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THE CRUEL VAGARIES OF NATURE IN THE MIRACLE SEED OF ASIF CURRIMBHROY

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ABSTRACT

Asif Currimbhoy is a great playwright. He brings out the real social problems through his plays. He thinks that villagers in India are of traditional nature. They are not aware of the new changes in the world. They are also not intouch with scientific discoveries. So through the character of Laxman, he wants to awake them. Laxman tells Ram that he should leave the traditional farming, he should come in touch with the new farming system. The play *Miracle Seed* thus is realistic play. It presents a gruesome and degrading picture of the drought that battered Maharashtra in 1972. The drought in Maharashtra in 1972 has brought an ugly scene that created a painful atmosphere in the state. It has assumed such ugly proportions that it can shrivel the vitals of the people into "distortion and decay". The play also has some satirical touches. The playwright has some satirical lashes upon false social standards of city life and awfully bad performance of government.

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INTRODUCTION

Asif Currimbhoy is a great playwright. He is a conscientious dramatist with his own definite views on the art of drama. His interest in what he sees around and how he reacts to it has brought him to the sphere of drama. Naturally, he is a dramatist with a social purpose. As a writer with a social purpose, he not only seeks to present men and things as he sees but also projects his own point of view. Commenting on the excellence of his plays K.R.S Iyenger has rightly pointed out that "The topicality of several of the plays, the opulence of scene, situation and character, the bold experimentation in technique, the resourceful and often splendid improvisation, the ample elbow room conceded to the producer and the mastery of dialogue are not qualities often found together in work of the same playwright" (246). It is indeed true that Currimbhoy has brought an exceptional talent and seriousness, lots of industry to the difficult craft of play writing in English though he is yet to achieve the appreciation, which he has earned. Meserve and Merseve have made very perceptive remark about him when they concluded that "Challenged to touch that essence of creativity, that latching to Currimbhoy's artistry, one discovers the complexities that are expected but also the substance of whole man, man as writer rather than simply the writer" (9). This is particularly evident in the manner in which Currimbhoy visualizes his art. In the play *The Miracle Seed*, he presents a ghastly scene of famine which broke out in Maharashtra.

There are five characters in the play. Ram is the head of the family and Malti his intelligent wife. Bapa is the grandfather of the family. Savitri is the daughter of Ram and Malti and Laxman is the son of Malti's diseased sister. He is a young and progressive boy who lives in the city of Bombay. The family is very poor and it is very difficult for them to survive without good harvest. But with the arrival of Laxman in the family, the play takes a new turn. He has the knowledge of scientific farming and brings hybrid seeds with him. He believes that these seeds will bring green revolution in Maharashtra and the family members also start hoping that one day they will also reap a golden harvest. The play opens with a conversation between Ram, a farmer and Malti, his wife in a village in Maharashtra, a few hundred miles away from Bombay. The husband grows restless because of the drought. His wife, who is pregnant, is equally worried about the drought which has dried up all the wells in the village. The whole family has to depend on withered vegetables and leaves which are not full and healthy. "Ram is restless, his hands clutching and clutching, pacing around, looking at the land, and the clear blue cloudless sunny sky" (9). Malti, who is simple and intelligent woman tries to calm down her husband and tells him that he should have faith in God and believes in His justice. With the arrival of Laxman to village, Malti and Savitri become very happy. He has brought some gifts from the city to everyone in the family. But the best gift was of mamu Ram whom he gave a packet of full grown hybrid seeds. He explains his uncle that this is the seed which has brought green revolution in Punjab.

Laxmi: It's for you.

Ram: I've never seen such healthy full-grown seeds before. Why, it's giant sized.

Laxman: Do you know what it is? Mamu listen to me and listen well. This is the seed that has created green revolution in Punjab. Have you ever heard of green revolution? It's field of gold, for as far as the eye can reach. Quick growing, full and healthy, well fertilized...There is nothing like this on earth (18-19).

Initially Ram does not believe in the words of Laxman but later on he is also happy with Laxman and his mind is full of good ideas. He tells Malti about him in very trustworthy words. Malti has full faith in her nephew Laxman and believes that all city people are not crooks. Ram is assured of golden harvest and prosperity from the miracle seed. Laxman gives Savitri, the stammering daughter of Ram, a pebble to rectify her vocal defect. Laxman tells Malti and Ram about various plans of the Government. He tells them that government is building all-year water storage dams and canals and therefore even in the time of drought no one will die. Moreover, the government is creating new works for the poor. Government is also providing relief camps for the drought suffering people. They will get not only boarding and lodging in the camps but also looked after by the group of doctors. They would be given free medical aid. But Ram and Malti have their own doubts regarding the performance of government. Ram is unhappy with the present government because it is not looking after the farmers. He thinks that if the land is not growing food, it is the duty of government to provide food to the farmers. He thinks that government of their own people is not performing its duty and therefore his anger against the government is justified.

Laxman: The Government...

Ram: Don't talk to me about the Government or I'll wring your neck!

Laxman: The Government have already set up...not planning to but already set up...relief centres.

Ram: Relief Centres?

Laxman: Metal breaking and road repair.

Ram: (spitting)that's a convict's job.

Laxman: They pay two rupees a day. Slightly less for women...

The land is parched and dry and sowing of the "miracle seed" has gone waste. The plant has shrivelled up and died with water. There is no rain for two years and the wells are getting dried up. There is an air of lassitude and helplessness. As the grandfather says "And there isn't enough to eat. And everyone around the house is either quarrelling or crying...or rather was..." Ram's cow is getting thinner and thinner for want of fodder and has become a shadow of itself. One could hear its painful dying breath. As it is about to die Laxman suggests to Ram that he should dispose it off to the slaughter house. But Ram, who is sentimentally attached to the cow, feels terribly bad at the idea. He tells "He, not it! He! He with whom, I have tilled the soil season after season.

He, with whom I've planted seed year after year, toiled with the same yolk, wiped our sweats with the same cloth. He, with whom I shall never reap the harvest again, I will not be part of it (28).

When the cow of Ram dies there is no money in the family and the whole of the family of Ram was on the verge of starvation. Laxman suggests them to go to the relief camp. He becomes successful in convincing Ram to go to the relief camp.

Malti: (softly, apprehensively) Refugee Camps?

Laxman: It's not as bad as it sounds. Not really. They'll feed and clothe you. (Looking at her in the last stage of pregnancy)...yes, even give medical care. You don't need to worry, Masi. And you, Bapa, you won't have to work there at all. No more breaking stones. You can sit back... and eat.

But at the last moment Ram changed his decision to leave the village for the city with his family because Savitri brings an armful of finest hybrid stalks grown in her vegetable patch fed by Malti with water. This lightens the hope in the family and they decided to stay back in the village and wait for the next monsoon. Laxman, however leaves for the city promising to come back "for the next-golden harvest"

The play *The Miracle Seed* thus is a realistic play. It presents a gruesome and degrading picture of drought that battered in Maharashtra in 1972. The drought in Maharashtra in 1972 has brought an ugly scene that created a painful atmosphere in the state. It has assumed such ugly proportions that it can shrivel the vitals of the people into "distortion and decay". People wait and wait at their fair price shops for a handful of grain. The low wages, high prices, unemployment, "near starvation diet" result in mob violence, police intervention, "tear gas, shooting injury and death". The last desperate "bid of the farmer" is to migrate to the city in search of relief centres. Currimbhoy's vivid account of famine in Maharashtra in 1972 invariably reminds us of Bhabani Bhattacharya's delineation of the Bengal famine of 1943.

Human endurance ebbed. Hungry children cried themselves to death. Streams of desperate men ventured out of their ancestral homes in search of footboards of railway trains riding on the sun-baked rooftops (110-111).

As a one-act play, *The Miracle Seed* deals with a single dominant dramatic situation- the cruel vagaries of nature resulting in a perpetual drought. The visible "arid land" and a well in the background, "the dying cow", withered vegetables and Ram himself with his face "clouded with frustration and anger, raising his eyes to the sky and the blinding sun" all these create visual images which underline the intensely pathetic condition of Ram's family.

The Miracle Seed invariably reminds one of the Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Both are based on the theme of drought and hunger, reflecting the poignant condition of the farmer in his fight for survival. The famine-stricken family of Ram and Malti recalls to us the equally drought affected family of Nathan and Rukmani. Further it is interesting to note the similarity of irony implied in the two titles- *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Miracle Seed*. Pouring nectar in sieve is as futile as sowing miracle seed in arid land.

The ending of the play, however is not convincing. As "the drought has worsened" and farmers are migrating to city, Ram too decides to leave for the city the next morning. There is no way out for him. The play would have acquired a tragic intensity if it handed with the actual leaving of Ram's family for the city in utter despair and despondency. The reversal of Ram's decision would have been more convincing if it had started raining as he got himself ready to leave for the city. Because the whole thrust of the play is on the failure of monsoon and not on the efficacy of the "miracle seed". Their despair and anguish stem out of the failure of monsoon only.

Thus, Asif Currimbhoy in the play has tried to presents a ghastly scene of famine which broke out in Maharashtra. It also gives us a tremendous impression of reality and presents an eternal challenge of endurance and survival.

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