CHAPTER-IV

MODES OF PROJECTION

Asif Currimbhoy’s plays are primarily meant for the stage and he brilliantly succeeds in scripting them for the theatre. He devises fascinating situations, creates appropriate atmosphere, sustains logical and coherent action, shapes realistic and convincing characters and writes even forceful dialogues. Above all, the playwright makes bold and successful experiments with a variety of dramatic techniques. The beauty of his dramatic art lies in such a way as he gathers largely from a conspicuously Indian experience and weaves various strands into it from the mythical and folklores as well as from the present-day society. His dramatic corpus presents a faithful account of Indian life in microcosm with all its preferences and revulsions, virtues and weaknesses, beauties and black spots.

Currimbhoy adopts a documentary technique to dramatize the political events like partition, liberation of Goa, Indian freedom struggle, the Naxalite movement and creation of Bangladesh. His plays address such issues as poverty, starvation, racial and class conflict, refugees, violence, superstition, loss of human and moral values, etc. He is appreciated for his dramatic art and his plays are placed in the category of world dramas. Faubian Bowers, the eminent theatre critic, comments: “Asif’s work helped him, in no mean measure to understand the spirit of India” (qtd. in Agrawal 4). He successfully achieves the communication process that enriches the effectiveness and theatrical performance. He adopts conflict as a powerful mechanism to achieve the intended effect on the stage. The technique of evaluating complex personalities and dramatic situations from the interplay of deep-rooted and diverse cultural ethos is the distinction of Currimbhoy.

Importantly, Currimbhoy makes use of strong creative imagination but there is also a strong element of melodrama in the plays like The Doldrummers, The Hungry Ones and Darjeeling Tea?. He also makes use of symbols to impart richness to his expression and to have an effective communication with the audience. He employs
artificial technique, theatrical trickery and stage gimmicks. By fusing the elements of
dance, song and pantomime, he succeeds in creating powerful images at once visual
and auditory which make his plays significantly theatrical. He deftly employs such
dramatic techniques as parallels, contrasts, irony, flashback, cut-outs, pantomime,
satire, song, language, chorus, juxtaposition, symbolism, imagery, soliloquy and
monologue which illustrate not only his themes but also present his distinctive skill as
dramatist.

The play *Inquilab* registers a strong protest against the unjust social order in
the contemporary India. Undoubtedly, India got freedom from the alien yoke in 1947,
however, its larger section is still languishing in poverty; still the position of the poor
and peasants is no better than that of slaves. Hunger, poverty and starvation are the
inescapable features of their life. Despite political freedom, socio-economic freedom
is a far cry. In this play, the youth along the lines of Maoism and Naxalism are
struggling to bring about social changes, but the elders going along the Gandhian lines
put emphasis on peaceful and parliamentary process to ameliorate the condition of the
poor and dispossessed.

The stage setting presents three different worlds through three different
scenes. The first set presents the view of a college building with communist slogans
scrawled on the walls and a red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle. The
second set pictures a modest home conservatively decorated with a library containing
leather-bound books on law lining the shelves and walls. The third set projects a
beautiful green Bengali countryside, portion of fertile plot of a cultivated land, and it
suggests the ostentatious Zamindar’s house beyond.

These contrasting scenes present the realistic picture of the Indian society
where revolt is juxtaposed against law and feudalism. The very setting constitutes the
warp and woof of the conflict in the play. The “red picture of Mao with hammer and
sickle” (Currimbhoy, *Inquilab* 9) is symbolic of the violent means aimed at bringing
about social changes, whereas, “a modest home conservatively decorated with a
library containing leather-bound books on law lining the shelves and walls” (*Inquilab*
9) suggests parliamentary and legal process to bring about social changes. The first two scenes are contrasted with the third one which is symbolic of social disparities.

The play presents a faithful account of violence in the wake of the Naxalite revolt in West Bengal in 1970. The slogans written on the walls of the college and red picture of Mao with hammer and a sickle signify revolutionary zeal among college students. The images of strikes, processions and violence are something disquieting for the Gandhian people like Professor Datta. The playwright uses the technique of juxtaposition to illustrate the topical social problems. Gandhian philosophy of non-violence and peaceful mass protest is juxtaposed with violent and destructive ideas of Mao. Amar, the son of Professor Datta, tries to draw the attention of his father towards the social problems like hunger, starvation, death, inflation and squalor in the figurative language: “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” (*Inquilab* 14). Ahmed pleads for the inevitability of an armed struggle of masses and peasants to bring about radical social changes.

In the play, parliamentary procedure is juxtaposed with the Naxalite revolt; Gandhism with Maoism; non-violence with violence; and the father with the sons. Through the technique of contrast, parallelism and juxtaposition, the playwright presents a vivid and comprehensive picture of social status as well as different approaches to solve the problems. The golden mean between the two groups is provided by Amar who realizes in the end that Maoism is not an effective ploy for social change. He pins his faith in the parliamentary democracy to have effective and lasting changes.

The Hooghly river stands for death and destruction. The river is supposed to provide the peasants relief and prosperity but it becomes the source of their misery, hunger and death. The Hooghly river symbolizes the debased state of life, the withered stream of civilization and the low level of existence. The burning city of Calcutta represents the staleness, paleness, violence and wretchedness of any modern city of the world. The landlord never works but leads a luxurious life by sucking
blood of the peasants like leaches. So they kill Mr. Jain and his severed head is found "hung on two poles, eyes dilated into death, hair dripping with blood" (Inquilab 66). The image of death is gruesome and disgusting.

The Refugee presents a vivid and graphic account of the aftermath of the political freedom of Bangladesh in 1971. The war created the problem of refugees among both Hindus and Muslims. The power-hungry politicians, instead of maintaining communal harmony and peace, fuelled the communal fire and frenzy. The academicians were averse to the problem arising out of political inaction. The situation that emerged on account of the political inaction and inertia is very shocking and deplorable. The play dramatizes the predicament of humanity caught in the whirlwind of political restlessness and psychological alienation. The moving plight of the refugees is presented by Mita: "The refugees exist the same way. They're alive, and oh, only too real. They bring tears to my eyes, their suffering touch my heart. I can't bear to leave them alone" (Currimbhoy, The Refugee 29). The statement provides an insight into the theme of the play and the playwright's dexterity to handle it.

Sen Gupta moves from place to place and man to man to become mayor of the town and to get his son appointed in same office or other, but he pays almost no heed to the rehabilitation of the refugees. He cherishes the word "politics" (The Refugee 14). His utterances—"too busy making a living" (The Refugee 14) and "man cannot live by bread alone" (The Refugee 15) reflect the hypocrisy and double standards of the present-day politicians. His concern for the people across the border provokes laughter in us. He claims to be "a responsible citizen" (The Refugee 15). There is an element of irony in it. Yassin's "I don't know" (The Refugee 15) makes us doubt whether he is really passive at all or he is concerned with the problem of the refugees.

The playwright uses language as an effective tool to add to the dramatic significance of the play. When cholera breaks out in the city, Mita cries aloud:

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).

The playwright employs picturesque technique to present the pathetic condition of refugees:

The refugee scene grows with early dawn or evening shadows like an ominous prehistoric beast’s death pangs. Groans and wails, skeltoned [sic] men and sunken eyed babies sucking on the shrivelled breasts. Maimed human beings reduced to inhuman existence, robbed of dignity and essential life (*The Refugee* 18).

The frightening picture of the refugees is presented through the forceful dialogue: “Pathetic helpless creatures, concerned only with food and safety and shelter, stories of repression and terror, wanting only time to get back their breath from the horrible tragedy” (*The Refugee* 35-36). We find the images of death and decay scattered throughout the play: “a rough graveyard...a young woman with a spade in her hand, and her dead mother” (*The Refugee* 39).

The play *Sonar Bangla* dramatizes the problem of refugees, hunger, starvation, death and destruction in the wake of political turmoil in 1971 in the then East Pakistan. Mr. Hussain, Professor Aziz and the Colonel have the same objectives and aspirations. They want to rescue East Pakistan from the clutches of the West Pak army. They have a deep concern for the refugees and they align themselves with the ‘Mukti Bahini’ and its Guerilla operations. The problems of the people of West Bengal are similar to that of the people of East Pakistan.

The urge of the students of East Pakistan to create a revolutionary history through shouting, screaming, throwing bombs, knives, sticks and stones is juxtaposed with the rattle of machine guns and with the volley of bullets from the West Pak soldiers. The concern of the refugees is contrasted with the apathy of the Martial Law administrators and with their atrocities. We notice the contrast between Mujib and Yahya—the former is more worried about Sonar Bangla and its liberation; whereas
the latter does not care for the plea of Mujib. These contrasts add to the thematic complication of the play.

The playwright desists from creating full-grown characters while keeping in view the very nature of the play. Excepting Hussain and Mujib, almost all other characters are dull and drab. They do not grow and develop with the action of the play. Hussain, being a refugee, shares the misery and suffering of other refugees. He pins faith in Mujib and hopes that Sonar Bangla is going to emerge soon. He takes an oath to avenge himself on all the enemies of Sonar Bangla: “Oh, God, oh God. I swear equally...that by fire and sword... I shall avenge...all who desecrated the tomb...and took from me...my Sonar Bangla” (Currimbhoy, Sonar Bangla 37). The most appealing and captivating characteristic of Mujib is his ardent spirit of patriotism. After his release from the solitary confinement, he expresses his heart-felt concern: “I never wept when they put me on trial. But I wept when I arrived back here and saw my wonderful Sonar Bangla” (Sonar Bangla 105).

The play built on conflict within and without portrays a complete and comprehensive picture of the situation. Apart from the principal conflict between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, the conflict between the Hindus and Muslims in East Pakistan resulting in the conflict between Bengali Muslims and the Bengali Guerillas. The conflict reaches its pinnacle when the refugee problem eventually leads to the war between West Pakistan and India. Besides the external conflict, there is also conflict within. Conflict in Hussain’s mind comes to the surface when he expresses his concern about “the pain and scars that’re going to tear my Bangla once again...” (Sonar Bangla 87). Conflict in the mind of Mujib becomes perceptible when he comes to Bangladesh after his release from the confinement and weeps over the pathetic condition of his wonderful Sonar Bangla.

Currimbhoy’s dialogue analogous to Harold Pinter’s presents gestures as well as word-pictures, so it can be seen as well as heard. The playwright’s purpose behind creation of the dialogue seems to use a concrete language, independent of speech. He looks “for a mirror to hold up to human nature that can reflect the unspoken and the
unspeakable with more clarity of form and continuance of pressure than dialogue of statement” (qtd. in Reddy 51).

In the very opening scene, our eyes confront an image of a man clad in modest Muslim clothes laying a *chaddar*, a sheet of tied *mogra* flowers, over the four corners of the engraved tomb. The man retreats slightly, the prayer on his lips changing to a distant look in his eyes as he sees the tomb. It is evident that the gestures are as eloquent as words. Also, it sets the mood of the play. Hussain’s visit to Sumita’s house also furnishes evidence of the distinctive dialogue:

Hussain in Sumita’s house. Calling out...house empty...no reply. Notices destruction of image and general disarray around the house. Stumbles over a roughly made grave....Around is all desolation and loneliness and destruction, charred remains which stand out in sheer contrast to the first scene of peace and plenty only 34 hours earlier. He goes back to the tomb, and prays, the tears at last gushing from his eyes (*Sonar Bangla* 37).

Hussain’s stumbling over a grave, going back to the tomb and praying, the gushing out of tears from his eyes are all transformed into a living action.

*The Doldrummers* dramatizes the hedonistic life of the educated, but jobless urban youth in the present-day Indian society through the characters of Tony, Joe, Liza and Rita. Though they live in a poor dwelling on the fashionable Juhu Beach, they pose to be queens and kings. The Beach stands for hedonistic life. The picturesque description of the beach gives a peep into totality of their life:

The flooring has fine sand, and distantly one can hear the waves, sometimes lulling and at other times irritating in its intensity and monotony. The sea-breeze is similarly erratic and either blows hard or is terribly still in consonance with the tides. At night the kerosene lamps cast shadows on the curtains and one sees the pantomime of life, mutely played. Somewhere, the rasping sound of an old (hand) record player churns out a tune (Currimbhoy, *The Doldrummers* 9-10).
The playwright uses the technique of song to reveal how the modern Indian youth have lost faith in the long-established and celebrated cult of non-violence that has provided us freedom from the alien yoke. Their aversion to the established values and traditions such as satyagraha, dharma and non-cooperation is presented through the song:

Satyagraha, Satyagraha,
Hurrah for Satyagraha
This passive resistance
Tickles our existence

One day we lay on railroad tracks
Protesting that it hurt our backs
When old Bhawani Junction expressed along
It flattened us a good furlong

One day we met a Dharma Bum
He came from America and called us Chum
Swore every night he slept with Nirvana
Smoked a weed he called...Mirajuana ... (The Doldrummers 11).

They believe in the cult of hedonism whereas Satyagraha calls for self-discipline, commitment, patience and hard work. They use sex and wine to escape the harsh realities of life. The playwright ridicules the modern youth and their purposelessness and the lack of courage and vigour when Joe says:

I’m the little man with the large pair of scissors. I’m kill-Joy and kill-truth put together, and when I can’t cut any more, I cut my own nose to spite my face. I’m the public that has no opinion, because I can’t bring myself to care a damn. I’m...spineless, because it’s easier to crawl around that way. Damn you! I’d like to spit in your eye.... Only I don’t salivate enough. But I’ve got a pair of
scissors...and with this little axe, I can lop off all the big shady trees in my Papa's garden (The Doldrummers 14-15).

The (negative) impact of western civilization on the lifestyle of modern youth is illustrated through the use of cut-outs throughout the play. The boys are clad in western clothes—jeans and tea-shirts, and the girls are in skirts, tops and high-heeled sandals. In the cut-outs the way they confront each other shows only physical proximity, nothing else. Their anxiety-ridden sullen faces reflect turbulent, tired and tense state of their minds. Though, they are in the posture of love-making in a few cut-outs, they look dejected, not in a comfortable and amicable position. For them, love is not a matter of serious concern and commitment, respect and responsibility and trust and tolerance. This typical attitude of youth is presented through the dialogue of Joe:

JOE: (angrily) Love! Respect! Love! Respect! What does it mean? I get sick hearing people talk about it all the time. And what does love have to do with respect anyway. They're the very opposite. You think of the word love like something from a fairy book, patented and germ-free. Like it had to have respectability. Well, it's not. It's love that the whore dispenses around the street corner, and it's the most respectable that pay its price (The Doldrummers 41).

The play dramatizes the disillusionment and mechanical life of modern youth who, according to Joe, are no different from 'hyenas' of the Zoo. He tells Rita:

JOE: Christ, you give me a pain in the neck, Rita. What are you trying to do? Reform us? Put us in jail? No, better still, put us in the Zoo? So you can laugh with the rest of the hyenas. Those ones with the red bottoms and the curly tops. I see them every day around me. They wear hats and ties and carry umbrellas and work from ten to five. I see them in tram-cars with their long snouts buried in the papers (The Doldrummers 24).

The materialistic and commercial values of the modern youth are exposed by Joe when he tells Rita that love can be bought by money in today's world.
Currimbhoy uses forceful dialogues to expose the vacuity of the lives of these wastrels as is evidenced by the following conversation between Joe and Rita:

JOE: Tell me, Rita, how much money do you have?
RITA: How does it matter?
JOE: It costs money to buy presents continuously.
RITA: I refuse to buy his love if that’s what you’re suggesting.
JOE: Stop over simplifying the situation, Rita. You know very well you wouldn’t be buying his affection. You already have it (*The Doldrummers* 37).

The playwright employs the technique of irony to exemplify the pseudo-heroism of modern youth through the character of Tony who swears to wring the ears of the fat and bald man for his supposed affair with Rita, but when he confronts the man, he cringes and does nothing. He derides modern youth for their marked aversion and indifference to the moral values. Rita turns into a professional prostitute to win the love of Tony, but finds him in low spirit. He looks up “at the sky with his hands folded behind his head. He has a far away look, as though he sees and hears nothing, but is living in a world of his own” (*The Doldrummers* 64). The gesture of Tony reveals his inner turbulence and turmoil. Instead of reciprocating to the love of Rita, he flirts with another girl, Moron Moe. The modern youth do not give importance to healthy lasting human relationships; rather they change relations like commodities or disposable goods.

The playwright also uses light humour to present the casual attitude of modern youth towards life and life-sustaining values like love, compassion, trust and tolerance:

TONY: Why... don’t you... get yourself a girl?
JOE: It’s no fun having one...
TONY: Then get yourself two.
JOE: The problem is not mathematical, Tony. Like one and one makes two. My mind does not work that way. It gets deeper and deeper, and love becomes no different from any other four-letter word (*The Doldrummers* 12-13).

The playwright uses sex as a theatrical technique “not to exploit his audience’s emotions, but to make a point” (Foreword, *The Hungry Ones* 17). The sordid aspect of their life is reflected in the words or language they use in the course of interaction with each other: “filthy swine” (*The Doldrummers* 17), “bloody swine” (*The Doldrummers* 19), “son-of-a-bitch” (*The Doldrummers* 17), “you’re in heat” (*The Doldrummers* 35), “Women with something nice between their legs” (*The Doldrummers* 40). These words and phrases reflect their animalistic existence, mental dirt and degeneration.

*Darjeeling Tea?* dramatizes the faithful account of the planters’ life with its nostalgic memories of the good old days and their fears of competition from the new rival planters. In the opening scene, the stage divided into four sets presents four different categories of social life from the top to the bottom at the tea plantation. This division presents a faithful account of the vivid and variegated life at the tea plantation. The first set depicts the life at the Planters’ club which is “typical of the clubs scattered over the vast isolated acres and acres of tea estates in North Bengal and Assam...with the portrait of the Royal King and Queen on either side and the Indian President in the centre” (Currimbhoy, *Darjeeling Tea?* 9). The second set portrays the living room of the garden manager’s bungalow. It looks like “an Englishman’s country-home, except that he was complete master here in an almost feudal way until just a few years ago” (*Darjeeling Tea?* 9). The third set presents “a small wooden shack on stilts, cute almost like a doll’s house, resembling the wooden houses hand-built by hill-tribes on the slopes of the Himalayan foot-hills. It should be made to appear that this plain little one-room house is in the manager’s garden” (*Darjeeling Tea?* 9). The fourth set presents the view of “miles and miles of tea gardens, with the dwarf-shaped tea shrubs umbrella-ed slim tall trees, all planted to
design, beautifully maintained, a magnificent sight in the evening play of sun and shadows" (Darjeeling Tea? 9).

Big Mac and Big Hugh, the expatriate garden managers, discuss how they toiled a lot and built "oceans of tea-bushes cutting the jungle" (Darjeeling Tea? 10), and how evil days have fallen on them owing to the change in values. The rise and fall of the tea empire and the feeling of nostalgia are presented through the technique of flashback:

BIG MAC: (calling out) Bearer, do burra peg, please.

BIG HUGH: (as though continuing)....Yes, not like the old days, Mac. No more fun left. Garden's not the same either. Pluckers goddamn lazy...

BIG MAC: .... Remember the time we played merry hell around here, Hugh? The only thing bigger than us was the sky, and we filled it all up....Gardens than were the size of my hand...(raising big paw)...we built them into oceans of tea-bushes, cutting the jungle...

BIG HUGH: No rules to the game then, Mac. Head Office left it all to us. The M.D.'s were only too happy warming the seats out there. Now...

BIG MAC: ... productivity fallen...

BIG HUGH: ... interference grown. . . (Darjeeling Tea? 10).

The decline of tea business is illustrated through the reverie-like drunken mood of Hugh:

BIG HUGH: . . . of course I don’t blame brown. Though if chaps like us leave, what's there left? Where was he going, did you say? Not home, no, he's too young for retirement; wouldn’t be able to stand the stuffiness of England. Got the warm blood and wanderlust of the overseas type. He’s full planter, Mac, like you and me. Off to New Guinea or Africa, I’d say, with low taxes and the high sun... (elbowing Mac slyly) coolie women...
and scotch that flows like the pure water of the Highlands, huh, Mac?

(Darjeeling Tea ? 11)

The reverie of a white Marwari presents the changing fortunes of the white planters:

MARWARI: The white Marwari. That’s what they call me. White for being relatively enlightened, Marwari for being the money-maker. Flattery...with a touch of insult. Mark my words, the days of the big Managing Agencies are over...like this club and its old...cronies?...we’ll buy over the gardens, one by one, proprietors like me who know how to cut wasteful overheads... (Darjeeling Tea ? 11-12).

The sense of loss on account of the fall of tea business is portrayed through the memories of Jennie and Sally:

JENNIE (Mac’s wife): We really should pull ourselves up, shouldn’t we? I mean...everything seems to be...fading. Couldn’t we bring some life to this club?

SALLY (Hugh’s wife): It takes a lot of energy, my dear. And when I see the children growing, I think...I’m not as young as I used to be....You were a model at one time, weren’t you, Jen?

JENNIE: ...could make it again...could make it again. Not too late. I keep saying, not too late yet.

SALLY: Oh, the mad things we did, Jen. Remember when we first came here? Slim, pretty brides of twenty, marrying the oh so-romantic outdoor planter...the long sea voyage to this far-away place.

JENNIE: (musing) Yes, we were queens in these plantations. The white memsahibs of the fearful planters who held absolute authority. (Voice hardening to reality) Twenty years later it all seems a sham, Sally.

SALLY: You...you don’t regret it, do you, Jen?
JENNIE: *(A bitter-sweet smile)* Regret? Oh, my dear, who does not regret loss of youth...even if one were really queen. And the men there, Sally, ours, the very best he-men in the world, somehow seem pathetically outdated today. And us, Sally, we sit and wait, drying up inside, getting older, unable to face this horrible loneliness any further... *(Darjeeling Tea? 13-14).*

Currimbhoy exposes the drunkenness and aping of the Brown Sahib and the lechery and lavishness of the expatriate planters. Bunty, the Brown Sahib, is presented as “a typical product of Indo-Anglian British public school, the inimitable ‘Brown Sahib’ so often seen in former colonies, culturally oriented to a class system where the privileged adopted a way of life and values that often became ‘more British than the British’ ” *(Darjeeling Tea? 14).* He simply apes the ways of the white planters because he studied aboard. The ways and manners of the white planters are ridiculed by the chorus in the club:

Where can I take a pea?
A planter’s life
No place for a wife
It’s wilderness and work
With wenches as perk.
It’s not romantic
It drives me frantic
The rattle of the snakes
Don’t they make lovely streaks? *(Darjeeling Tea? 19-20)*

The white planters incur heavy losses, lavishing money on wine and women. The rhetoric of the Chairman of the Tea Association, while addressing the planters, emphasizes the sterling virtues to restore the lost business:

We’ve got to cut our costs and compete. But at the same time, we must maintain our traditions...of honesty, good quality, and integrity in our business dealings ... *(cheers).* We must maintain our high standards of research and plan
for the future. This is the obligation, we owe to the industry and to the country (Darjeeling Tea ? 30).

The playwright uses sex as a theatrical technique to evoke response in the audience. Big Mac who gives in to sexual pleasures has to pay the price for the sin he has committed. His wife, Jennie also fails to desist herself from committing this sin. Through these characters, the playwright dramatizes how man is a sensual being and also an object of compassion.

By using the technique of pantomime, the playwright presents the innermost urges of Bunty:

Bunty is part dreamer (visionary?) part activist. First he walks bandy-legged as though getting over the effects of the long horse ride...There he imagines himself as the Lone Ranger....He whistles... He swings the empty haversack over his back and pretends to collapse under it.... Next he's aiming the gun and scoring, swishing the club and saying 'four', drinking and reeling like a 'he-man'...all imaginary but speaking the story (Darjeeling Tea ? 27-28).

The pantomime of Bunty produces certain visual effects. We come to learn that Bunty has a compelling desire to become a very consequential person even among the whites. He is fond of riding in breeches, a whip in hand “whistling and bouncing up the steps” (Darjeeling Tea ? 36) to McNeil’s house.

The pantomime of Bunty, the dance and music at the Annual Darjeeling Festival, the ‘shadow screen in Darjeeling’ suggesting a vast extent of tea-gardens are some innovative theatrical techniques employed to create singleness of effect on the audience. The devices such as the chorus, the sudden shifting scenes, the shadow cut-outs, the scenes of fabulous beauty of the undulating hills magnetize the audience. The view of the pluckers, the coolie women with baskets behind, the inscrutable face of the Nepalese Gurkhas, their simplicity and child-like charm are cited as complex theatrical events. This definitely presents a total view of the life of tea planters. The scene showcasing the Himalayan range strengthens the play by exposing the lives of the hill people. Through slides and shots, the playwright presents a view of the base of
the great Himalayan Mountains where Mac offers prayers for the hill woman. The play is extremely symbolic and it gradually unfolds itself. As Iyengar remarks: “One sees in Didi, the symbol of the romance and flavour of *Darjeeling Tea*, and in her brief history the passage from the old to the new dispensation: from Big Mac the white father to Bunty the brown lover, from the old pioneers to the new inheritors” (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 11). Thus, Currimbhoy, while exposing the lack of values among the British planters, “offers a shrewd discussion of changing values in Indian society, indigenous and expatriate” (qtd. in Reddy 74). He has effectively created the singleness of effect—the effect being that there is a shift of values in the world of tea estates.

The element of conflict claims critical attention in the play. As W.J. Meserve and R.L. Meserve rightly observe that *Darjeeling Tea* dramatizes “a serious conflict between levels of society” (Foreword, *The Hungry Ones* 11). There is conflict in the mind of Jennie who feels that her husband led himself astray and was responsible for the birth of Didi. She does not tolerate the very sight of Didi and asks Mac to leave the country without any delay as she has been deprived of conjugal love for the last nineteen years. Jennie says:

JENNIE: Been [sic] hurting myself for nineteen years, Mac. Anybody would think. I’d be insensitive by now. But no. It keeps growing and growing...(*looks at him*)...like her... (*beseechingly*) like...you understand, don’t you, Mac. Oh, say that you do, or else I’ll kill myself.... You understand why I want you to leave, my dear. Anywhere, anywhere... it need not be England or Scotland. Away from here, that’s all I want (*Darjeeling Tea* ? 42).

Jennie becomes very critical of the mother of Didi and tells Bunty that she does not like her husband’s affair with Didi’s mother. She asks Bunty to look at the drunken Mac who is trying to drown his affairs with Didi’s mother in the country brew. The conflict between the workers and the management also takes on serious dimensions. Dissatisfied with the wages the workers attempt to kill the planters and burn the doll’s house. The conflict in the mind of Didi is lacerating because she has been deprived of maternal love and care.
Through gestures, the dramatist reveals the inner turmoil and turbulence of the characters like Jennie who played a leading role in the past in guiding the planters and their children. Now she “sometimes feels tired... occasionally lapses into dreaming... embarrassed, confused, at suddenly being discovered... stretching, trying to break out of the reverie” (Darjeeling Tea ?21). These gestures provide a peep into her unhappy state of mind.

The playwright uses certain Hindi words and phrases such as “Han, Burra Sahib,” “Han,” “Han Sethji” (Darjeeling Tea ? 12), “Pucca,” “Brown Sahib” (Darjeeling Tea ? 14), “aur aik double” (Darjeeling Tea ? 16) and “Hare Ram Hare Krishna!” (Darjeeling Tea ? 32) to appeal to the feeling of the audience.

The playwright brings together contradictions and disagreements. Darjeeling Tea which is the best in the world is not served there. The Marwari is called “the white Marwari” because he is “relatively enlightened” (Darjeeling Tea ? 11) like the white people. Besides his enlightenment as a money lender, he feels that there is “flattery...with a touch of insult” (Darjeeling Tea ?11) in it.

Ironically enough, the Britishers who migrated to India worked very hard and expanded the tea gardens and promoted the tea business but never accepted India as their own home. Instead they retired and settled in England. Sally, the wife of Hugh, tells her husband that there are lots of planters like them “drifting around, wanting to settle down” (Darjeeling Tea ? 35) in London. Didi in a doll’s house feels that it is not really a doll’s house but her own home. Mac feels that she is “too wise for her young years” (Darjeeling Tea ? 44). Bunty calls Jennie “Madam” (Darjeeling Tea ? 46) but she calls him “a wog” (Darjeeling Tea ? 46). Bunty tells Jennie: “Strange, isn’t it, you come to my country and call me a wog. I go to yours, and call you Madam. (Jennie still speechless) Why? Because I come out with a harsh truth” (Darjeeling Tea ? 46).

In Goa, the theme of racial discrimination and Goa’s liberation from the Portugal yoke and its aftermath are presented vividly and realistically through the technique of symbolism, imagery, parallelism, contrasts, soliloquy, folklore, satire, irony and language. The title Goa seems to be very simple but it conveys a deeper
meaning. Like the character Rose, Goa stands for purity, beauty and innocence. "Rose is Goa, Goa is Rose" (Currimbhoy, Goa 41). But the purity, beauty and innocence of both Goa and Rose are desecrated by the colonial bulldozers. The playwright employs the techniques of contrasts and parallels to present a complete and comprehensive picture of Goa which inhabits two worlds—the world of natives and the world of Portuguese. The Portuguese enjoy a luxurious life with wine and women without doing almost any work, on the other hand, the locals come to the patio in the evening after day's toil to have an entertainment in gossiping. The patio is the microcosm of Goa where two diametrically opposite worlds are perceptible.

The conflict between the two worlds is presented through the contrast between Miranda and Rose, Alphonso and Krishna and the Administrator and Goa's Hindu Nationalist. Miranda as a professional prostitute presents ugliness amidst natural beauty. She is symbolic of colonial snobbery, affectation and hypocrisy. Through her character the audience gets acquainted with the attitude of the Portuguese towards the natives. She exploits natives in various ways—emotionally, physically and financially. The way she plies her trade of prostitution clearly indicates that she, like the Portuguese, does not have any concerns about the pains and privations of the natives. On the other hand, her daughter, Rose stands for Goa and its beauty and purity which are exploited by the colonial agents in the name of welfare and better future. Miranda drags her into the ugly world of prostitution to maintain the façade of her luxurious lifestyle. Alphonso, the Portuguese, stands for the parasitical character and authoritarian attitude of the colonialists. He enjoys sex and wine with Miranda and also wants to enjoy the beauty and body of Rose. On the other hand, Krishna stands for true love for Rose as well as for Goa.

The playwright frequently uses sex as a strong force, not simply to exploit emotions of the audience, but to make a point. The violence and hate segregating the Portuguese and Indians in Goa are symbolized by strong sex throughout the play—the devastation of something beautiful by the viciousness of man whether through professional whoredom, bizarre passions devoid of a sense of responsibility or a
Machiavellian villainy. Rose is raped by an Indian boy but with the consent of her mother.

The cultural conflict between the natives and Portuguese is presented through the art of characterization. Senhora Miranda and Alphonso stand for the casual and exploitative attitude of the Portuguese towards human and natural resources. Miranda, a professional prostitute, fleeces the natives both financially and physically. Alphonso is symbolic of the downfall of Portuguese authority in Goa. The way he staggers and stammers in drunken state suggests the dwindling state of Portugal reign in Goa. Miranda, symbolic of colonialism, keeps in view the norm of equalization when she establishes sexual relationships with the rich natives. The way she keeps distance from her own dark-complexioned daughter Rose reveals her colour consciousness. As a mother, Miranda is supposed to protect her daughter from sexually hungry people, but she serves her before the rich customers to upkeep her lifestyle.

The playwright uses both auditory and visual images to give a realistic touch to the narrative of Goa and evoke an active response in the audience. In the beginning of the play, the audience confronts the landscape of patio where the regulars are sitting on the benches and Miranda splendidly dressed comes down the steps of the tavern on the west side of the stage and walks across the long patio:

SENHORA MIRANDA:. . . . . walks slowly and carefully to avoid showing the effect of any tipsiness. As SHE passes the VICAR, SHE bows slightly in acknowledgement. As SHE passes by the ADMINISTRATOR, the latter lifts his hat and SHE bows again, a coquettish smile playing around the corner of her lips. SHE ignores the rest: the local people (Goa 14).

The gait and gay posture of Miranda not only reflects her own character or the character of the agents of colonialism but also stands for colonial attitude towards the natives. From the excerpt, it becomes clear that the Portuguese have not only exploited the beauty of Goa but also have grossly overlooked the existence of the natives.
Through the relationship of Krishna and Rose, the playwright highlights colonialism and colour prejudice in a light ironic vein. The simple love story with symbolic dimensions develops into a strange and terrifying play of deep emotions. Krishna represents India, whereas Rose represents Goa. Krishna’s waiting for Rose for fourteen years symbolizes India’s waiting for fourteen years for Goa to become one with it.

The description of the landscape in the very opening of the play introduces us with the routine of both the natives and the Portuguese through the soliloquy of the Administrator:

Goa...Goa...this is Goa, my own, nestling amidst green hills and valleys, the rich fields and rivers that make this a paradisial land....This is the heart of each village in Goa...the white cross...the Taverna...the trellised balconies...always surround the patio...the patio...where everyone meets...the old and new...those alike and different...like me and my friend here. The meetings here are always loud and lively, with nothing to hide...on market days there is all noise and bustle, scents and smells, a strange mixture of fish and flowers. Buxom, garrulous fisher-women, with sweet-smelling saiös in their hair, are busy enticing the wily customer to buy their delicious river fish.... There is the village band, with fair and fireworks...the smell of incense and finim in the evening air, and at home hot sarapatel, and wines await the revellers (Goa 18).

The plot of the play does not run on a strictly linear progression but develops through transverse parallelisms. The play consists of six scenes in two Acts. The first scene is balanced by the last scene. Both the scenes open with the patio, though the first is gay and the last is sombre. Both the scenes end with the encounter of the young lovers—the first in beautiful innocence, the last with terrifying experience. The effect thus created is one of completeness, of things having come full circle.

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

The play *The Hungry Ones* portrays how hunger and love are not easily overwhelmed by the exigencies of circumstances. The play presents a poignant cry of poverty and conscience. It presents all manifestations of hunger in the riot-torn and the famine-stricken city of Calcutta. The playwright juxtaposes plenty and poverty, the rich and the poor to present the real and vivid picture of Indian life.

The playwright uses the technique of parallels and contrasts throughout the play. On the one side, the beatniks practise Yoga and meditation and, on the other, an Indian and his wife perform the hungry act. There is a correlation between the Yogic beatnik of America and the meditative Yogi in India, between the Black Muslim of America and the Islamic Muslim of Bengal. The strength of the hippie movement lies in the pretence of ignorance, and the forte of the Hindu religion is in learning. At one time the Indians can be seen begging and at the other, the same people are found offering alms. On the one hand, the hungry beggars are found slapping their empty stomachs and inviting at once pity, revulsion and charity and, on the other, the fat person is sitting at table eating and "gorging himself with food, greasy, fatty vitaminized food" (Currimbhoy, *The Hungry Ones* 34). The playwright contrasts the deformed body of the Indian man with the beautiful body of the Indian woman. On the one hand, there is an atmosphere of peace, harmony and brotherhood and on the other, is the atmosphere of killing, looting and communal riots. Through the techniques of contrast and juxtaposition, the playwright presents before the audience a realistic, complete and comprehensive view of the contemporary Indian society.

The playwright uses the technique of parallelism to provide a touch of universality to the problem of colour and communalism. The Hindu-Muslim problem in India is presented akin to the racial problem in the U.S.A. The enterprising nature
of Sam is juxtaposed with the passive nature of Ramesh. Sam fittingly comments on the superiority of the philosophical attitude of Ramesh:

So listen now, Al, have the humility to learn, to become one of them, for he has proven stronger than you, stoic and stone-like, noble and true. Leave him to his meditation and prayer. Perhaps he has blood on his hands too, the blood of her brothers, that must cause incessant conflict between them, of hate and revenge, love and reunification, in this world of their own... (*The Hungry Ones* 50).

Thus, through the technique of parallels and contrasts, Currimbhoy suggests that hunger and love are not overwhelmed by the exigencies of circumstances.

The dramatist uses his skill and knowledge to give his characters a vocabulary and style appropriate to their nature and profession. The language is highly colloquial and simple when the college students talk of the beatniks. The conversation between Sam and Razia in which the latter is worried about her husband is racy. The playwright rises to the heights of poetic magnificence in passages like Sam’s witnessing the acts of violence in the city of Calcutta:

I wander through the desert, Al, and the hot sun parches, and the cool night wets. Like back home under blaze of the law’s searchlights, the incessant questions, the cruelty that tore, the big town bully, the knife I twisted and turned till the gory blood flowed on my hands and cooled my fire in the wet night full of rain ... (*further sounds of violence and rain*) (*The Hungry Ones* 45).

Through the beautiful image the pains and privations of the dispossessed and the poor are graphically recorded:

And as day follows night, in deserts sandy and bare, blazing hot and starry cool, this firmament did witness such acts of privation, unfelt and untold ... when warring tribes clashed in thousands, the sands turned red, the casis [sic] dried, figs no longer grew on trees, and life stirred only though the murmur of the evening breeze, the last breath there was to life... (*The Hungry Ones* 41).
When Currimbhoy wishes to convey the deeper and inarticulate feelings of the two Americans, he gives them action rather than speech: "Sam and Al let out a cry and approach this man victoriously....As they touch him, the man sumps, lifeless .... They catch him by the hair, and twist his head to catch the lamplight's flare, a mute dead face, lean and gaunt ..."). Through the device of giving a character action rather than speech, the dramatist makes action still more eloquent.

The playwright presents gesture as a precise and powerful expression of the inner turmoil of his characters and its outer manifestations. With all its complexity, *The Hungry Ones* is actable on the stage. The eleven scenes follow in quick succession, thereby accommodating the quickness of action. Moreover, he succeeds in creating auditory and visual imagery which activate the senses of audience. The fascination of the students for the beatniks, the refugees in the streets of Calcutta, the scenes of riots, the recitation of hymns from the Indian epics by the Guru and the saying of prayers by the Muslims during the *Mohurrum* produce the visual and auditory images which make the play successful on the stage. Thus "*The Hungry Ones* is most characteristic of Currimbhoy’s work—extremely theatrical and a strong determined, tense statement about man and about India in very physical but compassionate terms" (Foreword, *The Hungry Ones* 18). Through the image of two Bengalis performing a monkey act the playwright presents a pathetic picture of hungry ones who are forced to behave like animals to eke out their bread. The image of the juggler who “lies prostrate, as though without arms and legs, writhing has [sic] body forward, inching forward painfully, his flesh picking up the filth of the pavement, cutting itself on sharp stones till blood shows on dirty cloth” (*The Hungry Ones* 26) touches emotional chord even of the most impassive audience.

The playwright ridicules the college students who put the beatniks on par with Indian saints, poets and patriots: “We haven’t come across anyone quite like you since....Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, Subhash Chandra Bose and Ram Mohan Roy...” (*The Hungry Ones* 32). The satiric tone and tenor enhances the thematic impact of the play in the sense that we,
Indians, are still slaves of the West who do not hesitate to downgrade our rich cultural heritage to appease the whites.

Currimbhoy uses humour not only to evoke laughter but also to compel the audience to think. Some Indian beggars beg on the one hand, and give alms to other beggars on the other. It is humorous as well as serious in implications. This act of offering alms by the beggars to other beggars introduces the audience with the uniqueness of Indian culture which acknowledges the importance of sterling values of love, compassion and sacrifice rather than individualism and selfishness. The uniqueness about the humour in the play is that it provokes both laughter and thought at once and at the same time. In the very beginning of the play, the Yogic feats of the two Americans produce humour. The underlying idea is that the two Americans have failed to have an understanding of the mystery of India. The students fascinated by the beatniks ask them to take them into their fold. In fact, one of them tells them that the strength of their movement lies in the pretence for ignorance. But the serious tone of the dramatist makes us alert to the fact that India is a land of contradictions. When the two Americans go round the city Sam humorously tells Al: “I can’t forget them, Al. They keep coming back. (Al doesn’t reply) He with his deformed body. She with her beautiful face” (The Hungry Ones 36). The contrast between ‘deformed body’ and ‘beautiful face’ actually sums up the contradictions and conflicts of Indian society.

The dramatist derides the Indian swamijis for their hypocrisy and hollowness. They exploit the naivety of people by asking them to keep on meditating all the time. The Guru asks his disciple to “go then home, my son, and meditate...meditate so deep that none may disturb you...meditate in yoga all the time...” (The Hungry Ones 48). Also, it is amusing to find some Indians begging on the one hand and giving alms on the other. Sam tells his friend Al: “Strange, isn’t it, Al, that at one point of time we see them begging for food, and at the other they are giving alms...” (The Hungry Ones 52).

The Miracle Seed gives us a tremendous impression of reality and presents an eternal challenge of endurance and survival. The play opens with the conversation between Ram, a farmer, and his wife, Malti, in a village in Maharashtra, a few
hundred miles away from Bombay. Ram grows restless because of the drought. His wife, who is pregnant, is equally worried about the drought which has dried up all the wells in the village. Furthermore, their cow is becoming thinner and thinner. The whole family has to depend on "withered vegetables" and "leaves which are not full and healthy" (Currimbhoy, *The Miracle Seed* 13). Ram feels that the government has the moral responsibility to feed the people. He asserts: "This is my land, and this is my government. I have rights if this land does not grow food, they have to feed us" (*The Miracle Seed* 13).

The dramatist juxtaposes the poverty of the rural life with the prosperity of city life. Laxman brings 'the miracle seed' that affected the green revolution in the Punjab. He is very optimistic about the seed: "It's fields of gold, for as far as the eye can reach. Quick growing, full and healthy, well-fertilized....There's nothing like this on earth. No more poverty, no more those whims of nature, the arid dying soil, the demented green....Here at least is man's dream coming true" (*The Miracle Seed* 19).

The playwright uses evocative imagery to dramatize the horrific and harrowing picture of the drought that devastated Maharashtra in 1972. The land is "parched and dry, with web-like cracks and fissures in the soil" (*The Miracle Seed* 26). The sun is scorching the earth relentlessly and mercilessly. There is not a drop of rain water for two years and the wells are getting dried up. There is an atmosphere of sluggishness and defenselessness. The Grandfather laments that "there isn't enough to eat. And everyone around the house is either quarrelling or crying" (*The Miracle Seed* 23). Ram's cow is getting thinner and thinner for want of fodder and has become a shadow of itself. One could "hear its painful dying breath" (*The Miracle Seed* 27). As it is about to die, Laxman suggests to Ram that he should dispose it off to the slaughter house. But Ram, who is sentimentally attached to the cow, feels terribly upset at the idea. He tells Laxman: "He, with whom I've planted seed year after year, toiled with the same yoke, wiped our sweats with the same cloth. He, with whom I shall never reap the harvest again. Take him to the slaughter house if you wish. I will not be part of it" (*The Miracle Seed* 28).
The drought has assumed such ugly proportions that it can shrivel the vitals of the people into distortion and decay. People wait and wait at the fair price shops for a handful of grain. The low wages, high prices, unemployment, near-starvation diet result in mob violence, police intervention, tear gas, shooting, injury and death. The last desperate bid of the farmer is to migrate to the city in search of relief centres.

Currimbhoy’s satirical lash is centred upon the false social standards of city life and the awfully bad performance of the Government. The city boys are portrayed so clever that they know how to get along in society by hook or by crook. Ram is disgusted with the city types because they make him “feel...uncomfortable...with their...superior ways and... crookedness” (The Miracle Seed 19). He satirizes the Government for bungling in providing relief to the drought-affected public. As Laxman, the idealist, goes on talking about the various relief measures initiated by the Government. Ram, the pragmatist, loses his temper and pounces upon him with the words: “Don’t talk to me about the Government or I’ll wring your neck!” (The Miracle Seed 28) The relief centres set up by the Government only in the form of metal breaking and road repair hardly provide any solace and support to the suffering rural masses. Also “there’s nothing fair about a fair price shop” (The Miracle Seed 29) which the Government opened in the rural areas. The people who are tired and exhausted in breaking stones have to be “waiting, waiting, waiting, at the...fair price shops...for a handful of grain” (The Miracle Seed 34-35). The playwright also lashes out at the kind of solutions that the Government offers to mitigate the acuteness of the famine. Ram tells Laxman how “the solutions they think of are...quick and easy. All... miraculous. Like the seed. Practical also. Like slaughtering the cow. And then...there’s always a profit angle there” (The Miracle Seed 30).

The play has a good deal of theatrical value. The creak of the rope, the painful dying breath of the cow, the stammering of Savitri, the pregnant Malti’s taking a deep breath of exasperation, the giggling of the grandfather—all these produce auditory images which widen the play’s meaning and reflect the poignant condition of the farmer in his fight for survival. The visible arid land and a well in the background, the dying cow, withered vegetables and Ram himself with his face “clouded with
frustration and anger, raising his eyes to the sky and the blinding sun" (*The Miracle Seed* 26)—all these create visual images which underline the intensely pathetic condition of Ram’s family.

The playwright creates various kinds of auditory and visual images: the incessant breaking of rocks, mounting in volume, the sound of riots and fire at the Government fair-price shop, the shouting of slogans like “*Inquilab Zindabad*” (*The Miracle Seed* 35), the loud protests that the people raise against inflation, the police controlling the violent mob by using teargas. The dramatist employs two dream sequences in the play which stimulate our feelings and thoughts.

The distinguishing feature of *The Miracle Seed* is the gradual emergence of hope through despair and doubt represented by three generations. The grandfather who thinks that “the world never changes” (*The Miracle Seed* 11) for the better represents the first generation that stands for despair. When Ram thinks that at least the third monsoon will not fail, the grandfather says: “It has ... in my days. And then there was... famine. Stark, raving famine, that drove us mad with hunger” (*The Miracle Seed* 25). In the face of natural calamity, the villagers are becoming hopeless. Ram, who belongs to the second generation, represents doubt with his ambivalent attitude towards the possibility of the green revolution. After sowing the “miracle seeds” brought by Laxman, Ram thinks that he will reap a golden harvest from the healthy seed. He tells his wife that “we’ll be rich. For once in our life. There’ll be money ... to buy all the things we ever wanted. But more than that...the soil will be fertile again” (*The Miracle Seed* 21). The younger generation represented by Laxman and Malti is represented as the torch-bearer of hope and happiness even in the worst of times. This generational gap is effectively conveyed by the dramatist though subtle characterisation and powerful dialogues.

The streak of realism offers the maximum opportunity for the playwright to make his comments on the people around him. Ramesh, a young man in the play, seems to echo the point of view of Currimbhoy himself: “Did we? You know what that wise old fox told me? He said there’d be a new election, and new corrupt M.L.A.’s [sic] would come in instead of the old corrupt ones” (*Currimbhoy*,
Dissident M.L.A. 55). As W.J. Meserve and R.L. Meserve rightly observe: "But even when he deals with India, he becomes that voice of universal revolt and anguish screaming itself hoarse at the seemingly immovable societies around the world" (Foreword, The Hungry Ones 12).

In The Dissident M.L.A., Currimbhoy gets the best opportunity to satirize politicians. Manu often opens a bottle of scotch, downs it, shakes his five fingers and gets into a long drinking session. The playwright lashes out at the lechery of the politicians who are so lustful that they do not spare even a destitute woman like Sonal who is brought from a rescue home. She says how she has been molested by the Minister of social Welfare: "When it wasn’t the attendant molesting us, it was the Minister of Social Welfare ... all in the name of the Mahatma" (The Dissident M.L.A. 20). The satiric lash becomes keener when it is directed against lechery committed under the cloak of Gandhism. Currimbhoy directs his satire on the hypocrisy and hunger of the politicians. Manu, who considers Kantibhai to be his mentor, eulogizes him by stating that the latter is a true Gandhian. But, in his private room, he ridicules his own mentor: "THAT FOX! THAT SLY WEASEL! Learnt from the Grand Old Master himself!... There are more things than are dreamt of in your philosophy, many more things, you old decrepit man" (The Dissident of M.L.A. 29). The playwright, thus, builds satire and comedy from hypocrisy.

The playwright digs at the selfishness and avarice of the politicians. Blinded by their inordinate greed for power they plot the most inhuman intrigues. They patronize the students’ organizations and pollute the atmosphere in the universities. Manu tells his son, Ramesh, how he has used the students for selfish ends: "May be it was to liberate myself. To make you do all the things I failed to do myself in life" (The Dissident M.L.A. 54). Manu overwhelmed with avarice misguides the students in the dissolution of the Assembly. Currimbhoy ridicules the belief of the politicians in astrology. Manu consults an astrologer with a view to know what exactly is in store for him. The astrologer tells him that Tuesdays and Thursdays are lucky days and that he should go slow on food, wine and women as "destiny surrounds him like a mortal coil" (The Dissident M.L.A. 37).
Currimbhoy does not spare even the students. When Manu tries to talk about the dignity of the students, Kantibhai tells him that the students “can be a bunch of hooligans” (The Dissident M.L.A. 27). They get funds from political parties and indulge in violence. In the beginning, they start the agitation against corruption but in the end, Ramesh, the student leader, realizes that the students are “corrupt, unethical” and “power-hungry” (The Dissident M.L.A. 45). The playwright satirizes even the educational administration and administrators. He digs at the appointment of Vice-Chancellors who are appointed not on the basis of merit but on other considerations. Manu tells the students: “You’ve heard of the fiddle in the appointment of the V.C. Do you think he got it on merit? It was manoeuvred” (The Dissident M.L.A. 13). Hardly does Currimbhoy exaggerate when he says so. In most cases the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor in our country is manoeuvred.

The theatrical devices, Currimbhoy employs to expose corruption, intrigues and loss of values in the academic and political worlds in The Dissident M.L.A. call for our attention. One such device is the propitious use of dual scenes in scene II of Act I. On the one hand, we see Manubhai in “hot urgent whispers” (The Dissident M.L.A. 13) telling the students what to do, commandeering the action without actually being present on the spot and on the other, we see the students conducting the gherao of the Vice-Chancellor. Through the theatrical technique, Currimbhoy “tries to guide his viewers to shock them but always to direct that shock effect toward the ideas he is dramatizing the emotion he wants them to feel (Foreword, The Hungry Ones 17). The idea he is dramatizing is how the students become a prey to the machinations of the modern politicians.

Thorns on a Canvas is an affirmation of the artist’s faith in man’s creative work. The play is a protest of all Establishment-sponsored art. The play opens with a pantomime from an academy of art which is like “a bee-hive, with neat and uniform rows of kiosks within which each artist performs his function” (Currimbhoy, Thorns on a Canvas 9). The image depicts the conditions in which a true artist produces artistic creations. Through the technique of contrast and parallel, the playwright underscores the difficulties faced by a true artist while creating artistic works in comparison of the pseudo artists. The characters of Yakub and Nafesa present the real
artistic world where art is steeped into real life experiences. Through their characterization, the true and genuine nature of art is exemplified. On the other hand, fake artistic creations are illustrated through the characters of the rich father and her delicate daughter, Malti who don’t have the taste and experiences of the real hardships of life. The playwright through the comparison of these characters underscores the real significance of art which is deeply rooted in genuine life experiences. The rose with thorns in the hands of Yakub symbolizes the hardships and pains of life. The rose stands for real life where the real sweetness and beauty in one’s life finds place in man’s life only after he undergoes the pains and privations of life. Yakub, an untidy and unkempt man, is holding “s rose in his hand upon which he gazes with quiet contemplation” (Thorns on a Canvas 10). The image suggests that real art engages one with the real life experiences. The real artist is not afraid of the thorns of life, whereas the pseudo artist who is without real experiences fails to understand the social significance of art. Malti rushes towards Yakub who is holding a rose in his hand to pick up the beautiful flower but cries when the thorn pierces her finger. The incident suggests that the comforts or roses of life are not without discomforts or thorns. The true artistic piece connotes the entire life that represents both comforts and discomforts. The Academies train people like Malti to produce only fakers in the realm of art and not true artists. She, as the privileged daughter of the Patron, enjoys an easy access to all the paraphernalia of self-expression, but the born artist like Nela is deprived of all these facilities and opportunities, thereby suppressing her artistic instincts.

The playwright, through the use of symbols, differentiates the two categories of the artists—true and fake ones. Exhibition of art in the scene III is the representative of “the vested interests behind the glittering façade, all the pretence, the poor quality, the naked self-interest and the total divorce from the flesh and blood actuality.” Scene-IV is the scene of slums “where Art speaks for itself” (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 17). The patron in the play is the epitome of patronage, glorifying in the act rather than the true artistic results. His daughter Malti, symbolizes perfection without a soul, slickness of execution, but lacking perfection. Nafesa symbolizes the ugly exterior holding a simple beautiful spirit. Yakub stands
for the inevitable artist who is able to create because of his pain and fear. The playwright suggests that a moving work of art may be created by a man who has undergone the trials and tribulations of life.

The success of the stage performance of the *Thorns on a Canvas* owes much to the stage directions given by the playwright. We see, for example, the following stage directions of the “development and production” of the first scene:

Firstly, all movements and directions must be subsidiary to the single action of the thorn and the bubble. The dancing and music and other improvisations can either be concurrent or in successive [sic] transition, but they are on the periphery so to speak of the central action, comprising the young man, the ungainly girl, and the beautiful daughter who is intrigued by them. Secondly, the arts must have a mechanical character, and gradually the individual variations must be reconciled to a uniform and harmonious action. As the scene develops, the initial individual exuberance is replaced by unemotional and repetitive forms with the effect of the full ‘orchestrations’ (*Thorns on a Canvas* 11-12).

Similarly, in Scene-VI, the playwright gives directions as how Malti’s bedroom which is “neat and delicately done, with a dressing table and mirror” and Yakub’s “shabby room” (*Thorns on a Canvas* 58) are to be shown on the stage. This clearly brings into focus the technique of contrast of two different worlds – one of rich and affluent and the other of poverty and squalor. This technique of contrast is deliberately used by the playwright to heighten the thematic aspect of the play. Similarly, the clean world of the Art academy and the last scene of the slums full of dirt and squalor are deliberately contrasted to show that the true art does not require the artificial world of the art academies. A true artist finds his natural environment even in the street, “a sort of nether world” which is “the world of reality” (*Thorns on a Canvas* 48) and which should form the subject matter of art. Asif Currimbhoy makes significant use of symbols in the play. Even the characters assume symbolic significance. Yakub represents the true spirit of art even in the absence of any kind of patronage from any quarter. Malti represents the falsity of the people claiming to be artist on the cruches of their affluence and high connection. She also symbolizes the
slickness of execution of a painter like the soulless bukaY who represents the mechanical and robot-like artists. The patron of the Art academy symbolizes the world of art academies which “have found mushrooming growth throughout India under State patronage” (Thorns on a Canvas 9).

Even the title of the play is symbolic which shows that there can not be beauty and fragrance of art without undergoing the trials and tribulations of life. It is only through suffering that the artist is able to capture the unique essence of the world, his rapture and ecstasy. This is further suggested by the way Malti cries when thorn of the rose stalk pierces her fingers. This is suggestive of the true spirit of art which Malti achieves after understanding the real meaning of suffering and pain when her love is rejected by Yakub. The academy is symbolically compared to bee-hive and the conversation of the invitees at the exhibition seem to emit the sounds of buzzards getting together.

Besides, the playwright satirizes the Government-run Academy where one finds “variable sound of TABLA tapping, the full instrumental scale of the SARANGI, interrupted sounds of singing, flashes of dancing of KATHAK and BHARATA NATYAM canvases streaming with colours, and the quick movement of artists busily engaged” (Thorns on a Canvas 9). This shows that how the Government-sponsored Academies produce only din and noise without any work of genuine quality. The playwright digs at the Patron for using pompous and hollow words to gain publicity whereas the true artist remains unacknowledged and unknown.

Asif Currimbhoy’s success in writing plays meant for the stage owes much to his ability to exploit a variety of dramatic techniques for the presentation of various thematic issues. His experimentation with dramatic techniques have earned him the appreciation and applause of both critics and audience. The interplay between theme and technique imbues his plays with variety and universality of great art. He finds in his dramatic techniques appropriate means and methods for the “agonised expression” (“The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy” 23) of his social and political consciousness.
WORKS CITED


