CHAPTER -II
THE BENGAL TRILOGY

After having established himself as a skilled dramatist who could produce actable plays, Asif Currimbhoy left the aura of New York theatre to return to write about the various crises which had gripped his country. During his stay in Calcutta, he wrote *Inquilab* (Revolution), *The Refugee* and *Sonar Bangla* which constitute what has popularly been called The Bengal Trilogy. *Inquilab* deals with the agonies of Bengal in the wake of Maoist Naxalite revolution, *The Refugee* with the pathetic condition of the Bangladesh refugees and *Sonar Bangla* with the emergence of Bangladesh on the world map. There is a new kind of seriousness in his plays of Calcutta period. To quote Iyengar:

Indeed, there is in the plays of Calcutta period a new thrust of seriousness. They are rather more edged, more ruthless, more touched with terror and pity than the plays of the earlier period. (Not that tragic Catharsis is lacking in early plays like *Goa*, *The Dumb-Dancer* and *The Doldrummers.*) But during his stay at Calcutta, Currimbhoy does seem to have wrestled closer still with the basic human condition and found appropriate means for the agonized expression of his social conscience (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 23).

*Inquilab* explores various dimensions of Naxal violence and revolt which tore apart the very fabric of social and political life in West Bengal. Iyengar rightly observes that the play attempts to answer questions like “Why are the Naxalites what they are?” and “Why are they fed up with the establishment?” (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 12) It is a non-partisan and honest rendering of causes and effects of the rise of Naxalism which aims at achieving political power through the barrel of gun by overthrowing constitutional forms of Government. The Naxalites openly swear to the tenets of Maoism which aims at achieving international proletarianism and total revolution through violent means. The propounders of the
philosophy openly debunk any form of parliamentary democracy and various forms of
democratic institutions, and believe in armed struggle and militarization.

They believe in Mao’s ideology of the People’s War mobilizing large parts of
rural population to revolt against establishment organization by engaging in guerilla
warfare. Their aim is to establish a classless society by conducting a successful
revolution against the exploiting classes and their state structure. The word ‘Naxal’
derives its name from a village Naxalbari of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. There
was a peasant revolt at Naxalbari which was led by Charu Mazumdar. The uprising
was the outcome of an incident involving a tribal youth who had a judicial order to
plough his land was attacked by goons of the landlord. The tribals retaliated and
started forcefully capturing their land from the landlords. Their slogan was ‘land to
the landless’. Charu Mazumdar provided ideological leadership to the violent
movement. Soon after its origin, Naxalite attracted a strong section of radical students
and intelligentsia. Mazumdar exhorted Naxals to eliminate class enemies of the
proletariats—the landlords, businessmen, police officers, politicians and everybody
who opposed their violent philosophy. The violent revolt which started from villages
soon engulfed the urban centres of West Bengal also. Calcutta, the political capital of
West Bengal, became the hub of the Naxalites. Schools, colleges and universities
became the centres of the Naxalites. Jadavpur University was soon taken over by
Naxalites and their headquarters became Presidency College, Calcutta. Calcutta was
up in flames of fear, violence and terror. In the words of Currimbhoy: “The city was
under a cloud of palpable fear. There were bombs, burnings, killing of policemen,
retribution, decapitation of status [sic], assassination of professors and Vice-
Chancellor or just plain innocent people dying who happened to be at the wrong place
at the wrong time” (qtd. in Khatri 148). What was touted as an ideological revolution
changed into bloodiest massacre of common men?

*Inquilab* is one of the popular plays which deals with the Naxalite revolt. The
playwright explores deeply the Naxalite violent movement which overtook Calcutta in
1970. As *Inquilab* is a direct response to the Naxalite revolt, the aim of the playwright
was to advance some concrete measures for handling the burning issues. The starting
focus of the drama is given towards origin of the revolution. The term and the
alternate name of revolution is ‘Inquilab.’ ‘Inquilab’ is generally used as political slogan ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ which originated from Urdu phrase meaning thereby ‘Long live Revolution.’ The word ‘Inquilab’ attained popularity through the socialist revolutionaries such as Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad. The famous critic Faubion Bowers rightly observed regarding the importance of the play:

‘Revolution’ (Inquilab) is one of those plays you read only to find the characters leaping off the page and seizing you by the throat. In deals ostensibly with the Naxalite revolt, where agrarian communists opt for violence. But the canvas Currimbhoy paints here is one massive dilemma composed of a hundred small ones —‘the devil and the deep’ (“The World of Asif Currimbhoy” 6).

The Naxalite movement continued intensively from 1967 to the middle of 1970s. Asif Currimbhoy as a dramatist of having acute socio-political consciousness seems to have written Inquilab as a solution to the problem of Naxalites. The playwright is an Indian dramatist whose plays are deeply imbued with varying hues and shades of socio-political consciousness. Though some critics find fault with his plays for their topicality, yet they are unique in the way he treats these issues by raising their contemporaneity to the universal. The Naxalite movement that rocked West Bengal during the sixties might be a thing of the past but the question of validity of resorting to cult of violence still remains because it has hardly left any part of the world untouched by its ideology of havoc, destruction and disorder. The dramatist looks at the ideology of naxalism from different angles and perspectives. He juxtaposes the rule of law enshrined in the constitution of India and the rule of jungle espoused by Naxalites, the passive majority and the violent minority, socialism versus proletarianism, order and disorder.

Currimbhoy, the most prominent playwright, has invested the Indian drama in English with intense realism. He breathes an air of realism into his plays by making the setting, incident, character and dialogue lifelike. R.L. Meserve and W.J. Meserve aptly observe:
Because through social and political systems man reveals himself, Currimbhoy employs the socio-realistic world as a starting point. There is, for example, the bitter anguish Currimbhoy feels for Goa, created by a union of Portuguese and Indian only to be destroyed by conflicts within that union. His socio-realistic plotting, however, expands into allegory in *Goa* where rape, the most violent personal abuse, symbolizes the final suffering and disintegration. The beauty is gone; only harsh reality remains; no one wins. *Inquilab* shows the same anguish as Currimbhoy extends his play about the Naxalite movement far beyond Bengal” (“Asif Currimbhoy” 32-33).

A large number of plays, written by him, deal with the historical, geographical and social events such as Gandhian movement; the partition and its aftermath; the advent of freedom in an island in the Malaysian archipelago, the Naxalite movement; the liberation of Goa; the Bangladesh war and the students agitation in Gujarat. As “India’s first authentic voice in theatre” (“The World of Asif Currimbhoy” 7), Currimbhoy is particularly drawn to the social and political concerns of his countrymen and gives vent to them in his artistic plays. While living in Bombay, he realised the problems of humanity at large and of Indians in particular. Currimbhoy is at his best when he writes about public or recent historical events such as Naxalite movement in Calcutta, Indian’s take over of Goa, and the Bangladesh war. In one of his most famous plays *Inquilab*, he has given deep insight into various dimensions of Naxalite movement. The local government is caught between ‘administrative skill’ or ‘law and order’, between brutally suppressing the revolt or losing their piddling power by having the Central (Federal) Government come in and take over. The professor gives lecture to his students:

‘Processions? Strikes? Gehraos? Violence? Breakdowns of law and order? Naxal revolt, my friends? Slogans of Gandhi or Mao? Are there bombs in your head or drains, gentlemen?’ The wife of a peasant talks to her husband: ‘you seem to have forgotten your dream. When it all started, all you wanted was a small piece of your own land. That made me happy. Now you want to lead the whole nation into revolution. That makes me unhappy.’ And the
husband answers, 'Why? It's the same thing. The better man gets something more. There's more to life than a small plot of land.' Yes, if only revolutionaries didn't grow up, governments could cope ("The World of Asif Currimbhoy" 6-7).

To Currimbhoy, 'Revolution' is not only portrait of a city and province though it has special significance to him, but also represents "the nightmare and the redemption of today's Calcutta" ("The World of Asif Currimbhoy" 7). Characters are placed in carefully selected circumstances and they are made to convey certain points of view. As it is customary in Currimbhoy's plays, several and often conflicting views are pitted against each other to produce a wholeness of phenomena. Currimbhoy believes that drama is the most convenient form of presenting social-consciousness of the society as he states:

The essence of the theatre in my opinion is conflict . . . you have different points of view which come head on. . . . This clash forms the most vibrant factor of the theatre itself. . . . My approach to my all plays is that there is an essential conflict of attitude (qtd. in Pan 93).

This is what we also find in this play. To depict the situation accurately and precisely, different characters are shown to react to this movement differently. Professor Dutta advocates Gandhian philosophy of peace and non-violence and achieving social justice through constitutional, peaceful and legal means. Amar and Shomik present the conflicting philosophy of Naxalism based on the use of violence as a tool to achieve the establishment of a classless society. Jain represents the landlords' perspective on right to private property whereas the politicians' perspective on this burning issue is that of a status-quoist.

The setting of first and main scene of the play is a classroom in one of the colleges in Calcutta where many communist slogans are scrawled on the walls and red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle is drawn:
Dutta, a distinguished professor of law with a conservative outlook and 'a British traditionalist approach,' is worried about the 'dying city' affected by processions, strikes 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. He recalls how he fought for the freedom of India and how it would be difficult to make people understand that non-violence is an active philosophy (Reddy 32).

Prof. Dutta is a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He came under the Gandhian impact and thinks that his non-violence philosophy is the best solution for the present disturbance in the country. He is an advocate of democracy, law and order, right to property, a free economy and established institution. He advises his students to keep themselves away from strikes, gheraos, bandhs, processions, revolt and violence:

PROF. DATTA: Principles founded on freedom of thought and speech by Gandhiji, the father of our nation!
Repeat, repeat: THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF REVISIONISM. HE IS...
PROF. DATTA: (raising voice louder over din) A free economy, socialistically oriented ownership of private property a fundamental right, protected by law, enforced by law, enforced by police, and if necessary, by the army! (sounding sloganish himself)
Repeat : CLASS ENEMIES! CLASS ENEMIES MURDABAD!
JOTEDARS MURDABAD! POLICE MURDABAD! INQUILAB!
INQUILAB ZINDABAD! (Currimbhoy, Inquilab 11)

Prof. Dutta calls the Naxalite menace the tyranny of the minority. He is disillusioned now with the state of affairs prevailing in Calcutta: "Difficult times, I admit Calcutta, my Calcutta, a ‘dying city’? Processions? Strikes? Gheraos? Violence? Bandhs? Breakdown of law and order? Revolt? Naxal revolt, my friends? Slogans of Gandhi or Mao?" (Inquilab 10) Prof. Dutta asserts:
Gandhiji... Gandhiji... how to make them understand? That when you broke the law, the old British law that you respected so much, it was because it came in conflict with your natural law of justice. The Divine Law. Gandhiji... with whom I fought for our freedom... how to make them understand that when you broke the law, you asked for punishment! Yes, your own punishment because you still recognized that the law of civilized society could have no exception! Gandhiji... whom I worshipped as my own father... how to make them understand that non-violence is an active philosophy? That it was used by you to fight violence (Inquilab 11).

Prof. Dutta is not happy to see the Naxalite movement in Calcutta. He wants that there everything should be solved on the democratic pattern. He thinks that in a free country constitution is the most important and nobody has the right to violate it. He says:

A free economy, socialistically oriented ownership of private property a fundamental right, protected by law, enforced by law, enforced by police, and if necessary, by the army! (Inquilab 11)

Prof. Dutta believes in the rules and regulations made by the constitution of the country. Unfortunately his son Amar has no faith in his father's principles. He tells his father that "you were the Gods that Failed, father!” (Inquilab 14) Amar pleads for proletarian internationalism and wants his father to ponder over the problem of poverty, hunger, dirt and inflation. Amar says:

Listen, father, understand. I’ll say it only once. This is my passion, my poetry, my cause. Look around, father, open your eyes: the poverty, the terrible poverty. People dying of hunger, father. Look at the gap between rich and poor. It's growing, father dangerously... and unfairly. It’s true. The city's dying, your old beloved city of the privileged. Do you feel the stranglehold? The bustees growing, enveloping the city with the stench of faeces and dirt. Trams coming to a halt, burning, burning, the extra 2 paise increase in fare
more than the dying man can bear. Not logical, is it? Not the game of agree to disagree. There's no time for that. We're drowning under the Hooghly, silting up with doomed humanity. The processions will grow, like nightmares, death processions of the 10 million around the funeral pyre of the burning city. *(shouting)* And you talk of EDUCATION, father! Institutes of education that have now shackled us for generations and generations *(Inquilab 13-14).*

In *Inquilab*, the Hooghly river has been presented as debased state of life, the shrivelled stream of civilization and the low level of existence. Calcutta has been represented in the drama as the 'burning city' and which exhibits the staleness, pallor, vehemence and of any neoteric city in the world. The same Amar calls Jain a revisionist, a pacifier for the maintenance of an existing order. Amar tells Mr. Jain that time is changing very rapidly and one should accept it and change himself according to time. Surplus land should be distributed among the landless people. The young people are not fools, they are impatient and hungry to get their rights. He does not want that the land owners should be given any punishment but the fact is that they should realize the demand of the time. If they have enough land, they should distribute among their landless brothers because land belongs to the tiller. But Mr. Jain does not agree with him and he thinks that the land has been earned through hard labour by his ancestors. So nobody has the right to grab it from him.

JAIN: You know we've been having trouble with the labourers. *(shaking his head)* Can't understand it. They're part of my... family. Yet suddenly they've turned around... viciously! as if I were some damned capitalist!

AMAR: *(quietly)* To be a benefactor is the same thing.

JAIN: *(surprised)* How do you mean?

AMAR: Tell me, they've been with you for many years, haven't they? Possibly their fathers and grandfathers were serfs to your ancestors?

JAIN: Yes.
AMAR: And you looked after them, like one big family. And their problems were your problems. In fact you were like a father to them, indulging yet correcting them, with a firm and gentle hand.

JAIN: Yes, what's wrong with that? I've seen lots worse landlords.

AMAR: *(still with trace of sarcasm)* In fact you were one of the more progressive ones. No adhiyar system of contract labour for you. In being absolute master you could measure out your charities, and still keep them in their place *(Inquilab 17-18)*.

The voice of Amar is not an individual voice but it was the voice of universal revolt and anguish screaming itself hoarse at the seemingly immovable societies around the world. The young men of the new generation want to change the society. If it is not possible through peaceful means they do not hesitate even to adopt violence and therefore, they are attracted towards Naxalite movement which aims at destroying the established institutions and laws.

Ahmed is a hard-core Naxalite who firmly believes that the miseries of the landless peasants and penurious workers are due to filthy exploitation of the rapacious and avid landlords. He feels that, like leaches, the landlords suck the blood of the penurious and they themselves lead opulent lives. Ahmed, being a follower of Maoism, wants to bring socialist revolution. He thinks that parliamentary democracy is not an effective weapon for socialist revolution. An armed struggle is inevitable since revolution in backward countries can only be brought about by militant action by peasants. He suggests to adopt the means of guerrilla warfare to achieve their aims. He also tells: "'Without the poor peasant, there can be no revolution. To reject this is to reject the revolution'. Remember the four commandments: One, We must go among the masses and concern ourselves with their weal and woe. Two, the mobilization of the people will create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy. Three, seem to come from the East but attack from the West... avoid the solid, attack the hollow... Deliver a lightning blow, seek a lightning decision. Four, the only way to final victory is the strategy of protracted war" *(Inquilab 25-26)*. Ahmed lectures that the rights of the downtrodden can only be had through violence. If they do not resort
to violence, they are doomed to live their lives of hunger and deprivation: "You get what you deserve: disease, hunger, want and death. You give your children an even larger share: scurvy, slavery, deprivation and death" (Inquilab 26).

Ahmed gives his plan for his guerrilla war and tells his followers to appoint the area committees to launch violent struggles on the lives of Maoism. For him, it is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area. He wants the peasants to learn to combine persuasion, terror and aid organize the peasants union, the Krishak Sabha. The mob favours Ahmed and the peasants are also supporting him but there was a group of peasants which was not totally against the landlords as class enemies. They think that some landlords, like Jain, are not tyrants. They support landlord Jain because he thinks that he is not so bad and he works himself on the land with his own hands. Therefore, some of the peasants want to use the method of persuasion first. But Maoists do not harbour any such distinction and, therefore, advocated total elimination of landlords as a class.

Unlike Ahmad, Amar is not an ideologue nor like Shomik, a leader of peasants. Amar is in the heart of his hearts is theoretician who believes in ideas, not in much action. He is lost in abstraction as is clear from the conversation of the college students: "Amar? He's a poet. Deeply moved, emotional. Not the stuff that activists and politicians are made of" (Inquilab 45-46). As an idealist, Amar feels great concern for the poor and the deprived people. He longs for a change in the society because the traditional system has further widened the gap between the rich and the poor. He finds fault with the system of education. He tells his father in no uncertain terms that the old generation has completely failed in bringing the desired changes in the system:

We’re drowning under the Hooghly, silting up with doomed humanity. The processious [sic] will grow, like nightmares, death processions of the 10 million around the funeral pyre of the burning city. (shouting) And you talk of EDUCATION, father! Institutes of education that have now shackled us for generations and generations. What for? WHAT FOR, I ASK? So that there can be more unemployed millions? So that your bourgeois hierarchy remains
intact! So that you've doped the masses sufficiently into complacency and resignation? You can have it, father, you can have it, but don't stuff it down our throat! You were the Gods that Failed, father! *(father slaps him, breaks up the hysteria)* *(Inquilab 14)*

Amar is naturally drawn to the cause championed by the Naxalites as he himself says, "I belong... to the cause... of the revolution *(Inquilab 14)*. He indulges in an act of violence when he hurls a bomb on a police van and defends his action on the ground that "any attack on a policeman is a war with the Government" *(Inquilab 54)*. When Suprea counters him that in this attack on the policeman some innocent people were also the victims, Amar is shaken:

AMAR: None are innocent. None can abstain. We're all involved.

SUPREA: Even the poor woman who died on the footpath near the police van, and the child who was injured?

AMAR: *(his composure shaken for the first time)* C... child? Woman?

SUPREA: Yes. These things happen in a blur. There are innocent... bystanders in life, Amar, or don't you know?

AMAR: *(repeating)* I... I didn't know... there was a... woman and child...

...

SUPREA: You don't know a lot, Amar, and yet you're prepared to pass judgement *(Inquilab 55)*.

Amar does not fully realise that to theorise and to kill are two different things as his father, Professor Datta tells Ahmad: "You don't think he's responsible for it, do you? I mean... I mean it's one thing to theorise, quite another... to... kill. He's not the type, Ahmed. He... *(almost pathetically)*... he's like me... involved in his own abstractions... *(Inquilab 57)*.

Ahmed, the leader of the Naxalites knows fully that Amar has been attracted towards the ideology of Naxalism because of his romantic and abstract nature and therefore, not a dedicated hard-core Naxalite like Shomik. He is of the view that his
father’s influence will sooner or later wear off the Naxalite influence, a fact which becomes crystal clear when the landlord Jain is tried by the Naxalite council of justice, “the ‘inner sanctum’ meeting, with peasants giving summary justice, along the method adopted by the Maoist revolutionaries” (Inquilab 59). There is hardly any defence or pleading of one’s innocence in the so-called council of justice of the revolutionaries. The hollowness of pious proclamation of a fair trial and absolute justice becomes clear even to a casual reader when he says:

To find a defence is difficult. Perhaps we are as biased on this side as they are on the other. Absolute justice... there is none. So we shall try and come close... examine the doubts that there are... by one most suitable: young Amar hear... (slight restlessness and comment; softly) I withdraw... (he disappears into darkness) (Inquilab 60).

Ahmed appoints Shomik as prosecution and Amar as defence officers. Without spelling out any ground for punishment to be meted to landlord Jain he summarily holds him guilty. Amar cannot stand this injustice and says: “This is a trial; not a verdict”. Amar goes against the Naxalite ideology of class enemies when he says: “Let us judge Jainji as an individual; not a class enemy. Everybody admits he’s been fair in his dealings, and a hard worker. Look at his calloused hands if you don’t believe me... (Jain’s eyes flicker with new recognition at Amar) Ask Shomik’s father if you don’t believe me...” (Inquilab 60). More than his opposition to the concept of class enemy he also pleads for “change through opposition” because according to him, “once you use a revolt to your own ends, it destroys what could be most meaningful” (Inquilab 61). Shomik accuses him of being a defector and Shomik questions his loyalty to the Naxalite cause: “What’s your loyalty, Amar! If you’re willing to do this for your father’s friend what wouldn’t you do for your father and the other bourgeois?” (Inquilab 62) After passing death sentence on landlord Jain, Amar is put on trial to test his loyalty to the Naxalite cause. Amar agonisingly cries to Suprea:
AMAR: (almost in agony) I can’t find my way, Suprea. It’s as though I were suddenly blind, after coming so close. I was never... traitor. They now want me to prove... my loyalty. Loyalty? (he laughs weakly) To whom? To whom, I ask? (Inquilab 75)

Amar ultimately tries to prove his loyalty when he leads a band of Naxal students, well-organised and planned” which attacks Professor Datta. He is adorned by the books on constitutional law and “the statue of his venerated Sir Asutosh” (Inquilab 76) as is customary with the Naxalites Amar is appointed “PROSECUTOR, JUDGE AND JURY TO CARRY OUT VERDICT IN THE EXECUTION... OF SIR ASUTOSH! (Inquilab 78) Much to the horror of his father, Amar tremulously approaches the statue of Sir Asutosh with an axe in hand and decapitates the statue. Amar is hailed as a true Naxalite by the band of “anarchists, dedicated to the total cause of destruction” (Inquilab 76). But Amar does not know the real motives of the hardcore Naxalite led by Ahmed. After the mob has departed from Professor Datta’s library, Ahmed kills Professor Datta with “peasant’s sickle” (Inquilab 78) because, for Ahmed, Professor Datta belongs to the category of class enemies of the Naxalite. It is only after the murder of his father that Amar realises the meaninglessness and futility of violence as a tool to bring social change. He now starts believing in constitutional methods and parliamentary form of government.

The scene shifts to ‘council of justice’ in a field at night and landlord Jain is summarily tried. Amar differs with his colleagues and he wants to judge Jain as an individual and not as a class enemy. He tries in his own way to seek Jain’s release and advises him to plead guilty but he doesn’t agree and gets killed by the Naxalite students. Amar defends Jain strongly that his loyalty to the party is suspected and he is put to test by students ‘inner council’ in order to examine his loyalty. This testing of his loyalty leads to the violent death of his father at the hands of the Naxalites.

Amar is totally disillusioned with the movement and resolves to keep away from it. This disillusionment of Amar represents the disillusionment of many youth who joined the Naxal movement without thinking about its disastrous results. After the murder of his father, Amar ruminates that the Naxal shortcut will not bring about
'socialist revolution' and his father's approach was absolutely right. He begins to feel that much needed change can be brought about in society only through democratic ways shown by Mahatma Gandhi and not through the orgy of Naxalite violence. His realization is the key to understand the purpose of the play. The message of the following speech of Amar reverberates with his explicit disillusionment with the violent methods or so called shortcuts:

I... I think... my father was right. I mean... his approach was right. That... that change should come through the will of the majority ... expressed through a free vote .... That society ... such as we live in, must follow certain norms ... of law and order ... to make such democratic expression possible (*Inquilab* 80).

Ahmed and Shomik are the most rebellious and their commitment to revolution is total. Their concept of revolution is based on their love for peasants and their identification with their needs. Ahmad has some real philosophical qualities which make him a natural leader of Naxalites. His aim is to create a world which is as perfect as the God's image. The burning desire to create this kind of Utopian world is clear, when Amar asks him about his individual thinking. Ahmad replies:

Such is our mould: sometimes heroic, sometimes selfish too, in those obsessive human ideals of the future, the frantic struggles of the present, that move us on and on and on until death and fulfilment. . . . So I search for the ultimate: the cause and effect. The cycle of generations that revolt. The great burning desire within us that is prepared to kill and recreate. Build the new world that is as close to God's image as Man is . . . (*Inquilab* 40).

Everywhere in the play, his thoughts give a thrust to revolution. Shomik is a die-hard Naxalite with hatred and violence billowing within him. He is the leader of the peasants who in Naxalite ideology, over the true harbingers of total revolution. He exhorts the peasants to fight injustice and tyranny of the present system.
Our father were serfs, and even if we're not, we're not free either! (More cheers, hot consent to this persuasive firebrand) No.... No .... No more waiting. The law cannot work equally for both of us. It's either ours or theirs. At the moment it's theirs, so we have to reject it. But the only means we know: fight, FIGHT! (Inquilab 28)

So, Shomik represents the real revolutionary spirit of that movement. He promises his wife that revolutionaries like him never die to give up the cause, the cause of proletarian internationalism. Asif Currimbhoy is fully aware of social as well as political absurdities, events and conditions in the affairs of man which strike his imagination. In the present play, these political absurdities are shown to symbolize the politician's attitude towards this movement. They have nothing to do with this anarchy. They believe in power of game getting votes which brings them into power. They are concerned neither with the disastrous impact of Naxalite violence on society nor with the maintenance of law and order. In Act-I Scene-II, Devdas tries his best to win the favour of Shomik by making a promise to provide him a fertile land:

Look, Shomik, let's be practical. I'm not here to bribe you, or threaten... unless I have to. You want more wages, better conditions of work, I'll give them to you. If you work for my party, even that is possible. There's going to be distribution of waste ... productive land. I'll see to it that your name comes up. Your father is the oldest tiller here. It may take time, but I'll arrange it (Inquilab 36).

The dramatist indirectly suggests that selfish politicians are the root cause to create disharmony in the country for their political gains. This play realistically reveals India's political degeneration against the backdrop of a violent Naxalite conflict between the peasants and the landlords which is the result of an unbridgeable gap between the privileged and the underprivileged, the poor and the rich in the society. In the play, the politician, Devdas and the Big Wheel Politician from the Centre are the embodiment of the corrupt, immoral elements in the post-independence Indian politics. Devdas, who is in the State Government of West Bengal, is in utter
apathy towards the burning situation of violence and anarchy, caused by the Naxalite movement in the State. There is not even a semblance of law and order in the State; the innocents are being killed; the properties of the rich landlords are being grabbed by force and violence; bombing and killing is rampant in the streets in broad daylight.

Devdas, though in power, does not feel any responsibility to assure the people of security of their lives and assets; he does not feel ashamed of expressing his helplessness. He is simply reluctant to take any stringent action against the rampant Naxalite violence. He has double standard policy towards the Naxalite revolt for he does not want to lose his peasants' votes in the election. Nor does he want to lose the support of money and muscle power which the landlords provide to him during elections:

JAIN: You have your own ways, I'm sure. (carefully) Inter-party conflict is not a new thing . . . (Devdas is sweating) . . . That's how you came into power. You stood for constitutional change, the other for revolutionary overthrow. Not only of me; of you too! (Devdas quiet, watching) Why are you telling the police to soft-pedal them! Are you afraid of losing your peasant votes? You're under-estimating me. . . . (laughing unlumorously) My good friend, (Devdas stockstill) Do you know what I carry in my pockets? (removes from one a purse with coins, and removes from the other a revolver) Power? From the barrel of the gun? Or from the purse of gold? (Inquilab 33)

Devdas meets Shomik, the Naxal leader, personally at his house and attempts to dissuade Shomik from his way of violence by offering him various kinds of inducements. He offers Shomik Party membership and 'a piece of land' in the distribution of surplus land, so that Shomik should cut off from the Naxal revolt. Devdas's chameleon disposition does not remain hidden when he tells Shomik: "...But the real people I'm interested in are you... the peasants" (Inquilab 35). He urges Shomik to desist from violence, as he (Devdas) cannot afford to condone violence outwardly. To Ahmed, the young Naxal leader, Devdas is in no way different
from a terrorist in Indian politics, for whom it is “easier to compromise when rewards are so close at hand.” Devdas proclaims himself to be a ‘champion socialist’ when he says: “The ... the socialist revolution will come, but it must be done constitutionally” (Inquilab 38) but this champion of socialism is exposed by Ahmad when he says:

AHMED : In order to get votes you are following the same old dirty path, having to pander to people like the landlord, who in the last analysis still controls the Government (Inquilab 38).

The Big Wheel Politician from the Centre visits the State to review the situation arising out of Naxalite violence and holds the talks with Devdas to exhort him to restore law and order, only to avoid the imposition of ‘President Rule’ in the State. Both the Big Wheel politician and Devdas are birds of the same feather; they are concerned only with their vested political interests; they think of their own political gain or loss even while talking about the violence. It appears as if they were made for each other, taking care of each other—one in the Center and other in the State—even at the cost of peace and general welfare of society. In the meeting, they resolve, to “play the game of checks and balances” (Inquilab 64). It seems that law and order is their only concern, but honestly speaking they do not bother to delve into the root causes of the burning violence and unrest in the society. The Inspector musters courage and tells them that: “Poverty. Unemployment. Injustice. Refugees. Corruption. Filth (opening his eyes to see them both) ... Politics...” (Inquilab 64) are the main causes of the unrest in the state. They ignore it all ‘giving a nasty stare’ at the Inspector. They show no promptness to save the life of Jain, even after being informed by Jain’s daughter that his life is in danger.

Notwithstanding the whole petty politics, the ‘President Rule’ is imposed. Devdas is stripped of power, only to realize the truth in the words of Inspector. Devdas in his meeting with Big Wheel Politician is once again obsessed with his new plans to win the election after termination of the ‘President’s Rule’—whether to remain with his parent party or to shift to the opposition, all to gratify his lust for power. Though, keeping in view the ‘socio-economic justice,’ there are laws about the land
ceiling on landholdings and distribution of surplus land to the landless, the constitutionally enshrined principle of the ‘socio-economic justice’ is still non-existent in the society, owing to the apathy of the politicians. All this escalates the violent conflict between the rich landlords and the poor peasants. Our politicians are not a bit diffident to capitalise on any social or national issues, howsoever disastrous it may be, for the sake of power and gain. Devdas along with Big Wheel Politician embodies the same corrupt, immoral political spirit in toto. Currimbhoy makes use of master stroke of satiric irony when he describes how the politicians remove their Gandhi caps before sipping Scotch: “(removing his Gandhi cap) Oh hell, I haven’t. What are we arguing about anyway? We’re both trying to make the best of a bad situation. (unlocking his cabinet) What we need, friend, is a drink of the good old Scotch whisky” (Inquilab 72).

No politician of any party or ideology is committed to the preservation and enforcement of principles enshrined in the constitution for the establishment of a truly democratic and socialistic pattern of society. It may be inferred from the play that the post-Independence Indian democracy and its politics is an ‘area of darkness’, with no rays of hope for political and socio-economic justice for the poor and the underprivileged. This vote bank politics is fraught with the filth of corruption, immorality, infidelity and everything that is bound to go against the individual, social and national interests. Many social evils like poverty, unemployment, violence, vandalism etc. are considered by the godless politicians as an assured way to the seat of power. This is a serious threat to any democracy. Constitutional and democratic culture and values have come to be openly dishonoured and outraged by the politicians without any hesitation.

As a result, one is compelled to contend with an atmosphere of frustration, disillusionment and indignation against the existing political scenario. In this socio-realistic play Indian democracy, the largest democracy of the world, stands exposed to be the weakest, ailing democracy of the world which strongly underlines the need of the ‘redeemer’ to cleanse the filth and oust black sheep from the prevalent Indian politics.
Asif Currimbhoy is an outstanding playwright who has successfully portrayed the different aspects of a situation through different characters in order to give it a real touch. As a social realist, he has a capacity to give the factual description of every event in a very precise and authentic way. He has also a capacity for observation, attention to minute details and the ability to convey all shades of human emotions and feelings. Currimbhoy views the Naxalite movement not through male characters only but also with female characters. In this play, there are four main women characters, Prof. Dutta’s wife, Suprea, Sarala and Old Mother. Prof. Dutta’s wife is very religious in nature. Throughout the play, we find her busy in dressing the image of Durga. She is not much conscious about Naxalite movement but whenever she speaks consciously or unconsciously, every word spoken by her evokes a sense of revolution. In Act-I Scene-I, she is not conscious of what she just said:

I still smell the fresh wet earth, longing for planting of new seed... (almost sharply) for it’s all barren! The new harvest, the new green. The food for survival, turning of the new generation. It needs to be planted with care. For the earth is fresh and fertile. Only the seed must be strong ... like the growth of new revolt! *(Inquilab 23)*

Sarala, Shomik’s wife, is an ignorant woman who does not know much about outside world. When she comes to know about her husband being a Naxalite, she advises him to protect his house and wants him to bring safety for himself and his children. She finds fault with Shomik’s idea of leading the whole nation into revolution. She tells him that whatever he is doing, it is neither for society nor for family but it’s all for acquiring power and position. She is very much concerned about the safety of her husband and her family. She is well known to the fact that desire for fame, power and pelf knows no limits. She tells her husband:

*SARALA :* You seem to have forgotten your dream. When it all started, all you wanted was a small piece of your own land. That made me happy.
Now you want to lead the whole nation into revolution. That makes me unhappy (Inquilab 73).

Suprea, the daughter of the slaughtered landlord and beloved of Amar, is kind-hearted and intelligent. She is also the victim of Naxal movement because the world which she lives in, is being destroyed by Naxalites. She wants Amar to protect his love instead of involving himself in revolutionary activities. She calls the movement 'inhumane' because many innocent people were killed and hatred was spread in the name of revolution which engulfed all like an epidemic.

The play is essentially based on social realism which is the acute awareness of the social forces that surrounded the individual. Their power is to influence the lives of men and women and the overall interaction of individual and society. Social realism as a theatrical stylization is attractive to the playwright because it has given his dramatic art verisimilitude, has infused his work with the breath of life and has also allowed the maximum opportunity for comment.

In this play, Currimbhoy highlights the impact of Naxalite movement on men and women from all social strata and walks of life. He portrays the whole phenomena very realistically such as political absurdities and complexities, faulty administration, insufficiency of educational policies, rotten system of law and order, and a burning desire of youth for bringing a change in the present social system which is still afflicted with disease, hunger and poverty. The ever-increasing gap between the landlords and the landless, the rich and the poor is the root cause of violent movements like Naxalism which bring in their wake avalanches of death and destruction. Currimbhoy strongly believes in changes in Indian society through constitutional and gradual methods. But the same has not happened because of the rulers of the day who have only bothered about gaining power through empty slogans like 'Garibi Hatao'.

The artistic treatment of this complex issue implies that the dramatist looks at all the sides of the problem in a critical manner. If he finds fault with the rulers of the day for poverty, unemployment, hunger and diseases afflicting the lives of common people, he equally holds Naxalites guilty of unleashing the reign of terror which
knows no distinction between the poor and the rich, the labour and the capitalist, and the landholder and the landless. Prof. Datta, a Professor of Constitutional Law, advocates the rule of law, right to property and life as enshrined in Constitution of India and he is, thus, the propounder of ideology of peace and non-violence advocated by Gandhi and Ashutosh Mukherjee. But there are few takers of this kind of ideology because they are taken in by the ideology of Naxalism which draws its appeal and strength by resorting to fear, violence and terror. It is quite ironical that Amar, Prof. Dutta’s son, is drawn towards the ideology of violence and becomes a tool in the hands of so-called guerrilla activists of Naxalite movement but the turn of events makes Amar realise that the Naxalite’s dream of creating proletarian internationalism, classless and egalitarian society through means of violence is merely moonshine. But this realisation dawns on him too late since he has already lost his father and would have been father-in-law at the hands of senseless justice of so-called Naxalite’s justice councils. Thus, Currimbhoy has presented an artistic rendition of an ideology which aims to replace the existing order based on constitutional law with an illusory system of a classless society.

Currimbhoy hailing from an educated family believed that society can not progress without having peaceful atmosphere. That is why his works are deeply impacted by Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, peaceful and passive resistance. This fact has aptly been pointed by Faubion Bowers to whom Currimbhoy himself wrote a letter indicating his socio-political consciousness: “The war is a tragedy. Don’t understand why others don’t see it the same way. The blood flows – the hysteria grips all opponents” (“The World of Asif Currimbhoy” 7).

Currimbhoy’s forte lies in imparting universal appeal and significance to a topical event, whether it be the Naxalite problem or liberation of Bangladesh or the predicament of the refugees. “‘The Refugee’ of Currimbhoy’s play is Yassin—he is also Sen Gupta — he is any refugee, he is all refugees. Which means that Currimbhoy has been able to touch his situations, characters and actions with the balm of universality” (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 11-12).

The play opens in the house of Sen Gupta who belongs to the upper-middle class of India. Sen Gupta escorts, a somewhat diffident, emaciated young man in his
twenties to the house. This young man is no other than Yassin, an intellectual refugee, round which the whole of the play revolves. It is by bringing together Yassin and Sen Gupta that Asif Currimbhoy tries to project how the social and religious ties get strained as a result of the refugee problem. Sen Gupta himself came to India as a refugee in 1947 who has risen to high position because of his hard work and diligence. Since Sen Gupta has suffered the agonies of being a refugee he has great sympathy for Yassin not only because he is his beloved's son but also because he is a refugee. Sen Gupta knows it fully well that to be a refugee is to be the worst thing in an individual's life. A refugee is without home, family, nationality or even any kind of identity. It is not surprising that Yassin is welcomed with open arms by Sen Gupta and his wife. All the members of the family are very anxious about the safety and welfare of Yassin. "All of us... anxious. Concerned... for your safety.... Remember... this is home, Yassin... and we are your family" (Currimbhoy, The Refugee 9). The play brings to fore how the initial sympathy for the refugee soon starts waning when millions of refugees start coming to India.

PROFESSOR MOSIN: (Pale) The refugees are coming. The floodgates have been opened. Thousands and thousands... look out of the window...(all look out instinctively and one imagines in the distance the presence of growing hungry masses)... which will grow millions upon millions, hungry, lost... in a growing unending stream. (softly) Where are we going to keep them, my friend...? (The Refugee 17)

Ramul, the self appointed leader of the refugees who lives in a sewer pipe is a surrealist character but he is a hardcore realist who fully realizes how the growing number of refugees will affect the initial welcome by the Indians:

Food, clothing, shelter—our urgent need. Take all the help we get now. As our numbers grow, the warmth and welcome will cease. The hearth and home will grow cold. And they will want the refugees to move on and on, out of sight, out of mind. But where can millions go... (laughing queerly)... I ask you... where can millions go? (The Refugee 19)
Ramul's prophesy comes true when Sen Gupta gets alarmed at the encroachment of his fields of coconut palms and open fields and pond:

SEN GUPTA: No. Of course I feel sorry for the refugees outside, but look at what a filthy mess they've made of things. Where's my open field and coconut palms and pond? They...they're encroaching. How long are they going to stay there? When will they turn...anti-social? And they're growing in numbers all the time. We've called an emergency meeting of the town elders. This can't go on. We'll seal the borders (The Refugee 20).

It is indeed ironic that Sen Gupta who himself offered his study room to a refugee becomes highly critical of the influx of the refugees and even starts talking of sealing the borders. When Sen Gupta's wife tells him that he was also a refugee a few years back Sen Gupta retorts by saying that they had come to stay permanently and they were Indians because there was no Pakistan at that time. The conflict between an Indian Hindu and a Pakistani Muslim ensues in the minds of people like Sen Gupta who had a few days back talked about Bengali brotherhood. The same Sen Gupta becomes critical and adopts an aggressive posture towards refugees and goes to the extent of saying that, "the refugee exodus is an undeclared war by Pakistan" (The Refugee 32). Even his ideal of secularism melts into thin air. The proximity of Hinduism gets the upper hand in him and he says that "minority Hindus being exterminated and derived out to purge Pakistan! If this pressure keeps and the hordes of Hindu refugees grow, how much longer will we in India remain secular?" (The Refugee 32) He holds a firm belief that the affairs of men and their actions are being dictated by politics. According to him, even the problems of refugees must have a political solution. He makes much fuss about the incursion of the refugees and feels that it has affected development projects. He says: "Our development projects have come to a standstill. The refugee, with his minimum rations, is better fed than the local unemployed. Something is going to explode soon!" (The Refugee 29-30) Gupta is a Hindu and so he is unhappy when thousands of Hindus are driven out of East
Pakistan. Gupta represents the social consciousness of the typical Hindus in India. T. Ravichandran rightly observes:

In spite of that, we cannot put the whole blame on Sen Gupta for his change in stance towards the rehabilitation of the refugees, because of the events, which condition his thinking, take an unpleasant turn endangering the geographical security and the social status of the older refugees and the other people” (161).

As the play progresses, the political and the social situation gets tensed up. The ties between characters as human beings are shaken, as their social-cultural identities become prominent. Sen Gupta’s relationship with Prof. Mosin gets a bit strained because of the Prof’s sympathetic attitude towards a ‘closed’, non-committed Yassin. Sen Gupta tries to provoke the professor to the extent possible. He criticizes him: “There’s a massacre taking place out there—in a Muslim country—and their Islamic brothers keep quiet here!” (The Refugee 32) As Chandrika observes: “Sen Gupta’s idealism wanes and now he looks upon the refugees as a threat to his own home and community” (The Refugee 50). The arrival of Pakistani Bengali Muslims intimidates the position of Indian Bengali Hindus. Sen Gupta represents the social consciousness of the typical Hindu in India and Prof. Mosin represents the social consciousness of typical Muslim in India. We tend to think that Yassin gets along well with Mosin since both are Muslims. But towards the end, they subtly bring out the difference between the Indian Muslim and Pakistani Muslim. Though both belong to the same religion, in reality, the presence of the Pakistani Muslim refugees in India jeopardizes the position of the Indian Muslims. Hence, the Indian Muslim in his heart of hearts may as well wish the Pakistani Muslim to go back to his home. This shows that all is not well with Mosin too. No doubt he is one of the most distinguished teachers but he is at a loss to understand what he should do for the refugees. He wants to shrug off the stigma of being a refugee and he has his own doubts about the Pakistani Muslims. In a poignant discussion with Mosin, Yassin sharply grasps this point and spells out the Indian Muslim’s inner fears:
PROFESSOR MOSIN: There is a natural...delicate balance in society. The Indian Muslim as a minority has learnt to co-exist, sometimes precariously. Along come the refugees, mostly persecuted Hindus, and throw off the balance.

YASSIN: What point are you trying to make. Professor?

PROFESSOR MOSIN: The same you made yesterday, Yassin. There is a difference between the Indian Muslim and the Pakistani Muslim.

YASSIN: (hard) You mean... there is a difference between me and you. (Professor Mosin shrugs his shoulders) You also mean the presence of the Pakistani Muslim, the refugee, jeopardizes the poison on the Indian Muslim in the India. (Professor Mosin raises his head in feeble protest) No. No, Professor. I know you mean this. Very subtle, very delicately put. (spitting out) Like a placard saying: MUSLIM REFUGEE, GO HOME (The Refugee 42).

It is not only the friendship between an Indian Hindu and an Indian Muslim that get strained as a result of the refugee problem but also Sen Gupta’s family which is torn asunder. Ashok, Sen Gupta’s son has joined Mukti Fauj to liberate Bangladesh and his daughter Mita spends all her time in refugee rehabilitation programmes. He is against Ashok’s decision to join the Mukti Fauj as he says, “The Mukti Fauj aren’t our problem, Ashok. They belong across the border” (The Refugee 23). For him, “it is for the East Bengali to fight for his own liberation...” (The Refugee 24). He advises his son:

Ashok, you don’t have to keep anything from me. Listen... listen and obey me, son. I don’t want you to volunteer. There are other able-bodied men from East Bengal who should do so (The Refugee 24).

It is much against the wishes of his father that Ashok joins the Mukti Fauj. His daughter Mita finds no time for her own family because she is totally immersed in providing food and shelter to the refugees. Sen Gupta tells his family problems to Professor Mosin:
My house is breaking apart, Mosin. My son wants to join the Mukti Fauj; my daughter is killing herself working for the refugees and my . . . my Muslim friend seems influenced by a . . . a peculiar pacifist (*The Refugee* 32).

As against Mita and Ashok, Yassin, the intellectual refugee, is least concerned about the refugee problem or the liberation of his country. He has a non-committal attitude towards the problems that surround his fellow country men. When Sen Gupta asks him “about the political situation across the border,” Yassin simply replies, “I do not know” (*The Refugee* 15). The following conversation between Sen Gupta and Yassin reveals Yassin’s approach to the situation:

SEN GUPTA: *(impatiently, trace of anger)* You don’t know? Don’t you live in Pakistan? Aren’t Universities the hub of all political activity? Or do you lock yourself up in an ivory tower!

YASSIN: What I do... or don’t do. . . is a matter of personal choice. It’s the interference of people that brings about tragedies.

SEN GUPTA: It’s the help of people that solves them!

YASSIN: What you call help someone else may call interference! (*The Refugee* 15)

As a student of Comilla University, he has twin paths of contemplation and action. He is torn between his involvement in the cause of a suffering humanity and his academic detachment and moral withdrawal from a world of simmering realities. When Sen Gupta’s wife asks him the reason behind his withdrawal, Yassin narrates the massacre of intellectuals by Pakistan army and his own traumatic experience:

YASSIN: In Comilla University we have a tradition of learning. We also have a tradition of revolt. The twin paths of contemplation and action—if you like. But politics sees all people in shades of the same colour and the military rulers considered it dangerous to give us the liberty of thought, and future leadership. Students, professors, teachers alike in all forms of studies and research became the target of their attack... *(as he speaks the white-bearded old Professor Mosin steps in and listens silently at the*
We were lined up along the football quadrangle and told to dig the earth. I must have known it was my grave I was digging but the thought left me strangely cold. I was already beyond... (his face darkens, almost emotionless while others catch their breath) (The Refugee 16-17).

It was this “shattering reality that erased all that followed, blocking pain, suffering and death.” He survived miraculously “to continue living without passing judgement, interfering or helping” (The Refugee 17). So, he remains aloof from the current disturbances. Mita, the daughter of Mr. Sen Gupta, accuses him, “You avoid the refugees. You don’t talk about them, or help them. As though they didn’t exist” (The Refugee 28). Yassin tries to justify his detachment by saying that “all pain comes from attachment, all wrongs come from self interest. That’s why we should each ... lead our own lives ...” (The Refugee 29). But when Sen Gupta pressurized him to explain whose side he is on, he says without hesitation, “I was born in Pakistan - not India like Mosin here. If I am anybody, I have to be Pakistani!” (The Refugee 33) And when Sen Gupta calls him a traitor, he outrightly refutes the charge and says that he is a traitor neither to his mother’s love nor to Bengal. Mr. Sen Gupta calls Yassin ‘an odd character’ and Mosin refers to his ‘closed nature.’ Mosin also warns him against his escapist attitude and says “Yassin must find out for himself that there is no getting away from it” (The Refugee 31).

As against Yassin, Mita, Sen Gupta’s daughter is a voluntary social worker who is now extremely busy in providing succour to the refugees. As against Yassin’s non-committal approach, Mita has a true humanitarian approach towards the refugee problem. She is always concerned with the refugee problem but Yassin is detached and aloof. Yassin and Mita represent two different ways of life. For Yassin, attachment is the root cause of all pain. But Mita finds meaning in a life of involvement: “No; no. I don’t agree with you. Life for me means action. Leave it alone, and you commit wrong” (The Refugee 29). Mita is deeply moved by the plight of refugees:

MITA: Oh Yassin, touch me! Can’t you see I’m a human being? Can’t you see I’m real? Aren’t you moved? (She touches his face tenderly) The
refugees exist the same way. They're alive, and oh, only too real. They brings [sic] tears to my eyes, their suffering touches my heart. I can't bear to leave them alone. All of life draws me... the human condition. The need and recognition. If... if all of us were to... abstain the way you do, we'd be doing harm, don't you see, the kind of harm that is deliberately done through neglect (The Refugee 29).

When Mita tells that cholera has broken out in the refugee camp, Yassin feels “guilty and oppressed” (The Refugee 34). However hard Yassin may try to forget the pitiable condition of the refugees and abstain from action, he cannot escape the feelings of guilt and compulsion. Mita raises very serious philosophical question of morality and conscience:

MITA: (continues) Refugees dying... like flies. Disease... spreading... (breathless) Trying hard... to contain it. Much sympathy... from outsiders. (Looking straight at Yassin, the tears at last streaming down her face) They say... at last... (laughing and crying hysterically)... the conscience of the world is aroused. At last, in crisis. The conscience. THE CONSCIENCE. What a word, oh my God, what a meaning. Don't tell me it escaped us all along. The morality of it all. Here we are talking about politics and refugees and even taking sides. It's not the lack of commitment that matters; it's the lack of morality that does. And we must... both aggressor and giver of shelter... search for our own conscience (The Refugee 34).

For the first time, Yassin goes to the refugee camps to find his conscience where he sees the naked dance of death, dearth and diseases. The refugees with their sunken cheeks, empty stomachs and skeletal bodies move him deeply. There he watches Ramul, the king of the refugees who governs from his sewer-pipe throne, condemning another refugee to death. He is presented as “a half—eccentric character but more responsible and realistic than Yassin” (Chandrika 55). He has appointed himself a leader of the refugees and soon he sets up field units, intelligence divisions,
etc. in his own mad way. When he is approached by some people to create trouble in the country he bursts into hysterical laughter and proclaims that they are not at all wanted. He confronts Yassin and interrogates him:

RAMUL: What have you done since you’ve come here?
RAMUL: How do we know you’re not a Pakistani spy?
YASSIN: I’m not.
RAMUL: But you might be . . . without knowing it.
YASSIN: Meaning.
RAMUL: ‘They also serve, who stand and wait.’
YASSIN: But I haven’t harmed anyone.
RAMUL: Depends on how long you do nothing.
YASSIN: What do you mean?
RAMUL: You negate life.
YASSIN: And then?
RAMUL: You become guilty through default. (then with soft unexpectedness)

It’s like someone dying of a broken heart. And not being buried (The Refugee 38).

Chandrika rightly observes that Ramul “seems to be originally intended as a foil to Yassin, but he develops an identity of his own” (The Refugee 55). Yassin is an escapist whereas Ramul is a hardcore realist who knows fully well that he must protect Hindu refugees against Pakistani infiltrators.

In this eerie atmosphere of gloom and sorrow, repression and terror Yassin looses, “distinction between reality and non-reality.” Yassin could not find his conscience and goes to his room “groping to a solution.” He is restless and once again goes alone to “outskirts of the camp, a graveyard” where “he sees a young woman with spade in her hand, and her dead mother.” The unspeakable grief of the girl stirs his conscience and he helps the girl to dig the grave of the girl’s mother: “Here, give me that spade. We’ll bury your mother . . . and pray for my salvation” (The Refugee 39). Here, we see a totally new Yassin who has found that the meaning of life lies in
helping others in their hour of grief and sorrow. The transformation of Yassin from a man of contemplation and detachment to a man of action and involvement is suggested by the setting of the moon and the “first rays of the sun” touching “the new day” (The Refugee 39). Yassin decides to fight for the liberation of his country by joining the Mukti Fauj. When Sen Gupta’s wife tries to stop him from doing so he quietly replies: “Would you rather see your son go? Your own son? As he said, someone has to do the fighting” (The Refugee 46). Towards the end, Yassin fully realises that man has little choice in life because he is a victim of circumstances. He never wanted to be a refugee but he is:

YASSIN: (turning around and smiling expressionlessly) I almost said ‘nothing’ through force of habit. But something has. The inevitable. Man really has little choice in life. He is often forced into a situation. . . where there is no way out, A [sic] decision, an action. . . gets destined, almost involuntarily (The Refugee 40).

He is grateful to Mita for showing him the path of his life. He tells Mita:

YASSIN: (turns around now with charming genuine smile, and holds her hands tenderly) Mita love, how do I put it? Of course you have nothing to do with it. . . these are the dictates of my own . . . conscience. Mita dear, of course you have something to do with it. You’re warm and lovely, full of moral purpose. . . and you gave me the choice last night (The Refugee 40).

The play, thus, presents a psychic transformation of Yassin who is first a victim of shell-shocked self, then a condemned insensitive refugee, and finally an awakened Pakistani Muslim. It is just as well a study in parallelism with the character of Sen Gupta who from a secular idealist turns a realist and finally ends up as a Hindu Indian Nationalist. Though a refugee Yassin can, at best, represent only himself as an intellectual refugee whereas Sen Gupta and Prof. Mosin have the characteristics of their general community.
Currimbhoy’s purpose in *The Refugee* is to suggest that refugees are not merely masses of people but essentially individuals and each of them is unique. Human beings are not stable beings but they get affected by the larger issues and concerns of the society and nation in which they live. Currimbhoy’s humanistic vision is best represented by Mita who sacrifices all her comforts to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees. Love, sympathy and understanding are the corner stones of his philosophy. In this connection, Ruth L. and W.J. Meserve rightly observe:

As an intelligent, well-read and scholarly person, history and philosophy interest him toward a search for truth which is frustrated by his agonizing compassion for the condition of man. Constantly at war with his strong social conscience, fully aware of the irredeemable absurdities of man, there is that part of him which remains idealistic and concerned with human and personal salvation (Foreword, *The Hungry Ones* 10-11).

Though *The Refugee* deals with the refugee problems as a result of struggle for the independent the nation of Bangladesh, it deals only tangentially with the role of the politicians, the armed resistance of Mukti Bahini and the genocide by the Pakistan army. *Sonar Bangla*, a sequel to *The Refugee* fills this gap. Both the plays open on March 25, 1971 when West-Pakistan establishment resorted to brutal suppressive force against the East-Bengalis. The genesis of the struggle for liberation of Bangladesh lies in the fact that political power remained firmly in the hands of West-Pakistanis. The situation reached a climax when in 1970 “the Awami League, the largest East Pakistani political party, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a landslide victory in the national elections” (“Bangladesh Liberation War”). However Julfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party refused to allow Rahman to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan. On 3rd March, 1971 the two leaders along with President Yahya Khan met in Dhaka to decide the fate of the country. However, the talks failed and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman calls for a nationwide strike and urged his people to turn every house into a fort of resistance. The Pakistani forces unleashed a reign of terror, loot and violence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman signed an official declaration pronouncing Bangladesh as a sovereign and independent nation. Mujib
was arrested on the night of 25-26 March, 1971. The resistance of the people was spontaneous and disorganised but with the crackdown of Pakistani army upon the population, the resistance grew. Mukti Bahini became increasingly active. With the active support of the Indian government, the liberation struggle gathered force and Pakistani reprisals went on claiming the lives of thousands of civilians. More than million refugees fled to India forcing it to take immediate and necessary action. The Indo-Pakistani war that ensued resulted in the surrender of the Pakistani Army and the emergence of Bangladesh.

*Sonar Bangla* is a fine dramatisation of all these events. Iyengar’s comments on the aptness of the title are highly appropriate:

Again, how direct, how utterly sufficient, how charged with meaning is the title *Sonar Bangla!* Not a piece of rhetoric, or poetry; not a sentimental idealisation of a piece of earth; for essentially and ultimately, *Sonar Bangla* the motherland is centred in a mother, a woman. For the diplomat, Hussain, *Sonar Bangla* is his home incarnated in the native innocence, beauty and power of Sumita. A whole continent is in upheaval. Millions become refugees, millions die or are butchered. But behind the mass killings and the mass sufferings, there is the trial, the travail, the tragedy and the final triumph of Sumita and her daughter Maya—these holding the quintessence of the deathless beauty and sublime endurance of *Sonar Bangla* (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 11).

Mr. Hussain, Prof. Aziz and a few students of Dhaka University are discussing the changing political situation of East Pakistan. They are unhappy because West Pakistani army is preparing a big under cover ‘military build up.’ Prof. Aziz, Hussain and their friends want to protest against the military power. Prof. tells them that Gandhian civil disobedience movement will be the best solution: “Sir, it is a matter of common knowledge that the East Bengal Regiment and Rifles are being broken up. Sent on false missions. Told to surrender their rifles, without explanations” (Currimbhoy, *Sonar Bangla* 10). But Hussain wants to balance off the Pak army with the underground resistance force being formed of peasants, students and some East
Pak rifle commanders. They called their liberation as Mukti Fauj and have full faith in it. The political consciousness of the dramatist becomes clear in the dialogue of Hussain:

HUSSAIN: We’re setting up a clandestine radio. The Mukti-Fauj, our new liberation force, needs every form of moral and material support. Then there are the papers, of course: the Patriot and the Ittefaq, publicly circulated, many more privately ... there is also international opinion that needs to be aroused. There’s a lot of work you could do, Professor, active work (Sonar Bangla 11).

The play also highlights the sectarian differences in the then East Pakistan. There was no love lost between the Bengalis and Biharis. This was mainly because the Biharis sided with the Pakistan army and collaborated in their brutal massacre of intellectuals, peasants, women and children. The reprisal from the Bengalis was but natural. Biharis come to meet Hussain and his friends. He requests them to provide some protection to Bihari as the police is not giving any protection to them. He also complains that the Awami League is against the Biharis as he says, “even since the Awami League won the elections every Bihari has become the target of Bengali hate” (Sonar Bangla 12). He ruefully observes that Biharis are not safe in spite of the democratic government in the country. His words sound realistic when he describes the unsafe life of the Biharis as shown below:

BIHARI: Look, Hussain. I’ve got nothing against you. You’re well protected by your diplomatic standing. But where do I stand? Is my family safe? (Turning around to the Professor) Professor, Professor, I hope you don’t get your own civil government because you’re not ready for it! Do you know how many Biharis have been killed merely because we were Pak sympathisers? And you call this a free election! (Sonar Bangla 13)

As the Biharis were Pak sympathisers, the students call them as “Bihari swine!” (Sonar Bangla 13) The Bihari has great sympathy for Mujib and his liberal
policies. He accepts him as a very moderate leader and therefore, informs them about danger to Mujib's life:

BIHARI: Whether you believe it or not, the fact is that I believe in Mujib. He is the only moderate leader we have. If he survives, he may be able to control ... the Mukti Bahini ... and other extremists in his own Awami party.

HUSSAIN: (Softly) Go on.

BIHARI: As a Bihari ... I get all sorts of information. Just as I know who you all were without being introduced to you. When I come here to see you I expose myself as much to risk as you do.

HUSSAIN: Come to the point.

BIHARI: Mujib's going to be assassinated tonight the moment he leaves his home. (It comes as a thunderbolt. Dead silence)

STUDENT: Who's going to do it? You? (The Bihari ignores him)

BIHARI: He's in the meeting with Yahya now. Then he returns home. You must warn him, Hussain, not to leave the house.

HUSSAIN: How do I know you're not lying? That he won't be killed after the meeting? Or that he won't be arrested at home? Or that this is not a trick to stop him from going underground ... where he could lead the revolution? (Sonar Bangla 13-14)

The play also highlights how the talks between Yahya and Mujib regarding transfer of power failed. Though Yahya has nothing against Mujib yet he has been threatened by Bhutto that he would boycott the meeting of the National Assembly. He clearly tells Mujib: "Frankly, two things : Bhutto's threatened to boycott the National Assembly and I can't afford to have a revolt in the West on my hands. . ." (Sonar Bangla 15). Yahya also declines to accept the "six-point autonomy plan for Bengal" because "that would mean an eventual break-up of the country" (Sonar Bangla 15). This shows his intention of not transferring the power to him. The talks between Yahya Khan and Mujib proved unsuccessful and it becomes clear that Yahya Khan
would not transfer the political power easily. Yahya Khan appoints Tikka Khan as Martial Law Administrator and dictates him to cleanse East Pakistan of every traitor.

The barbarity of the Pakistani army evidenced by the massacre of Dacca University intellectuals and general populace is reported in a Reuters report despatched by its reporter, Anderson:

switches to one of the camps of the East Pak Regiment/ East Bengal Rifles (Sonar Bangla 25-26).

Tikka Khan, the Martial Law Administrator not only uses barbaric force to quell the liberation struggle but also the shrewd tactics of a wily politician to take full advantage of sectarian differences between the Bengalis and Biharis. He was an excellent psychologist and knows how to take advantage of the Biharis for his own interest. He assures Biharis that he will provide them full support if they are on the side of West Pakistan government. He follows the policy of ‘divide and rule’ by reminding him that the Bengalis are always against the Bihari people. Tikka Khan’s words are worth quoting in this regard: “No more playing games. This is it. How safe are your family and friends from the Bengalis? You could be rulers instead of slaves. Today you live in fear of Bengali reprisals” (Sonar Bangla 21). On the basis of religion as he says, “and you’re a musalman too, not like these mixed-blood types. We’re pure. We’re Pakistanis” (Sonar Bangla 21-22).

Mujib has some hope from Yahya Khan but Hussain informs him that he has flown to West Pakistan. So, Mujib decides to fight for an independent Bangladesh “by direct action and resistance” (Sonar Bangla 28) with the help of Guerrilla War and Mukti Fauj. But he is naive enough to think that Pakistani army won’t harm him because he has 75 million people behind him. But Hussain knows the reality when he tells him that Pakistani army will “try you for treason and execute you” (Sonar Bangla 29). And this is exactly what Yahya Khan had ordered Tikka Khan to do.

Apart from the perspectives of the politicians, intellectuals, army officers, rebels and reporters, the play also offers a family perspective on the struggle of liberation of Bangladesh of which Mujib is the undisputed leader. His wife is very apprehensive about the safety of her husband. Mujib tries to assure her that his detention will not be long and that one must do everything that a leader should do for the country and the people. But Mujib’s wife is more concerned about her husband and family:

Mujib: (consolingly) No... no, my dear. It won’t be for long.
Wife: (bursting out) It will be forever. I know it. I feel it.
MUJIB: One has to take a chance... for one’s people.

WIFE: Who are the people? It’s me... and my sons there. We’re the people who should be nearest and dearest to you.

MUJIB: You are.


MUJIB: (guilty, moved, touched) Hush, hush, my dear.

WIFE: (near-hysterical) No, no, let me finish. I should near have started it, but now I must finish. From politics... to martyrdom is a big gap. I don’t want my husband to fill it (Sonar Bangla 32-33).

But at the same she gives him strength and encouragement: “Listen to me. You... are... the... man... of... destiny. Never forget it. It has my faith, and my will. Because it is you, timing or no timing, jail now or jail forever” (Sonar Bangla 33).

Like The Refugee, Sonar Bangla also presents the unspeakable and unimaginable miseries of the refugees who have been forced to leave their homes and nation by the barbaric acts of the Pakistani army which has been directed by Yahya Khan “to stamp out every trace, of what he calls Bengali culture” (Sonar Bangla 38). Major General of the Pakistani army orders his fellow officers to carry out the orders of Yahya Khan by using all forms of brutal force including genocide of the East Bengalis:

MAJOR GEN: I’ll once again say what has been said before: We’re determined to cleanse East Pakistan once and for all of the threat of secession, even if it means killing two million people and ruling the province as a colony for 30 years. (Mental flashes, reflected in army code, spelling: KILL AND BURN MISSION. . . KILL AND BURN MISSION FINAL SOLUTION. . . CLEANING PROCESS . . . SORTING OUT MISCREANTS AND ININFILTRATORS. . . ) Let’s face
it—the Bengalis have proved themselves unreliable and must be ruled by West Pakistanis. The Bengalis will have to be re-educated along proper Islamic lines. That is all. (Flashes: ISLAMISATION OF THE MAZSES. . . ISLAMISATION OF THE MAZSES) . . . When the Hindus have been eliminated by death and fight, their property will be used as a golden carrot to win over the under-privileged Muslim middleclass. . . (KILL AND BURN MISSION . . . PUNITIVE ACTION . . . REHABILITAITON EFFORT) (Break-up for drinks. Informality and mess-talk) (Sonar Bangla 44-45).

The barbarity of the Pakistani army in the cleansing operation is depicted by Currimbhoy in very moving terms through the burning of Kustia, a Hindu dominated village. Sumita and her daughter find the village in “smoke and ruins, ghost-like, empty except for a few vultures and dogs picking on the remains of dead bodies” (Sonar Bangla 42). All the villagers were slaughtered by the Pakistani army because the Hindu village had given refuge to a Mukti Bahini volunteer:

...the village must be punished ...(duplicate)... so they tied up the men, women and children, packed them in crowded army trucks, and sent them away... never to return... (sound of truck, supplication [sic], departure)... I alone remained... (no repeat, back to present) and now I just can’t remember any more... (Sonar Bangla 44).

The only survivors were a half blind old woman and a helpless child. Hussain, the Bangladeshi diplomat rightly sums up the mass-scale murder of the East Bengalis. He tells Ray:

HUSSAIN : It will never end, Ray. It started as a minority persecution... of intellectuals, Hindus, political leaders. It’s developing into mass slaughter now, which will mean more and more of refugees. There is only one way of stopping it... only one way (Sonar Bangla 55).
As against the inhuman cruelty of the Pakistani army, there are examples of humanitarian approach towards the destitute exemplified by Sumita and her daughter who take the only surviving and helpless old woman and the child. Trudging their way to find shelter in the refugee camps, they narrate to each other the most despicable and inhuman acts of barbarity and bestiality of the Pakistani army:

‘They raped my daughter ... 
... my wife ...
... they have special curved knives to cut off breasts ...
... forced the son to rape the mother before the family ...
... bit off her nipple ....
... over and over and over again, one by one, like brutes ...’

‘They shot my husband ...
... carried him off crowded like sheep marked with the fatal red dye in a truck ...
... tortured him with bamboo splinters until ... merciful death ...
... made him reveal ... the hideout ... of his brothers ...
... made him beg for mercy, over and over again ...

‘They caught my son ...
... barely sixteen ...
... with a knife ...
... what they did to him I will not say ...
... except that they did it over and over again ...

‘She was a beautiful, proud mother ...
... the picture of Bengal lush with gold and green ...
... now she lies in her grave ...
... desecrated by their brute force and tyranny ...
... oh mother of ours, will you ever rise again ...?’ (Sonar Bangla 51-52)

Asif Currimbhoy philosophically quotes the following lines of Tagore’s poem to point out the tenacity of man to survive in the face of all odds:
Man's body in [sic] so small.
His strength for suffering
so immense (Sonar Bangla 39).

Though the government of India and the other volunteer organisations were providing all necessary help in the rehabilitations of the refugees but with the arrival of millions and millions of refugees there was always the shortage of rescue material, food, milk and medicines. To add to the miseries of the refugees the dreaded diseases of cholera started taking its toll.

Apart from the depiction of savagery of the Pakistani army and the plight of the refugees, Asif Currimbhoy also depicts the political and other related developments leading to the liberation of Bangladesh. Hussain wants India to declare war against Pakistan but Ray stubbornly cancels the suggestion. He says:

RAY: (angry again) I don't have to do a thing, Hussain! I'm here in my national interest, not yours. You want temporary refuge, we'll give it. We're Bengali brothers after all. You want war, we won't give it. It will mean economic ruination for my country, and permanent enmity with a neighbour we have to live with (Sonar Bangla 55-56).

Hussain then urges Ray to train and armed “a ragged Mukti Fauj incipient force, disorganised and ill-trained, but with a thirst for revenge and raw courage” (Sonar Bangla 46). No wonder then that this ill-equipped and disorganised army was being routed everywhere by the Pakistani army. The colonel of Mukti Fauj minces no words to describe this unhappy situation: “Bad. Bad news, Hussain. We're being routed all over the place in spite of the propaganda we're putting up through the Mukti Fauj radio and the A.I.R.” (Sonar Bangla 61). Hussain clearly understands that without the active support of the Indian government in arming and training the Mukti Fauj, the liberation of Bangladesh will always remain a non-reality. He tells Ray:

Build up, support, militarise the liberation force in East Bengal. That's the root of it all. Arm them, recruit volunteers, cross borders, build logistical military
support of the Mukti Fauj. That's the only way, the only way: a total liberation, an independent Bangla Desh (Sonar Bangla 55).

Ray also understands that there is no other way out but to help the Mukti Fauj. He then agrees that Indian army will hold “clandestine training camps” (Sonar Bangla 56) and supply weapons to the ill-equipped Mukti Fauj. With the full support of the Indian army the ragged guerillas of the Mukti Fauj take the might of the Pakistani army with renewed strength and vigour. The guerilla camps are now being supplied “modern arms and equipments” (Sonar Bangla 71). The following dialogue between Ali and Arun clearly brings out the new face of the Mukti Fauj:

ALI: No other way. And our numbers have increased. (Holding on to his weapons confidently) And our weapons have increased.

ARUN: We’ve come a long way . . . from crowbars . . . months of training . . .

I can even see in the dark now (Sonar Bangla 71).

But still the victory is not in sight. The Colonel of the Mukti Fauj asks for “logistical backing” (Sonar Bangla 75) of the Indian army and even “border skirmishes” (Sonar Bangla 76) with the Pakistani army. Though Ray is against this suggestion but his hands are tight because the refugee problem is gaining monstrous proportions:

RAY: (his shoulders slumping) It would be ruinous. (Neither of the other two men say anything; they let Ray’s worry run itself through. Ray continuing, almost talking to himself) I . . . I get nightmares. Of ten million people crying for food in a hungry land. Everything on the brink of a holocaust. 80% Hindu refugees on the verge of setting off a communal explosion. Towns in Bengal with more refugees than local residents, breeding resentment and hate. Revolutionary politicians exploiting the situation to bring about chaos. The national budget going down the drain . . . (shaking his head, Hussain tapping him on the shoulder) (Sonar Bangla 76).
The only option left with India is to go in for open support to the Mukti Fauj for the liberation of Bangladesh so that the Pakistani army is forced to declare war on India. The strategy works and Pakistan declares a full-scale war against India. In the words of Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi the united will of the people of India will “decisively and finally” repel the “wanton and unprovoked aggression of Pakistan” (Sonar Bangla 87).

Asif Currimbhoy fully reveals his political consciousness of international events and diplomacy. He clearly shows the general apathy of the world at large towards the gigantic problem of the refugees being faced by Indian. The play also dramatises how America acted as “world’s policeman” (Sonar Bangla 90) by trying to get a resolution suggesting withdrawal of Indian army and declaration of cease-fire to help Pakistan.

The Soviet delegate in the U.N. Security Council vetoes the resolution whereas the British and French delegates remain neutral. Asif Currimbhoy also reveals how economic interests determine the course of international diplomacy when Hussain, a delegate from the Bangladesh mission, tells the British delegate that “Right, Sir John. But not for long. And as an independent nation we pledge to look after all British trading interests there...” (Sonar Bangla 92). America supplies arms to Pakistan through Middle East countries and despatches 7th fleet to the Bay of Bengal. The Chinese also contemplated and “imminent invasion” (Sonar Bangla 94) on India. All these designs against India are foiled by the Russians flexing the muscles against America and China. This kind of international stalemate helped India to decimate Pakistani army in less than two weeks and forcing the General A.A.K. Niazi, Commander of the Pakistani forces in Bangladesh. Less than an hour later, “Indian troops rode triumphantly into Dacca as Bengali went delirious with joy” (Sonar Bangla 99). Mujib, who had been incarcerated for nine long months, was finally set free and Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation on the world map.

Though, Asif Currimbhoy poignantly delineates the inhuman and unspeakable miseries heaped on the people of Bangladesh by the Pakistani army, he is equally vehement in denouncing the violent acts of the frenzied Bangladeshis. The play forcefully brings out the fact that violence generates violence:
The quivering, pleading men are tied, much in the same way of initial massacre by Pak army then thrown to the ground, lit cigarettes’ torture-marks on their face, and then slow piercing with bayonets, in all areas outside of the heart, with slow death creeping and they screaming, the crowd cheering while Yusuf and Arun fanatically and systematically keep driving the bayonets. (Sonar Bangla 89).

Even Children are not spared and Sumita voices the playwrights’ concerns:

SUMITA: Is this what victory means? They . . . they’ve become beasts. All. Just like that man who . . . who . . . Mulla, oh, Mulla, won’t we ever learn to . . . (Sonar Bangla 89).

Asif Currimbhoy feels that there is no permanent solution to the problems of war and violence. His humanitarian approach towards the oppressed and suffering humanity is made clear when he wrote to Faubion Bowers when the Bangladesh war was at its height: “The war is a tragedy. Don’t understand why others don’t see it the same way. The blood flows—the hysteria grips all opponents” (“The World of Asif Currimbhoy” 7). His message of love and compassion is also made clear through Mulla:

MULLA: (screaming) JEHAD! THERE IS NO THING LIKE JEHAD! There should be no wars . . . no reprisals. To war . . . is unholy! God is not on one or both sides of those who fight. God is on neither. And you shame Him now (Sonar Bangla 90).

The tragedy is that the sane voices of people like Mulla are silenced by the violent forces roaming in every corner of the world. Mulla’s killing by an unknown assassin reminds the readers of the silencing of Gandhi’s message of love, understanding and sympathy by those who believe in violence.

Though, the Bengal Trilogy depicts the essentially topical events of Bengal during the sixties and seventies revealing his strong socio-political consciousness, Asif Currimbhoy does succeed appreciably in imparting universality to the plays. All
the plays basically deal with the eternal struggle of man against all kinds of oppressions and miseries resulting in the ultimate triumph of humanity over bestiality. The message of universal love and brotherhood is artistically conveyed by the dramatist.
Agrawal, K.A. “Socio-Political Consciousness in the Plays of Asif Currimbhoy.” 


