

# *Asif Currimbhoy's "Goa": A Study*

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ASIF CURRIMBHOY'S *Goa*<sup>1</sup> (1964) deals with the Indian take-over of Goa<sup>2</sup> in December 1961. The play reveals the unique stand taken by Currimbhoy in assessing the worthwhileness of the political event. It opens with the encounter of the dramatist with his friend Mario, the Portuguese local Administrator who is proud of Goa and who praises a Goan village "nestling amidst green hills and valleys." It is evening and the "regulars" meet at the "patio" benches. Senhora Miranda, a fair-looking woman of about forty, splendidly dressed in the latest Portuguese fashion, with colourful parasol in hand, comes down the steps of the tavern on the west side of the stage, walks across the long "patio" walk, and enters her house on the east side of the stage.

While the woman walks into her house, a young man at the "patio" looks at a girl who is "dark looking and about fourteen with a beautiful innocent face and a strange voice."<sup>3</sup> The girl seems to tell the young man:

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 . . . and I would love . . . this secrecy. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The boy moves his lips, and the scene ends with the girl's strange voice.

The action in the next scene takes place in the house of Senhora Miranda. The woman is in love with Alphonso. She has migrated to Goa where she leads a happy sexual life with the natives. She receives a necklace as a present from Alphonso. When she introduces her daughter Rose to him, he calls her the fairest flower in the whole world and says that "Rose is Goa.

Goa is Rose.”<sup>5</sup> These words are significant in as much as they alert the mind to “the coiled symbolism of the play.”<sup>6</sup>

As the plot develops so do the characters. The Indian boy, Krishna, who is introduced to Senhora Miranda, is found declaring his love for Rose :

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. But it was more than that. I love her.<sup>7</sup>

But, Miranda, a veteran prostitute, wants Krishna to pass by her first :

Nobody’s going to stop you, Krishna, but you’ll have to get by me first. . . . (Her hands go up to his black hair)<sup>8</sup>

Thus, she lures him with her passion.

The action now takes a new turn. The Portuguese Administrator assures the Goan nationalist of very good administration in Goa, but the Goan nationalist is not the person to be convinced of the arguments of the Administrator. He says :

You could float this enclave in milk and honey and yet we would want for ourselves that abstraction with all our hearts, and nobody, no one will ever be able to stop us, even though we may be ruthless to ourselves and others in getting it.<sup>9</sup>

These words reveal the attitude of the Indians towards white colonialism.

In Act I, Scene iii, Miranda calls in the dark boy, Krishna, and makes amorous advances, but the boy turns a deaf ear to her persuasions. Instead, he recalls his love life with Rose :

She’s tender to the touch, though I never touched her. She watched my lips . . . speak through the night, afraid to close her eyes, and be embalmed in the terrifying stillness of it all.<sup>10</sup>

Miranda becomes cruel and asks Krishna to leave her house immediately.

In Act II, Scene i, Krishna is physically won over by Miranda whom we see “caressing his black hair and holding it in her hand behind the nape of his neck from time to time.”<sup>11</sup> He makes it explicitly clear that the way to Rose’s love should be open and

that Rose should decide it for herself. Rose "advances and is almost in his arms."<sup>12</sup> Miranda proclaims that she has blemished Krishna's pure love for Rose. As a result, "Rose raises her hand to her mouth to stifle the agonizing scream. Krishna's face contorts with fury. . . . He flings himself towards Rose, crushing her in his arms, trying to kiss her frantically."<sup>13</sup> Krishna is beaten by Alphonso. He leaves the scene with "blood flowing from his face."<sup>14</sup>

The next scene takes place on December 18, 1961, during the invasion of Goa. By 1961, Goa had lived through 14 years of slavery even after India had won her independence. Krishna enters Miranda's house after murdering Alphonso in the bar. He attacks Miranda for having been vengeful towards Rose :

You . . . 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!<sup>15</sup>

Krishna is now filled with hatred both for the mother and the daughter. He corners the mother thus :

Pour your hate not on me but on Rose. Relieve yourself of this 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.<sup>16</sup>

This logic drives Miranda into a delirium and she helps Krishna to rape Rose.

The last scene presents the change that has come over Goa after its liberation. There is an atmosphere of absolute silence everywhere. Miranda and Rose, who have become whores, "see each other . . . as patches of darkness."<sup>17</sup> Krishna goes to Rose who now "wants only darkness. She wants to hear . . . only silence."<sup>18</sup> As Rose ascends the stairs, Krishna follows. Then a voice is heard as though it was from the empty balcony. Suddenly Rose recognizes Krishna by touching his body. Her voice changes. She gains courage and implores her mother :

Take the blind off, mother! Take the blind off! I want to see . . . I want to see . . . I won't have to wait any longer.<sup>19</sup>

The mother removes the blind. Rose walks up slowly to her room and shifts the curtain aside "as Krishna's nude body falls out, with a dagger in his heart."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, *Goa* is the story of an Indian boy's love for a Goan girl, caught within the complex relationships of a half-Portuguese mother and her Portuguese lover. To the usual triangular relationship, Currimbhoy has added a fourth character. Both Krishna and Alphonso love and want Rose but it is Rose's mother they are obliged to court. Within the framework of a story centring round the romance of an Indian boy and a Goan girl, the dramatist highlights colonialism and colour prejudice in a light ironic vein.

This seemingly simple love story develops with symbolic dimensions into a strange and terrifying play of deep emotions and uncontrollable forces. As his name suggests, Krishna clearly represents India. The girl is Rose, but Rose is Goa. Rose is fourteen years old and she is the child of a half-Portuguese mother and a native father. By 1961 Goa, too, had lived through fourteen years of slavery even after India had won her independence in 1947. Krishna's waiting for fourteen years for Rose, thus, symbolizes India's waiting for fourteen years (1947 to 1961) for Goa to become one with it.

*Goa* is finely balanced and tautly knit play in spite of Currimbhoy's confession that "some of the speeches in the play are interminably long and there are certain actions in the play which are slow."<sup>21</sup> As Currimbhoy himself pointed out this is largely because over the years people have come to expect "a lot quicker action"<sup>22</sup> and he said that he would not revise the play because "it is a whole."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he expressed that he could not "disturb the balancing forces which are in the play."<sup>24</sup> As it stands, the play is by no means flabby. The scenes move with a relentless momentum, alternating between fierce confrontations and temporary respites, culminating in the artistically wrought rape scene with its mind-boggling intensity. A close reading of the play reveals that "the plot does not operate on a strictly linear progression, but develops through transverse parallelisms resulting in a density of texture."<sup>25</sup>

*Goa* consists of six scenes in two Acts. The first scene is bal-

anced by the last scene. Both the scenes open with the "patio," though the first is gay and the last is sombre. Both the scenes end with the encounter of the young lovers — the first in beautiful innocence, the last with terrifying experience. The effect thus created is one of completeness, of things having come full circle.

Yet another interesting feature of the structure of *Goa* is the use of repetition within the play whereby it is held together by verbal echoes and visual replays. The artistry lies in variation which precludes monotony. Miranda, Alphonso and Krishna are all made to take the long "patio" walk, but each performs in a different way provoking different reactions from the "Bench-watchers." Rose's opening speech is repeated at the end of the play but in entirely different circumstances and with altogether different consequences. Thus, Currimbhoy exercises constant and masterly control over the play, carefully dovetailing various parts with a view to achieving the desired effects of coherence and organic unity.

We have in *Goa* some of Currimbhoy's most psychologically complex characters who are not only individuals but also the symbols of historical and social forces. Perhaps, the most notable among them is Senhora Maria Miranda who has "internalized the self-hate that comes from white colonialism."<sup>26</sup> Miranda idealizes Portugal and longs with pathetic intensity to be taken to her motherland:

Lisbon. Lisbon. How musical it sounds. How different I feel. . . . I hope, naturally. Perhaps even more because it sounds so unreal. But I want it so.<sup>27</sup>

Part of her idealization of the motherland manifests her heightened consciousness of colour and race. She may have a white skin but she has "shades of black" within her, and her tragedy lies in her inability to come to terms with this. This is made clear when Krishna tells her:

What you fear is only yourself, Maria. . . . It comes from within. From the darkest recesses of your own soul. . . . From all you want to hide about your real self; from all you want to tear out of others.<sup>28</sup>

Splendidly dressed in the latest Portuguese fashion with colourful

parasol in her hand putting on dark red lipstick, Miranda projects the image of a whore of Babylon. She turns what is pure and ideal into something ugly and sordid. She is unscrupulous in preying upon others. We may say with Daphne Pan that "she is the Geraldine to Rose's Christabel and like Geraldine she is an enigma, an object of fear but also of pity."<sup>29</sup>

Miranda is a creature to be pitied, a creature torn by contradictions which result ultimately in the collapse of her sanity. Reminding us now of Lady Macbeth and now of Cleopatra, she has her own redeeming features. She is, like Lady Macbeth, "only a woman" and human. She has a full range of potential. She is both soft and hard and like Cleopatra she is as passionate in her love as in her hatred. The preservation of her essential humanity is a testimony to Currimbhoy's compassionate understanding of human nature.

Rose is clearly contrasted with Miranda. She is presented as "the fairest flower" and "an innocent white flower."<sup>30</sup> With her beauty and innocence, she stands for Goa. This is made explicit when Alphonso says, "Rose is Goa and Goa is Rose." Her name suggests an innocent loveliness, but at the same time it connotes something different. Miranda explains: "That's why I called her Rose, the colour of blood that broke when she was conceived."<sup>31</sup>

Rose is pure in herself and beautiful but like Goa, her innocence is precarious. She is raped by Krishna and so is Goa invaded by India. With her rape she is led from a life of innocence to a life of experience. She becomes a prostitute symbolizing the fate of Goa after the invasion. Lost in gloom and despondency "she wants . . . only darkness. She wants to hear . . . only silence."<sup>32</sup> With her eyes and ears closed, she is at the end, "like some living quivering animal that lies helplessly in the dark."<sup>33</sup>

If Rose stands for Goa, Krishna represents India, or the Indian spirit personified in all its contradictions. He is distrusted and feared by the Goans for his nature is like India's, an apparently unfathomable one compounded of opposites. Miranda who is able to understand this aspect of his personality questions him: "Why are you so full of opposites, Krishna? Soft and hard. Love and hate. Young and old. Peaceful and violent."<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, she is alive to the potential in Krishna:

You have potential. You cover the full range of the known and unknown. But there is also that crack within you, Krishna. You don't let your opposites come into full play. You're pushing one side too hard.<sup>35</sup>

Krishna loves Rose and tells Maria about this:

I love her, Maria. . . . She watched my lips . . . speak through the night, afraid to close her eyes, and be embalmed in the terrifying stillness of it all. And I felt equally. Terrified that my hands should hold the uncrushed flower . . . so pure . . . and fragrant.<sup>36</sup>

From this one can infer India's longing for merging with the Goan enclave.

Krishna, "the quiet peaceful boy," in the beginning turns violent, kills Alphonso, and then proceeds to rape Rose. The rape is a violation not only of Rose, the innocent girl, but also of his own essentially gentle nature. He, thus, becomes the "remnant" of his former self.

In spite of his brutality, Krishna is really a helpless creature driven to desperation. He bursts out:

I've got a heart that yearns. But I've been stopped too often. It develops callouses. Not dead callouses, but callouses that burn!<sup>37</sup>

In the final scene, when he goes to Rose, who has now turned prostitute, he is overwhelmed by pity:

She can only give . . . everything! Not knowing she will give, to me, like to any other . . . (Whisper) you . . . you say she is still warm and tender . . . like some living quivering animal that lies helplessly in the dark, with her eyes and ears closed, unable to withhold . . . (Whisper). There can be no violence about it then. I revert . . . to my former self. As I always wanted it, not as I was forced to take it.<sup>38</sup>

Currimbhoy's handling of the element of conflict in the play is effective. There is inner conflict in Senhora who is obsessed with her Portuguese identity. She becomes nostalgic about her "Mother Country" and her happy days with her husband in Portugal. She is worried about Rose who is born brown:

She came from my womb. Dark and bloody as the night when she was conceived. Oh the pain; the dreadful pain. They say it

should give rise to love when it's cut out from your own flesh. But the colour is different. A constant reminder. . . .<sup>39</sup>

The outer conflict is manifest in the confrontations between Krishna and Alphonso, the Portuguese Administrator and the Goan nationalist, the Vicar and the Goan Hindu, and the smuggler and the old woman. Rose is pitted against various forces about her — the vengeful mother and the possessive lovers, Krishna and Alphonso.

*Goa* is notable for its poetic value. Miranda is poetic when she speaks of her husband and her happy years together with him :

Oh, he sang beautiful love songs. It was one long happy moment . . . of youth, when no one ever believes that there can ever be an end . . . till it comes.

(her voice hardly a whisper)

He died, Alphonso. He merely died. Unbelievably he died. And there was never anything — nobody . . . who could do anything about it.

(softer)

Not even I. Nor those great white churches that stand like spectres in the moonlight.<sup>40</sup>

The smuggler reacts most poetically on seeing Krishna in the balcony :

What matter? What matter? Sometimes there are ghosts, they say, that whisper through the night, clear as a silvery shaft of moonlight, in that balcony bare. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Alphonso becomes virtually a poet when he calls Rose “an innocent white flower” and also says that “Rose is Goa and Goa is Rose.” When Miranda tells Krishna, “Dark you are, Krishna; darker your thoughts are too, in spite of the light which you claim to shed on her,”<sup>42</sup> we are reminded of the light imagery in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Currimbhoy’s prose often soars to lyric beauty as, for instance, he gives a graphic description of a Goan village :

At eight, the Church bells chime again. . . . The labourers wend their way home, as the village is enveloped in the dark folds of the night.<sup>43</sup>



Thus, Asif Currimbhoy admirably succeeds in dramatizing the "motion" of the whole country just before and after the end of colonial rule. He is at "his best when he writes about public or recent historical events such as the Indian takeover of Goa, the Naxalite movement in Calcutta and the Pakistani war that gave birth to Bangladesh."<sup>44</sup> The brilliant success on the stage that *Goa* registered is a solid proof of Currimbhoy's capacity "to make good plays out of political events that boggle the moral imagination."<sup>45</sup> Acclaimed as "a masterful and an exciting theatrical event,"<sup>46</sup> doing "honour to the western theatre,"<sup>47</sup> *Goa* clearly demonstrates Currimbhoy's fine sense of the theatre and his skill as a dramatist.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Asif Currimbhoy, *Goa* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1970).
- <sup>2</sup> Goa was attacked in March 1510 by the Portuguese under Albuquerque. The city surrendered without a struggle and Albuquerque entered it in triumph. A crisis was reached in 1955 when Satyagrahis from India attempted to penetrate the territory of Goa. Tension between India and Portugal came to a head when on December 18, 1961, Indian troops supported by naval and air forces invaded and occupied Goa, and the Portuguese India was by constitutional amendment incorporated into the Indian Union in 1962.
- <sup>3</sup> *Goa*, p. 14.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>6</sup> K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "The dramatic art of Asif Currimbhoy," *Indo-English Literature*, ed. K. K. Sharma (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakasan, 1977), p. 245.
- <sup>7</sup> *Goa*, p. 42.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- <sup>21</sup> Asif Currimbhoy, "Commentary meets Asif Currimbhoy," *Journal of the University of Singapore Society*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1976), 41.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>25</sup> Daphne Pan, "Asif Currimbhoy's *Goa*: A Consideration," *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. 8, Nos. 1-2 (1980), 86.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter Nazareth, "Asif Currimbhoy: Dramatist of the Public Event," *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1976), 14.
- <sup>27</sup> *Goa*, p. 31.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- <sup>29</sup> Daphne Pan, "Asif Currimbhoy's *Goa*: A Consideration," *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. 8, Nos. 1-2 (1980), 83.
- <sup>30</sup> *Goa*, p. 33.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- <sup>44</sup> Peter Nazareth, "Asif Currimbhoy: Dramatist of the Public Event," *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1976), 13.
- <sup>45</sup> *Goa* was first performed in 1965 at Michigan State University, then shown on Broadway in New York three years later, produced in Singapore in November 1975, and at the Centre for the Performing Arts in New Delhi in 1970 to packed houses.
- <sup>46</sup> Rone Eysers, reviewing the production of *Goa* at Martinique Theatre and quoted in the Writers Workshop edition of *Goa*, p. 5.
- <sup>47</sup> Brooks Atkinson, reviewing the production of *Goa* at Martinique Theatre, quoted in the Writers Workshop edition of *Goa*, p. 5.