

**Celebration of Life: A Study of Asif Currimbhoy's Selected Plays**

**By**

**Supriya P**

**(16PEN015)**

**A thesis submitted to**

**Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,**

**Coimbatore – 641 043**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the**

**Master's Degree in English**

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Drama in India has had a rich and glorious tradition. It has its connection with not a *Natyasastra* and a sacred Vedas. The origin of English drama can be traced to the ancient rules and seasonal festivities of the Vedic Aryans. The dramatic performances of those times mainly included the depiction of events of daily life accompanied by music. As literature is a mirror of nature, so is drama imitation of the actual life, its joys and sorrows. The function of drama is to provide instruction, entertainment, enlightenment, happiness, peace and moral upliftment.

The drama performed during the age of Vedic Aryans was crude and simple. Later different episodes from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavad-Gita* were selected and enacted out in front of the people. This kind of performance is still very popular in India. Drama is a story which is intended to be acted out or read out through the dialogue. It involves the playwright, the actor, the audience and it is characterized by plot-construction, characterization, dialogue, music, dance, posture, stage directions, setting, etc.

Indian drama is a broad concept comprising Indian myths and culture. Drama in India is older than it is in Western Literature. Indian drama came two thousand years before Aristotle's monumental work *Poetics*. The journey of Indian drama begins with the Sanskrit plays, among which *Natyasastra*, is the oldest text of the theory of drama. It is a performance based book that explains all aspects of drama. Thus an origin of Indian drama is found in the Vedic period itself. Indian English drama dates back to eighteenth

century when the British rule became very stable in India; the British brought with them the theatre. But during the initial decades of their rule, they could not present English drama due to lack of awareness on the part of Indians regarding the English language.

Indian Writing in English has developed well and been appreciated widely. Earlier, amongst all the genres, drama had lagged behind in the literary output, but at present it has not remained restricted to performances on stage but has also gained a wide readership because a number of works are published by new, emerging playwrights along with many renderings of translations of the already existing regional plays. Experiments have been in techniques, forms and styles of plays. The themes in these plays do not stop with the depiction of the middle class and the lower class strata of society, but also expose the problems and frustrations faced by people of the higher class. Playwrights intermingle the traditional and the modern, classical and the contemporary modes also while writing their plays.

The traditional dramatic activity in India is very ancient and dates back to the Vedic period when Bharata, in his *Natyashastra*, described drama as, 'Natako Panchamo Veda', meaning 'drama is the fifth Veda'. According to the translation of Kapila Vatsyayan, Bharata explains, Brahma, the Creator of the Universe, in order to instruct the life of ethics and to provide some entertainment to the Gods and Humans created the art of Drama.

India has a long history of drama from ancient times. The Indian English drama is supposed to have begun in the eighteenth century with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted* in 1813. It is a social play which presents the conflict between

the east and the west. The real journey of Indian English drama begins with Madhusudhan Dutt's *Is this Called Civilization* which was published in 1871.

In the ancient period, drama was considered to be a reflection of actual life, which was seen from the language it employed. Most of the Sanskrit dramatists followed the rules of the *Natyashastra*, and the earliest specimens of ancient drama can be found in some of the Buddhist plays ascribed to 'Asvaghosh' in the first and second centuries. Before Kalidasa, there were other dramatists like Bhasa and Shudraka, the author of *Mrichchhakatika* or the '*Little Clay-Cart*' depicting the Indian society of those times.

Early Indian English drama came from Bengal and it was a closed drama with music and dance. The well-known Indian English dramatists who made drama an authentic mode of creative expression were Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. In post-independence era, Indian drama in English flourished in the hands of G. V. Desani, Lankan Deb and Pritish Nandy.

Asif Currimbhoy was born in Bombay on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1928. He was a 'Khoja' Muslim. He had his schooling in a Jesuit Mission school. He graduated from the Berkeley University in California and spent the next few years in France. He visited all over India and some foreign countries. He was married to Suraiya who like him, was a talented woman and loved Indian culture very much. It is her influence that her husband blossomed as a creative writer and realized the problems of humanity at large and of Indians in particular. She also inspired him to study Hindu classics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. According to her suggestion, the playwright studied the Indian sublime literature.

Currimbhoy's early education at a Christian missionary school and Higher Studies at U.S.A. helped him to have the combination of Eastern and Western cultures in his creative works. He read William Shakespeare deeply and was a great admirer of this world renowned dramatist. His plays inspired him to adopt his career as a playwright. In his interviews he had frankly accepted that his wife Suraiya and William Shakespeare were the two chief influences upon him. Moreover, his father an industrialist and liberal-minded armchair intellectual and his mother a veteran social worker also had influenced him. Their distinguished intellectual concerns and outstanding commercial enterprises deeply touched the mental proclivities of Asif Currimbhoy in his teenage.

Currimbhoy was brought up in an environment of new ebullient ideas, which in his later life formed an integral part of his temperament. Since his childhood, he developed profoundly disturbing psychological nuances, which later on became the moving spirit behind his plays. The western culture also influenced him because it was the days of Britishers when he got his education in a Christian college by British teachers.

Asif Currimbhoy emerged as one of the potent forces of Indian drama in English. This business executive produced plays on a variety of themes relating to Indian Culture and life. His plays constitute a class by themselves when diversity of themes and the richness of thought are considered. Other noteworthy dramatists are Pratap Sharma, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnard, Mahesweta Devi and Mahesh Dattani.

Asif Currimbhoy had produced twenty-nine plays in all shades and thoughts, during the period of his creative writing spanning seventeen years (1959-1975). His achievement in the field of drama is both impressive and distinctive, because his

contribution to Indian English drama is varied and significant. The nature of his official work in the oil company took him all over India. Religious rituals held fascination for the free thinker of him. A period of fifteen years starting from 1959 proved to be the most fruitful time in this playwright's life. He wrote about 30 plays-some of them short, some full length-during this period. Once social and literary pursuits started claiming his undivided attention he chose to retire from the oil company.

Asif Currimbhoy is a versatile genius, with a keen eye for the dramatic art. He had been writing plays for many years, but none of his works had been produced at home in India. One of the ironies of the Indian situation, particularly in the arts, is that talent must be discovered abroad before it is recognized at home. Asif Currimbhoy is an example for this fact. He received a grant from Rockefeller Foundation inviting him as a playwright to come to America in 1965-1966. It was a great moment and memorable occasion for him as he was fortunate in getting a number of his plays performed Universities, repertory theatres, and an experimental Coffee House theatre in Greenwich village. At America he was accepted as a great playwright. When he returned to his home town Bombay the reverberations of his recognition came with him and it set him off as a distinguished playwright in India also. It also gave him an entry into the academic world of the theatre, with a more durable and saner quality. The plays he wrote became the subject of study and research, and translation into many regional languages. And this, with encouragement of the next generation, gave him a fuller appreciation of life.

Professor K.R Srinivasa Iyenger has also admired his versatility, the theme and structure strength. Critics of World Theatre have also been impressed by Currimbhoy's talents. Agarwal in his book *A Best Play of Asif Currimbhoy: A Critical Study*, quotes

Faubion Bowers views regarding Currimbhoy's work: he says, "Asif Currimbhoy's work helped him, in no mean measure, to understand the spirit of India" and he finds Asif world-class playwright calling him "India's first authentic voice in the theater" (4). Most of the themes and plots of Asif Currimbhoy have their source in contemporary Indian problem. A number of plays have been staged in both India and abroad. Currimbhoy usually explores everyday speech in his plays, and his dialogue tends to be bare and casual, wanting in the literary taste, but his themes are of the topical interest, and his one-act plays are more compact and concentrated and hence more impressive. His great appeal lies in his employment of natural and simple language. His language suits the occasion and the character in a particular play.

Asif Currimbhoy is one of the greatest modern Indian dramatists in English and a major figure in twentieth century literature. An iconoclast, he has used language, form and content in innovative way producing an enduring body of texts. He began writing plays in his twenties. He chose to write for the theatre because he thought that this was the art form which allowed him the most to show the complexity of the society he lived in. He entertained independent thinking, close controversial themes embodied them in arresting dialogue and constructed and resolved plots in an unconventional way. His plays are first and foremost meant for the stage. He brilliantly succeeds in producing 'actable' plays.

Currimbhoy's plays are richly invested with his understanding of Indian history, society, religion, politics and philosophy. He has brought to the Indian theatre a breadth of vision, a metaphysical rigor and depth of thought, a symbolic richness, a lyrical fervor and an essential 'Indianness' of style. His plays wake the reader up to a critical culture.

The demand to be read with attention, to be understood, to reach the point of communion with the playwright so the word disappears and all that remains is the meaning, the sudden light in the reader's own mind as connections form, shaped by his own experience and recent knowledge. He has consistently tried to modify the Western form of the play to suit his Indian subject matter.

Though several plays have been written in India dealing with a variety of social issues, there are very few playwrights, who have written plays which can be stage produced. This is where Currimbhoy has his singular position because he has produced realistic plays for the stage. He is considered the first dramatist to show great interest in producing plays by fusing elements of pantomime, dance and song. He is also believed to be the most prolific among the Indian dramatists contriving interesting situations with a great sense of atmosphere. He wrote his plays based on what he observed in life.

Currimbhoy explores universal human predicament through his social, moral, religious and political concerns in the plays. He is a voice of universal revolt and anguish. And it is compassion that unifies his plays. The conflict he deals with is at every level – physical, mental, emotional – because from the time one meets other people, it is bound to develop. Currimbhoy's plays are all centered on human predicament which puzzles him so much that he shares the pain and agony of humanity through the characters he creates.

*Inquilab* (1970), is one of the plays, falls under the heading of Bengal trilogy. It is a political drama. It deals with the Naxalite revolt that battered Bengal in the 1960s with West Dinajpur District in West Bengal as its background. The play *Inquilab*, has for its setting a classroom of a college of Calcutta. A majority of the college students are the

supporters of Maoism. They scrawled on the wall many communist slogans. There was also a red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle drawn. Dutta is a famous professor. The people regard him as a distinguished scholar of law. But he has a conservative outlook. He has a British traditionalist approach. He does not like the indiscipline in the college. Moreover, he is worried about the ‘dying city’ affected by processions, stickers and violence and is equally perturbed by the ‘revisionist’ students questioning the holy institutions of learning in general, and his lesson on the freedom of thought and speech in particular.

Professor Dutta reminds the days of country’s freedom when it was fought under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi with the weapons of truth and non-violence. It was a noble fight against the tyrant foreign government. But Naxalite violence is destroying everything. His younger son, Amar, who is also the student of the college, pleads for proletarian internationalism and wants his father to ponder over the problems of poverty, hunger, dirt and inflation. His eldest son Ahmed, on the other hand, belongs to the group of Naxalites and his friends think that ‘Parliamentary democracy is not an effective weapon for socialist revolution: an armed struggle is inevitable...A revolution in backward countries can only be brought about by peasants: start organizing peasants for militant action...’ (qtd. in Agarwal 7).

The students seem to have been tremendously influenced by the revolutionary ideas of Ahmed. They make a strong protest against professors Dutta’s lecture because he was quoting a few articles from the Indian constitution and was favoring democratic system of India. They were against it and were feeling that the peasants were being exploited by the landlords. They made a holocaust in the class and wanted ‘socialist

revolution' by the Naxal shortcut. Thus the play is a play of social realism. Landlord Jain stands for the rich landlord who exploits the poor peasants. So Amar tells Jain that "Land to the landless, collective farming, community holdings, a distribution of surplus land to be done immediately" (qtd. in Agarwal 7). Professor Dutta comes under the Gandhian impact early, and realizes the relevance of Gandhian thought. He also wants socialism but with the philosophy of non-violence. The Naxalites do not appreciate him and Ahmed, an angry young man wants to put his Naxalite theory into practice. He and Shomiko do not care for the members of their family and want to change the constitution through 'cruelty and revolt.' The murder of landlord Jain is the result of it. Thus the dramatist indirectly suggests that some selfish politicians are the root cause of the disharmony in the country for their political gains. So there should be a proper education to the students to channelise their power to bring up the society in a healthy way.

The second play *The Refugee* (1971), is about Yassin. He is a young refugee from East Pakistan and is in search of conscience in the confusing world standards. Sen Gupta also comes to India as a refugee and works hard and soon becomes prosperous. The play brings out the morose and cold attitude of Sen Gupta towards the refugees. Sen Gupta invites Yassin to his house. He welcomes him because he is the son of his childhood friend Rukaiya. Yassin is inspired by Mita who is an intelligent daughter of Sen Gupta. His son Ashok also inspires him to work for the liberation of the country. The play concludes when he goes to the cupboard to take out the Mukti Fauj uniform and the rifle to join the 'Mukti Bahini' to liberate his country from the cruel clutches of West Pakistan.

The *Refugee* is full of conflicts and the main conflict is between Sen Gupta and his son, Ashok. Sen Gupta is selfish, cold, hypocritical and suffers from a crisis of conscience. Ashok the latter, concerns himself very much with the refugee problems. There is a conflict in the mind of Yassin too. It is between action and inaction. All is not well with Mosin too, who is one of the most distinguished teachers; but he is at a loss to understand what he should do for the refugee. Moreover, he has his own doubts about Pakistani Muslims. These conflicts have a coherence which emphasizes the underlying idea of the play – concern of man for humanity. It is this conflict between conception and execution that forms the central idea of the play.

The third play of the *Bengal Trilogy* is *Sonar Bangla* (1972), the play gives a vivid account of the Indo-Pakistan war that took place in 1971. In this play also Asif Currimbhoy has taken the problem of refugees and the emergence of the nation of Bangladesh. The play opens with the slaughter that took place in East Pakistan on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1971. Some intellectuals like Mr. Hussain, professor Aziz and a few students of Dacca University are unhappy because the West Pakistani troops are preparing a big ‘military build-up.’ The talks between the two leaders Yaha and Mujib have failed, and the former appoints Tikka, as the Martial Law administrator. He orders him to clean East Pakistan. Tikka is a cruel man, who does not hesitate to make slaughter of the intellectuals and others in East Pakistan. The story is full of pain and problem. The only way to solve the problem is to raise the liberation force in East Bengal. ‘Mukti Bahini’ seems to be the only way to solve the problem of these deserted people. The Pakistan army is helpless before the Mukti Bahini and at last there is the final war and later the emergence of a new country with the name of Bangladesh. Mujib, who has been

sentenced to solitary confinement for nine long months at Minawali, is released. He weeps on seeing desolation, destruction and bloodshed in his Sonar Bangla. The play concludes with Hussain hearing the sound of Tagore's 'Golden Bengal.'

*The Tourist Mecca* (1959), is a romantic play. It is the story of two lovers who end up passively accept the continuance of 'life movement' in a separation. Four groups of tourists to Agra from four different countries – France, U.K., U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. enter the lounge. After a while Lady Toppin, an elderly woman tourist from the U.S.A., comes to the hotel along with Janet, her daughter. Lady Toppin likes Agra very much and she shakes hands with Keshav, who is a tourist guide and engages him to guide her to Agra and the Taj. Keshav falls in love with Janet and wants to marry her. However, Janet wants to loves him but not marry him.

Asif Currimbhoy successfully contrasts Lady Toppin, who is growing older with Keshav, who becomes younger and younger. Lady Toppin contrasts her sanguine nature with the sedateness of her husband. She outwardly says that her daughter is growing just like her, but inwardly feels that they are poles apart. Both Janet and Kate are jealous of Keshav but their understanding of him is different. When Kate thinks that Keshav is a professional lover, Janet feels that he true and sincere lover. The dramatist is successful in handling people with different characters and cultures from different countries.

The play is *Doldrummers* (1960), which explores human relationship in a nice way, was written in 1960 but produced only in 1969. The play has four Anglo – Indians – Tony, Rita, Joe and Liza – who are too close to reality 'to live the life of imagination' had their idealism turned to cynicism. Tony is 'a pleasant, easy going young fellow, who has a slightly vacuous smile, and a magnificent torso'; he starts singing merrily with Joe

‘another small young man, who has ratty and intelligent eyes.’ Rita, ‘a young sensual girl, is very much in love’; she is leaning on a tree fondling Tony’s hair. Liza is a ‘technicolor doll, who has everything about her is painted.’ The play has sex as one of the theatrical techniques. The play became a success for the themes charming scenes and remarkable audio–visual effects along with picturesque description of the Juhu Beach.

*Darjeeling Tea* (1971), is a light comedy set in the beautiful tea plantations in the Himalayan range. It has the British-Indian and tribal characters and the tone of the play is satiric. The play is an outcome of the playwright’s tours in the tea garlands as well as his holiday visit to Darjeeling, the hill station in the summer of 1970. The play unfolds the story of Big – Mac, the tea-planter, Jannie, his wife and the illegitimate daughter of Big Mac, Didi. The play presents an intimate picture of the planter’s life with its nostalgic memories of the good old days. The planter is afraid of competition from rival planters. The play with its four main sets – The Planters Club, The Manager’s Room, A Doll’s House and The Tea Gardens, covers the entire life of the planters.

*This Alien Native Land* (1975), deals with the predicament of an Indian middle – class Jewish family, comprising of Jaseph, his wife, Rachel, his two sons, Jacob and David, and his daughter, Sarah. Everybody in the family is in the doldrums. David does not have job satisfaction and is advised by his father to toil so that he can come up in life. Sarah, who does not get a proper Jewish groom in India, fixes up her engagement with married Muslim. Jacob marries a divorcee Tara.

The high cost of living in Bombay, the nostalgia for the promised land, the crisis in the family due to the arrival of Tara, build up the conflict in the play. It is a romantic play where the dominant theme are love and sex. Through this play the dramatist wants to

convey the message that sex and love are necessary for a healthy life, but if they cross the limit they would prove to be most harmful.

*An Experiment with Truth* (1969), is a political play dealing with Gandhian theme. He is like any other human being, but having extraordinary qualities. The play has three acts and the dramatist has adopted the stream of consciousness technique, perhaps for the first time in the history of Indian drama in English. The play is built on conflict operating in the play from the beginning to the end. The conflict is between the Indians and the British –regarding the monopoly of the British Government on salt. There is also a conflict between Gandhi and his wife, Kastur Ba – regarding accumulation of wealth. Then, there is the conflict of idealism between Ambedkar and Gandhi, the former pleading for a separate electorate for minorities and the latter asking for a joint electorate. The inward and outward conflicts were successfully handled by the dramatist.

*Om Mane Padme Hum* (1971), is a play on Lamaism, based on the plight of the Dalai Lama from Tibet when China occupied it in the 1950s. Apart from giving a succinct account of the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet, the play dramatises the conflict in the mind of the Dalai Lama. Currimbhoy has brilliantly succeeded in weaving a political event in a much wider context. The dramatist interweaves a public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity. The dramatist raises the moral question at the end of the drama, when Dalai Lama escapes from the Chinese threat – the ultimate interest of the combatants being ephemeral. Asif Currimbhoy has elevated the temporal conflict between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government to the metaphysical level.

*Angkor* (1973), is a political as well as a historical drama. There are four main characters— Tho the Indo-Chinese; Pierre, the French; Sam; the American and Phu, the Vietnamese girl, and by various permutations and transmigrations, It deals with the past history of Cambodia and Indo – China. The rise and fall of civilizations takes the construction of *Angkor*. There are vicissitudes, the alterations and transformations, the disappearance and the recovery in it. Moreover, the play deals with the coming and the exit of the French; the tragedy of Vietnam. The last brief scene hints at the conclusion yet to be concluded. First, the Frenchman leaves, then the American too. Tho and Phu are left alone, at last Phu weeps for a while after which she gets hold of a broom and starts to clearing up the mess.

*Thorns on a Canvas* (1969), is a play which was written as a reaction against the banning of *The Doldrummers* and is a protest against all Establishment-sponsored art. It is the story of the Parton who introduced his daughter, Malti, to the Academy of Art. The daughter and her father come upon Yakub. He is an untidy and unkempt man with a rose in his hand upon which he gazes with quiet contemplation. He is with an ugly young woman Nafesa. Malti does not like her. She feels the pain of life. There is a long discussion about the parallels and contrast about the natures of the prominent characters of the play. The playwright contrasts the world of Malti with that Nela. The play is purely symbolic. The patron is a epitome of patronage, glorifying in the act rather than the true artistic results. His daughter, Malti, symbolizes perfection. Nafesa symbolizes the ugly exterior holding a simple beautiful spirit. Yakub symbolizes the inevitable artist who is able to create because of pain and fear. The playwright satirizes the Government –run Academy where one finds variable sound of table tapping, the full instrumental scale of

the Sarangi, interrupted sounds of singing, flashes of dancing of Kathak and Bharat Natyam, canvases streaming with colors, and the quick movement artists busily engaged.

*The Hungry Ones* (1965), is a social play. The playwright presents a poignant cry of poverty and conscience. Beginning with the visit of the American beatnik poets Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky to Calcutta, the play presents with greater penetration all manifestations of hunger in the riot-torn and the famine-stricken capital of Bengal. The two American beatnik poets want to know the mystery of India but they are unable to do so. The play is full of conflict. On the one hand there is an atmosphere of peace, harmony and love and on the other is the atmosphere of arson, loot and communal riots. There is also parallelism between the racial problem in the U.S.A. and the Hindu-Muslim problem in India. The enterprising nature of Sam is contrasted with the passive nature of Ramesh. The play presents the realistic picture of the streets of Calcutta where beggars walk like shadows and where one may witness scenes of riot and arson.

*The Miracle Seed* (1973), the one-Act play gives a tremendous impression of reality and presents an eternal challenge of endurance and survival. It is the story of Ram, a farmer and Malti, his wife. They live in a village. Ram 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. Again, there is the story of famine in Maharashtra. It deals with a single dominant dramatic situation – the cruel vagaries of nature resulting in a perpetual drought. The ending of the play, however, is not convincing as 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 had ended with the actual leaving of Ram's family for the city in utter despair and despondency.

*The Dissident MLA* (1974), is also a social as well as a political play. The play reveals the cunningness of the political leaders. The dramatist transforms a topical event into a work of art. The play is about Manu, The Dissident MLA of Gujarat, who makes use of students to get the assembly dissolved. The play opens with the conversation between Manu and his wife, Shanti, about their son Ramesh, a student leader who puts forth before his father some of the problems confronting students. As in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* there is in Currimbhoy's *The Dissident MLA* an exploration of the dramatic resources of gesture, posture and movement as unrelenting and ingenious as to make the accompanying words in many cases almost superfluous. Through this play Asif Currimbhoy gets the best opportunity to satirise politicians. He directs his satire on the hypocrisy of the politicians.

*The Clock* (1993), a one-act play by Asif Currimbhoy covers a vast range of social issues. It is a mirror up to contemporary life with all its concomitant frustration, isolation, helplessness, materialism, lust, loneliness and moral degradation. *The Clock*, portrays the travails of Henry, a salesman or tired salesman. It is also apparent on a bigger scale that this play is a social commentary. It touches all the problems brought on by wealth and success in our culture. The play is an exposure of middle-class delusions. The clock describes the disturbed human mind and the consequent frustrations of a salesman who has resigned his job. Every now and then, Henry gets lost in his own thoughts even in the presence of others. His mind keeps wandering all the time-nursing old grievances and thinking of the past stupid mistakes. He finds nothing to look forward to. He has lost ambition and hope and looks older and more tired time. It is a symbolic play and deals with the traditional period. It tells that materialism has demoralized man.

The physical richness is not important. People should take care of spiritual upliftment also. The title of the play the *Clock*, has a symbolic significance which shows the condition of modern man. He is bombarded from all sides to become successful which means to be rich and powerful. Time passes and he feels more pressurized by the burden of his responsibilities. Henry looks, again and again, at the wall clock because he has a target to be achieved before twelve at midnight. No one can stop the hands of the clock. The tick-tock of the bell is like the ‘harnessing bell’ of the horse that reminds the traveler to go ahead because there are “miles to go” before he sleeps (Frost 63-65).

The play presents a true picture of modern society where money dominates moral values and man dominates woman indicating that materialism has corrupted man completely. Man has turned a worshipper of mammon. Society, friends, family, children and even his own ‘self’ are not his own due to his materialistic attitude. And this reality of the modern ‘waste-land’ has been presented honestly by Currimbhoy in the play.

*The Captives* (1963), is also a social play. It reflects subtle tensions and alienations that continue to exist between Pakistan and India. It 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 place around him in his Milieu.

*The Captives*, is a play sequel to *The Restaurant* and 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 Indian 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 the moral values.

*Om* (1961), is a religious play. It presents man's search for God and outlines, on some of the most theatrically impressionable scenes, the different paths of salvation. It is a thematic unity. The development of Hinduism since the ancient times, the transformation of many Gods and Goddesses into the world of one and one only, the progression from action and sacrifice to knowledge and action are ably dealt with in Act I of the play. The playwright has written this play on the Greek tradition. Here chorus plays an important part. The playwright draws freely upon Vedic and Upanishad lore to make his plays a panoramic sweep of India's spiritual traditions.

*The Dumb Dancer* (1961), is a powerful ritualistic dance dealing with a Kathakali dancer who so completely identifies himself with the characters of Bhima that it leads him from one misapprehension to another, one disaster to another. The play moves through the labyrinth of the dancer's confused mind as he hovers between reality and the world of myth. Currimbhoy successfully combines dance, music and action so as to make the play very effective. It takes us through the story of a kathakali dancer, Bhima, who undergoes psychological and mental confusion, leading to insanity. He plays the role of Bhima in the dance play and believes that he has killed Duryodhana and has eaten his guts. Having been admitted into the mental asylum, he is under the treatment of Dr. Prema. She arranges to give a shock therapy by showing him real human entrails. She also begins to communicate with the dumb dancer and allows him to caress her. While trying her psychiatric experiment on the dumb dancer, Dr. Prema herself falls into his

arms and decides to kill Shakuntala. Dr. Prema is mesmerized by the dumb dancer and lets out her mind to Dr. Dilip who is sane,

Dilip, and who is not? Remember, I tired, Dilip. Really tired. But it drew me closer instead of further. The vertigo.... The vortex... I found myself slipping into the terrifying abyss of darkness...slipping, slipping without being able to hold myself back. How much of the insane was true and how much was not. Sanity lay... as a fine dividing line. It seemed to move...and fantasies engulf me. No words can tell you what its discovery means because it lies beyond... the point of no return. No grater passion was there than this stalwart God...when I touched him, I felt the element of distraction grow within me... the desperation grew. Identification. I searched for it. But the other image of myself lay in his world...not mine.

(qtd. in Agarwal 80-81)

This play is an intense psychological study of man's frailty and emotions that become uncontrollable.

*Monsoon or A Noah's Ark* (1965), is among Asif Currimbhoy's more ambitious experiments in drama, and it has seen production of Dallas theatre Centre, Texas. It is a full-length play in three acts located in the exotic background of one of the tropical islands in the Malaysian archipelago.

Thus Currimbhoy with his contribution to the Indian English drama, stands apart as a talented playwright. He has made a mark in the Indian theatre through a variety of place made for the stage. His plays offer a fair sample of his genius as a playwright and

the totality of his vision. K.A. Agarwal quotes the views of C. B. Venugopal, a great critic on the plays of Asif Currimbhoy in his book *The Best Plays of Asif Currimbhoy* :

If Indian drama in English has had a significant breakthrough of late, only a handful of playwrights can take the credit for it. Among these few, Asif Currimbhoy most definitely figures prominently. For sheer fecundity as a playwright he has no equal; ever since he began writing in the late fifties, he has averaged almost two plays a year... viewed as a whole, what he has achieved is a singularly impressive. Also, some of his plays even consider individually, do show signs of a mature artist who knows what he is after.

(3)

The present study is entitled, “Celebration of Life: A Study of Asif Currimbhoy’s Selected Plays.” The researcher has taken up two plays of Asif Currimbhoy for her study namely, “The Hunger Ones” and “The Miracle Seed.” Asif Currimbhoy deals with the themes of hunger and man’s waiting endlessly for some miracle to happen when everything around him fails. In spite of all the odds faced by man, he wants to go on living and celebrate life because life is worth living.

The present study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter “Introduction” gives a brief introduction to Indian English drama, and Asif Currimbhoy’s contribution to the genre drama and his place among the Indian playwrights. The second chapter “Hunger” deals with hunger for food and hunger for love touching upon other hungers faced by human beings. The third chapter “Mystery of Life” deals with the mystery of life as realized by the characters. Man tries to understand this mysterious life as he

undertakes his journey towards knowing his identity and realising his own self. The final chapter sums up the arguments of the previous chapters offering the conclusion that life is worthy of celebration.

## Chapter II

### Hunger

Asif Currimbhoy's social plays reveal his fine sense of the theatre and his skill as a dramatist. Currimbhoy's close observation of the basic human condition and the agonies people suffer due to their abject poverty claimed his undivided attention.

Currimbhoy's play *The Hungry Ones* is a symbolic play having interesting situations and captivating dialogues depicting the terrible famines in Bihar and Maharashtra in the early seventies of the twentieth century.

The play *The Hungry Ones* talks about the pain of hunger and love. The play starts with the two American poets coming to Calcutta to know about the Indian culture. It presents a poignant cry of poverty and conscience as they try to mingle with the Indians. Beginning with the visit of the American beatnik poets – Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky – to Calcutta, the play presents with greater penetration all manifestations of hunger in the riot-torn and the famine stricken capital of Bengal. It shows how the two Americans strive unsuccessfully to understand the mystery of India. The play *The Hungry Ones* presents the famine-stricken city of Calcutta. It ends with the two Americans leaving India in frustration because all their efforts prove futile.

They learn that they can never comprehend the mystery of India. As Ruth I. Meserve and Walter J. Meserve observe in the "Foreword" to the play, their [the two American poets] frustration only underlines the bitter compassion, Currimbhoy feels for India with its deep conflicts, both religious and social, incapable of resolution through the exciting and contradictory voices, still hungry, still suffering, sadly through death and the agony of believing without hope" (xv). They find that the deep conflict of religion and

society are the basic cause of the untold problems of the poor people. The play as Currimbhoy describes, “opens with the two American ‘Dharma Bums’, the white one standing on his head in Yoga-pose, the black one kneeling on carpet, facing Mecca, praying”(9). The beatniks come back to the normal position after performing a few feats. When they are seen in their big stature, lying like carcasses in the crowded Indian city of Calcutta, people watch their performance with amazement.

After a gap of some minutes a Bengali man and woman come there, deposit their bag near the coffee house on the sidewall, open their bag and take out their tattered clothes. The crowd begins to notice their bizarre movements as the Bengali couple proceed to perform after changing their dress. Currimbhoy gives a curious situation in the play.

The new-pair consisting of a Bengali man and a Bengali woman begin to perform ‘a monkey act.’ The crowd shifts from the side of the Americans to the Bengali couple. The woman takes out a small drum from the bag shaped like an hourglass with tight canvas skin on either side and a couple of strings attached to it. The couple begin to twirl the drum slowly with regulated tapping, and the man began a monkey act. It is not a funny act but one sequence of a monkey act, often played in this country. The monkey takes out his cap, drags himself on the pavement, like a deformed hungry beggar, slapping his stomach, inviting pity, revulsion and charity. The Americans who are awed by this do not change their course. They are still lying on the sidewalk, propped on their elbows, looking at the two Indians, again deeply contemplative.

As the attention of the crowd shifts from the yoga-pose of the two American beatnik poets to the Bengali entertainers; it laughs at the wonderful performance of the

monkey act. The Bengali juggler then lies prostrate, as though he has no arms and legs, writhing and inching his body forward painfully. His flesh picks up the filth of the pavement, cutting itself on sharp stones till blood shows on the dirty cloth; all the time he keeps slapping his bare brown stomach. The Bengali juggler with his hollow eyes and appearance offers a pathetic sight. Currimbhoy who is driving home his point deftly arouses the sympathy of the spectators as they behold the performance of the Bengali juggler. His empty stomach sounds very much like the empty drum as he slaps it catching the emotions of the audience so that they may show pity and give him some coins in charity. When the Bengali juggler is offered a banana by the American he crawls by without accepting it. As his body passes the second American, he takes out a coin from his pocket and offers it to the Indian. He passes by as though he is blind. This arouses their interest and they want to know more and more about not only India but also the Indians.

The two beatnik poets are also performing their feats- from yoga to athletics, from 'carpet-prayer' to 'frog-dance'. They want to involve the Bengali couple also. So that they can get the undivided attention of the audience. After a while they succeed in involving the two Indians in their 'frolicsome game'. Even then the attention of the audience is drawn only towards 'the hungry act' which makes them wonder and search to gain an insight into the mystery. The two friends from America turn their attention towards the lady-juggler, and are attracted by the extreme physical beauty of the Bengali woman. The curves of her body and facial features spell bound them.

The two Americans, who are fascinated by the half-naked beauty of the woman, offer her a banana. Unlike the male counterpart, the Bengali woman accepts the offer

with thanks. One of the Americans peels open a banana and enjoys the sweet tasty peel throwing away the core of it. The woman, who watches his action, laughs in pleasant amusement. The second American is happy to see the bewitching face of the woman and encouraged by her smile, he takes some notes from his pocket tears them up into many pieces and throws them away. The woman is quite astonished and begins to laugh again. The two friends are filled with fun and confidence. They begin to do all sorts of funny things to amuse the lady. The woman is amused, temporarily distracted from the grief of seeing the man, who continues sliding along the length of the pavement.

The two American young men have not taken any interest in the Bengali juggler at the beginning; but now all their attention is turned towards only the Bengali juggler. They see him getting up and walking slowly back to the woman, his chest still heaving from the exertion and emotion. His woman is very sympathetic towards him. She receives him warmly and helps him to remove his tattered dress. She also cleans softly the blood on his skin. The Indian juggler never pays any attention to the Americans. He does not accept either the banana or the coins. He goes on ignoring them, whereas his woman shows a little interest in the two foreigners. But the Bengali juggler accepts the food from the urchin. The two American beatniks are surprised at the indifferent attitude of the Indian. So they try to make a vigorous search to gain an insight into the mystery.

Currimbhoy presents a very interesting scene of a 'mute hand game' because the game requires three or four persons. Therefore the American beatnik poets ask the woman to join them. She happily accepts the offer. The Indian juggler does not want to participate but the woman coaxes him and her man reluctantly joins the party. One of the Americans takes the liberty of peering into the bag of the Indians and removes the drum,

which he twirls playfully. Immediately the Indian man turns around and snatches it away from the American. He replaces the drum in the bag. The woman co-operates with the Americans but her man does not like them. The Americans are internally very happy and they are also getting extreme delight, at having made their friendship with Indians. They think that the Indians are the good people and they are fortunate to have some closeness with them. The Indians are the only ones they had so far come across who have interest them. The Indians may be suffering from hunger but they reserve it and try to take hunger. This arouses the curiosity of the American friends.

The Americans are delighted to have made their initial friendship. One may assume that the bizarre trait in both the pairs has mutually attracted them, though the Indians still seem to maintain their reserve in terms of the 'hungry' act. This has stirred the curiosity of the Americans and they desperately want to join them in this game they do not yet understand.

In the meantime a group of college going young men and women comes. But these youngsters take interest in Hindu-Muslim riots in which millions of both communities have lost their lives. They talk about the British rule and the cultural heritage of Tagore. However, they are not quite serious about the riots. They have no concern with the Bengal famine or any other social or political problems of the country. They are all pleasure seeking. Though a girl among them has a good knowledge of the great man of the country, nobody takes any interest in that. The students do not see them as strangers they call them a "Punditju" and "Molviji", Al tells them stretching himself flat on the ground, "I was bitten by a bug one day. He was fat and round and had sucked up all my blood. So I squashed him under my foot. He burst into a bucket full of red

blood. And I said to myself: ‘My God, that’s my blood!’” (17). Both of the friends think that they will be satisfied if they come to know how the Indians know how to control mind and matter. However, hard they try they cannot be satisfied in this regard because they still discriminate people. Sam says, “I was not bitten by the bug; I was born with it. A big white bug that sucked my black blood. It grew thinner, poisoned and emaciated, till one day, it disappeared. And I said, ‘My God, that was me’” (18). They realize that they are yet to know the secret of the Indians.

In the next scene Asif Currimbhoy again deals with social consciousness. The central place of the actions of the two Americans is again Calcutta city. The time is of night and the two American friends are roaming on the streets of Calcutta, with their haversack-beddings on their backs; they stop wearily, leaning against the lamp-post and remove their load off of their backs temporarily. Both of them talk about the sharp contrast between the ugliness of the Bengali juggler and beautiful and charming face of his female partner.

SAM: I can’t forget them, Al. They keep coming back. (Al doesn’t reply)

He with his deformed body. She with her beautiful face.

AL: Yeah.

SAM: Something repulsive...

AL: ... like us...

SAM: ... yet something beautiful...

AL: ...not like us... (*brief pause*). (19)

Asif Currimbhoy in *The Hungry Ones* has taken basic theme of hunger, and dealt with most of its significant aspects and varieties. His play is based upon man's hunger for food. But it also gives adequate consideration to other forms of human hunger, namely hunger for eternal ethical values; hunger for a happier life for the common people; hunger for sex and wealth without any concern for moral social codes and decency.

After the performance in the street these two, Americans could not forget the Bengali woman. So they start their search for her. They call her a pure woman because she has the purity of a virgin. Sam says with enthusiasm like a child "that was fun, wasn't it? The games we played with them. I haven't had so much fun for a long time. I haven't talked for a long time and yet... we didn't speak a word" (19).

The poor rickshaw-puller warns them not to cast their lustful eyes upon her. He also tells them that they should not try to extract her woman's weakness. It is her secret. The woman is innocent and she has all the roles of a woman. She is a child, a wife and a mother. When they try to stretch out their hand to her victoriously, she screams, but as they drag her body out, and lift her face to the light, they again see the face of the dead woman, lean and gaunt. Their fingers tremble as they leave her face, in bewilderment and horror.

The underlying thought of *The Hungry Ones* is that hunger for love stands out even in an environment of violence and loot. Currimbhoy has given the importance to socio-realistic aspects in *The Hungry Ones*. Ramesh, a Hindu boy, is in love with a Mohammedan girl, named Razia. But her brother does not like the choice of his sister. So he has a conflict with Ramesh. But the love between Ramesh and Razia only increases in spite of the hurdles and they live together. Ramesh, who is taking his lessons from a guru

comes to know about the importance of meditation and yoga. Razia, the Muslim girl, is much devoted to Ramesh. Due to her economic condition she becomes one among the beggars. The American beatniks find her receiving food and later giving food from a window which is partially close. Currimbhoy on the one hand presents people who are hungry for food and on the other people who are hungry to give.

Currimbhoy also presents the women's hunger for that equality. He feels that women should not be kept within the four-walls of the houses. Moreover, in this scientific age when the women of other castes and creeds are taking their proper share in all the activities of political and social fields, the Muslim women are kept under the Burkha. He wants the Muslim women to come out and play equal share like other women in all walks of life.

Asif Currimbhoy's genius lies not only in the vivid topicality of his plays, but also in getting under the skin of situations and characters thereby involving the emotions and feelings of the audience and making them think. He uses the dexterous use of romance and sex as technique in his play *The Hungry Ones*. Al and Sam are the two American poets who are young and romantic. They reach up to the window where Razia in her Burkha is receiving charity food. They see her dark and beautiful eyes. When the Burkha is partially removed by her, they see her extremely beautiful face and are fascinated by her beauty.

Currimbhoy has given a romantic scene, which shows his love for natural human beauty. The two friends get the lift to enter into the house of the Bengali woman. Sam lies down on the bare charpai, which is made of bamboo bed with jute ropes. Razia sits by him and after some minutes she leaves from there and his friend Al enters the house.

They are fascinated with her beauty and so they are freely sweating and tossing around.

Al tells him about Razia's beauty.

She's nice, isn't she?

Razia is her name

Like the sweet smell of jasmine

A savior angel

(Catches Sam's shirt and pulls his face close)

She is sensuous too, Sam

With woman's weakness

I know you can't tear your eyes off her

And man needs to test her strength. (25)

Sam is a cultured American. He does not appreciate the sensuous and romantic words of Al about the gentle Muslim woman. He rebukes him for his immoral ideas and calls him swine, "Sam threatens him saying I'll kill you, you swine, whether you do it through lust, or lack of intent" (31). Al is ashamed but he is a cunning fellow and with his twisted words he manages the situation. He says that, he is only testing his strength to know the mystery of their hunger. They decide to help Razia and her husband Ramesh in the weakness of hunger. Sam is restless and he is rolling in part-dream part-delirium. He feels fire on his throat. He hates the riots and arson that are increasing and are affecting the city of Calcutta. Sam feels that Razia is a pure and powerful woman. She is a great source to console his wounds. Pure love has a great strength. With these pure and

powerful thoughts he falls in deep slumber; however, outside on the street there is a continuous sequence of riots and arson, violence and rain.

Currimbhoy is a master of description. The romantic scenes where Ramesh and Razia meet with their passion explains that. Razia has a deep and pure love for Ramesh, who is a Hindu young man. There is no bar or caste and creed as far as true love is concerned. It is the blending of two hearts that have only one thread of selfless love. Razia meets her lover, Ramesh, in the peering darkness of night. The man is in torn and bloody dress. He brings some food for his beloved Razia as he does not want her to suffer from hunger.

Once Ramesh and Razia's hunger is appeased their yearning for love emerges. When Ramesh comes dragging himself slowly holding a sack in his hand. The contents of which are unknown; he is holding it so tight that he seems that he would not let it go in spite of the emotions he feels for his lady love in front of him. Asif Currimbhoy has described here a most sensuous scene, which represents his sense of the feeling of romance.

They go to their room, their bed, overcome with emotion and fatigue, demanding love of each other, kissing and breaking away, strangely conflicting yet in union, their clothes slipping away, struggling and yielding, motions undulating under folded bed sheet, till she cries piercingly, with anguish and ecstasy, in the privacy of their own selves....

Razia and Ramesh look up at each other with deep love. Razia lowers her Burkha to cover up her nude body and allows her lover to leave the room. The physical and spiritual hungers of the victim woman and the Hindu young man are fully satisfied. They get the richness of the night. But the hunger of the two American friends is not at all satisfied. They understand the relationship of Ramesh with Razia unknown that there is something beyond the physical hunger that is worth pursuing.

Ramesh is in tension to see the environment of arson, loot and rapine. His Guru advises him to meditate so deep that none may disturb him. The dramatist wants to show that love is possible even in adverse circumstances and that there are other things that go even beyond that – that is the need and hunger to help people in need – whatever the need may be. When the two Americans see Razia, the beggar, distributing alms to so many people, they are surprised that they are unable to understand Razia. But they conclude that Ramesh has earned food by means of hard work. They approach Razia and offer her food by telling her that they too have learnt how to earn food. But she simply asks them to save Ramesh. They promise to do so and go in search of him. But they have not unravelled the mystery of India.

Ramesh having accepted the advice of the Guru takes shelter in yogic meditation. He has Janau (the Hindu thread) across his neck and shoulder. He sits on a low stool in yogic meditation, unmoving, hardly breathing, through all the hours of darkness and night. Thus Ramesh exemplifies the spiritual hunger also. By seeing the nudity of Razia, he wants to rape her, Razia objects by raising her hand to her mouth, stifling a scream; but he protests and tells her that it is not his fault. It is her nude beauty, which has arouse the flame of sex in him, and that his desire to rape her is not from his side; rather he want

to show to her that he is far-superior over her lover Ramesh. What he considers his strength not at all the strength require. Razia tells him that it is not his strength; rather it is his weakness. The flame of sex that is very strong in Al makes him fling her on her bed, his weight closing upon her. However, Razia is saved by the interference of the second American beatnik, Sam.

Sam threatens his friend saying that he would kill him if he does any harm to Razia. She thanks Sam for helping her in this critical situation. Ramesh, who has been raised to the level of a yogi remains still in his state of meditation and prayer. He is trying to get the internal power. The Americans are surprised that the Indians are people who have pride over their self-respect. It is the mystery for the American youths.

Both the Americans are ashamed at this sudden and unfortunate turn of events. They do hard work and earn some money. They again go to Razia's home and give her the food requesting her to accept it because it is earned with their labour. She accepts it cheerfully. She knows that both of them can never understand the mystery of India. Razia's face is calm and has a beautiful dignity when the American beatnik poets raise their hands in farewell to her.

Currimbhoy takes the themes of hunger and love which are not being conditioned by circumstances, but only man-made. The two foreigners are unable to understand the mystery of India. They depart from this land with frustration. The Americans appreciate Razia not only for her beauty but also for her sincerity, and truthfulness towards her husband Ramesh, who has been forcibly take away by her brother. The play powerfully presents the realistic picture of poverty and his starvation in Calcutta, where the beggars and the destitutes throng in large numbers like restless shadows.

As Bayapa Reddy says, “The playwright contrasts the deformed body of ‘the Indian man with the beautiful body of the Indian woman. On the one hand there is an atmosphere of peace, harmony and love and on the other is the atmosphere of arson, loot and communal riots” (109). With the help of the technique of parallels and contrasts the playwright conveys the message how hunger and love are not overwhelmed by the exigencies of circumstances. The conversation between Sam and Razia, in which the latter is worried about her husband, is racy. The play presents before the readers a realistic picture where beggars walk like shadows.

The theme of hunger can be seen in Currimbhoy’s play *The Miracle Seed* also where due to the failure of the monsoon and its resultant harvest, people are affected by drought and try to move to the cities in search of livelihood. *The Miracle Seed*, is an eloquent affirmation of faith in the resurrection of life. In the words of Agarwal, “It represents the two cultures of the country, urban and rural. The play is rooted in the modern Indian rural society and gives us a tremendous impression of reality and presents an eternal challenge of endurance and survival” (213).

Ram’s family is very poor and relies completely on agriculture hence Ram’s family suffers when the land is affected by drought and the land becomes arid. As they will not have a good harvest, even survival will become a problem for them. Ram’s wife Malti, who is a very intelligent woman, stands by her husband at his difficult times. When he is restlessly walking up and down, she tries to calm him down they know very well that as human beings they cannot do anything. Her faith helps her to support him. She kindles his emotions by touching him affectionately as Ram is clutching his toe tightly she speaks to him.

Malti: (softly) The hoe is well-worn, husband.... (softness in her voice)

You clutch it hard and sure.

Ram: (Calming, sensing the change in mood, going up to her) It's the

only thing that matters.

Malti: (feeling his touch) Yes.

Ram: (separating slightly as his body touches her stomach) Are you well,

woman?

Malti: The child grows.

Ram: (tenderly) You work too hard around the house. Be careful.

Malti: Don't worry. It will be a boy, and it will grow strong.

Ram: (smiling) I never said anything. (Malti smiles too doesn't reply) I

like to see you smile. It's careworn...and sweet.

Malti: And I like to see you angry. It's so...like you (she smiles) And

then...I've seen you smile too.

Ram: (questioningly) Not enough?

Malti: There's never enough of anything. (9-10)

As Malti talks to him in her own affectionate way, their poverty is also revealed. They may be poor. But they have love and compassion. Through the portrayal of Bapa, Asif Currimbhoy points out to the readers that one should always keep one's mind busy so that it could be free from tensions. Ram is sad because he knows no other work except

farming and even that farming has become a curse to him because it is not yielding anything. It is the suggestion of the playwright that even the farmers should do some other work besides their farming. So that they could depend upon them during famines and drought. Ram is unhappy with the city people. He knows that it is the village people who are the root source of the prosperity of the cities but during the hard days of drought the city people and the government do not help them.

The village-bred Ram does not believe in the words of Laxman, who talks about the miracle seed. He is also of the opinion that the strangers are not trustworthy and particularly the strangers of the city types like Laxman. He thinks that the strangers from the city make him feel uncomfortable with their superior ways and crookedness. But Malti does not agree with him she feels that not all the city people are crooks. She has full faith in her nephew Laxman. She feels that he is gentle fellow and a sensible boy. Ram is also happy after knowing about the progressive ideas of Laxman, he appreciates him for this good ideas. He tells Malti about him, he feels that they could utilise his wisdom to improve their financial condition.

Ram: (reluctantly) Well... he did show us... the miracle seed. And he has worked in the fields with me. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it. Do you know he actually worked with his hands, this city slicker.... Wouldn't have known if I hadn't seen it myself....

.....

Ram: (preoccupies, thinking of the boy, getting excited) He's full of ideas, you know. Talks about setting up a pumping set near this well. Says the cow is too slow... God knows, he'll be talking of tractors next... but over

and over again he comes back to talking about the hybrid seed. Where did he get all that knowledge from! These city people know everything. Scientific farming h calls it. (laughing hard) Science at a time when we're starving... But he's worked. I respect him for that. We have ploughed and ploughed. Planted the seed. This entire season. He promises we'll reap... a golden harvest. (20-21)

Thus he starts loving Laxman and has faith in him. Savitri, Ram's daughter, understands Laxman from the very beginning. She appreciates him. Laxman, helps her in both ways one, with the help of the pallet stone he is able to set right her stammering voice. Secondly, with the help of the miracle seeds he along with Savitiri is able to surprise everybody with the stalks of the miracle seed. Thus her hunger for fullness is soothe along with her physical healing.

Laxman belongs to the city, but he is very intelligent and knows the conditions prevalent in the villages very well because he reads the newspaper regularly he is quite updated in his knowledge and comes to know about the plans of the government to make drains and canals to irrigate the dry lands, so that the farmers will not have to depend upon the monsoons. When Ram and his family suffer from hunger due to the failure of the monsoon and harvest, Laxman's hunger for knowledge and his desire to help the needy are clearly brought out by the playwright.

In spite of all his struggles, pains and hunger, man wants to live because he knows that life is worth living. The mystery of life is that man needs something to hold on to, like hope, faith or spirituality. It is very difficult to understand man or his nature because he himself is not sure of what he does. Through spirituality, faith and hope, he starts his

journey towards self – realization which will ultimately lead him to God. Hence, it is very difficult for others to understand a person especially one who is completely different with regard to culture, religion or race and that is the mystery of life. This mystery only enables one to celebrate life in all its aspects.

## Chapter III

### Mystery of Life

The play *The Hungry Ones* reveals the social consciousness of Asif Currimbhoy which has a deep preoccupation with the search for truth. Through his play *he* portrays the pains of hunger of the poor people. To Currimbhoy socialist realism becomes a prelude and the play *The Hungry Ones* depicts the famine-stricken city of Calcutta. Two American young poets with their bitter compassion, for this developing country, are baffled by the things they see in India. They feel that the religious and social conflicts are the basic cause of the untold problems of the poor people. “The two American beatnik poets come to Calcutta to search out the reality of the poor people” (190) says K. M. George in “Asif Currimbhoy: A Preface.”

The two poets try to understand India and they visit India with the purpose to know the reality. They make all sorts of efforts to attract people. They perform a few feats in the streets of Calcutta. As the play opens, the two American poets are seen lying and tumbling back to normal position after performing a few feats. Currimbhoy says “The two American tumble back into normal posture. Then they just lay there... they just lie there, contemplating, for a long while, as the Bengalis pass by, jabbering, pointing at them, curious, sometimes laughing at these odd dishevelled bearded Americans, big in statures, lying like carcasses in this crowded Indian city...”(25). People gather to watch these two Americans in Yoga-pose. The white man is standing on his head – his Shirsassan whereas the black one is kneeling on a carpet in a praying position facing

towards Mecca. Very soon there is change in the gathering. Currimbhoy describes the reason for the change.

Out of the maze of people, another curious action transpires. A little further down the sidewalk one begins to notice the bizarre movements of two newcomers: a Bengali man and woman, able-bodied and decently dressed, who walk up near the coffee house, carrying a bag. They deposit the bag on the sidewalk, open it, and remove tattered beggar-like clothes, which they proceed to wear. (9)

The crowd which has been attracted by the two poets in their yoga-pose turn their attention to the Bengali couple. After changing their clothes, the man begins to perform “A monkey act.” The woman takes from her bag a small drum, a very ordinary one shaped like an hourglass with tight canvas skin on either side and a couple of strings with striking objects which tap on the drum as it is twirled with wrist action. Drums like this are very commonly used in India by the monkey-trainers to entertain people so that they will be able to earn their meagre living. The crowd watches the performance with intense interest. According to K. A. Agarwal:

The street show was a wonderful one. The Bengali woman and Bengali man began to twirl the drum slowly with regulated tapping, and the man began a monkey act. It was not a funny act. It was one sequence of a monkey act, often played in this country. The monkey took out his cap, dragged himself on the pavement, like a deformed hungry beggar, slapping his stomach, inviting pity, revulsion, charity. The Americans did not change their course. They were still lying on the sidewalk, propped on

their elbows, looking at the two Indians, again deeply contemplative.

(192)

The crowd is no longer interested in the feat or yoga pose of the American poets. Their attention shifts to the Bengali entertainers. The crowd laughs at the wonderful performance of the Bengali juggler as he lays prostrate as though he has no arms and legs. He writhes his body forward covering every inch painfully picking up the dirt of the pavement. All the time he is slapping his bare brown stomach and his body is wounded by the sharp stones on the pavement. His eyes are hollow and his empty stomach sounds very much like the empty drum they have on them. He tries to catch the emotions of the audience so that they would be moved to pity and give him some coins in charity.

The two American poets are performing a few feats starting from yoga to athletics and from 'carpet prayer' to 'frugdance.' They want to involve the Indians also in their 'frolicsome game' and they succeed in doing so after sometime. However, the attention of the gathering is no longer drawn towards them but only towards 'the hungry act' of the Indians. The Indians are the only ones they have so far come across who had interested them. The Indians may be suffering from hunger but they reserve it. This arouses the curiosity of the American friends. So they make a vigorous search so as to gain an insight into the mystery of the Indians. As Currimbhoy points out,

The crowd has now stopped laughing. They became indifferent to the repetition of the same act, and leave the two Americans look at each other meaningfully, then slowly get up, and come over to the two Indians. The Indians continue as before, unaware and almost indifferent to anyone

around. The body is still writhing, arm held up in supplication, moving forward imperceptibly. (10)

One of the American poets takes out a banana from his pocket. He offers it to the Indian juggler who does not accept it in spite of his hunger. The other American poet takes out a coin from his pocket and offers it to the Indian juggler who again ignores as though he is blind to the act and leaves the place. The two American yogis could not understand anything from his reaction. So they want to watch them further. They lean against the wall and once again watch the Indians at their feats. They see the body of the Indian juggler crawling and people become more interested in his performance. The two Americans turn their attention towards the lady-juggler and are much attracted by the beauty of the Bengali woman. Currimbhoy describes her beauty: “They now turn their attention to the woman. There is a heavy beauty about her Bengali features, a proud face with aquiline nose, her skin with the deep glow of copper, her voluptuous body recognizable under the folds of her Sari. She looks at the man. She looks unwaveringly at the man, her expression unknown and unfathomable” (11).

The two yogis are fascinated by the beauty of the Bengali woman. They offer a banana to her and to their surprise and unlike her male counterpart, the woman receives it gratefully. When one of the American poets peels open the banana and enjoys the taste of the peel throwing away the core of it, the woman laughs at him in pleasant amusement. The other American poet wants to amuse her further and hence he takes some notes from his pocket, tears them into many tiny pieces and throws them away like confetti. The woman is surprised at his act and begins to laugh again at him. Thus the two poets gain their confidence and start their feats again. The amused woman is a little distracted by

this. She turns all her attention to them from the man who continues sliding along the length of the pavement. Now the entire atmosphere is filled with fun and laughter.

The Bengali juggler crawls up to an urchin who is eating gram from a palm leaf. He slaps his belly to show that it is empty and that he needs something to eat. He stretches his hand out. The urchin is moved by his appeal and gives him some food. The two American poets are wondering at the attitude of the juggler. Currimbhoy says, “the child is moved to pity, takes out some of his own food (possibly from mouth), and puts it in the mouth of the man, who at last closes his eyes, stops hitting his belly, lies inanimately, only his mouth chewing slowly on the food, the life coming in and going out of him” (11-12). The American poets find it difficult to understand the behavior of the Bengali juggler. Even between the man and the woman there is so much of difference in their attitude towards others. The American poets who are bewitched by the beauty of the Bengali woman turn their attention to the Bengali juggler. Agarwal remarks,

They saw him getting up, and walking slowly back to the woman. His chest still was heaving from the exertion and emotion. His woman was very sympathetic towards him. She received him warmly and helped him in removing his tattered dress. She also cleans [cleaned] softly his bloody skin. The Indian juggler did not take any interest in the two American friends. He was continuously ignoring them but his woman was taking interest in the two foreigners. The two American beatniks were surprised to see the indifferent attitude of the Indian man. So they try to make a vigorous search to gain an insight into the mystery. (195)

Currimbhoy talks about the interesting scene of a ‘mute hand game’ because three or four persons are required for the game. When they request the Bengali couple to join them, the Bengali woman happily accepts the offer whereas her man does not want to join them. Finally she succeeds in coaxing him and he reluctantly joins them. When one of the Americans takes the liberty of peering in to the bag of the Indians, takes the drum and twirls it playfully, the Indian juggler turns around and snatches it away from the American and replaces it in the bag. Currimbhoy tells about the happiness of the Americans in striking a chord of friendship with the Indians in the following manner:

The Americans are delighted at having made their initial friendship for, odd as they come, the Indians are the only ones they have so far come across who have interested them. One assumes that the bizarre trait in both the pairs has mutually attracted them; though the Indians still seem to maintain their reserve in terms of the ‘hungry’ act. This of course has aroused the curiosity of the Americans who now desperately want to join them in this game they do not yet understand. (13)

They are unsuccessful to understand the mystery of the real India. At the end of the play the poets leave India in frustration and go back to their country.

Sam: (Standing up wearily, rolling up his carpet) Yeah . . . it’s time to go. . .

AL: (getting up, putting the straps of the haversack on his back). . . Home. . . .

(36)

Asif Currimbhoy has shown not only pressures of environment in the play but he has also taken a communal problem and the problems of the refugees. In the partition

days of the country there are separate camps for the refugees and Muslim camps. Even the women and men are taking shelter in separate camps. Currimbhoy describes the pressure of the environment of the time:

Let us leave, let us leave this refugee camp, and return. Let us leave this Hindu man, this Moslem woman, torn within them, trying to find their own peace and hating, killing and weeping yet preserving their own from outside help or interface... leave them alone... friends. (39)

Currimbhoy has also given the socio-realism in *The Hungry Ones*. Ramesh, a Hindu boy, is in love with a Mohammedan girl, Razia. But her brother does not approve of the choice of his sister. He has a conflict with Ramesh. Anyhow, the love between Ramesh and Razia grows and they live as husband and wife. Ramesh is in touch with Guru who teaches him the lessons of the importance of meditation and yoga.

The underlying thought of *The Hungry Ones* is that love-hunger stands out even in an environment of violence and loot. Razia, the Muslim girl, is much devoted to Ramesh. She does not want to cheat him. She is a pure woman and observes the Muslim customs. Among the group of beggars one finds her presence which shows her weak economic condition. The American beatniks find her receiving food standing in the line of the beggars and later parting with food from a window which is partially close. She gets the charity hidden under a Burkha, which represents her Muslim identity. Her Burkha is not a transparent veil that only covers the face but an opaque white or black cloth that covers the entire body with a net like aperture over the eyes.

Currimbhoy is not happy that Muslim women should be kept only within the four-walls of the houses. Moreover, in this scientific age the women of other castes and creeds

are taking their proper share in all the activities of political and social fields, whereas the Muslim women are kept under the burkha. Currimbhoy himself belongs to a Muslim family but his ancestors and even his father were of liberal minded armchair intellectuals and his mother was a veteran social worker. Their distinguished intellectual concerns and outstanding commercial enterprise deeply touched the mental proclivities of Asif Currimbhoy in his teenage. He was brought up in an environment of new ebullient ideas, which in his later life he developed profoundly. This background plays its role while he deals with Muslim women.

Currimbhoy in the present context wants to convey the message to the Muslim society that they should come out and give full liberty even to the women so that they may have either equal share in the scientific and liberal society of today. That is why Currimbhoy says that, “it [burkha] is still worn by conservative Moslems in India” (24).

In the romantic scene where Currimboy talks about the sensuousness and beauty of Razia, he talks about the Americans’ interest in her. The two friends get to the house of the Bengali woman. Sam lies down on the bare charpoy which is made of bamboo bed with jute ropes. Razia, the Muslim woman, sits by him swabbing his brow and after a few minutes she leaves the place. Al tells Sam about Razia’s beauty:

She’s nice, isn’t she?

Razia is her name

Like the sweet smell of jasmine.

A saviour angel.

(Catches Sam’s shirt and pulls his face close)

She's sensuous too, Sam

With a woman's weakness

I know you can't tear your eyes off her

And man needs to test her strength.

...

I'll test my strength not her

But on him. (25)

By testing his strength, Al thinks that he can understand something more about the mystery of India.

Al's friend Sam, however, is a cultured American. He does not appreciate the sensuous and romantic words of Al about the gentle Muslim woman. He rebukes him for his immoral ideas and calls him 'bastard'. Al is ashamed but he is a cunning fellow and with his twisted words he tells him that it is not so, rather he is only testing his strength to know the mystery of their hunger.

Never fear, old friend

I'll test my strength not on her

But on him

For he holds the secret

The secret, Sam

The secret of our hunger

Which we must know. (25-26)

Thus these two American beatnik poets, after their encounter with the Bengali juggler and his woman, feel that they have found their counterparts in India and they want to know more about India. Then they come to know about the month of Ramzan and are asked by the Bengali woman “to learn” about “the hunger that goes with fasting” (24). They come to know about Razia and Ramesh and their love for each other.

Razia and Ramesh are filled with deep love for each other. Once their love-making is over, Razia lowers her burkha to cover up her nude body and allows her lover to leave the room. The physical and spiritual hungers of the victim woman and the Hindu young man are fully satisfied whereas the American friends continue to be unsatisfied. They understand the love and the relationship of Ramesh and Razia have. They follow Ramesh and find out that he goes to the forest to the hermitage of a Guru, seated under the banyan tree. It is early in the morning. The Guru has divided his disciples into two groups. One group recites from the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, and the other from the *Ramayana*, the epics which are the backbones of the essential philosophic treatise that form part of the Hindu religion. Ramesh touches the feet of the Guru and sits in the centre, facing him. While leaving also Ramesh touches the feet of the Guru, who preaches him to follow the high thoughts embedded in the two epics of India. Ramesh follows his advice and meditates. He is so immersed in it that he remains unmoved in spite of vicious attempt of the American to rape Razia. It is worthwhile to notice what R.K Kaul points out in his review in this regard:

*The Hungry Ones* presents a contrast between two Americans (one black, one white) and an Indian. While the Indian is personification of the truly

detached yogi, the Americans make a feeble attempt to imitate him. They go so far to assault his wife sexually, in the hope that they would be able

to disturb his meditation, but he is so much absorbed that, like lord Shiva, he is not disturbed.

(20)

The Guru drives home the point that even in this form of clay, man will be able to learn lessons that will help him to realise eternal values and that he will be able to learn them through meditation and yoga. The Guru tells his disciple,

Learn you this, my son, for none is beyond learning in this life of existence, that the stories you heard... (His hand floating to the left)... from the Ramayana... (to the right)... and the *Mahabharata*... form part of your life and religion, raised as you were on these thoughts and deeds, which inculcated themselves deeply within you, inspiring forms and motives that came from your own clay, from your own reincarnate spirit, that you might take from these scriptures the essence-extract of your own life, and give it the meaning you choose, destined though you are, as man of action and meditation, seeking vengeance and purity, remorse and repentance, tolerance and worship... go then home, my son, and meditate... meditate so deep that none may disturb you... meditate in Yoga all the time.... (29-30)

Al and Sam are wonderstruck when Ramesh sits and does his yoga, unaware of what is happening around him. Al wants to test his strength by attempting Razia sexually. However, Ramesh remains unperturbed. Sam says “H’s not faking, Al. It’s true what he does. It’s real. Not like us, faking strength and superiority, pretending to know about their religion and yoga.” He says that they should “have the humility to learn, to become one of them, for he has proven stronger than you, stoic and stone-like, noble and true. Leave him to his meditation and prayer” (31).

The Americans also consider Indians mysterious in yet another regard. They wonder how the Indian beggars beg for food at one point of time and give alms at the other.

Sam : Strange, isn’t it, Al, that at one point of time we see them begging for food, and at other day they are giving alms....

Al : ... and yet they would not accept the food we offered them nor the money....

Sam : ... it is therefore likely that they could not have bought food with money, either given, borrowed or of their own .... (Brief pause, an excitement growing within them) We’re coming closer now, aren’t we, Al? Closer. Now let’s proceed further....

Al : ... the night I waited outside waited for him....

Sam : ... the night I slept inside, thinking of her....

Al : ... he came, torn and bloody, with sack in hand, of unknown contents, which he would not let go of....

Sam : ... in spite of her love and caress, he would not let go, he held on to the sack. What did it contain? Al! What are the millions of people who die waiting around for!

Al : Food! (33)

However, hard they try they find it very difficult to understand Indians.

As Vinay Kumar Dubey remarks in his article “Asif Currimbhoy’s *The Hungry Ones*: A Paradigm of Religious and Social Consciousness”,

Sam and Al, the two Americans have come to India to know the reality, but they are unsuccessful to understand the mystery of this vast country. The two young people, in spite of their best efforts, are unsuccessful to understand the real India. In [At] the end of the play they become frustrated and go back to their country. (106)

In his social play, *The Miracle Seed*, Asif Currimbhoy, represents the two cultures of the country, urban and rural. The play is rooted in the modern Indian rural society and gives a tremendous impression of reality, presenting an eternal challenge of endurance and survival. There are five characters in the play – Ram, the head of the family and Malti, the simple but intelligent wife of Ram; Bapa, the grandfather of the family and Ram and Malti’s sixteen year old charming daughter Savitri and Laxman, the son of Malti’s diseased sister. Savitiri has some vocal defect and it pains the parents to see their daughter stammering. Laxman, who lives in the city of Bombay, is twenty years old. He is a modern and progressive boy, who does not follow the fashion of the city.

The play opens with the conversation between the husband and wife. Their village situated in Maharashtra, a few hundred miles away from Bombay is very backward. Due to a great drought, the land becomes arid. The family is very poor and it is very difficult for them to make both ends meet. They cannot survive without a good harvest. Ram is worried about the future. “Ram is restless, his hands clutching and unclutching, pacing around, looking at the land and at the clear blue cloudless sunny sky” (1).

Malti informs her husband Ram that their nephew, Laxman is coming to the village. She has some pity for the boy because he is an orphan. His mother and father died when he was very young. The grandfather of the family, Bapa, often goes to the kitchen in search of some good food.

Asif Currimbhoy, through the example of Bapa, who is tension free, suggests to the readers that one should always keep ones’ mind free from tensions. Ram becomes sad because he has no other work than farming and even that farming has become a curse to him because there are no crops. It is the suggestion of the playwright that even the farmers should do some other work besides their farming so that it will help them in times of trouble like the drought. Ram is quite unhappy with the city people because he thinks that, it is the village people who are the source of prosperity; but during the hard days of drought, neither the city people nor the government help them.

Ram is happy that he is living in a free country. However, he is not happy with the present government because it is unconcerned about the poor farmers. He feels that if the land is not growing food, it is the duty of the government to feed the farmers. When their first child, Savitri was born sixteen years ago, there was a drought as it has fallen that day but at that time they were slaves under the British and the government was able

to help them with the foreign wealth. But the government of our own people fails to perform its duty like foreign government and hence his anger against the government.

When Laxman enters the house, Malti and Savitri become very happy. He has brought some gifts to everyone in the family from the city. But the best gift he reserves for his uncle Ram and that is the seed which has brought about the green revolution in Punjab.

Ram: Where did you get this from?

Laxman: 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? (Ram looks up at him questioningly but without skepticism) Mamu, listen to me and listen well. This is no smoke... it won't curl and vanish... This is the seed that has created the green revolution in Punjab. Have you ever heard of the green revolution? It's fields of gold, for as far as the eye can reach. Quick growing, full and healthy, well fertilized... There's nothing like this on earth. No more poverty, no more those whims of nature, the arid dying soil. The demented green... Here at least is man's dream's coming true. I've seen it myself, revolutionise life, bring prosperity and fullness to living... We'll plough it tomorrow, together. You and I, for here at last... is the miracle seed. (18-19)

Laxman is very intelligent. Even though he belongs to the city, he knows the conditions prevalent in the village very well. He is keenly interested in knowing things

and because he is in touch with the newspaper, he is quite updated in his knowledge. He knows about the plans of the government to make drains and canals to irrigate the dry lands, so that the farmers will not have to depend on monsoons. Ram says happily, “There will be no more droughts. Laxman tells me of dams and canals and irrigations that will give us sufficient water all year through” (21).

Laxman is of the opinion that the city people are rich because they are broad-minded and they work hard to earn their money while the villagers depend only upon their crops. Moreover, they believe in their luck and do not try their hands in other business or work. Thus with the help of these two characters of Ram and Laxman, the dramatist juxtaposes the poverty of the rural life with the prosperity of the city life. Laxman brings the miracle seed that brought about the green revolution in Punjab. He is very optimistic about the miracle seed.

Laxman is sure that they could have a ‘golden harvest’ and prosperity from the miracle seed. Laxman does not stop with bringing the miracle seed; he brings something for Savitri also as a remedy for her vocal defect. He gives Savitri the stammering daughter of Ram, a pebble to rectify her vocal defect. He tells Malti how the government is building dams and canals that will give them sufficient water all through the year. Like Ram, Malti also is not satisfied with the performance of the government. She thinks that the corrupt officers of the government do not want to serve the village people sincerely and the money which the government allots for the upliftment of the villagers is not fully utilised for them.

The corrupt officers misuse the grant and thus there is no improvement in the condition of the villagers. Therefore, Malti is doubtful whether the schemes and plans of

the government will be executed properly. She tells her nephew Laxman that the plans of the government for building dams and canals would prove good if sincere efforts are taken and implemented successfully. When the villagers are able to get sufficient water throughout the year, they would be successful in growing 'golden harvest'; however, all this would be realised if the government has officers who are free from corruption.

The drought worsens and the farmers start migrating to the city. Ram too decides to leave for the city the next morning as he feels that there is no way out for him. The play could have acquired a tragic intensity if it had ended with Ram leaving for the city with his family in utter despair and despondency. The desperate Ram catches his plough and smashes it on the ground; he goes to the idol which Malti has garlanded and spits on it. At that time Savitiri brings an armful of the finest hybrid stalks from a small patch of land which Malti has been watering. This brings hope to the family and it decides to stay back and wait for the next monsoon.

The reversal of Ram's decision through the hope created by "an armful of the finest hybrid stalks" (38) brought by Savitri all of a sudden strikes a note of anti-climax. This reversal 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 the monsoon and not on the efficacy of the 'miracle seed.' Neither Ram nor any other characters in the play ever doubt or question the possibility of a golden harvest through the miracle seed. Their despair and anguish are due to the failure of monsoon only.

Asif Currimbhoy has given some episodes in this play, with the help of which he wants to give some solutions to the problems. The pebble episode is very important in this play. It has symbolic significance. Laxman has brought "a small, thin pallet stone"

(38) to remove the stammering in the voice of Savitri. She is a nice girl and has no defect in her physique or voice. But the very atmosphere of the village house is harmful to her. She has lost her self-confidence which has caused the stammering in her voice. When Laxman comes, she feels happy and regains her self-confidence and the pallet stone is also helpful in removing her stammering. Thus the pebble episode is a lesson to the parents to treat their children with love and affection. If they are given psychological treatment, the minor faults with the children can be easily removed.

There is another episode of 'vegetable patch.' Though a big part of the seeds brought by Laxman sown in vain in the dry land, Savitri is able to grow an armful of hybrid stalks in a small patch of land. She surprises her parents and grandfather with her speech quite free from stammering. Symbolically, like the 'small pallet stone' setting right the stammering of Savitri, the miracle seed saves the famine-stricken farmer from the clutches of poverty by means of a green revolution. The mystery of life is that when there is a ray of hope man will cling on to that and will be able to overcome all his difficulties. That is the value of life.

Asif Currimbhoy deals with the real social problems through his plays. He thinks that the villagers in India are of traditional nature. They are not in touch with the scientific discoveries. So through the character Laxman, Currimbhoy wants to awaken the people and to give them awareness. Thus Laxman helps the traditional farmers like Ram to come out of their slumber. Laxman tells Ram that he should leave the traditional farming and come in touch with the new farming system. The hybrid seed, tractors and dams and canals have changed a lot for the Punjabi farmers. Thus the green revolution

has made them rich and prosperous. Thus Laxman wants to awaken the traditional farmers like Ram. As Agarwal points out in his book *The Best Plays of Asif Currimbhoy*,

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 process, 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. (223)

Asif Currimbhoy, through this play shows the gradual emergence of hope through despair and doubt represented by three generations. Bapa, the grandfather is a man of old thoughts. According to him there cannot be any change in the world. Everything is going on as usual. He stands for despair because he thinks that the world will never change; the representative of the next generation is Ram. He is not as desperate as grandfather; he has some hope.

Ram belonging to the second generation, represents doubt with his ambivalent attitude towards the possibility of the green revolution. He thinks that if he sows the miracle seed brought by Laxman he would reap a ‘golden harvest.’ He believes that the hybrid seed is a healthy one and it will give him a rich crop. “We’ll be rich. For once in our life. There’ll be money... to buy all the things ever wanted. But more than that... the soil will be fertile again” (21). However, all his hopes are shattered because even the miracle seed fails to bring the ‘golden harvest.’ The monsoon fails and the plants

shrivelled up and died. Ram begins to abuse Laxman because he only has given him false hopes with big talks; he grumbles “talked big. That’s what he did. Had us all fooled”(32).

While Ram has a little awakening of the modern age, Laxman and Savitiri represent the third generation symbolising hope. The city boy Laxman comes from Bombay, a very advanced city. He knows about the latest scientific inventions in many fields particularly the field of farming. He knows about the planning and the working of the government also. With his progressive ideas he knows very well that the dams and rivers could bring about a great change in the villages and that the villages need not wait for the monsoon.

Laxman knows very well that with the advancement in the field of science and technology they could reap a rich harvest and the problem of unemployment will also be solved because more and more people will be employed in all these works. Savitiri, who is highly influenced by her cousin Laxman, is all appreciation for him. She is convinced that the green revolution is possible only through the controlling of the water of the rivers and hybrid stalks.

When Ram’s daughter has shown that wonder with the green patch of land, he also begins to believe in ‘green revolution’ and the ‘golden harvest.’ The playwright traces the development of thought from generation to generation. Bapa belongs to the generation whose mind is only one sided. While Ram belongs to the second generation with little awakening of the modern age, Laxman and Savitri represent the third generation symbolising hope. With his knowledge he feels that the villagers need not wait for monsoon. Every time there will be sufficient water for the golden harvest. Taking the example of Punjab, he says that the dams and rivers in Punjab only had brought about the

green revolution. Moreover, he also knows that the government is making proper roads not only in the city but also in the villages. Thus the unemployed people will get their work and there will be no problem of work. Nobody will have to sleep with hungry stomach. Savitri, the daughter of Ram, also represents the third generation symbolising hope. She is very much influenced by her cousin Laxman. She appreciates his current general knowledge. It is in her “vegetable patch” that “an armful of finest hybrid stalks” has grown. She says to Laxman, “young Miracle Seed has worked after all” (38), thus generating hope in all the members of the family; hence the family is stopped from leaving for the city to join the refugee camps.

Asif Currimbhoy in this play has tried to show patterns of despair, doubt and hope through the three generations. Bapa represents despair while Ram stands for doubt, but Savitri and Laxman stand for hope.

## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

Asif Currimbhoy emerged as a notable Indian English playwright in the postindependence period. Faubian Bowers commented about him that he was “India’s authentic voice in the theatre”. His modern plays were well known in India and abroad. The dramatic groups of American Universities, repertory companies and the off Broadway theatre staged his plays. Politics and public affairs found abundant expression in his plays and according to Peter Nazareth, “Asif Currimbhoy interweaves the public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of de-colonisation”. Therefore, his experience with various trends in drama in the USA would have helped him to shape himself a “man of the theatre.”

Bayapa Reddy in his seminal work analysed Currimbhoy’s plays extensively, dividing them into political, religious and social categories. These plays were again classified in terms of the period in which they were written. Being a political play written in 1964, *Goa* belongs to the first period of his creative output. This play is a significant example of Currimbhoy’s treatment of colour and race as an inevitable tool of analyzing post colonialism.

It was Asif Currimbhoy alone who dedicated his whole life to the field of drama; rather he is the dramatist among very few Asians who have been able to promote the art of drama both at home and abroad. Asif Currimbhoy believes in the fact that literature is meant to represent the society as a social critic, he exhibits the social condition as

prevalent in the contemporary times. Jr. Martin, C. Carroll has also commented that the chief function of literature is “to reflect with meaning the totality of the contemporary human condition”. One observes that an artist brings out social truths and that literature is a reflection of social process. Thus the literature influenced by its milieu reflects the contemporary social structure.

Asif Currimbhoy is a close follower of the above mentioned view. Each play has a touch of reality due to its connection with some major event or incident of the past or the contemporary time. He targets the impact of the social issues on the lives of people. Currimbhoy’s plays are concerned with the problems of man everywhere. He lends breath to his thought even when he deals with India, he becomes the voice of universal revolt and anguish screaming itself hoarse at the seemingly immovable societies around the world.

*The Hungry Ones* is a realistic play. It comes to close as the two American beatnik-poets leave for America. Razia is “broken shattered”. She yearns for the love of her husband, Ramesh. Currimbhoy takes the themes of hunger and love. They are” not being conditioned by circumstances”. The hunger is only man-made. The two foreigners are unable to understand the mystery of India. They depart from this land with frustration. The Americans appreciate Razia not only for her duty but also for her sincerity towards her husband Ramesh, “who has been forcibly taken away by her brother and henchman. The play powerfully presents the realistic pictures of poverty and starvation of Calcutta, where the beggars and the destitute throng in large numbers and like the restless shadows. Her college students, women-folks and Sadhus come in for a sharp focus.” *The Hungry Ones* has the socio-political themes.

The Hungry Ones is a play, which reveals the pains of hunger of the poor people. The play has “a social conscience which has a deep preoccupation with the search for truth. To Currimbhoy socialist realism is only a prelude. Their critique may be helpful in analyzing the symbols of Currimbhoy”. The playwright has contrived interesting situations and arresting dialogues in the play. Currimbhoy has shown his mastery over a sense of atmosphere. The play has the actable quality. It depicts the terrible famines in Bihar and Maharashtra in the early seventies of the twentieth-century.

A healthy and moralistic society is degrading. There are a group of young men and women who behave like college kids in the city of Calcutta. They are called intellectuals but they have also become the victims of modern society. Their demeanour does not represent a sublime culture. They converse in a humorous manner calling each other titles such as ‘Molviji’ and ‘Panditji’ and the boys and girls have no interest in the Bengal famine where millions of people have died on account of hunger. But they talk often of the partition of Bengal into two—East Bengal and West Bengal. They also take interest in the Hindu-Muslim riots in which millions of both communities have lost their lives. They are enthusiastic about British regime and cultural heritage of Tagore. The group does not concern itself with the famine or any other social and political issues of the country. The girls have a good knowledge of the great men of the country.

Currimbhoy’s humour has some purpose. He laughs in a metaphoric way and leads the readers to the central point of his play – manmade hunger and illogical partition of the country. The social and political problems that give rise to violence, looting and raping in Calcutta contribute to disharmony in the country. The technique of contrast in the play helps to drive home the playwright’s message. When Currimbhoy presents the

same Indians as begging and giving alms, the mystery of life is highlighted. On the one hand there are the hungry beggars slapping their stomachs and inviting at once pity, revulsion and charity and on the other, is a fat person sitting at a table eating and gorging himself with food, greasy, fatty until the tongue shovels it into the mouth. The playwright contrasts the deformed body of 'the Indian man' with the beautiful body of the 'Indian woman', on the one hand there is an atmosphere of peace, harmony and love and on the other, is the atmosphere of arson, loot and communal riots.

With the help of the technique of parallels and contrasts the playwright conveys the message that hunger and love are not overwhelmed by the exigencies of circumstances. The playwright has drawn powerful characters. He has given his characters a vocabulary and style appropriate to their nature and profession. The language is highly colloquial and simple like when the college students talk to the beatniks. The conversation between Sam and Razia, in which the latter is worried about her husband, is racy and of the soil. Currimbhoy is unhappy to see the miserable condition of contemporary Indian society and so satirizes it. He also ridicules the college students who stupidly place the beatniks on par with the Indian saints and patriots: one girl says that they need the American poets' help also to bring peace and harmony in the country.

After all, we need your help too. We haven't come across anyone quite like you since...Swami Vivekananda and ShriAurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, Subhash Chandra Bose and Ram Mohan Roy... (15)

The technique of parallels and contrasts is at work throughout the play. On the side the beatniks practice Yoga and meditation and on the other an Indian and his wife

perform “the hungry act”. There is a correlation between the Yogic beatnik of America and the meditative Yogi of India, between the black Muslim of America and the “Islamic Muslim” of Bengal. The strength of the hippie movement lies in the pretence of Ignorance, and the forte of the “Hindu religion” is in learning.

Parallelism between the racial problems in the U.S.A. and the Hindu-Muslim problem in India is evident in the play. The enterprising nature of Sam is contrasted with the passive nature of Ramesh. Sam aptly comments on the superiority of the philosophical attitude of Ramesh:

So listen now, Al, have the humility to learn, to become one of them, for he has proven stronger than you, stoic and stone-like, noble and true. Leave him to his meditation and prayer. Perhaps he has blood on his hands too, the blood of her brothers that must cause Incessant conflict between them, of hate and revenge, love and reunification, in this world of their own... (109)

For Asif Currimbhoy, gesture is a precise and powerful expression, not a way of passing the “whole play over to the actor; it is a language which he tries to make precise.” *The Hungry Ones* presents a realistic picture of the streets of Calcutta where beggars walk like shadows and where one may witness scenes of riot and arson. The two Americans visit the refugee camp where disease, deformity and despair live, reflecting the misery of the unhappy lot in the contemporary Indian society.

With all its complexity, *The Hungry Ones* in its opening scene presents the Yogic feats of the two Americans, and “the hungry act” of an Indian and his wife. The eleven scenes that follow are quick-moving, thereby permitting rapidity of action. Furthermore,

Currimbhoy succeeds in producing visual and auditory images which stimulate the eyes, ears and minds of his audience. The fascination of the students for the beatniks, the refugees in the streets of Calcutta, the scenes of riots, the recitation of hymns from the Indian epics by the Guru and the reciting of prayers by the Muslims during Mohurrum, produce the visual and auditory images which make the play effective on the stage. Thus *The Hungry Ones* is the most characteristic of Currimbhoy's work—extremely theatrical and a strong determined, tense statement about man and about India in very physical but compassionate terms.

Currimbhoy's satire is also directed against the bungling of the Government in providing relief to the drought affected public. As Laxman, the dreamer, goes on talking about the various plans of the Government, Ram the pragmatist loses his temper and pounces upon him saying, 'Don't talk to me about the Government or I'll wring your neck!'. The relief centers and set up by the Government only in the form of 'mental breaking and road repair' hardly offer solace to the suffering masses of the rural areas. Also 'there's nothing fair about a fair price shop' which the Government starts in villages. The people who are tired and exhausted in 'breaking stones' have to be 'waiting' at the 'fair price' shops for a handful of grain. Currimbhoy also lashes out at the kind of solutions that the Government offers to mitigate the acuteness of the famine. "Ram tells Laxman how the solutions they think of are . . . quick and easy. All . . . miraculous. Like the seed. Practical also. Like slaughtering the cow. And then . . . here's always a profit angle there." (30)

*The Miracle Seed* has a great quantity of theatrical value. It is a wonder that it was staged in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta and telecast and broadcast in different regional

languages. “The creak of the rope,” “the painful dying breath” of the cow, the stammering of Savitri, the pregnant Malti’s taking “a deep breath of exasperation,” the giggling of the grandfather—all these produce auditory images which widen the play’s meaning and reflect the poignant condition of the farmer in his fight for survival. 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.

Also, the various kinds of auditory and visual images—the continuous breaking of rocks, growing in volume, the sound of riot and fire at the Government fair-price shop, the shouting of slogans like “Inquilab Zindabad,” the loud protests that the people raise against inflation and the police controlling the violent mob by using teargas—the dramatist employs in the two dream sequences in the play.

The distinguishing feature of *The Miracle Seed* is the gradual emergence of hope through despair and doubt represented by three generations. The grandfather who thinks that “the world never changes” for the better represents the first generation that stands for despair.

Currimbhoy’s social plays are the first manifestation of a new deal for Indian drama in English with their intense social realism and poignant satire. They testify to the fact that the theatre can be exploited as a medium to portray immediate social and moral concerns.

Currimbhoy seizes a striking event of contemporary national significance and presents it with all the theatrical skills and techniques at his command. *The Hungry Ones*

presents two Americans – one black and one white – juxtaposed to an Indian. The Indian is a personification of a true detached Yogi where as the Americans make futile attempts to imitate him. After presenting the total futility of ‘the miracle seed’ due to the absence of the rains, the play ends on a note of hope as Ram’s daughter Savitri preserves it later yielding good results.

*The Miracle Seed* takes one back to 1972-73 when the whole of Maharashtra was reeling under a drought. Having waged one war against the prolonged British rule, Indians were now confronted with new problems, some caused by natural forces, some by unseen forces but in most cases they were mainly man made and could have been avoided with the same united and sincere efforts which the people sowed against the foreign rule. In this play, disillusionment is centred upon the awfully bad performance of the government as well as its officers.

The play also has some satirical touch. The playwright makes some satirical lashes upon false social standards of city life and awful bad performance of the government. The city boys, as told, are so clever that they know “how to get along” in society by hook or by crook. Ram is distinguished with the “city types” because they make him feel uncomfortable with their superior ways and crookedness. The playwright against the bungling of the government’s various plans will soon bring green revolution in the country. On the other hand, Ram is pragmatic and he soon loses his temper upon the false assurances of the government which wants to show the innocent people through its various plans will soon bring green revolution in the country.

Asif Currimbhoy is one of the greatest modern Indian dramatists in English and a major figure century literature. An iconoclast, he has used language, form and content in

innovative way producing an enduring body of texts. He began writing plays in his twenties in his twenties. He chose to write for the theatre because he thought that this was the art form which allowed him to showcase the complexity of the society he lived in. He entertained independence thinking, close controversial themes, embodied them in arresting dialogue and contrasted and resolved plots in an unconventional way. His literary career is from 1959 to 1975 during which he wrote twenty nine plays with the rapid speed of two plays in a year.

Asif Currimbhoy is successful in capturing the attention of his audience. He has a deep and sound influence on the English Theatre in India. His plays are compared with the plays of his contemporaries written in several Indian languages—Girish Karnad in Kannada, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. But as is known language does not make any difference as it is the quality of vision. The versatility in themes is his skill of handling theatrical technique art of presenting historical event in a dramatic way. He has won an honourable place among contemporary Indian dramatists.

Currimbhoy's plays show his deep knowledge of man and his relation to his society. He is a social realist. He may be called the "pillar of the Modern Indian Drama in English. His plays should be widely known both at home and overseas.

The dramatist is one of the most influential and successful representative voices of contemporary Indian life in theatre: the various themes are covered such as political, social, religious, art, psychological etc. The use of new technique, dream like sequence and several props convey hidden emotions of the characters. The language of the dialogues is suitable to the situation and characters; language is simple, lucid, crisp and understandable to Indian audience. The playwright has a cosmopolitan background. He

studied in California, worked in France, lived in India and writes on important international events and circumstances. As a dramatist, he focuses on the human condition all over the world with compassion and truth. The thesis intends to study Asif Currimbhoy's art, elegant craft, the stage worthiness, social concern and his journey to write the mature dramas. The plays evaluate various aspects of dramas like the theme, technique, setting, imagery and his vision for the world. The study proposes to put together the aspects of his social, economic, philosophical art literary influences which shaped the author.

Asif, as a social critic, throws light on the serious issues related to the society and instead of giving his own idea about the particular issue. He has taken different themes from contemporary Indian society and presented them in a realistic manner. Asif Currimbhoy, as a social critic and a dramatist, himself remarks: "the theatre is in the life and blood of the Bengali people. They are proud of their heritage of being rebels and learned men at the same time. Their temperament stretches from the volatile to the philosophic and peaceful. This was my hunting ground" (107).

The Hungry Ones a poignant cry of poverty and conscience. Beginning with the visit of the America beatnik poets – Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky to Calcutta, the play presents with greater penetration all manifestations the hunger in the riot-torn and the famine stricken capital of Bengal. It shows how the American strive unsuccessfully to understand, mystery of India.

"Since man expresses himself socially as much as politically, Asif Currimbhoy explores the socio realistic world to the fullest to make his point. This is exemplified, in a greater measure than in other plays, in four of his significant plays—Thorns of a Canvas

(1962), *The Hungry Ones* (1965), *the Miracle Seed* (1973) and *The Dissident MLA* (1974)— which distinguish themselves by their unfailing social realism and satire. . . they are. . . not without a touch of universality. . . *The Hungry Ones* seeks to dramatize the great reality of hunger and love. Based on the actual event of drought in Maharashtra in 1972, *The Miracle Seed* is an eloquent affirmation of faith in the resurrection of life. (103) says Bayapa Reddy.

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