being responsible, sincere and loyal. Hasan himself has made a note that they (Mehtab and Hasan) remain captive and Hasan Declares, "I never felt free, Mehtab. I don't know why, but I never felt free. Perhaps it was no more than anyone else. Have you ever had the feeling. . . of being a captive: the more so because you had a certain freedom of choice and yet could not bring yourself to choose" **(The Captives 28)**

Hasan has got affected in the above mentioned way and there are many other Indian Muslims who are suffering till today. Mostly they are suffering economically. It is no hidden fact that the economic condition of Muslims in India is far from ideal. There are a number of theories that give various reasons for this, like government apathy, lack of education and ignorance, but there is one reason that most miss out, the migration of upper class and rich Muslims to Pakistan.

Though it may sound like a farfetched theory, but one cannot deny that most of the people, who migrated to Pakistan, were rich landlords. As they say, the cream of Muslims moved away from the country, leaving behind poor Muslims. This has disturbed the balance of the society. The situation is further compounded by the government apathy towards Muslims, and lack of dedicated plans towards the most downtrodden strata of the society.

Since, the number of rich people within the society shrunk, there was not much hope for Indian Muslims apart from depending on government programs for development.

Aref tries to drag Hasan towards himself by using the Chinese invasion marching advancement towards our country's border, yet Hasan's remains firm and loyal in spite of a slight shake in his mind. Asif Currimbhoy has set the background of the play with the Chinese invasion of India and the problem that exists because of the Pakistan. India and Pakistan have played a role at major level through the character of Aref and he has brought the terrorism to India in his manner and Mehtab is dead as per his plan and Hasan is severely wounded, so that he will rest in death bed The biggest menace of modern India, is terrorism and is clearly a Pakistan promoted

monster. In the traditional battleground of Kashmir or the rise of neo-terrorism among the dissatisfied Muslim youth, Pakistan has played a major role.

After Pakistan, the biggest ploy for Pakistan to destabilize India was terrorism, first in the name of Kashmir's autonomy and later about Indian's perceived apathy towards Muslims. In these unholy intentions of Pakistan, the Muslims of India became the unexpected victims.

Indian Muslims faced the double edged sword, with Pakistan exploiting them for their malicious intentions and Indians suspecting them for their soft corner for Pakistan. This alienated majority of the Muslims from the mainstream. Here, if we conclude that formation of Pakistan is essentially the reason for the most, if not all, the problems faced by Indian Muslims, it will not be an exaggeration.

In the war that has happened in Indo-Chinese Invasion, many people were fired and shot dead. There is news that China and Pakistan are having "a strategy to invade India". China's people liberation army invaded India with an overwhelming force on two separate flanks in the west in Ladakh and in the east the Chinese aggression and the defeat and humiliation it wreaked on an unprepared India remain deeply embedded in the Indian psyche. India was taken completely (unawares) by the invasion. This reflected political naiveté on its part. The invasion of India was carefully planned well in advance and came after extended military preparations, including the improvement of logistics and the movement of heavy artillery from opposite anticline Taiwan to Tibet, where PLA had since its annexation maintained infantry troops in large numbers to suppress the local population without the need to induct heavy weaponry. That began to change by the spirit of 1962, but Indian intelligence remained horrifically oblivious.

In the war of Indo-Chinese due to invasion, "the distant "tat - tat - tat-"of a machine gun", far-off screams and yells are well heard by the people in west border of Ladakh. We can see the impact of war on the children of Hasan. The sound and screams have made Hameed and Kripal to play it as game. Their game may make us believe that it is real for some time. While the readers of the play the war has even influenced the children in India. This is how the future generation of Indian is spoiled even at a budding age.

Hasan's wife Raj is shown as an image of typical Indian woman, as usual by Asif Currimbhoy. Currimbhoy is used to show his women characters' in a typical manner in his plays. Her family means the world to Raj. When Hasan decides to leave for his duty, Raj stops him from not going, since it is a very dangerous work which may even lead to unfortunate happenings. When Hasan is brought home by the guard in a serious condition, because of the severe wound that made by gunshot, Raj has felt very sad and nurses him with care, day and night till he comes out of the dangerous condition towards the end of the play. Thus Raj is shown as real woman who is fit to be in an Indian Family. While Hasan takes much care in protecting the country as best as he can, his wife does so in maintaining her family even in the long absence of her husband in a usual manner.

Thus, Asif Currimbhoy has made the plight of Indian Muslims, and the drastic effects on people because of Chinese invasion and role of an Indian woman in a family of the soldier serve as the main themes of this play.

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