

Interweaving Foucault and Micro-politics of Resistance: A Select Study of Asif Currimbhoy's Plays

Dr. Lisha Sinha

Academician

Department of English and Foreign

Languages

Central University of Bilaspur

Bilaspur

Abstract

The way the power and domination is understood is what Foucault calls it micro-politics of resistance. The paper attempts to display the sites of micro-politics of resistance through the plays of Indian dramatist Asif Currimbhoy. The paper also showcases that resistance is not mere an expression rather it a kind of performance. The plays effectively bring out such politics of resistance. It deals with the plays as a representation of certain generic forms of power presentations. It brings fore that how the micro-politics of resistance within the private and personal sphere becomes a point of mass resistance.

Key Words: *Michel Foucault, Asif Currimbhoy, power, politics, micro-politics of resistance, Performative resistance*

The contemporary world is a political world which comprises of dominations, repressions, constructed identities. Understanding such political efficacies becomes a challenging task. Michel Foucault takes up this challenge and attempts to understand the contemporary situations of political participation. His works brings out newer dimensions of politics which transgresses beyond the normalized concept of state and institutional politics. Foucault in 1969 interview says, "The boundary of politics has changed, and subject like psychiatry, confinement and medicalisations of a population have become political problem" (Foucault, cited in Macey, 217). What Foucault implies here is that politics has become an element of interest in every level of people's lives. Perhaps, the main purpose of Foucault's working on politics is to bring the alternatives of politics and question the true nature of politics. His intentions are neither to criticize ideological aspects nor to change people's consciousness. His sole purpose seems to point out the unchallenged, unquestioned, and unconsidered political queries which are beyond the level of right or wrong. Foucault is highly critical of the current political order and always questions the true nature of politics.

It appears that for Foucault, politics which is apparent in every aspects of life is formed out of the entangled elements of power and resistance. And both power and resistance are the two sides

of the same coin. The unstable nature of power gives rise to every possibility of resistance, which itself is a kind of politics playing within the realm of power. The way the power and domination is understood is what Foucault calls it micro-politics of resistance and this politics is an everyday performance of the community. The sites of micro-politics of resistance are abundant in the arena of gender, class, family. And this kind of micro-politics of resistance can be clearly studied in the plays of Indian dramatist Asif Currimbhoy whose plays are drawn against the political background of the nation. His plays are unique of their kind because on one side they display politics and on other they tend to bring forth the private play of politics which actively play within as Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* explains as “power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth” (122). He deliberately undercuts the dominant, repressive, oppressive constructions in order to highlight the politics of deprivation and exploitation. The plays intertwine the power, resistance, and politics and try to experiment with the micro-politics of resistance. The power is constantly circulated throughout and thus keeps on changing the hands. The privileged struggles to maintain power and the unprivileged thrust constant resistance. During such tug of war, there arises a situation of micro-politics of resistance which mainly becomes a central concern of the dominated individuals. Currimbhoy through his cleverly constructed characters like Sumita, Miranda, Sarah, David, Kantibhai, and such who are forged out of the various emergent issues tries to raise the question of politics of truth.

The plays of Currimbhoy reflect the varieties of political activities prevalent and efficacious in the contemporary society. There are cases of national politics as in *Sonar Bangla* (1972), *Goa* (1964), *Om Mane Padme Hum* (1971), *An Experiment With Truth* (1969), the state politics as in *Refugee* (1971) *The Dissident M.L.A* (1974), institutional politics in *Thorns on a Canvas* (1972). Each play is distinct from each other yet similar in nature. The plays are guided by human ‘reason’ and ‘nature’ which are two essential features of political participation. Amidst the political action one can perceive the every individual participating in political action, is influenced by a reason which may be constructive or destructive. And beneath the ‘reason’ lies the nature whose purpose is critique the state of the society. Rabinshaw mentions that according to Chomsky,

...the end of political action is clear- or will become so- because it is guide by reason and human nature. The task of intellectuals is to use the concept of human nature as a standard against which to judge society and to use their reason to formulate a precise inceptualisation of a more humane and just social order (5).

Thus, Chomsky seeks the political action complimented with reason and human nature unlike Foucault. Foucault believes that the task of the individuals seeking an explanation to political participation must be to cast aside will to knowledge, and to ask instead how power actually functions. Currimbhoy prefers to adopt Foucault’s concept of power in political participation. The plays dominate political struggles which mainly pursue to alter the power relations. Power permeates every strata of society and is visibly made clear in Currimbhoy’s plays. His plays demonstrate the various kinds of power which operate on a multiple level beyond the state or institution. Foucault clearly echoes in all Currimbhoy’s plays when Foucault says in *Critical theory/Intellectual theory* that, “I am not referring to Power with a capital ‘P’, dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple, they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an

institution or an administration” (38). Currimbhoy not only showcases the variety of power relations but also experiments with the unstable nature of power which keeps circulating in the form of chain. The will to power exists in every individual and there is constant strain between the dominant and subjugate. The flexibility of power enables it to move beyond the state/institutional forms of power and enter into the domain of local kinds of power like body, sexuality, family, kinship and so on. ‘Foucault’s bottom-up model of power’ characteristically becomes a prominent feature in plays of Currimbhoy. The plays display the various ways in which the power is enacted and contested in everyday life. It is at this junction new forms of behaviour arises among the individuals especially the less powerful ones. The purpose is to deny the forceful will imposed upon them by the more powerful. To challenge and topple the dominating realm becomes a central issue. This further creates a new arena- politics. It is at this point where the powerful and powerless contest to maintain and renew the power relations in the best possible ways. And this clearly echoes in Foucault’s wordings in an interview in ‘Power and Sex’, “to engage in politics- aside from party politics- is to try to know with the greatest possible honesty, whether the revolution is desirable” (122). And it is always true that revolution in every political struggle is desirable as long as the concept of power lingers and also the nature of resistance exercised along with power.

The nature of power is unstable only because it is always subjected to resistance. The struggle over power is a never ending duel. And amidst this political struggle of power and resistance, the question regarding the purpose of political struggle may arise. In *Sonar Bangla* the *Mukti Fauj* seeks freedom from the tyrannical Pakistan, In *An Experiment With Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers seeks freedom from the British, in *Inquilab*, the working class seeks freedom from the dominating clutches of the bourgeoisie community, In *Goa*, Goan nationalists seeks independence from the Portuguese regime. So, as it is evidently revealed that the purpose of political struggle is very singular- ‘freedom’. One might raise the idea that justice can be another purpose of political struggle but the very concept justice is a socially constructed which is often used as an instrument of power and Foucault in ‘Human Nature’ thus rightfully asserts that, “...idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work indifferent types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power ...” (187). The concept of justice which the participants of the political struggle often seek to claim is only a roundabout nature of accessing power by altering the power relations. The less powerful individuals remain as a dormant factor in the political struggle of power. They resurface not mere as representation of resistance but as a performative resistance whose actions are a newer way to reconstitute and regenerate a new kind of power. And since power permeates all levels of society, one can observe the local and immediate political struggle of power and resistance right from the ‘bottom-up level’. The performative resistance acts against the face of the power. This kind of resistance brings forth another form of political action which moves beyond the mere state or institutional politics. It operates on a micro-level as Foucault mentions in his essay ‘Subject and Power’, “opposition of power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over mentally ill, of medicine over population, of administration over ways people live” (211)

The micro-politics of resistance is seen as the immediate struggle against which people tend to critically access the daily events of life, the way they are being administered, controlled, monitored, and exploited by the dominants of the society. Foucault invariably challenges the

traditional notion of political-power relations, mainly within a state. He refutes that political participation is enacted every nook and corner in this contemporary society. The anonymous discourses make themselves apparent by operating according to their own system of rules and regulations. These anonymous discourses can be considered as micro-politics of resistance as Sara Mills says that, "Individuals should not be seen simply as the recipients of power, but as the 'place' where power is enacted and the place where power is resisted" (35). This micro-politics of resistance gives rise to new agents of power, a completely new domain of relations wherein the newly emerged actors participate in newly created activities and locations of political action which can be easily found in politics of gender, class, family. Here, we can find that actors of the political stage constantly perform to dominate as well as resist. The political participation which takes place at the micro-level incorporates resistance in order to facilitate own private interests, influence over others, and to a large extent self-development. The self-development is an important aspect in micro-politics of resistance. The intention of the individual is to elevate oneself against the restrictions of power operations which hinder the progress of the self. In the process of projecting oneself to hierarchical position, Sumita in *Sonar Bangla* and Senhora Miranda in *Goa* use their body and sexuality to accomplish their motives. For Sumita, politics becomes a means of protecting her personal benefits. She makes her sexuality as a means. Foucault rightfully asserts in *Power/Knowledge* "... sexuality is far more of a positive product of power than power was a repression of sexuality" (120). Sumita uses her sexuality as a strategy to guard her own interests. She outwits her dominant patriarchy and uses them as their ladder. During the political upheavals between Bangladesh and Pakistan, the common masses of Bangladesh suffered the most. Houses were burnt, children were killed, and women were raped by the Pakistani tyrannical regime. Sumita too becomes a victim of the situation but still she emerges as a triumphant by her sheer use of politics. Sumita's resistance comes fore when her action ceases. She uses resistance as a vehicle of spontaneity out of her agonistic situation.

The moment Sumita realizes that both she and her daughter cannot be spared from lecherous Pakistani Jawan; she uses her sexuality as a mode of resistance. Unable to defend the Jawan with her physical strength, she offers her own body and asks to spare her daughter Maya. Sumita perhaps becomes aware that being submissive to Jawan is the possible manner to resist the Jawan.

SUMITA: (to Jawan) Wait. (She leads her daughter to the other room).

The daughter goes and bolts it from inside. Sumitra from the outside then turns around and faces the Jawan closing her eyes alone in the room with him now). I am ready...

JAWAN: DO YOU THINK I'M A BARBARIAN! (Turns around and leaves...) (1.1.37).

The moment Jawan faces the determined mother and a woman, his ego is hurt. This is what exactly Sumita wants. She plays and titillates with the Jawan which invariably hurts the military nature of Jawan. This becomes the first test to Sumita where she learns that in the long run she has to use her sexuality to protect herself and her daughter. Sumita loses her home, her husband, her daughter Maya. But unlike other desolate woman she never cries over her situation. Instead she tries her level best to unite with her daughter. An initially meek and weak Sumita tries to get into

the *Mukti-Fauj* through Arun who is an active member of the *Mukti-Fauj*. Political action may not be rational, intentional or planned. It may be like Sumita's case which is accidental, impulsive and spontaneous. She uses *Mukti-Fauj* and her admirer Arun to reach her daughter. She identifies her body as a site of power as well as resistance. This is perhaps best observed when she lures the Mulvi away in order to save the commanders of the *Mukti-Fauj*. Sumita by now, not only saves the powerful commanders from the clutches of the Pakistani troops but also is seen later to be united with her daughter.

Senhora Miranda in *Goa* too like Sumita plays politically in order to resist herself against poverty and insecurity. The women of the 1960s were not allowed to seek employment outdoors. So the women, especially who lost their husband either worked as house maids or few bolder like Miranda took up prostitution to raise oneself from bare means of survival. Diamond and Quinby suggest that, "Both [Feminism and Foucault] identify the body as the site of power...point to the local and intimate operations of power rather than focusing exclusively on the supreme power of the state (x)". In *Goa*, Miranda challenges the dominant discourse of patriarchy and revolts against the masculine elite who suppress the female world beneath themselves. She seems politically aware that if the physical strength maintains the men's world, then the body/sexuality sustains the female world. Throughout the play, one can perceive that she controls and manipulates the two masculine strengths, Alphonso and Krishna to fulfill her interests. Prostitution is not only her means of income but also her means of settling in Portugal. She satisfies the lust of Alphonso and in return seeks to get away from her wretched condition. The politics she plays with Krishna is on a different scale. Rose is Miranda's illicit daughter born out of Miranda's rape by a native. Miranda's resistance is towards the entire patriarchy that thwarted her dignity. She constantly manipulates and exploits the sentiments of men only to satisfy her own sense of revenge. She is a victim caught in the process of objectification and constraint. Her only sense of relief is to see her daughter Rose stained and plucked just like her because Rose seems to be only medium for the salvation of her conscience. Miranda constantly plays with Krishna in order to make him more attracted towards Rose. Towards the end, Miranda's motive ultimately succeeds when Krishna rapes Rose. She avenges her lost dignity by forcing the men as sworn enemy against themselves and ultimately leaving both the men dead at the hands of Miranda's shrewd politics. Miranda is like that person who, as Foucault says in his 1984 interview that, "the way the subject constitutes himself in an action for him, by the practice of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, imposed on him by his culture, his society, and his social group" (11). Senhora Miranda is a forced political player who utilizes liberal ideals of personal liberty by her use of malevolence only to critique her socially constructed situation. Her micro-politics of resistance is used strategically to bring out the game of truth, relations of power, and also the form of relation to herself and others.

Scott raises a question that, "How do we study power relations when the powerless are often obliged to adopt a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful and when the powerful may have an interest in overdramatizing their reputation and master?" (xii). The concept of power is very unstable. The one who is powerless can also be seen displacing the more powerful. This strategic removal of the powerful from his dominant position can be noticed in Currimbhoy's play *The Clock*. Henry, an exhausted salesman marks an open rejection against the bourgeoisie values and

materialism. His resistance against the capitalist world comes in the form of his resignation of his job. But his politics of resistance is farfetched than one can think of. On one side he will no longer be a slave to his boss and on other, Jean whom the boss lusts will remain Henry's mistress because the vacant position will be usurped by Jean. The office politics becomes more relevant when the boss turns up to Henry. The boss is attracted to Jean and wants to make Jean his mistress. But since Jean is closer to Henry, the Boss tries to coax Henry to help him with Jean. Here, the Boss objectifies Henry by applying "dividing practices". Foucault's words in 'The Subject and Power' are aptly applicable here that "the subject is objectified by a process of division either within himself or from others" (208). However, Henry's political nature is aware of the materialistic mentality of his employer and thus he denies the boss and his offers.

BOSS (V): Well...and...you got to admit that I'm in a position to do favours...for both of you. It would be in your personal interest to drop in a word to Jean saying...er...that...that...

HENRY [unable to control himself any further]: You lousy fat bastard [He gets up with clenched fists]

BOSS (V) [jumping back]: Loo...looks, Henry. Look here. I'm ...I'm...your Boss. (1.43).

Here, one may notice that relation of domination has been constantly dissociated from the relation of power by continual use of resistance. The powerful is displaced from his position of domination by the circumstantial powerful Henry who seems to be the only one to control Jean. His resistance towards his Boss is kind of political. His use of resistance in the play of politics at the micro level is like power which is performed strategically. The strategically used 'power' becomes dominant over 'power' which is possessed. Henry not only argues against the subversive nature of bourgeois society but also mocks it. The highly materialistic dominant boss turns meek and helpless at the hands of Henry who politically handles both his Boss and Jean.

For Kantibhai micro-politics of resistance is at another level which cannot be characterized in terms of those who possess it. Kantibhai the Gandhian type politician forces his resistance against forces like Manu, the politician who believes in violence. Kantibhai resistance is also against the present government who is corrupted to the core. He follows Gandhi's footsteps of Fasting till death if the demand of dissolution of the Gujarat assembly is not fulfilled. This kind of political struggle includes a kind of performative aspects of resistance and demonstration. He uses fasting as a kind of demonstration in order to point out the flaws and create awareness among people. Kantibhai is well aware that mere violence on the streets will not be enough to pull down the government. He tactically decided to arouse and ignite the emotions of the people of the state. The main purpose of his resistance is to create self-formation among the individuals and other politicians like Manu to act morally. Kantibhai tries to influence upon his own people by acting upon their souls, thoughts and conduct.

KANTIBHAI: Our means are different. You believe, if I may be frank in saying so in agitation. I believe in non-violent means such as fasting to bring about moral pressure...

...

Therefore I take heed of your words. I don't dismiss it lightly. But you'll admit...with this timing...it does place the Government in an awkward position.

MANU (eyes widening with new appreciation): I thought you said it was moral pressure and not political timing.

KANTIBHAI (shaking his head with that glint in his eyes): Don't be naïve, Manu. Of course it's both (3.4.50).

Kantibhai displays the effects of power which is peculiar to the play of statements. Kantibhai uses his show of 'fast till death' to get away with his own interests. His resistance is both political as well as moral. His individual kind of micro-politics of resistance not only pulls the Government down but also forces Manu to realize the justice of truth to the people.

The micro-politics of resistance can be minutely observed in a family where the power is internally localized and unevenly distributed. Family is a kind of agency which is a creation of an identity and thus becomes a site of permanent political contest. Currimbhoy's *This Alien...Native Land* involves a kind of politics of resistance wherein the less powerful members of the family overthrows the other participants. The primary feature of a family is its disciplinary power. As Sara Mills mentions, that the discipline "consists of a concern which is internalized by each individual: it consists of a concern with time-keeping, self-control over one's posture and bodily functions, concentration, sublimation of immediate desires and emotions" (43). Rachel, the mother of the family of six is the most dominating member. Rachel is a politically active woman who has let her husband and others in isolation for the sake of his elder son Jacob. Jacob contributes the larger share of the money to the family. She controls Jacob in order to control the entire family. Her acceptance of Jacob's marriage to native Tara is another politics. By allowing Jacob marrying his love is gaining Jacob's confidentiality and security forever. She also compels other members to accept Tara as a disciplinary measure. Rachel's disciplinary motto is not repressive, violent or seizure. She uses discipline as Jana Sawicki explains "by producing new objects and subjects of knowledge, by inciting and channeling desires, generating and focusing individual and group energies, and establishing bodily norms and techniques for observing, monitoring and controlling body movements, process, and capacities" (83). Rachel brings in Tara and fulfills Jacob's desire. In return of her favour to Jacob, she grips harder over Jacob and thus controls as well as monitors Jacob. As a consequence, Tara can never win over Jacob completely. Jacob stands as a right weapon of power for Rachel.

Dominating individual always rules. But it is also true that there is always a space for resistance and disobedience. Amidst the shrewd politics of Rachel, the other members of the family too get politically active and try to resist the disciplinary power of Rachel. Sarah, the daughter's

affair with a married Muslim man is a deliberate political resistance against her dominant mother. Sarah's performative resistance is a strategy of demonstration.

RACHEL: I don't insist on knowing. I merely asked.

SARAH: Your asking mother...is like insisting every time.

No, you don't say "Do this" or "Don't do this". You merely say...
"Don't you think it would be better not to do this?"

...

RACHEL: Who's he?

SARAH: (pause) did you ever ask Jacob "Who's she?" No, we none of us know...including you. He's bringing a total stranger into the house...it's you who almost arranged it, didn't you" (1.1.21). Sarah protests her mother's political intentions which she skillfully brings out through her own love affair. She points out and makes her mother know the way Rachel treats Jacob and others. Where on one side Sarah tries to hurt the conscience of Rachel and make her realize the guilt, on other David- the younger son plays on a different level. David is the youngest and perhaps the most neglected. He always dislikes Jacob's special treatment by his mother. Thus his purpose becomes to gain Rachel's attention by any means. David knows that Rachel needs Jacob to maintain her dominance over family. He starts playing with the members of the family in order to create a bridge between Rachel and others. With father already dead, David starts with the weakest member of the family, which is Sarah. He makes Sarah believe that mother is behind the misery of her spinsterhood. David also insists that mother is also supposed to be responsible for Sarah's failed love. The distraught Sarah ultimately breaks off and moves to Jerusalem. He next moves to Jacob, the most important member. He outwits Jacob into thinking that it is Mother for whom Sarah left. And it is mother again who has not allowed Jacob and Tara to have a conjugal life. The enraged Jacob finally leaves his mother and goes away with his wife Tara. He cannot openly claim his position from his mother, so David cleverly resists his opponents. He does so because he knows that once his mother left alone by others including Jacob, David will be the only one beside his mother.

RACHEL: David...David, come upstairs...to my bedroom... (David stops for a moment. His Expression is...)

DAVID: Coming Ma...coming...

(Light Fade) (2.3.73).

The micro-politics of resistance enabled once neglected David finally lavish attention from his mother as the first born male. David might not have cut off king's head but he successfully gets rid off queen's hands leaving him as his mother's sole affection.

The micro-politics of resistance is a kind of performative action which resist, challenge, constitute, and control various sequence of things and behaviour. It is quite obvious that the

characters turn out to be political in relation to power networks of body, sexuality, and family and so forth. They contest at the micro-level over the everyday affairs which are part of the global politics and thus contribute to larger extent the global domination and contestation over politics of power. However, analyzing Foucault's concept of power, resistance, and more especially micro-politics of resistance is a difficult task. The three concepts are intertwined in such a manner that each of them interplays with another. The matter of fact is that if power is unstable, so is resistance. The contestation between the two is a never ending struggle of politics and thus judging the political situations under the lens of truth and justice remains flexible. Rightfully, the sociologists Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham suggest that "the task of [a Foucauldian] analysis...is to describe the way in which resistance operates as a part of power, not to seek or promote or oppose it" (51).

Works Cited

- Currimbhoy, Asif. *This Alien...Native Land*: Writers Workshop, 1992. Print.
- . *The Dissident M.L.A.* Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1992. Print.
- . *Goa*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1993. Print.
- . *The Clock*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1993. Print.
- . *Sonar Bangla*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1993. Print.
- D.Macey. *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. London: Vintage, 1994. 217. Print.
- Diamond, I. and Quinby, L, Ed. *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Boston: North Eastern University Press, 1988. Print.
- Michel, Foucault. "Human Nature: Justice versus Power". *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind*: Ed. Fons Elders. London: Souvenir Press, 1974. 187. Print.
- . "Truth and power". *Power/Knowledge*: Ed. C. Gordon. Brighton: Harvester, 1980.p.p. 107–133. Print.
- . "The subject and power". Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Ed. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow. Brighton: Harvester, 1982.p.p. 208–226. Print.
- . "Critical Theory/intellectual theory". Interview by Gerard Raulet. Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interview and Other Writings, 1977-1984. Ed. L. Kritzman.London: Routledge, 1988.p.p.20-47. Print.
- . "Power and sex: discussion with Bernard-Henri Levy". Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984: Ed. Kritzman. London: Routledge, 1988. p.p. 110–124. Print.

- . "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault". *The Final Foucault*. Ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988. 11. Print.
- G. Kendall and Wickham, G. *Using Foucault's Methods*. London: Sage, 1999. 51. Print.
- Mills Sara. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge, 2003. pp. 35-43. Print.
- Nazareth, Peter. "Asif Currimbhoy: Dramatist of the Public Event". *Journal of Indian Writing in English*. Madras: OUP, 1976.
- Paul, Rabinow, Ed. *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.5. Print.
- Sawicki Jana. *Disciplining Foucault*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 83. Print
- Scott, J. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990. x-xii. Print.