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Only that art is living, in whose inmost chamber,
the human heart beats.

- Bharatha’s Natyashastra

Theatre in India has begun with the Gods. Brahma, the creator of the world, is supposed to have commanded the first dramatic representation. The oldest sacred books describe that in heaven long before the world was created, when good and bad co-existed, the lesser Gods revolted against the demons, and defeated them. In commemoration of the victory, Brahma, the breath of the world, helped the Gods re-enact the dual scene among themselves for their own gratification. During the course of the dramatic presentation, the devils felt humiliated and filled the air with their invisible form to hinder its progress. A real battle occurred for the second time, and once again the evil spirits were beaten but this time with a flag staff that was near at hand.

Brahma gave an explanation that such visual performances were for the recreation of all of them, and thus convinced, the demons vowed to be manageable. However, it was arranged that in order to safeguard theatre in the years to come, a holy pavilion would be provided to contain the players, and the area would be marked, and made consecrated by a flagpole. This tradition to a considerable measure has endured in many a number of Asian villages where we come across stages having roofs and the
audiences sitting in the open air on the ground, and nearby a long bamboo pole with a banner indicating the area where performances take place.

Later, we find, that after the creation of the world, the Gods assembled together, and requested Brahma to give the mortals an occasion to imitate the pleasurable theatre of the Gods by making and presenting events which are simultaneously pleasing to the eyes and ears of all classes of people alike. Thereupon, the Omnific Brahma, by way of response to the need of the hour, took language from the Rig Veda, music from the Sama Veda, abhinaya (gestures) from Yajur Veda, and a range of emotions (rasa) from the Atharvana Veda, and to which Lord Shiva contributed Tandava, the dance representing violent emotions to which Parvati provided Lasya, the dance representing tender emotions. Vishnu contributed different kinds of dramatic styles. The divine architect, Viswakarma, constructed a theatre in the heaven.

Brahma entrusted with a sage called Bharatha all his secrets of dramaturgy, in all its forms, and gave what has come to be called Natya Veda or the Fifth Veda. Bharatha's Natyashastra is exceptionally comprehensive in content. It is similar to Aristotle's codification of the Greek drama. In the Natyashastra, every aspect of a performance, from the costumes and makeup to the facial movements, and from the plot situations to the various postures of dance along with the stagecraft, is prescribed and annotated. It follows that no other theatre of ancient times has been so massively and impressively documented in a single treatise.

The origin of Indian drama is thus ascribed to divinity in the light of Natyashastra, and its esteemable growth marks the confluence of three major streams
namely, the ancient folk forms, the classical Sanskrit drama and the powerful British influence. Similar to the Greek Drama which had its origin in the fertility rites and in the frenzied worship of Dinoysus, the classical Indian drama originated from the folk features such as pageants, rituals, and mimes, and in course of time, these two modes of theatre borrowed from each other, and totally contributed to the growth of theatre art.

The purpose of all art, according to the classical writers, is promotion of moral values. Hence the eminent playwrights like Bhasa, Bhavabhuti, Kalidasa, Sudraka, Visakhadatta and Harsha attributed religious and mythical dimensions to their works. The classical Indian Theatre received royal patronage. Plays were performed on special occasions in honour of kings and noblemen. A company of wandering ministrels and actors took charge of each production, and the painted curtains served as backdrops for the occasion. The producers highlighted the symbolic significance of the characters in terms of costumes and designs.

The Sanskrit drama continued to flourish for centuries. But the prominence given to Persian in the Mughal regime had its own adverse effect on Sanskrit literature. Consequently, the Sanskrit stage which was meant for the class began to decline owing to which the popular theatre of the mass with familiar themes in the vernacular flourished both in quantity and in quality.

The theatre of the common man inherited a few classical conventions like the Sutradhara and Vidushaka who took different names in different regional presentations. The history of drama, everywhere in the world, shows a thematic gradation from Gods to Kings, and from Kings to ordinary men. The entire bulk of the
Sanskrit drama, barring a few, dealt with godly events. As against this, the new Indian theatre, as a ‘talking, non-religious, danceless, realistic, action-packed, abbreviated entertainment, was introduced to India by the British: “This is certainly one of the best legacies the West left its colonies in the East” (Faubion Bowers 83). The West introduced their playwrights to contemporary India, and has significantly influenced the regional theatre too.

Since the nineteenth century, there has been an earnest demand for plays written in Indian languages, including translations. But the elite were drawn towards plays in English. Accordingly, the first theatre in Bombay, Amateur Theatre, came into focus in 1776 on a spot which was used by military officials for their social and political gatherings. The theatre presented mostly the later Georgian comedies, but thereafter, it lost its prominence owing to unknown reasons. Meanwhile, many English and Italian dramatic performers travelled to Bombay and presented a lot of English plays, especially of Shakespeare.

The scornful attitude prevalent among the dramatic companies like The Fairclough Company, the Lewis Dramatic Company, Norville’s Our Boys Company, the Loftus Troupe, and the Williard Opera Company towards sponsoring dramatic Indian presentations in English hindered its growth and development. Nevertheless, the Dave Carson Troupe staged a few farcical comedies with homespun themes such as Scenes in the Bombay Police Court and The Bombay Palkheewala. The Original Theatrical Company manned by Pestonji Ptanj, sometime between 1860 and 1870, encouraged verse plays from the Indian epics and from Persian romantic tragedies.
Despite the support, the dramatic endeavours in English were constantly challenged by the sudden rise of modern drama in Marathi and Gujarati. In addition to it the directors of *The Amateur club* in Simla, a desired centre of dramatic activity, ignored the Indian playwrights in English, and popularised among the Indian audiences Western dramatists like Ibsen, Chekhov, Camus, Eliot, Fry, Ionesco and Brecht for the reason that “many of these directors skilfully exploited Western technical know-how and ideas of design and presentation in imaginative and polished productions” (Benegal 111). Simla’s conspicuous *English Language* theatre centre rarely did anything either to the growth of the Indian drama in English or the vernacular drama.

The English language theatre had painfully narrowed down the theatre movement in Calcutta where the Britishers constructed a play house in 1753. But, when the Fort and Calcutta were lost to Nawab Siraj-ud-Dowla, the play house got closed down in 1756, in the place of which, yet another centre with the name *The Calcutta Theatre* was built in 1779, and a group of professional entertainers came from Europe to delight a colony of English men there who suffered from homesickness. Apart from this, the *Wheler place Theatre*, *The Dum Dum Theatre*, *The Baitaconah Theatre*, the *Sans Souci Theatre*, and the *Chowringhee Theatre* organised in Calcutta dramatic presentations of Shakespeare as well as those comedies, farces and problem plays which had already sought the favour of the English men. As regards the theatre activities in Bengal, much can be said. The first Bengali Theatre (the Hindu Theatre) was established by Prasannakumar Tagore in 1831, and some English plays (and translations) were also staged.
The theatre movement in Bengal which had started with the presentation of Bengali plays, adapted first from English and then from Sanskrit, could, finally, take pride in producing only one play in English, *Is This Called Civilisation?* in 1871 by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The dramatic activities in Madras too gave little scope for the flourishing of Indian Writing in English. The Madras Dramatic Society was formed in 1875, and regretfully only the plays of Shaw and Ibsen found audiences. On the other side, the emergence of amateur troupes served as a sanctuary for English and Vernacular plays.

The Suguna Vilasa Sabha, for instance, supported performances from classical plays, Shakespeare’s plays, and other popular plays of the time. The Secretariate Party and the Kripa Amateur troupes enacted English and Tamil plays. The Walltax Theatre, near the Central railway station, put on the stage English as well as Tamil plays. Similarly, Sarasa Vinodhini Sabha of Dharmavaram, Sumanorama Sabha of Kolachalam, The Museum Theatre of Madras promoted much of theatrical activity in the vernacular in the Andhra region. But, they rarely did anything to improve the growth of Indian drama in English.

Several dramatic organisations like the Indian people’s Theatre, the Indian National Theatre (established by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya) Ebrahim Alkazi’s Theatre Unit, and the Bharatiya Natya Sangha (affiliated to the World Theatre Centre of UNESCO) also showed a stepmotherly treatment to the plays originally written in English. In the post-Independence period the Sangita-Natak Akademi, the National School of Drama, the training institutes like Adyar Kalakshetra in Madras, and
Darpana in Ahmedabad, and Drama Departments in various universities in the country lent a driving force to the success of plays in the Indian languages. To sum up, ever since the beginning of the 20th century, the drama in English toddled round to painfully see her friends, the Indian languages, making giant leaps in the world of the theatre:

With so much encouragement coming from so many quarters, drama in the Indian languages has ‘fared sumptuously’ and put on flesh; but drama in English has had to remain content only with the crumbs fallen from its rich cousin’s table. (M.K. Naik 155)

The absence of a living theatre and a live audience are the environmental factors inhibiting a sizeable growth of the playwrights in English. Being complacent about the fact that their motive in writing a play was to generate readers and not viewers, the playwrights in English totally allowed their “dramatic vision to be warped in the embryo itself” (155). Besides, some playwrights were also incompetent to distinguish between “the voice of the poet addressing an audience” which leads to dramatic poetry, and the “voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse” (T.S. Eliot 2) which accounts for authentic poetic drama. This is evident in the writings of T.K. Kailasam and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, who despite their intense eagerness to poetize had not succeeded in creating genuine verse plays owing to their inability to categorise the functions of a dramatic medium, though the former had a good sense of stage. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo and Tagore were out of the ordinary in the field of poetic drama.
Sri Aurobindo, one of the outstanding writers in Indian English literature in general, and in drama in particular, produces an impression that "he is a born lord of language" (K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar 89). He has written eleven verse dramas. Of them The Viziers of Bazzora, Perseus the Deliverer, Rodogune, Eric and Vasavadutta are complete five-act plays. The rest are incomplete.

As a playwright, Aurobindo has been influenced by the English theatre of the late Victorian era which was dominated by Robert Bridges and Stephen Phillips. Aurobindo has perpetuated the tradition of British poetic drama revived by the aforementioned dramatists. The Greek and the Elizabethan have a great hold on the dramatic features of Aurobindo's plays. He explores the Greek and the Indian for his myths, the Persian, Arabian and Indian for his legends, and resorts to the history of Greek, Scandinavian, Celtic, and Indian for his plot constructions.

All the eleven dramatic works of Aurobindo contain ample evidence to prove that they are stageworthy in their constructions. Aurobindo, like Shakespeare does not adhere to the three unities of drama. Only The Witch of Ilni among the longer fragmentary pieces, and Perseus the Deliverer, and, to a certain extent, Eric among the complete works, confine themselves to only place. But in all cases, Aurobindo is not found to be indifferent to the obligations of stage representation with respect to both the arrangement and management of his plot, and the treatment of his characters, especially in Rodogune, Eric and Vasavadutta. In the dramas of Aurobindo, the story line and the character delineation are woven together to uphold psychological interest and impact. Besides, to create audience involvement, Aurobindo employs concentration as
a mode of dramatic characterisation. In other words, only that aspect of a character which really influences the course of dramatic action is made prominent. Aurobindo embodies this principle of dramatic economy in *Perseus* in the case of Andromeda and Cydone. It becomes more significant in *Rodogune, Eric and Vasavadutta*. As a contrast, in the incomplete plays, characterisation has no direct bearing on the dramatic action. It stands apart to that extent of making the writer guilty of overcharacterisation.

As a part of dramatic design, Aurobindo makes an effortless endeavour in presenting the exposition scene in each of his full-fledged plays, and the transition from exposition to the rise of crisis is smooth, natural and logical. The catastrophe is convincing, for it complies with the law of causality. Aurobindo employs the principles of contrast, juxtaposition, irony and suspense as chief structural forces. The effective use of soliloquy in *Vasavadutta* and in *Perseus the Deliverer*, and the application of asides in *The Witch* and in *Eric* contribute to the playwright's practice of revealing the inner recesses of a character on which the plot spins around.

A true drama, as Aurobindo states in *The Future poetry*, must interpret life. *Perseus*, for example, conveys the evolutionary idea of compassion which is the distinct mark of a superior civilisation. This idea arises out of the inner life of characters expressed in a language which leads to an evolution of action. For Aurobindo, the true movement of a great drama lies in its capacity to arouse psychological interest. Though he has written plays before *The Future Poetry*, they still rise up to these criteria.

Inspite of that, those plays have never been staged by dramatic companies because he has failed to evolve a language appropriate to the dramatic medium. A play
in order to be successfully staged requires “crisp dialogue mostly in the spoken tongue in keeping with the level of the characters; and such a stage sense alone can strike a balance between dialogue and action, keep up the tempo of the play and thereby make it stageworthy” (Krishna Bhatta 23).

Though Aurobindo is known for his felicitous use of the blank verse, for those lengthy speeches in verse often deter the action of his plays. Aurobindo’s emphasis on the general principles of dramatic design is definitely his achievement in the field of Indian English drama despite the regrettable fact that he cannot totally cater to the demands of the stage in practice.

Tagore has written more than forty plays of all kinds using myth, legend, symbols, and allegory in large proportions to express his views on love, religion, and death. Tagore is close to the Sanskrit concept of dramaturgy in eliciting sentiments and imagery through inner meaning, rather than, outer manifestations. It perplexed his contemporaries and producers who shied away from them, for they were too poetic, too lyrical, too metaphysical, too symbolic, too obscure and too unstageable. Tagore was also influenced by Jatra, a prominent form of the folk-theatre of Bengal which does not stick to the aspects of a well-constructed play, but is characterised by a fluid form, with minimum stage devices and maximum allegorical renderings.

For Tagore, the dramatic medium is not meant for depicting action, but for conveying “a moment of intense life”. His plays are plays of feelings and not of actions. For instance, Tagore’s drama Sanyasi affirms “the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite” (Tagore 235).
Moods and feelings take precedence over external action in the plays of Tagore. *The Cycle of Spring* creates a positive mood of acceptance of life with all its flights and drops. The play employs dance and song. Yet the tempo is decidedly slower, for the dramatist does not elaborate the situations which may intensify action. His emphasis is not on showing action, but on suggesting action.

Each of his plays deals with some of the momentous issues of man and his society. *The Red Oleanders* is one such play, for instance, where the writer has severely criticised the dehumanised nature of the totalitarian government which does not uphold beauty, love, individual freedom and joy, but gold and materialism, the monstrous destroyer of peace and happiness on earth.

In general Tagore's plays are labelled as "proportion plays" or idea-oriented plays, which are essentially designed to be read and not to be staged. However, the play, *The Post Office* exemplifies the peak of his dramatic excellence. It is considered to be his best, for it has been translated into many languages, and has been successfully staged at home and abroad.

W.B.Yeats in his preface to this play states, "on the stage the little play shows that it is very perfectly constructed and conveys to the right audience an emotion of gentleness and peace" (W.B. Yeats, Preface, *The Post Office*, by Rabindranath Tagore 5). Here again, the predominance of feelings, a characteristic feature of poetry is acknowledged by Yeats. It follows that Tagore does not attach importance to action which is the basic criterion of the dramatic medium.
Tagore wants the art of acting to be subservient to his poetry. He dislikes stage embellishments which are for him a barrier between true literature and the art of the theatre. He has revolted against the adolescent habit of frequent change of scenes and moving the curtain up and down, for on the one hand it mocks the outer reality and on the other, hinders inner truth from emerging.

Another dramatist who has made an impressive contribution to the field of Indian English Drama is Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam, popularly known as T.P.Kailasam. Though he is essentially a Kanada playwright, he holds a secure and prominent place in the Indian drama in English. His English plays include The Burden, Fulfilment, The purpose, The Curse or Karna, Keechaka, and a short monologue. Kailasam expresses a profound reverence for our ancient literature, culture, its legends, and myths by borrowing well-knit themes from them. However, he has shown an exclusive liking for The Mahabharatha, for its characters are rooted in reality. As a contradistinction, characters in The Ramayana, are either noble or divine. Therefore, all his plays, except the story of The Burden which is from The Ramayana, are based on a few episodes from The Mahabharatha: “Whatever the themes be, the delineation of characters is Kaislasam’s own and it has been the result of either intuitive vision or his fertile imagination” (M.K.Naik, 1972, 1).

Everytime he takes up a principal character from the epics, he aesthetically transforms him either into a new Ekalavya or a new Karna. In the play, The Curse, Kailasam is least troubled by Karna’s imperfections. The primary stress is on the Brahmin’s curse which stands for a relentless fate brutally victimising Karna, a noble
soul with an inherent aspiration for knowledge of arms. The play reveals the mental sufferings of a doomed but brave and courageous soul. Karna’s moral integrity is questioned in the epic. But Kailasam presents Karna in the most favourable light by making the character’s innate thirst for knowledge the cause for the lie.

The dramatist embarks on the element of Fate to intensify the tragic helplessness of his hero. But as the theme is deficient in suspense and climax, it hardly reaches the heights of a Greek or Shakespearean tragedy. In his interest to show prominence to neglected characters, Kailasam is akin to Tagore. But he makes little efforts to interpret old myths to present contemporary problems unlike Sri Aurobindo and Karnad. In his deep passion for glorifying the underprivileged epic heroes, he makes them even unconventional, the intention of which is to generate dramatic intensity and values that are being realised during the course of the action.

Another play which embodies Kailasam’s dramatic talent is The Purpose. Vyasa has made a brief reference to the story of Ekalavya in the Adi parva of The Mahabharatha. Kailasam has invested the ‘passing reference’ with great dimensions and proportions which lend power and significance to the composition of ideas.

Apart from the substance, if one evaluates the nature of the verse medium of some of his plays, one may conclude that Kailasam is not genuinely poetic like Sri Aurobindo. He is essentially rhetorical, and his passion for forced alliteration obscures his thought. It is hard to explain the sudden shiftings that the dramatist makes from verse to prose, and vice versa, in communicating with in the readers. Equally, his bold venture in introducing Sanskrit words and other Indianised expressions in the making
of plays is still a debatable issue. Nevertheless, compared to Aurobindo and Tagore whose works mainly are of literary interest, Kailasam’s plays do have stage potentials.

Like Shaw, he presents elaborate stage directions in some plays, and it validates his aptitude for the stage. However, he has failed to employ a more natural English idiom with minimum rhetoric which would have made him a great success on the stage. The other writer, who adds to the lyrical grandeur of Indian drama in English is Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, a poet of almost infinite possibilities according to Sri Aurobindo. His dramatic output is tremendous for he has a long list of devotional plays, social plays, historical plays and miscellaneous plays.

His devotional plays deal with certain crucial situations in the lives of the Maharashtrian saints. It is not birth, but the inner essence of a being in terms of simplicity and humility which determines the eligibility or worthiness of a person which is to be recognised and rewarded as great. The first play Raidas, being wrapped in exquisite poetry, stages the conflict between Brahmins who have an air of haughty aloofness and the cobbler saint who insists on simple and humble devotion. Harindranath develops the same theme with slight variations in Chokha Mela, Eknath, Pundalik, Sakubai, Jayadeva and in Tukaram. The last play in the group is effective both as a literary piece and as a stage play. G.Venkatachalam’s observation substantiates this:

While living with his wife’s people at Mangalore, where he (Harin) spent several years and wrote many of his best poems, he did a series of short plays in verse on the lives of
the Maharashtrian saints, who were his mother-in-law's favourites. Tukaram, Jayadeva, Saku Bai, Eknath, Pundalik came out in rapid succession and enthralled everyone who heard them from the poet's lips. Of these, Tukaram became the most popular and was staged all over India. (103)

Many critics have acknowledged the dramatist's attempt to throw light on the lives of the saints. However, they have criticised his devotional plays which do not have tense construction, clarity of characterisation, and predominance of action over poetry.

Chattopadhyaya's social plays which are "manifestos of new realism" are mostly symbolic and didactic both in content and in effect. Similar to Mulk Raj Anand who has introduced working-class characters and their realism in the field of Indian fiction in English, Harindranath has succeeded in bringing the slum life of the poor, the downtrodden, and the weary workers on the stage which help us have a look into their depths of misery and squalor. Written at a time when the Progressive Writers' Movement was gathering intensity in India and elsewhere, The Window drives home the excesses of the inhuman nature of industry owners which trigger off rebellious tendencies among the workers.

The Window is a neatly constructed play making the entire action take place in the house of the worker. The play commences at 'dusk' and works upto a climax with the arrival of the Tar Man, and concludes with the very revolt of the workers at dawn. It has no loose ends. The characters are convincing, and their medium of conversation
is authentic. The playwright overcomes the limitations with regard to language by writing in poetic-prose that is essentially racy, lively, and intimate to accommodate with least strain petty details, colloquialisms, slang expressions, allusions quite, characteristic of the working-class community.

Simple setting, minimum characters, quick action, crisp and forceful dialogue make the play eminently suitable to the stage. However, the writer’s proneness to didactism, wordiness, ingenuousness and over-emotionality belittle the artistic excellence of the play. Like Arnold Wesker, who shows an earnest commitment to set right the predicament of the working-class community, Chattopadhyaya’s social plays The Parrot, The Sentry’s Lantern, The Coffin and The Evening Lamp recommend means to get over the tyrannical nature of the capitalists through organised revolution. It must be admitted that a few of his plays like Siddhartha lack suspense, concentration and manageable of themes. However, his consummate skill in evolving stage-techniques must be acknowledged without a pinch of salt.

Among the few women playwrights, Bharati Sarabhai is outstanding. In both of her plays, The Well of the people and Two women, the dramatist has shown the different faces of the Indian feminine mind. The Well of the People is a pageant epitomising, in the person of an old lady who wishes to construct a temple well, the history and the spiritual heights of India. That the play is not meant to be staged is admitted by the dramatist in the preface; “it defies the rules and requirements of the actable drama”. However, Sarabhai’s other play, Two women, which symbolically deals with tradition and modernity at various planes, is actable in its presentation: “In
fact, it was produced at the Excelsior Theatre, Bombay, on February 27, 1948" (Melwani 14).

To this tradition of social realism belong A.S.P Ayyar, S.Fyzee-Rahim and J.M.Lobo Prabhu. The plays of A.S.P. Ayyar depict the contemporary affairs of the society. In The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays, the writer gives a pleasant sketch of the social life. But in the other prose play, Sita's choice, the dramatist is critical of all young men who are inclined towards material pursuits showing least regard for beauty or accomplishments among the poor females. As Srinivasa Iyengar remarks, "Ayyar handles the prose medium effectively, and he is seen to be a vigorous critic of contemporary life" (Srinivasa Iyengar 242).

Fyzee Rahim is another playwright whose works, Invented Gods (1938) and Daughter of India, deal with work-a-day themes. The need to sacrifice the desires of an individual self for common good is the theme of J.M. Lobo Prabhu in his three act play Mother of New India (1944). Flags of the Heart, another play of Lobo Prabhu, expresses the earnestness of university students to serve and sacrifice for the poor and the needy.

The dramatists of the Pre-Independence phase have written plays which are essentially lyrical, allegorical and symbolic producing heightened aesthetic pleasure among the readers. On the other hand, the works of those who belong to social realism reveal a matter-of-fact reality lacking colour, drive, enthusiasm and interest despite their social relevance. Only a few dramatists have attained recognition by achieving the concentration and tempo required of a short play. Aurobindo's lengthy speeches,
Kailasam’s rhetoric, and the struggle for the spoken tongue among Ayyar and others, reveal that their plays are not meant for stage production. The absence of a living theatre and a live audience acted as contributory reasons for the paucity of actable plays during the Pre-Independence phase.

When India became independent, the drama enthusiasts started predicting a silver lining to the dark clouds of Indian dramatic achievements in English. By coincidence, the first five-year plan gave encouragement to the performing arts which in turn led to the establishment of the Akademic centers and other organisations. Performances were given by some English and American troupes, but those dramatic activities were mostly related to plays in Indian languages depriving, thus, the Indian English drama of a chance to gain access to the proper stage.

We are not sure whether the reluctance of drama groups to perform Indo-Anglian plays leads to the growth of unactable play writing or discouragement from drama troupes drove playwrights to stick to closet dramas. The fact that the vicious circle still continues is deeply harrowing, and we have got to break out of this.

Among those dramatists of the Post-Independence phase, who have found appropriate means to relate drama to theatre, Asif Currimbhoy can be singled out both in quantity and quality of actable plays. The playwright’s commendable respect for the actual requirements of theatre has fetched him honour from home and abroad. Currimbhoy is identified as “India’s first authentic voice in the theatre” (Rev. of “The World of Asif Currimbhoy” by Faubion Bowers. The Village Voice New York) because he has not treated drama as a thing to be imagined in isolation but as a visual art to be
perceived in a social gathering. To put it in another way, Currimbhoy's emphasis is more on the performing aspects of drama which act as visual aids in the understanding of events and people than on the literary features which may increase the knowledge of plays in theory, but not the satisfaction of 'seeing' life lived through in practice. Currimbhoy's achievement on the stage is not sudden but spontaneous taking environmental support as much as a baby plant takes for its growth. Hence a portrait of the dramatist in relation to his formative years is worth recalling.

Currimbhoy belonged to a family of industrialists who were awarded the title of baronetcy by the British government for their singularity in the field of commerce and industry. His mother was an active social worker and his father was a broad-minded intellectual. The committed life of the former and the cosmopolitanism of the latter widened the mental inclinations of Asif Currimbhoy during the impressionable period of his life. Consequently, an outburst of feelings and ideas, which would assist him in the long run of his dramatic career, set upon him. Similarly, Currimbhoy's consuming interest in English and his passion for Western Culture were quite obvious from the time of his secondary education at Bombay, St.Xavier's High School. In an interview to Commentary, Currimbhoy has described his basic education and its impact on his growth:

These were of course pre-Independence days and the colonial influence was felt full blast. It meant going through schools under the institutions that existed at that time for which I have my own sense of preparation and, perhaps,
criticisms: the family environment was centred around English; we were literally brown sahibs – as they call it, with a sense of humour and a sense of frustration.

("Commentary meets Asif" Commentary 38)

Exposure to alien culture and language, however, had indirectly intensified his predilection for mysticism and philosophy embedded in the Bhagavad-Gita, The Upanishad, The Ramayana and The Mahabharatha from which he has borrowed themes and perspectives.

Currimbhoy’s university life and education had also contributed much to his growth as a dramatist. He graduated from the University of California in Economics in 1950. He recapitulates his experiences in the university in the U.S.A:

College was in America, those beautiful mid-west landscapes of snow and loneliness. The love for language and life grew, and in the isolation of a groping search and hyper-sensitivity, I tried again to balance withdrawal with participation: physical activity, vigour and the consciousness of living seeped through my veins, with tremendous sensuality and sex*(qtd. in Bayapa Reddy 23)

His collegiate life in America opened up a new vista of dramatic learning by exposing him to the genius of Shakespeare and other outstanding playwrights in the American drama. He was osmotically alive to the various trends in drama which shaped him as a man of the theatre. Like Keats, Currimbhoy also yearned for a life of
sensations, of course, enveloped in thoughts, in his youth that “when he speaks of them he sounds more enthusiastic” (Girija Rao “No Laurels for Asif at Home” The Sunday Standard 23 June 1968).

Currimbhoy’s thirst for dramatic accomplishments was activated by his wife, Suraiya whom he married soon after he returned to India. In one of his letters, he acknowledges, to his heart’s content, her influence on him:

I doubt if I would ever have been a writer were it not for my wife who gave me stability and sanity through home and love (L. Meserve and J. Meserve. Foreword. The Hungry Ones by Asif Currimbhoy 5)

Currimbhoy’s importance to compassion and truth when he writes on the human condition everywhere is on account of Suraiya’s hold on him in the making of a well-anchored dramatist.

Time was out of joint when Currimbhoy chose the dramatic medium to set it right. The political upheavals, the ill-fated partition of the country causing deepest struggle and anguish in Bengal and the Punjab, the loss of fraternal background, people’s indifference to communal harmony, the topsy-turvydom of human values, the poor execution of land reformation acts and bills, the resurgence of undemocratic measures to seize power, irrelevant educational policies, the mediocrity in the rank of teachers and the students unrest were, therefore, treated as the source material for his play writing. Besides, the various offices Currimbhoy held gave him an opportunity to
develop an in-depth acquaintance with men and matters in the proper study of mankind.

His first assignment in **New India Assurance Company** was in Paris, in the year 1954. But he left France soon and joined Burmah-Shell in India as a marketing executive. He toured throughout India and interacted with people from different localities which finally developed his spirit of inquiry, powers of observation and a profound concern for souls in distress. In an interview with Rajinder Paul and Paul Jacob, he states:

> In a way, playwriting is an intuitive thing, and it's always been that way, with me. Perhaps I was a playwright even before I deliberately started to write plays. In other words, the dramatic form, the structure of the theatre was always meaningful to me from the time I had palpable feelings about life. That it expressed itself in a theatrical form when I was in my late twenties was perhaps accidental. I found what I wanted in life, and that was it. Having found the theatre, nothing was going to tear me away from it. ("Asif Currimbhoy interviewed" Enact 1970)

The literary career of Asif Currimbhoy may conveniently be divided into two periods, the first ranging from 1959 to 1968 and the second period from 1969 to 1975. During the first period he wrote **The Tourist Mecca** (1959), **The Clock** (1959), **The Doldrummers** (1960), **The Restaurant** (1960). **The Dumb Dancer** (1961), "OM" (1961),


Of all writers, it is truest to say of the playwright: "He must communicate or he will die" (qtd. in Naik 151). It is this essential urge to communicate the compulsive force towards life that has directed Currimbhoy to write for the theatre because a theatrical presentation gets a wider viewership compared to closet drama which survives on limited readership. Furthermore, Currimbhoy strongly feels that drama attains fruition only on the stage.

Therefore, the need arises to analyse the theatre implications of his plays for the purpose of which a few plays are chosen from the first phase of his production, and are regrouped theme wise. The present study intends to affirm that the elements of theatre, which instead of paralysing and stifling dramatic art, will not only be faithful to it but also be a source of inexhaustible suggestion for the future playwrights and their interpreters.

Of the selected plays, The Clock (1959) and The Dumb Dancer (1961) are classified under psychological theme. The Doldrummers (1960) and Thorns on a
Canvas (1962) are listed under social theme. Goa (1964) is analysed in relation to political theme and The Hungry Ones (1965) represents the East-West relations.

It is worthwhile to note that events and actions stir the creative spark of potential writers. Such a thing did happen to Currimbhoy. The external situations played a very important role in his choice of themes. He was posted to Agra in 1958, and it was during his stay in Agra that he encountered professional challenges and set backs which find expression in the play The Clock. Currimbhoy used to go to suburban Juhu for his week ends and holidays, and he might have drawn inspiration for The Doldrummers from the lives of the urban youth living in a shack on the fashionable Juhu beach. Currimbhoy's interest in mythology, psychology and philosophy is discernible in the composition of The Dumb Dancer. Thorns on a Canvas is written as a personal grievance against the disheartening experiences he had had in the banning of The Doldrummers. As regards the starting point for the production of Goa, much can be said. Currimbhoy was posted to Rajkot in 1961. The newness of the place delighted him and in order to enjoy freedom he made frequent visits to Diu. Currimbhoy admits,

In fact I wrote Goa when I was in Diu which was very much like Goa in all the instances, all the things that happened. And I think I could show you most of the characters in the play living in Diu. (Enact 1970)

It follows that no character can be created in purely fictional terms. Conversely, there is no character who is totally authentic. However, their roots are always in reality.
having certain characteristics and qualities. This is obvious in the production of The Hungry Ones too:

When American beatnik - poet Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky came to Calcutta not long ago, they created a sensation. They walked around the streets of the teeming city in dirty khaki shorts and dishevelled beards, attracting college students like moths to a candle - flame. About the same time came the cry of the "hungry-generation" from the hovels and coffee houses of Calcutta, and what effect the Americans had on it is not known, though there was a definite sense of identification with the beatnik-poets.

(Foreword. The Hungry Ones by Asif Currimbhoy)

This play commences from about this point with fictitious characters, but analyses with greater penetration all forms of hunger in the riot-torn and famined capital of Bengal. A peculiar correlation exists between the yogi-beatnik of America and the meditative-yogi in India but superseding this mystique is the theme of hunger and love conveyed at a symbolic level.

The fact that some of his earlier plays were successfully staged first abroad and then at home lends authenticity to Currimbhoy's artistry. Goa was the first play of Asif Currimbhoy to be produced abroad because nobody would do it at home. It was first shown at Michigan State university, and a few years later received a distinguished
production on Broadway and 34th street. Later still it was also shown at the honoured inauguration of the Performing Arts Centre in Delhi. Goa was later filmed on location.

The Dumb Dancer and The Hungry Ones were produced at the Café La Mama of Ellen Stewart in the mid-sixties when Currimbhoy was invited to the United States by the J.D.Rockefeller 3rd Fund. The Hungry Ones was also performed at the Theatre Company of Boston, and The Dumb Dancer, a Kathakali dance-drama, was shown at the British Drama League Festival.

Conversely, the first production at home of Currimbhoy’s plays occurred only in 1969. Thorns on a Canvas was staged by the Fine Arts Theatre Group in Bombay. Then followed a production of The Doldrummers by the Little Theatre Group at Delhi in 1969. The Doldrummers was performed by the Oscars in Calcutta in the year 1970. It is very soul-satisfying to have a production in one’s own country irrespective of how it is received. But theatre has its own universality and Currimbhoy does not like to be parochial about it. What ultimately matters to him, as a playwright, is his genuine interest in viewing drama as a performing art having profound theatrical values with which it attains aesthetic identity or artistic realisation on the stage. The present study analyses theatre implications of the selected plays of Asif Currimbhoy.

Chapter 11, The Essence of the Theatre, shows how Currimbhoy looks upon action in terms of dramatic situations and predicaments which engender conflict which is the essence of the theatre because in all human relationships, there are striking sparks in them that bring about a feel of life. Conflicts, thus, generate life and involvement on the stage.
Chapter III, "The Physicality of the Stage", affirms that the printed script of a play achieves colour, grace, elevation and the structural pattern in motion only when it is performed on the stage. Hence it is essential to get to know the stage conditions and techniques which enhance visibility, concentration, mood, atmosphere and the overall impact of the play.

The Fourth Chapter, entitled, "The Attributes of Music and Spectacle" examines the aural-visual aspects of the selected plays in relation to the language of senses such as, sound, music, tempo, mime, gesticulation and dance.

The Fifth Chapter, "Author and Audience", show how a play is to be judged by its values to those who watch it. Not only the experience, but also the degree to which we recreate it is the measure of its worth. It also shows communicative dimensions of the dramatist who is at work throughout the play, guiding and activating the response of the audience. The desired effect of Currimbhoy’s theatre is emotional entanglement.

The concluding Chapter recalls the findings of the preceding chapters and states that the selected plays of Currimbhoy are essential pieces of theatre in terms of dramatic effectiveness and thematic concerns. They also offer positive directions for the incorporation of technological inputs to become an intense core of a living experience in the theatre.