Even after India became politically independent, there was no living theatre so far as the Indo-Anglian playwright was concerned. Of course, (as already mentioned) in addition to the encouragement given to the performing arts in the first Five-year plan, we do find many encouraging developments like the establishment of the National School of Drama, the Sangit-Natak Akademi, training centres like Kalakshetra in Madras, and Darpana in Ahmedabad, Drama departments in some Universities, the National Drama Festival organised by the Central Sangit-Natak Akademi and performances by some English and American troupes. But, these dramatic activities boosted up mostly plays in Indian languages, leaving the Indo-Anglian Drama to suffer for want of a proper stage here though the West paradoxically enough provided for successful staging of a few plays like Das's Mira, Partap Sharma's A Touch of Brightness and Asif Gurrimbhoy's The Dumb Dancer.

However, compared to the plays belonging to the pre-Independence phase, those published during the post-Independence period show a greater influence of the West. Also we come across different kinds of experiments (at times, giving more prominence to psycho-analysis of characters than to presenting sequences) and also in employing new models and techniques including those of Mini-plays. While in output Asif Gurrimbhoy can easily be singled out, there
are a few others like D.M. Borgaonkar and Lobo Prabhu who started writing during the pre-Independence period but published collection of plays only after Independence in addition to a good number of playwrights who have written just one or two pieces each.

Asif Currimbhoy (b. 1928) has, so far to his credit, twenty two published plays in which he evinces interest in a variety of themes. These can be grouped themewise as follows:-

1) Historical and Political Themes:
   (with India and the Indian Sub-continent as the setting:)
   The Captives (1963), Goa (1964), Abbe Faria (1968),
   An Experiment with Truth (1969), Inquilab (1970),
   The Refugee (1971), Sonar Bangla (1972),
   "Om Mane Padme Hum!" (1972), The Dissident M.L.A. (1974)

b) Foreign setting: Valley of the Assassins (scenario) (1966),
   Angkor (1973)

2) Social themes: The Doldrummers (1960), Thorns on a Canvas (1962), The Miracle Seed (1973)

3) East-West Relations: The Tourist Mecca (1959),
   The Hungry Ones (1965), "Darjeeling Tea?" (1971)

4) Religious Themes: Om (1961)

5) Psychological Themes: The Clock (1959),
   The Dumb Dancer (1961), This Alien .... Native Land (1975)
The following plays have been staged, but not published:-

1. The Restaurant
2. And Never the Twain shall Meet
3. The Kaleidoscope
4. Monsoon
5. The Temple Dancers
6. The Lotus Eater
7. The Mercenary
8. The Great Indian Bustard

**Historical and Political Themes**

Among the plays with historical and political themes (with an Indian setting), Goa is a two-act play where Currimbhoy presents a story of passion and violence of the period of the Indian take-over of Goa. The plot is constructed around Krishna and Rose, the dark-complexioned daughter of a Portuguese widow, Senhora Miranda (Maria). A liaison develops between Maria and the lusty Portuguese Alphonso. Maria creates tension in the love-affair of Krishna and Rose; the complications lead to the death of Krishna.

The play is better constructed than many of Currimbhoy's other efforts. While the scenes in the patio incidentally reflect the corrupt atmosphere of the Portuguese rule in India, the lengthy description of Goa given by the Portuguese Administrator is

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natural from his point of view. On the political plane, the final tragedy of their rule is indicated by the remark made by the Goan Nationalist in the course of his talk with the Administrator: "Your days are numbered."\(^2\)

It is exactly on the 18th December 1961, the day of India's invasion of Goa that Alphonso is killed by Krishna, consequent on the conflict engendered by Maria; and this act coincidentally symbolises the rooting out of the Portuguese rule in India. Further, while the love between Krishna and Rose is reminiscent of the innocence of Romeo and Juliet, Senhora Miranda represents sheer sensuality. As Subhas C. Saha remarks, "The conflict between the purity and impurity of sexual relationship gathers tremendous force in the play."\(^3\)

*An Experiment with Truth* is an attempt at a dramatisation of certain episodes in the later life of Mahatma Gandhi. In this play of three acts the playwright presents some sequences starting with the first attempt on the life of the Mahatma and ending with his assassination, with a few important scenes in between: Sardar Patel and a Police Officer dealing with Madanlal who made a fruitless attempt to throw a hand-bomb and Gandhiji feeling pity for him; Gandhiji's dealings with his wife Kasturba and the 'untouchable' girl Manu; the Salt March; Kasturba's death; finally Gandhiji's assassination before the commencement of a prayer meeting.

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The playwright is successful in highlighting Gandhiji's adherence to truth and non-violence, though he appears to concentrate more on projecting a series of pictures of the Mahatma's life than on coherently constructing the plot. However, these episodes are impressively dramatised. Further, the death of Kasturba is effectively suggested to the audience by way of her fading voice and Gandhiji's shedding of tears with an intervening chorus of mourners singing the famous Upanishadic lines:

Lead me from the unreal to the real
Lead me from darkness to light
Lead me from death to immortality.  

The panorama of the Mahatma's experiments with truth would have been more comprehensive, had the playwright covered a few more events from the great man's boyhood and also his career as a barrister in South Africa.

The Naxalite Movement in Eastern India is the subject of the three-act play Inquilab (Revolution) which throws light upon the origin and development of the revolutionary activities of some agrarian Communists who opted for violence. Prof. Datta is in conflict with his students who are fired by their new notion of revolt against the existing order; the group consists of the Professor's own son Amar, Suprea (sic) the daughter of a landlord Jain, Shomik, Ahmed and others. In addition to inciting the villagers, their violence ultimately leads to the

torture and death of both the Professor and the landlord.

Currimbhoy portrays the conflict between the existing order and the new order anticipated, between conservatism and the forces of revolution. For example, while the Professor is lecturing about the need for discipline and constitutional methods in a democracy, the entire premises are full of slogans like "Bourgeois! Bourgeois University! . . . . . . Bourgeois Landlord Govt. of India! . . . . . . Inquilab Zindabad". The Professor is branded "a Revisionist. A pacifier for maintenance of an existing order. An order of vested interests". There is suspense created by the intervention of the police and the politician. The tension reaches its climax with the death of the existing order at the hands of students. The play is replete with terrorism and acts of violence like exploding bombs, burning the library books, physical torture and killing etc. But the playwright evidently makes no attempt to probe the theoretical aspects of the problem.

In his one-act play The Refugee, the playwright shows his concern for the burning problem of refugees of Bangla Desh (formerly, East Bengal) who poured into India during the 1971 war. Pakistan's massacre of intellectuals in the Universities there leads to an exodus of refugees like Yassin from Comilla University. He is given shelter in the

5. Currimbhoy's Plays, p.72.
6. Ibid., p.79.
household of Sen Gupta who has had to leave his home in East Bengal at the time of partition. He gets a job in the local University with the help of Prof. Mosin. But, being restless at the acute refugee problem, he decides to go back across the border and discharge his duties to his fellowmen there.

The playwright concentrates on a single topic according to the requirements of a one-act play. The whole piece hinges on the conflict in the mind of the hero Yassin, who represents the University intellectuals of his country. As the proverb goes, it is only the wearer of the shoe that knows where the shoe pinches; and thus naturally enough, Sen Gupta, himself a refugee in the past, sympathizes with Yassin in the latter's state of helplessness. The plot is naturally developed with suspense and conflict, leading to Yassin's final decision; and he is right when he explains to Sen Gupta's daughter Mita, "...... these are the dictates of my own conscience".  

In *Sonar Bangla*, the dramatist deals with the conflict between the people of East Bengal and the Pakistani forces. There are four parts ('Acts') dealing with four important phases of the War: I 25th March 1971 — The Slaughter; II Exodus — The Refugees; III Liberation Force — The Mukti Bahini; IV The Final War. The title is taken from Tagore's poem sung often in the play.

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7. Ibid., p.229.
The play with its moving dialogue and fast action presents a realistic picture of some horrible events of the war, the unity existing among different religious groups in organising the fight against Pakistan under the leadership of Mujeeb, direct and guerilla warfare and the people's final victory won with the help of the Indian forces. The atrocities committed by the Pakistani soldiers are narrated by the refugees thus:

"They raped my daughter .......
......my wife .......
......they have special curved knives to cut of breasts ...
...... forced the son to rape the mother before the family.
...... bit off her nipple ...
...... over and over again, one by one, like brutes ....
"They shot my husband .......
......carried him off, crowded like sheep
marked with the fatal red die 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...."^8

Passages like this make the play look like a semi-documentary film projecting different aspects of the Bangladesh War; and it lacks a logical construction of plot. Sometimes, what should have been reported on the stage by one or a group of characters, is presented in the film style. Here is an illustration of such stage-directions given:

(Light dims on the correspondent, and scene switches to one of the camps of the East Pak Regiment/East Bengal Rifles)

^8. Ibid., pp.325-326.
(Barracks. Forms of men asleep in their bed. Faint light. Whispers. West Pak commandos pour in a silent, active stream. They take their position).

(Fire: rifles and recoilless sten-guns open up spraying the beds before anyone can reach for their rifles. But ... strangely there are no screams).

(It's a double trap. The Commander of the East Pak Regiment, suspecting that this was afoot, has placed dummies in the beds, and he and his men have taken positions in hiding. They open up fire on the Commandos, dropping them).

(It's all over in a few minutes. The Colonel goes over to the dying Captain).9

Communist China's occupation of Tibet and the consequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India form the theme of "Om Mane Padme hum!" (Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus). The title is one of the sacred mantras of the Buddhists, used here probably as a symbol of the origin, development and death of the Lamaism in Tibet.

So far as the atmosphere of the Buddhist monastery is concerned, there seems to be a faint resemblance between this 2-act play and James Hilton's well-known novel Lost Horizon in spite of their divergent themes. Here Currimbhoy brings in events like the Dalai Lama's flight to India and the subsequent political developments in Tibet. The playwright portrays the terrorism and tricks of the Chinese Communists who aim at supplanting Lamaism. In addition to brain-washing the tradition-bound Tibetans, General Chang Chin-wu trains a duplicate Dalai Lama, another Rimpoche ('reincarnated Lama') carrying on telepathic and mystical exercises.

9. Ibid., p.300.
But, the playwright appears to have forgotten that he is writing for the stage, not for the film. The dream sequences about the legendary origin of Tibetans and other scenes in the second act are, no doubt, interesting; but, even with all modern stage-directions and techniques, it is very difficult to present them on the stage. The classical method of reporting such dreams in dialogue is certainly more useful: for example, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Calpurnia effectively apprises Caesar of her dream; and the Sanskrit playwright Bhatta Viśram makes it effective. Further, in addition to some quickly-changing scenes, Currimbhoj introduces the following special sequence of an invisible communication between Chinese and Tibetan minds:

General with his telescope beamed on the cave ... where Rimpoche sits down to his long three-year uninterrupted meditative vigil ... and to flashback induced by the hypnotic situation where he goes back into a dream-like past.

The past unravels thought reform memories which he is sub-consciously transmitting to Rimpoche:

.............for this, the operative factor is guilt ...
.............transference of a social guilt as a selfish human being who has not cared for the wants of others whom he has exploited .........................(etc., etc.)

(while this sequence is taking place, there are flashes of Rimpoche in the dark cave, motionless, sitting in Buddha pose, receiving the messages .... and flashing back his
own 'third eye' transcendental meditations to the General who feels its own enormous persuasive pressures.)

These are obviously cinematographic and, not for the stage; thus the playwright seems to have transgressed the limits of theatrical possibilities here.

The Dissident M.L.A deals with recent Indian politics, i.e., the dissolution of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly in 1976. With Manubhai, a fictitious Dissident M.L.A. as the nucleus, the playwright presents many relevant events connected with the political developments in the State and weaves them into a fabric of a 3-act play. Starting from the students' dharna of their Vice-Chancellor, all the agitational activities are supposed to have been the brain-children of the Dissident M.L.A.; further developments include organising a Monkey-ride of a Minister, loot and arson, the reactions of many M.L.A's breaking their ties with their main political group, the Government's threat of using the army with the final inevitable result of the proclamation of the dissolution of the Assembly and the establishment of the President's rule.

The playwright does not seem to question the right or wrong of Gujarat politics. But, with this as an example, he intends dramatising a situation fertile for the formation of dissident groups in the politics of any country and their activities to achieve their desired goal. The author portrays Manubhai the Dissident M.L.A.

10. Currimbhoy, "Om Mane Padme Hum!" (Calcutta, 1972), pp.53-5.
as the prime mover of all these activities. To highlight the fear-complex generally found among politicians, the playwright brings in the character of the Astrologer. But in his over-enthusiasm, the playwright at times resorts to exaggeration: To illustrate, he makes his Speaker of the Assembly weep when the situation goes out of control. Further, though the scene of Manubhai's sexual advances towards his maid-servant may not be unrealistic, the playwright could have presented it in a more suggestive way.

Currimbhoy deals with historical and political themes in a few more plays with Indian setting. While *The Captives* deals with the China war, *Abbe Faria* is about an 18th century Goan priest.

Some of Currimbhoy's political plays have a foreign setting. To illustrate, the theme of Angkor is from the history of Indo-China.

Thus the playwright attempts to make use of contemporary political developments for dramatic purposes in some of his topical plays.

**Social Themes**

Currimbhoy does not seem to evince as much interest in social problems as in contemporary politics. Yet he is drawn towards the life of Bombay vagabonds in *The Doldrummers*, the lives and problems of artists in *Theons on a Canvas*.

12. Ibid., p.30.
while the famine in Maharashtra forms the theme of *The Miracle Seed*.

The peculiar life of waifs and wastrels in shacks at Juhu Beach of Bombay is the theme of the two-act play *The Doldrummers*. The playwright makes an attempt to portray the doldrums (depression) in which the alienated youth of the lower stratum of our urban society, represented by Tony, Joe, Rita and Liza in the play are found. There is no story as such, and the play is full of protracted conversations which show the interaction of characters in their sexual affairs, rivalries and the consequent conflicts in their minds. If at all there is any climax, it is only when the audience learns that Rita is the mother of a child by Joe (who is drowned), and a policeman comes to Liza to investigate Joe's death.

The play has hardly any of plot and the action is impeded by excessive doses of dialogue. What the audience can enjoy is only the presentation of slices of the doldrummers' lives, attitudes and reactions. The plot seems to be mainly concerned with the lives of three persons (Tony, Rita and Joe) who have drifted off the main stream of life into a world of hopelessness, to which Liza is an occasional visitor. The vague but pathetic attempts of the social dropouts to discover some meaning in their lives is seen to a greater extent in Rita than in others. Joe only questions the fundamentals of man's existence; and the whole of the second act serves no other
purpose than making the characters stare into a void. As K. Raha remarks, "Joe's motivation in driving Rita into a corner and making sure that the only door left open led to the bedroom (for professional use) is far from convincing". 13

Thorns on a Canvas tries to expose all the evils of patronage of Arts in cities. Yakub the born artist has to disguise himself as Bukay the Manager. In the process, his art is lost in mere management.

The one-act play The Miracle Seed gives a picture of the drought in Maharashtra in 1972-73. In a village in the State, the farmer Ram's family encounters all kinds of sufferings caused by drought; but the unexpected yield which his daughter Savitri gets from her vegetable patch, brings a ray of hope. Meanwhile, his nephew Laxman, an employee in Bombay, brings a few seeds of a new scientific breed and new ideas of the green-revolution; and at the same time, the effects of the drought mount up, resulting in the exodus of villagers in a large number. Compelled by him, Ram too makes preparations for leaving the village with his family; but the journey has to be cancelled once for all on account of the information received about the second bumper crop in Savitri's garden caused by the 'miracle seeds'.

As in some of his one-act plays, the playwright concentrates on a single theme here. At each stage, the

conflict between the age-old ideas and sentiments (represented by Ram and Dada) and the new scientific ideas (represented by Lexman) is emphasized. In addition to the need for scientific farming, the playwright is not blind to certain difficulties in the way of its implementation. He shows how the intended Government aid is either misunderstood or often fails to reach the farmers. There is suspense; the educated village boy who does not keep himself shut in an ivory tower and the unlettered stammering girl full of earnest effort, take the story to a befitting climax, and thereby suggest remedies for the villagers' recurring hardships. The two short dream sequences introduced towards the end of the fourth scene are typical of the techniques of Currimbhoy.

East-West Relations

Among Currimbhoy's plays dealing with East-West relations, The Tourist Mecca is a play in 2 acts set against the background of the Taj Mahal. The entire story of the play revolves round a travel-agent at Agra by name Keshav Singh, a gigolo who serves foreign lady tourists. Lady Toppin, an American widow has visited this 'Tourist Mecca' (The Taj Mahal) several times. This time she brings her daughter Janet Toppin. The new innocent 'customer' falls in love with Singh. Her mother, who is jealous of this love-affair, reveals her own experience of him during her previous visits. Janet learns more about his 'business', and breaking off
her connection with him, leaves for her country with her mother.

Currembohn does not seem to give much importance to suspense and action here. The lengthy (and sometimes boring) conversations, particularly in the first act, appear to check the development of the plot. Though full scope has naturally been given to all the tourists for conversation, the space provided to the French couple in the beginning seems to be out of proportion in view of the central theme of the play; and the dialogue is not every time properly linked to the main plot. The ending falls short of a logical sequence as it is difficult to explain how Janet's love-affair could be so easily cut short by the intervention of the mother. Also, it is equally difficult to agree with the evaluation that "In it the satirical and the serious are skilfully blended" as there is neither much of satire, nor the serious in the play.

In the two-act comedy "Darjeeling Tea?", Currembohn presents a picture of planters in Indian tea estates and their cruel treatment of the workers. There is no regular development of the plot as such; but with the help of loosely-connected dialogue, the playwright attempts at projecting on the stage an image of a few major characters like Big Mac the Planter, Bunty, Jennie and Didi and minor characters like Thapa, Hugh, Sally,

the Marwari and the Young Man.

Jenny describes how the planters use women-coolies; and, according to her, Mac has 'never grown up'.15 Sally, another English lady is portrayed as one longing for home and one who 'never could accept India as my own'.16 and Bunty, as an young man who has come to Mac's estate and earned his good will. Further, some lengthy speeches like that of the Marwari 17 check the tempo of the action; but the evocation of the plantation life is enhanced to some extent by the introduction of a few young men singing in chorus. In view of the lack of a comprehensive treatment of the theme, it is difficult to agree fully with the claim"..... Inwardly it (the play) has the bitter-sweet taste of life, of changing times, and the pathos that accompanies it".18

East-West relations are also presented in one more play, i.e., The Hungry Ones which deals with the life of American beatniks in Calcutta.

Religious Themes

Though religion is a rich thematic source for any writer, Currimbhoy does not appear to have much fascination for it. Om is the only play (in three acts) the theme of which is religious. With Swétakétu as the

16. Ibid., p.259.
17. Ibid., p.241.
18. Ibid., Publisher's Note, Back flap.
central characters (in different roles from disciple to guru), the playwright attempts to trace the development of Hinduism from Vedic-Upanishadic times and also the formulation of its basic tenets. But, it is only a superficial treatment of an important subject.

Psychological Themes

Among the plays with psychological themes, The Clock is a one-act play with a novel technique; it has only one scene and one character; other characters are introduced by means of stage-devices like voices and shadows. The intention of the playwright seems to be a presentation of the frustrations of youth and its rebellion against the existing order. The main character in the play, whose life is influenced by seven other characters, gives expression to his disappointments and failure in life and his consequent indignation.

Henry, a salesman, is the only character to be seen by the audience, others being revealed by voices and shadows. First, Henry explains to his wife Mary why he resigned his job. Next, his pessimism is felt by his old neighbour Joe and the old family doctor. Then he exhibits his love for his young girl-Secretary Jean; and the sequence is followed by the appearance of two gunmen, the Commentator and finally his boss. Henry bursts out with anger at the sight of his boss and takes him to task in a soliloquy. All the characters join in a chorus to sing 'Happy Birthday' to Henry. In the end, he hears the voice of a lady giving him a piece of advice.
As the voice fades out, the volume of the tick-tock of the clock increases to a deafening pitch. With a terrible expression of frustration and anger, Henry smashes the clock; but its sound continues.

There is not much of action in the play, but the playwright is successful in probing the mind of the main characters. As an extension of the conflict in his mind, there is the advice given by the lady, which refers to the title of the play: "Make good in life .... Don't let time fly away uselessly. Nobody lives forever, and even the best and dearest live only once .... and remember, son, nobody ever stopped the hands of the clock". Yet, his frustration is so much that he fails to realise the fact of the eternity of Time and indulges in the fruitless gesture of smashing the clock. The drama here is all within.

Totally psychological in its content, The Dumb Dancer presents a Kathakali dancer who plays Bhima and is so much engrossed in his role that he thinks that he is Bhima himself. The lady psychiatrist who treats him, herself becomes insane in the end.

In his This Alien ... Native Land (1975), Currimbhoy projects a picture of the plight of the Jews who find themselves alienated in India, the land of their adoption. Here is an attempt to write a psychological

drama of family relationships. On the model of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the playwright tries to probe a deep and frequently anguished past; but his approach is crude and melodramatic and thus, he is not fully successful in what he seems to be trying to achieve.

As this study reveals, during his dramatic career spanning two decades, Currimbhoy handles a variety of themes—historical, political, social and others—ranging from an imaginary event at a tourist centre to contemporary politics; he widens his range further by projecting scenes with a foreign setting and also by dramatising East-West relationships. But, in his enthusiasm for dramatising a variety of topics, he mostly fails to go deep into his subject. So far as his technique is concerned, he achieves success in one-act plays like *The Clock*, *The Refugee* and *The Miracle Seed* on account of their compactness and concentration. But, his bigger plays (except a few like *The Dissident M.L.A.*) fail to reach this level as most of them lack depth of treatment of the themes and the broader vision required and also because most of their characters are extremely thinly sketched.

As regards form, Currimbhoy's plays, particularly his one-act plays, show the influence of the modern theatre of the west though it is difficult to trace the exact influence of a single playwright on him except in the case of *This Alien .... Native Land* which is, as
pointed out earlier, clearly O'Neillian in inspiration. As already discussed, he experiments with different structures (1 to 4 acts); but is successful mostly in his one-act plays like The Refugee and The Miracle Seed, as he can concentrate on a single topic in a compact manner. But, in scenes where the life of masses are to be projected (for example, in "Darjeeling Tea?" and "Om Mane Padme Hum!"), he neglects to employ the techniques of our folk-stage such as folk-songs etc., which would have made the presentation more natural. More than all, some of his plays (as already mentioned) like "Om Mane Padme Hum!" and The Dissident M.L.A are so full of fade-outs, flashbacks, light and sound effects and other cinematographic techniques that one wonders whether they are meant for the film or the stage. However, some techniques like the chorus in "Darjeeling Tea?", the technique of one character on the stage conversing with another who is represented only by his voice\(^\text{20}\) and the Narrator-cum-Actor technique in My Experiments are handled with considerable skill.

So far as the problem of language is concerned, Currimbhoy triumphs over many other playwrights by composing effective dialogue in spoken English as suited to his themes. Of course, in some of his early plays like The Tourist Mecca, his dialogue is a little too literary; to illustrate,

Keshav: Janet, by hurting me, it won't hurt you any the less.

Janet: Can anything even hurt you Keshav? Let me look at you again. Let me see if I can find what I saw in you, earlier. There used to be something ... terribly remote and unhappy about your unspoken thoughts; something that made the good in you suffer — because it was there. Did I imagine it? Was it really there? Perhaps it was all part of an act.

Keshav: No, Janet, it wasn't. It's true that I had to put on an act with every one, but not with you. All along I have been bound like an actor on the stage, destined to play the role laid out for me. But I met you off-stage, and that was for me the breath of a new life. That's why I never wanted to touch you. I swear it. Because I know that the moment that happened, the illusion of this happiness would be over. 21

But as years pass, the playwright seems to have discovered the need to make his dialogue more natural by employing more of the spoken tongue. Here is an example from one of his later plays Inquilab, where he gives a realistic picture of the immediate repercussions which a bomb-explosion has on some excited students running helter-skelter and forming little groups:

1st Student: ... bomb thrown ...
2nd Student: ... police van ....
3rd Student: ... one dead, two injured ....
4th Student: ... pedestrian too ....
5th Student: ... assassin unknown ....
One of them: ... presumed Naxalite
Another: ... who else? 22

22. Currimbhoy's Plays, p.106.
Here the broken dialogue brings out all the excitement of the incident. To quote another instance of crisp dialogue in spoken language: conversation held when Yassin surprisingly decides to leave Sen Gupta's house in *The Refugee*:

**Sen Gupta:** Ah, Yassin, there you are! Spent a somewhat restless night, did you? Saw the light in your room.

**Yassin:** Y...Y...Yes.

**Sen Gupta:** What are you doing with that bag in hand? (Joking, laughing)

**Yassin:** Yes.

**Sen Gupta:** What?

**Yassin:** I thought you expected it.

**Sen Gupta:** Yes...No!

**Yassin:** I'm leaving anyway.23

The playwright does not bring in lengthy speeches unless they are warranted by particular situations; to illustrate, the Smuggler in *Goa* cannot explain his multi-faced activities and abilities without his long speech.24 Further, like Anand and others, the author does not hesitate to use Sanskrit and other Indian words where their English equivalents fail to convey the desired connotation: For example, *ashram*,25 *brahmacarya*,26 *bundh*.27 At the same time, it has to be noted that on occasion, Currimbhoy's dialogue is so bare, banal and casual that it reads like only

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23. Ibid., p.231.
24. Ibid., p.59.
27. Ibid., p.33.
a transcript of everyday speech and lacks all literary flavour. He seems to forget the important truth that dramatic dialogue is not a mere reproduction of everyday speech, but something more.

To conclude, Currimbhoy demonstrates his varied interests in his selection of themes; and he is drawn mostly to topics of contemporary interest — social and political. As the analysis of his technique shows, he achieves greater success mostly in his one-act plays like The Refugee and The Miracle Seed than in his bigger plays. At times his plots in the full-length plays appear to lack coherence. The discussion also shows that, as regards models and techniques, it is clear that he ignores the tradition of our Classical drama as well as the folk-stage. Though he seems to have been influenced by the Western theatre, it is difficult to point out any specific influences on him (except in This Alien .. Native Land). In some plays like "Om Mane Padme Hum!", he overdoes his use of theatrical gimmicks by reducing the scope for dramatic dialogue and by employing excessive cinematographic devices which appear to be cumbersome and artificial on the stage. So far as his language is concerned, he can employ spoken English to suit his characters and situations and thereby make his dialogue natural.

Though Currimbhoy has abundant stage sense (like Kailasam), it is at places (particularly in his later plays)
marred by his over-enthusiasm in presenting realistic pictures, somewhat loose structure and an unlimited use of novel techniques "subjecting the dramatic art to a strain it cannot bear". In view of these imperfections, it is difficult to agree fully with Faubion Bowers who opines that "Currimbhoy is India's first authentic voice in the theatre". However, he has a real flair for drama which can be expected to develop with maturity, and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar is near the point when he remarks, "While Asif Currimbhoy's resourcefulness and slick efficiency as a playwright is unquestionable, he creates the impression that he is as yet only testing his strength before he can feel ready to embark on something really worthwhile".

II

Though Currimbhoy, a major playwright of the post-Independence phase, does not exhibit much inclination towards mythological and hagiological themes, we find a good number of playwrights like P.A.Krishnaswami, V.V.S.Aiyangar and Sadar-Joshi who have attempted dramatisation of such episodes. Among the two playwrights of the phase dealing with Gandhiji's life, Shiv Kumar Joshi attempts a socio-mythological experiment. So far as

30. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p.246.
historical and political themes are concerned, a favourite theme is rational integration. Further, in common with the pre-independence phase, many social plays presenting some contemporary problems have also been written in this phase. Allegory does not seem to be prominent, while the phase demonstrates some new experiments like Mini-plays.

Religious, Mythological and Hagiological Themes

The first example of religious drama in this phase is Swami *Avyakta* Ayyavunanada's *India Through the Ages* (1947). Avyakta Ayyavunanada employs the dramatic medium to show some salient features of the religions and cultures that met on the Indian soil. He calls his work *India Through the Ages* (1947) a collection of ten plays; but many of them are conversations highlighting the essence of a particular religion and leading to the common ground of the spiritual aspect of human life. The contents of the collection are:


Of these, the three pieces, viz., The Ashrama, The Battle Within Man and The Flute of Krishna (not to be confused with a play with the same title by P.A. Krishnaswami) deal with Hinduism — starting from the highest Upanishadic concept of the Cosmic Soul up to
the devotional legends meant for those with different levels of comprehension. The conversation in the first piece is imagined to have been held in the āshrama of the sage Yājnavalkya, who expresses his desire to renounce the world and enter the fourth order in conformity with the Aryan tradition. Incidentally, the sage discusses with his wives Maitreya and Katyāyanī some aspects of the Vedānta philosophy and then the play almost comes to be a religious discourse.

In The Battle Within Man, the playwright shows a greater ability to compose dramatic dialogue in order to present in brief the essence of the immortal song The Gīta. As Sanjaya reports the day-to-day happenings of the Mahābhārata war to the blind King Dhritarāṣṭra, the personified image of the Goddess Gīta is made to appear just before and after their conversation; and in between, there is a flashback of the scene of Lord Krishna preaching to Arjuna. Though the playwright effectively presents the scene of the conflict, he unnecessarily brings in the concept of Krishna's flute and its call from The Bhāgavata, which is not quite relevant here.

The Flute of Krishna is a dialogue about the ideals of the Vaishnava cult held between Gurdas and Harimati, two devotees of Lord Krishna; and some far-fetched ideas about conventional marriage etc. are also brought in. To make the dialogue a little
dramatic, the playwright introduces a dream-sequence where Radha's extreme love for Krishna is presented. Though the concept of Krishna's flute and its call is taken from The Bhagavata, the modern interpretation given here has a blending of the spiritual and the material; and unlike in the legend and contrary to the devotees' dialogue, the call of His flute directs the women of the Brindavan to do their duties and thereby fulfill the work of the Lord.

In Towards Buddhahood, Avyaktananda presents a scene from the Buddha's life, where the prince Siddhārtha (Buddha's early name) secretly escapes from his palace with the help of Chhandaka to seek enlightenment. In addition to the conversation held between them about tradition and revolt, the playwright introduces the short episode of the two thieves talking about a box of jewels just then stolen from the palace. This adds some dramatic element to the piece as the prince, who had earlier seen only some miseries of the world, now also comes to know about the fear caused by wealth.

The Children of Israel is a dialogue about the shipwreck of the Jews near the western coast of India, the rescue of the seven men and the seven women, and their vision of Elijah as described in the tradition of the Bene-Israels. With some fictitious characters like Benjamin, Susanna, Miriam and Orpha, the playwright develops a discussion about the mission of the
Israelites which is explained by the vision of Elijah the guardian of their race: "...May your suffering save mankind .... By the absence of all oppressions will the Messiah be known Until He comes, build Jerusalem wherever you go..."31

The Cross in India is a discussion among some Indian Christians like Appar and Pillai about Thomas, a missionary who is supposed to have first brought Christianity to India. To extol his greatness the playwright brings in a picture of the ill-treatment meted out to the 'untouchables' by a few Indian priests and also his acceptance of a Harijan woman as his disciple. In addition to these scenes, the ending is dramatic as Thomas goes towards a mountain nearby as the goal of his last journey. As in the other pieces, the author explains (in the speech of Thomas) the teachings of the religion in clear terms:

".....Children of God, see Jesus in everything. Let parents see Jesus in their children; husbands in their wives; wives in their husbands; friends in their friends; men and women in one another and in animals. The world will then be the Kingdom of God."32

Similarly, Avyaktananda provides a glimpse of the Islamic religion in The Fakir's Lizard. There is little dramatic here in the conversation held among the highly-respected Fakir, Kamala a Hindu girl who seeks temporary shelter in his cottage, Gafur and others. They

32. Ibid., p.40.
dwell on many topics like the after-effects of the Muslim conquest of India and the true Islamic faith. In the process of the dialogue, the author makes a vague attempt to make the lizard a symbol of different forms of God.

The Sacred Fire of Life is again a conversation held among some Parsees about the circumstances which forced them to leave their country and come to India. As shown in some of the previous pieces, there is no plot, no suspense and nothing of drama. However, the author does not forget to explain the salient features of the Parsees' religion, the story of Zarath-Ustra (Golden Light) and the powers of Ahura.

The Disciples throws some light on the faith of the Sikhs and the life of Guru Govind Singh. Apart from the usual conversation about the religion, the author makes the piece slightly dramatic by bringing in the sequence of the Guru's decision of leaving the tribal residence in a forest after a long stay of fifteen years (which news upsets Jagu and other tribesmen) and the Guru's sudden change of decision enabling them to have his company for another five years.

The significance of the title is indicated in the following words of the Guru:

"The disciples must learn to find the Guru within themselves. The common will of the disciples must decide all matters. The Holy Book must be their guide. Each disciple must be a Khalsa — a pure soul."

33. Ibid., p.77.
All Prophets Day, the last piece in the collection seems to be the most dramatic of all these pieces, though the author seems to transform the drama into melodrama. A Fellowship Club of which Mumtaz and Gauri are Secretaries, arranges the celebration of All Prophets' Day in order to make the people realise the ideal of brotherhood preached by the prophets. In the meeting attended by the representatives of all faiths including the Marxist and the Nationalist, Gauri moves a resolution favouring an appeal to be sent to different groups of people all over the world, and it is passed with a majority of votes. Meanwhile, a huge crowd of people rushes into the building shouting slogans like 'Victory to the people'. While the porter and others plan to face the mob with loaded pistols, Gauri and Mumtaz exhort the members to face the situation peacefully and non-violently, and in this direction, they somehow make two white flags of their own and move towards the mob; and the end is left to the imagination of the reader.

India Through the Ages thus contains mostly dialogues on different faiths flourishing on our soil, and not regular plays though the author likes to call them so. (By the way it is curious that he has left out the Jainism whose role in the cultural history of our country cannot be ignored).

P.A.Krishnaswami's The Flute of Krishna (1950) is a verse-play dealing with the legend of a girl Murali and an young man Vidyaratna who, by their devotion to Lord Krishna, become respectively His flute and the bamboo
With this as the nucleus, the playwright creates some events and situations, gradually developing his plot into a five-act structure (the fifth being just a small scene). At the very outset, his hero and the heroine, though born in different castes, are shown to have a similar craving for the realisation of the Lord. Vidyaratna gradually ascends the spiritual ladder, two of its rungs being his condemnation of animal sacrifice resulting in his departure from home in search of Truth and his secret learning of the Scriptures. In the course of further development of action, the playwright brings in some complications after the hero's marriage with Murali. Disgusted to hear the continuance of animal sacrifice, he dislikes the idea of taking her to the village; and both spend their life in the service of humanity at a distant village, in the course of which both die and get their prayers answered by the Lord. As a symbol of caged souls craving for freedom, the playwright introduces the brief episode of a pair of two birds bought from a fowler and set free by Vidyaratna.

The play lacks suspense except in a few places like the scene of the nuptial room where the appearance of the Lord's shadow first causes suspicion in the mind of the husband about his newly-wedded wife's character. But this suspicion, which would be enough for a tragedy in the case of an ordinary man, is considered here
only as a transitory phase in the life of Vidyaratna who is portrayed as a man more refined than his tradition-bound father and consequently patient enough to realize the truth of his wife's true devotion to the Lord. Further, his father (unlike other ordinary fathers) reconciles himself to the situation in the end, and he says to his son:

Perhaps my love for you is a Selfish love!
Perhaps I must let you go and find your freedom!
And may be my loss will be the gain of others.

K.S. Ramaswami Sastri is right when he says in his foreword, "In this play, imagination is wedded to reason and both are sublimated with spiritual intuition."

But the lengthy speeches in verse are sure to affect the stageability of the play.

Dilip Kumar Roy's Sri Caitanya (1950) is a verse-play in three acts dealing with the life of a devotee of Lord Krishna, during fifteenth century Bengal. The three acts are named as follows: I Aspiration, II Conflict and III Illumination. By persuasion, the young Chaitanya gets his mother's consent and becomes a wandering mendicant singing the name of the Lord.

On his way, he performs many miracles like defeating two disputing traditional Sanskrit scholars, Keshav and Murari and correcting two notorious terrorists of the neighbourhood, Jagai and Madhai. His wife Vishnupriya,

35. K.S. Ramaswami Sastri, Foreword, p.111
who first questions the propriety of his renunciation,
at last realises her mistake in failing to understand him.

As the author writes in his preface, the sources of his theme are Amiya Nima Charita, the most authentic biography of Sri Chaitanya and Chaitanya-charitamrita, and he says, "What I set out to write is not his history, but to express dramatically my heart's vision." As Shakespeare does in his historical plays like Julius Caesar, Roy takes the spirit but not the letter of history, and sticks to some main events and details, but not so far as to fetter the play of his imagination. There are conflict and suspense throughout — in Chaitanya's prolonged persuasion of his mother for permission to leave home and become a wandering mendicant; in Vishnupriya's trance bringing before her mind a vision of devotees surrounding the saint, and also in his stern refusal to take the help of his devotees in saving himself from the terrorists' attack. The last sequence is, in fact, the climax of his spiritual victory as, quite calm and composed, he thinks that God has 'come to play in new guises' and the terrorists miraculously relent; and Vishnupriya also surrenders saying, "it was for this my sin of sins I lost you." Further, the playwright brings in a touch of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy time and again; to illustrate,

37. Ibid., p.72.
38. Ibid., p.82.
Sri Chaitanya speaks of 'His rainbow Grace which shows me an exit into the Life Divine.' The blank verse employed in dialogue makes good reading, but the long speeches again render the play less stageworthy.

V.V. Srinivas Aiyangar, whose work mostly belongs to the pre-Independence phase, also writes a later play, *Ramarejya* (1952) the theme being the depiction of an ideal kingdom of an ideal king. Like Sri Aurobindo, Girish Karnad and others, the playwright tries to interpret an ancient legend from a contemporary angle. He demonstrates his ideal of a modern ideal State through several motifs and episodes: King Rama as a common man; his sacrifice for the good of mankind; his socialism shown in the episode of Harinara Sastry and Bhaskara Gupta; the controls on currency and trade; the use of armed forces to supervise the various industries during the time of peace; protection to the infant industries and the people's realisation of their responsibilities as shown in the Sathyamurthi episode.

As C.L. Ramaswamy Iyer points out, the dramatist "has, with the instinct of a true playwright, interwoven into the ancient story, episodes and lessons bearing on the life of today". The modern concepts of democracy and socialism are traced back in the ancient benevolent monarchy; statements like "the King is like a common man and the common man like a King" and

40. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Foreword, V.V.S. Aiyangar's *Ramarejya* (Madras, 1952).
"All food is the common property of those who are hungry"; and the hero of the play is portrayed as one who is wedded to truth, justice and service to humanity. But the playwright does not develop the plot so as to present a continuous story, and thus the 'five acts' look like episodes artificially knit together. Further, the play may fail to make an impact on the audience on account of the overplus of conversations without action and lack of suspense.

Another attempt to view the hero of *Rāmāvana* from a modern angle and make him more human than divine is made by Mathuram Boothalingam in the play, *Alone in Ayodhya* (1970). Here is an imaginative reconstruction (in 6 scenes) of an episode from the last part of the epic (the sending of Sītā to the forest). The inner struggle of Śrī Rāma, the conflict between his duty as a king and his human emotions, constitutes the theme of the play. Taking Śrī Rāma's order of banishment of his queen Sītā (the purity of whose character is doubted by the malicious tongue of a washerman as she had lived in Rāvana's capital for a year) as the nucleus, the playwright develops the plot, inventing a number of events to highlight the struggle: Sītā's being asked to declare her purity before the People's Assembly; Lāvana's rebellion; the intrigues of Rāma's Ministers Mantrapāla and Jayanta, against the Chief Minister Sumantra etc.

Without sacrificing the nobility of Rama, the playwright makes him perfectly human, and shows him against the background of the various political intrigues. Unlike Aiyangar's Ramarejya, this play has a coherence of sequences and logical plot-construction. Further, unlike the heroine of the epic, the Sita of the play is not fully submissive; in spite of her deep love for Rama, she argues with him and also desires to participate in the politics of the kingdom. Also, like the heroine of Maithilisaraṇ Gupta's Hindi work Sākēt, Urmilā is given much importance and portrayed as a woman of high self-respect, who takes her husband Lakṣmana to task for being too proud of Raghu's race and neglecting his wife; but this sub-plot occupies excessive space in the play, making the main plot somewhat loose and thereby impeding its development.

As in the pre-Independence phase, The Mahābhārata supplies themes to some plays in this phase also. Smt. K. B. Thakur's Mother and Child (1960), a Bhavan's Journal's Competition Prize-winner is a 3-act play, which deals with the tragic story of Karna. As in Tagore's Karna and Kunti, the playwright focusses light on the natural bondage between a mother and her child and the consequent conflict she has to undergo when she is forced to abandon the child for fear of consequences. Unlike in the other works about the tragic hero, both Kunti and Karna are given importance in the play. The playwright judiciously chooses only
such events as are directly pertaining to her theme:
but it is rather an unbearable strain on the audience
to imagine the hero's life in the big gap left between
the first and the second acts, between Karna's birth
and the commencement of the war (where the Pravēśaka
technique of our Classical Sanskrit Drama would have
come to her aid). The dialogue is simple and
frequently effective as in: "A mother's heart trembles
for the safety of her sons who alone are her life";43
These sentiments are similar to what Kailasam's Radha
says to her foster-son,

".... A mother that doth bear
And bring forth son ... she may not, will not
See or know a world beyond her son".44

The theme of D.A. Sadar-Joshi's five-act play,
Achārya Drōna (1963) is also taken from The Mahābhārata.
Achārya Drona the preceptor of the Pandava and the
Kaurava princes has a materialistic wife, by name
Krupi. She insists that her husband must become the
Commander of the Kaurava forces in the Mahābhārata war;
at which Sakuni raises a great controversy by charging
Drona with partiality towards the Pandavas. Caught in
a mental conflict, Drona finally accepts the generalship
against his own will and also against the currents and
cross-currents of opinions about him. He performs his
duty with all sincerity in the battlefield, but meets
his fate on account of the trick played on him by Krishna.

43. Smt. K. B. Thakur, Mother and Child, Bhavan's Journal,
V i, 14 (7-2-1960), p.35.
The author says, "I have tried to infuse him (Drona) with all the traits that are the abiding factors in the life of a teacher, be he in any time or clime .... I feel this character has been lost sight of on the vast canvas of the epic, and hence my endeavour to reveal it in all its growing splendour ...."45 He has been eminently successful in this attempt. Here Drona is symbol of a teacher who, with his simple living and high thinking, is always engaged in moulding the character of his pupils; who, frank and outspoken, stands on principles without caring for the consequences: and who, in addition to his rich spiritual heritage of a Brahmin, is a master of archery. Borrowing from the Sānkhyā philosophy (vide the words 'Brajkṛti' and 'Purusha' used in Act III, Scene 1 and in Act V, Scene 1), the dramatist seems to suggest that Energy in the form of the universal teacher can activate the inert Matter of the world. Thus, the playwright attempts to project the image of Drona as the Achārya par excellence.

But, there is no suspense except in the scenes presenting Drona's mental conflict and the controversy regarding the Commandership of the army. Also, speech being more and action less, the whole play looks more like an essay on Drona's character than a well-developed piece of dramatic art suited for the stage. Further, in his enthusiasm to idealise the character of Drona,

45. D.A. Sadar-Joshi, Achārya Drona (Calcutta, 1963), Preface, p.i.
the playwright wastes dramatic opportunities. Take his treatment of the Ekalavya episode, for example: While Kailasam makes his Ekalavya first observe the practice in archery from a distance and thereby gives a natural tinge to the entire episode, Sader-Joshi simply arranges an earlier meeting of the teacher and the pupil.

In his Utara Geetha or the Geetha Reminded (1964), Padmanabhi Krishnamurthi dramatizes an episode in the last portion of The Mahabharata in order to highlight the Vedantic thought enshrined in the Bhagavad-Geeta. After the Mahabharata war, Arjuna is grief-stricken on account of the loss of his kith and kin as well as his elders like Dropanacharya. He decides to renounce all mundane duties and pleasures and lead the life of a Vanaprastha (hermit). To put him in the path of action again, Lord Krishna takes him to the family of a Brahmin in a nearby forest. The son of the Brahmin is dead; but none of the members of the family is upset by it. This experience reminds Arjuna of the teachings of the immortal poem Geeta, and then ashamed of his conduct, he returns to the capital, thinking of his duty again.

According to the original story of the epic, Yudhishthira (not Arjuna) develops disgust at the mundane world in the end and hence thinks of retiring to the forest. The change made by the playwright appears to serve little purpose. However, the play
has suspense and action which sustain the interest of
the audience as each minute of the host's treatment
of the guests in the crisis arouses curiosity.

Geethacharya and other Dramas (1972) by
Keshavadasji is a collection of three one-act plays in
prose; 1. Geethacharya or the Lord of Bhagavad-Gita,
2. Sant Tukaram and 3. Bhakta Sri Puranderadas. The
author says that, "to attract the attention of the
Westerners towards the Indian spiritual culture", he
wrote these plays in English and staged them, himself
taking the key roles. All the three pieces are frankly
didactic.

The theme of the first is from The Mahabharata.
Caught in a mental conflict as to whether he could kill
his kinsmen and elders in war, Arjuna goes on raising
questions which are duly answered by the divine-human
Krishna. As to the content of the dialogue, the author
almost follows the Bhagavad-Gita. Here again, Arjuna
represents the tormented soul of man, while Krishna is
the symbol of the Omnipotent, enlightening him on the
purpose of man's existence in this world and directing
him to do his duties without attachment. But, the piece
cannot be called a play at all as it is merely a series
of questions and answers on the life of man and contains
no plot.

In the second play, Keshavadasji highlights a
phase in the spiritual life of Sant Tukaram. A low-born

46. Keshavadasji, Geethacharya and other Dramas
(Bangalore, 1972), Preface, p. i.
devotee of the Lord, he is persecuted by some 'high-caste' people; and even his wife Jija first fails to understand him. Once his devotion to God brings forth a miracle which drives out Aurangzeb's troops and saves King Shivaji. Excepting the miracle, there is nothing to develop the plot. Further, the only scene having some suspense is that of the Lord assuming the form of Shivaji and misleading the enemy.

The theme of Bhakta Sri Purandaradas is the dramatic event in the life of the saint in which a miracle turns the wealthy materialistic merchant Srinivasa Nayak into a saint. Unlike Sant Tukaram, this has suspense throughout, and the miraculous change in the merchant is well brought out with the aid of suitable dialogue coupled with action.

A more ambitious attempt at hagiological drama is The Beggar Princess (1956), a play in five acts, jointly written by Dilip Kumar Roy and Indira Devi on the life of Mira the mystic queen of Mewar. Fully devoted to Lord Krishna, Mira cannot accept anybody else as her husband; and Bhojaraj, her married husband, takes sometime to understand her spiritual power. Meanwhile, wrongly interpreting Mira's motives and actions, Bhojaraj's sister Udayabai and others persecute her; but her devotional songs become more and more popular day by day. Her inner spiritual urge makes her leave Mewar in her middle age, wander like a beggar in many places and finally shake off her mortal body at Brindavan.
The playwrights develop their plot around the significant title The Beggar Princess, which brings out the paradox of the heroine who, born a princess, becomes a beggar only in order to be a princess in the realm of the spirit. The conflict is there between the limited power of man and the infinite Grace of the Lord as can be seen in the lives of saints "who defy the weights and measures of the human superbazaar". This conflict and the consequent suspense are presented well in the queen's dealings with her husband, Udayabal's acts of villainy and the robber episode. To focus the attention of the audience on the popularity of the mystic singer, the playwrights rightly introduce the scene of the Emperor Akbar and the gifted musician Tansen who in disguise are tempted to hear her devotional music. Another touching scene is that of Mira's farewell to Mewar as she hears a call from Krishna the Lord of Brindavan. The play contains a Prologue and an Epilogue, and also an 'invocation' to Mira (a unique feature); the presentation would perhaps have been more effective if the playwrights had adopted the mode of introduction employed in our classical drama, and also folk-songs to demonstrate the popularity of the saint among the masses.

In this phase we also come across a few dramatic dialogues (not plays in the strict sense of the term) imagined to have been held between two heroes or heroines.

47. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p.234.
of our epics and legends. Of the dialogues Radha and Krishna: The Reunion and Bheeshma and Drona by 'Ketaki', the theme of the former is from The Bhagavata and that of the latter, from The Mahabharata whereas Kamala Subramaniam's Gandharee and Kaikyee has two characters, one each from The Mahabharata and The Rameynae respectively.

In Radha and Krishna: The Reunion (1948), 'Ketaki' makes the devotee and the Lord converse when the latter is nearing his end in the human form. After Krishna leaves Brindavan for Dwaraka, Radha suffers a lot from the pangs of separation. After finishing his various duties in this world, Krishna returns to Radha. He explains how he, hit by an arrow of a hunter, is at "the journey's end". The central idea is suggested in Krishna's words: "You are the soul wandering in quest of god, and I am God. The time has come for the end of the quest".

Bheeshma and Drona (1951) is a dialogue imagined to have been held just before the marriage of Droupadi. Drona says that he is in search of a young Kshetriya whom he can train in archery so that the insult suffered by him at the hands of Droupada could be avenged. Bheeshma who foresees the annihilation, welcomes Drona to train the future kings of the Kuru race; for "you are the fittest person to train them in the art of hatred, filled to the brim, as you are yourself with hatred".

49. Ibid., p.649.
Their conversation turns on to Karne's story and the machinations of Duryodhama against the Pandavas and finally the Kaurava's preparation to go to Droupadi's swayamvara. The author does not concentrate on a single topic; but he succeeds in his design of contrasting the wisdom of Bheeshma (who could foresee events) with the military expertise and determination of Drona.

In Gandhāreee and Kaikēyee (1962), Kamala Subramaniam brings together two queens (probably in heaven) belonging to two different ages. Each provides an apology for her actions. Kaikēyee tells Gandhāree how she first rejoiced at the news of Sri Rama's coronation and then how Manthara's words forced her to demand Sri Rama's exile and her son's coronation. According to Gandhāreee, it was her extreme affection for her son Suyodhana that urged her to turn a deaf ear to Draupadi's sobs when she was insulted by Duryodhama at the royal court.

To sum up, though our ancient legends and epics have not been fully used even by the playwrights of this phase, we do find a few examples of this nature provided by some playwrights like Krishnaswami and Sadar-Joshi. Smt. Thakur tries to exalt the human aspect of the symbolic mother in Kunti. A few playwrights of the phase try to extend ancient myths to modern times and interpret them from a contemporary angle (as in V. V. S. Aiyangar's Ramarāṣṭya and Mathurem Bhoothalingam's
Further, regarding the portrayal of the lives of saints like Sri Chaitanya, Sri Tukaram and Sri Purandaradas, most playwrights appear to have been content with the presentation of one or two episodes alone.

**Historical and Political Themes**

Like their predecessors, the playwrights in this phase also have failed to make full use of the rich thematic material available in the long history of our country. We could understand the risk that our authors had to take to employ political themes during the British rule; but it is a wonder how this fecund source could not be fully tapped even in the post-Independence period. Yet, as in the pre-Independence phase, we come across a few playwrights in this phase also who draw their themes both from our ancient history and modern and current politics. There are quite a few plays based on material from the history of the Mughal period.

Chronologically the first of these is S.Janaki's 3-act play *The Siege of Chitor* (1960), a Bhavan's Journal competition winner, which deals with Akbar's final successful bid to conquer the formidable Chitor fort. In the last phase of the war, Akbar camps outside the fort which is now guarded by the loyal Rajput Generals Patta and Jaimal (as the Rana is in exile). Among the Rajput women who take active part in the battle, Padmini and Jaya (Jaimal's wife) make an unsuccessful attempt to kill Akbar. In the end,
as the fort wall is demolished by the Mughal army, the Rajput soldiers directly confront the enemy and die a brave death in the battle; and true to their chaste life, their women observe johar (fire-immolation).

The playwright tries to ennoble the character of Akbar; for example, here are his instructions to his General before leaving Chitor: "Temper authority with lenience. Do all in your power to win the hearts of those who remain here." Also, he is noble enough to find merit even in his foes: "The valour of these Rajputs compels even my admiration ... Perhaps they deserve to win". But, in giving prominence to the Mughal Emperor, the playwright does not relegate to background the staunch patriots like Patta, Jaimal, Jaya, and Padmini. There is suspense, particularly in the scene where Padmini and Jaya attempt to kill Akbar. This scene is reminiscent of a similar one in V.V.Srinivasa Aiyanger's *At Any Cost* (1921) which has already been considered in the previous chapter. The play has brisk action and is certainly stageworthy.

Santha Rama Rau's *A Passage to India* (1960) is a dramatised version of E.M. Forster's novel bearing the same title. By dramatising almost all its main episodes, the playwright does justice to the novel. Also, in this process, she does not seem to lose sight of characterisation as intended by the novelist. For the

52. Ibid.
development of the plot, the playwright appears to have judiciously selected four scenes of dramatic and narrative interest and distributed these in the three-act structure as follows: I Tea-party at Mr. Fielding's, II (i) Picnic, Marabar Caves (ii) English Club of Chandrapore and III Magistrate's Court. A reviewer rightly remarks, "... Her arrangement of his material is skilful. Much of the original dialogue has been used, and his gift for making his character talk intelligently and naturally at the same time appears to work almost as well in the theatre as in the novel." 53. Thus, the story-interest as well as the suspense of the original is maintained in the play. Hence it is difficult to agree fully with J.A. Collins when he remarks, "By telescoping the vast sweep and profound depth of Forster's novel into dramatically heightened scenes, Miss Rau has done a disservice to the original"; 54

The killing of Afzal Khan, the Muslim general of Bijapur by the Maratha ruler Shivaji forms the theme of Lakhan Deb's *Tigerclaw* (1967), a verse-play in three acts. Afzal Khan has taken an oath to present the head of Shivaji to his king. Shivaji who too is waiting for a chance to kill Afzal Khan pretends to surrender. Their

54. J.A. Collins, 'Novels into Plays',
envoys arrange their meeting. Pretending to embrace Shivaji, Afzal Khan tries to finish him off; but Shivaji himself kills the Khan with his tigerclaw. At the same time, Shivaji's trusted Commanders surprise and rout the Muslim army. In the end, he is blessed by his guru Saint Ramdas.

Instead of concentrating on the main theme (which could have been better fitted into the structure of a one-act play), the playwright broadens its dimension into a three-act structure. While the second act presents the crucial moment of the killing, the first act prepares the ground for it by presenting the contradictory opinions held by the common citizens about Shivaji's exploits and his plan of attack. But, as the actual action ends in the second act itself, the third act appears to be superfluous on account of the unimportance of the events presented (viz., the bestowing of honours on Shivaji's commanders and the punishment meted out to the traitor Chandra Rao) though 'the sub-plot enhances the sharp outlines of the main plot'.

As K.R. Srinivasa-Iyengar says, "Lakhan Deb has presented a credible enough Shivaji whose heroic stature and essential nobility are hardly affected by the grim necessity that drives him to deal with his adversary in the way he does".

56. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 246.
Drawing his theme from recent history, Lekhan Deb gives a picture of the last days of Gandhi's life in his recent two-act verse-play, Murder at the Prayer Meeting (1976). The title is evidently modelled on T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. The plot covers the Mahatma's dominant role in politics just before partition, the events that followed it, the two-way exodus of refugees and the consequent communal clashes and bloodshed. Written in the manner of a Greek tragedy, the play observes the unities and contains a Prologue and employs the Chorus, while the Interlude successfully used to link the two acts reminds us of the Praveshaka technique of the Classical Sanskrit Drama though it has clear affinities with Eliot's play. The playwright has used the expressionist method in characterisation making almost all the characters universal. He makes combined use of blank verse, rhymed verse and metered prose but the audience may find this style difficult to follow.

In his three-act play, Larina Sahib (1970), Gurucharan Das deals with the political career of a British Resident in Punjab whose initial self-respect and faith in the principle of natural justice gradually give place to his madness for power and glory finally leading to his downfall. The plot is developed around Henry Lawrence who is appointed the Resident by the East India Company at the court of Dalip Singh of Punjab, the young son of the late Ranjit Singh. He is fair to
the Rani Jindan and to the people of the State, and keeps the traitors at a distance. The imperialistic Governor-General (coaxed by his Secretary) calls for his explanation on his support to Indians and Lawrence boldly defends his action. Next, as the first step to annex Punjab to the empire, orders are issued for the banishment of the Rani much against the wishes of Lawrence, who, in the meanwhile, has fallen in love with her and has gradually assumed the authority of an 'Angrez-Badshah'; finally Lawrence is dismissed from his post.

According to the playwright, the action of the play "is based on events in the Punjab in 1846-47, and was reconstructed from documents and letters exchanged by the principal characters". The playwright makes his opening scene significant by indicating the future conflict in the play, as shown in the Governor-General's Secretary Currie's report about the "the bad news ... from the frontier, Peshawar" and also the former's suggestive query "What sort of a bloke is Lawrence?". Some convincing dramatic sequences that contribute to the development of the plot are — the arrest of Lal Singh and Tej Singh, the friends of the British, for their political intrigues; the 'caw-row' for which Lawrence apologises; and the court scene where Lal Singh is humiliated by the prince Daleep. The characters are

58. Ibid., pp. 1-2.
59. Ibid., p. 2.
skilfully made to unfold themselves through dialogue: Lawrence, a man of self-respect, opposing the British policy; the imperialistic Governor-General; his secretaries Gurry and Elliot, the latter valuing the merits in others and less scornful than Gurry towards the natives; Tej Singh and Lal Singh, the traitors ready to develop friendship with the British at any cost; Sher Singh, loyal to the throne of Punjab; the patriotic prince Daleep and his mother the Rani Jindan. But, what is disappointing is the playwright's failure in showing the stages of development of the mania for power in Lawrence, as the audience can see the change in him only towards the end when he contrives to wear the coveted jewel Kohinoor and the late Ranjit Singh's robes.

Das employs local colour in his dialogue, as e.g:

**Rani (Salaaming):** Zubheda Begum, the singing queen of Benaras offers her salaams and services to the Resident Sahib.

**Lawrence (elaborately returning her salaams):** We welcome the Begum (Pause). But we are at a loss to remember if we asked for the charming favours of the Singing Queen.

**Rani:** The widespread fame of the Resident attracts the Queen as the flickering light from an earthen lamp attracts the moth of the night.

**Lawrence:** (Obviously enjoying himself): Such flattery would make even the gods blush). 60

60. Ibid., p.30.
He also employs analogies in a style of dialogue with a typically Indian flavour. To illustrate,

**Lawrence:** 'Fear is only human', said the jackal.

**Rani:** 'But the brave are not afraid', said the lion.

**Lawrence:** 'Even the brave are afraid of beautiful women', said the fox.61

As already pointed out, there are many things in the play to contribute to its success on the stage — the neatly developed plot with suspense in many scenes, the generally lively dialogue (excepting a few lengthy speeches) and the realism of presentation. Thus, the play, even with some of its imperfections, is an experiment of considerable importance in the field of historical drama. As C.V. Venugopal remarks: "The singular achievement of Das, which I am sure was what got him the Sultan Padamsee Prize in 1968, is not so much his recreating history faithfully as his portrayal of the essential human elements of the historical characters, captured in all their subtlety ..."62

Dilip Hiro's *To Anchor a Cloud* (1972) deals with Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. The playwright presents the weakness of the old Emperor Jahangir who looks upon Shah Jahan as his successor to the throne, and also the circumstances that led to the unsuccessful bid of Shahriyar and Parweez to capture power. But in his attempt to transform Mumtaz Mahal into an active

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61. Ibid., p.31.
The playwright seems to distort history altogether. She is shown to be a woman who is shrewd and crafty. (e.g. her secret poisoning of Parweez and her insistence that the Emperor should put his seal to her decree of death-warrant to Rodreguiz). Thus, it is difficult to agree fully with Simon Trussler admiring "the gradual transformation of Mumtaz from passive adorer of her husband into manipulating (still adoring) wife-cum-politician". Further, though the playwright shows his ability to create lively situations, he has not ensured harmonious development of the plot, as is seen from his stage-directions like 'some years later', 'two years later' (These intervals should have been suggested either in the dialogue itself or with the aid of the techniques of our Classical Drama). Thus, To Anchor a Cloud may not fully impress the audience on account of the playwright's immaturity in handling a historical theme and his loose plot-construction though we learn that "the play has been tested across footlights in London". As C.V. Venugopal remarks, "this success might have been due to several reasons ....: excellent stage settings,

64. Ibid., p.23.
65. Ibid., p.46.
66. Ibid., The playwright's letter to the Editor, n.p.
Perhaps; a foreign audience, for whom anything Indian, particularly from distant Mughal history, has a romantic aura about it...

Manohar Malgonkar, though essentially a writer of fiction, has also written a two-act period play, *Line of Mars* (1978), the theme of which is drawn from the period prior to and during the 1857 revolt. Against the bizarre historical background of the decadent morality of impotent princes, palace intrigues and Dalhousie's cunning Doctrine of Lapse, the playwright creates some tragi-comic situations showing the unethical efforts of a royal family to maintain their family tree. The characters are one-dimensional and most of the situations conventional though the dialogue is frequently crisp.

Apart from these historical plays, there are a number of plays which deal with the post-Independence political situation. The first of these is V.K.Gokak's playlet *The Goddess Speaks* (1948) the theme of which is the coming of Independence. A flood-lit image of the Goddess Bhārat-Mātā (made by the patriotic artist) attracts typical persons from various walks of life, who view Independence from their own narrow angle. Frustrated at their parochial attitude, the artist turns towards the image, and sobbing he sinks at her feet. Then, he sees a vision of the Goddess who inspires hope in his dejected mind and vanishes.

The intention of the playwright appears to highlight the true patriot's concern for the problems facing new India; and there is no plot as such. First, seeing the image of Bharat-Mata, the patriot-artist delightfully remarks, "..... For centuries has our country waited for this day to dawn"; and in the end, the Vision of the Goddess (the optimistic aspect of the patriot's mind) says, "Walk serenely with a young hope in your heart ..... The earth will be turned into heaven." Between these two points, the playwright presents some typical characters each with his own reaction to freedom: the Englishman, the imperialistic State-Officer, the liberal-minded Muslim-Leaguer, the Hindu-Mahasabhaite, the merchant and the Communist. Thus the playwright symbolically draws the patriot's mental graph starting with the pleasure brought by the long-awaited political freedom, gradually going down with the disappointing parochial interpretations and then suddenly rising with an optimistic note in the end; and though there is neither much of plot, nor characterisation in the play, its thought-provoking dialogue is impressive.

A play in a similar vein is R.Jevantinathan's Guardianship of 'India' (1949). This is a mock-trial

69. Ibid., p. 460.
(with allegorical characters) dealing with the post-Independence politics of our country. The Supreme Court of Conscience of which Mr. Spirit-de-Gandhi is the Chief Justice, registers a case about the lack of proper nourishment given to the two-year old 'India', one of the bleeding children born of partition. It is Mr. Common Man, the father of the child that files the suit against Mrs. Jai Hind Lal its foster-mother; and Mr. Anarchy and Mr. Patch-Abyss are the Counsels for the Plaintiff and the Defendant respectively. Miss Danger, Mrs. Communalism, Mrs. Parochialism are some of the witnesses for the Plaintiff; and Mrs. Un-Mount Batons (Midwife), Miss Democracy and Mrs. Patriotism etc. for the Defendant; and the Exhibit 'A' is the child 'India'. After conducting examination and cross-examination of all the witnesses, both the Counsels effectively present their arguments. In the end, the Chief Justice advises the plaintiff to withdraw the case and come to a compromise in the interest of the child, and then Mr. Common Man extends his hand of co-operation to Mrs. Jai Hind Lal.

The mock-trial makes interesting reading and should go off well on the stage also; it certainly deserves the eulogy of Harindramath Chattopadhyaya who calls it "a well-drawn cartoon in the finest sense of the term."

70. R. Javanthanathan's, Guardianship of 'India' (Madras, 1949), Foreword, p.1.
The partition and aftermath is the subject of some plays in the post-Independence period. D.M. Borgaonkar's one-act plays (1957) contains two plays on this theme: The Great Coward and The Refugee. In The Great Coward, Rajani subjected to rape during the riots, is rejected by her husband, Dr. Bimal Kumar Benerji; and she later dies in a bus accident leaving her child of illegitimate birth. In The Refugee, the playwright gives a picture of a refugee camp and the people's sufferings; and the play deals with the tragic death of an old man caused by the communal riots, leading to his daughter Prabha's inevitable acceptance of life-partnership offered by another refugee, Miranjan who had to perform the funeral rites of the dead man.

Among other "partition" plays, K.S. Rangappa's one-act play They Live Again (1969) is about the communal disturbances that broke out in Punjab and Bengal and also the broadmindedness of the Hindus that could protect the lives of many Muslims.

In this land of infinite variety of customs and languages, there have been frequent attempts to maintain unity in diversity, as shown by our history. Particularly after Independence, there was an outburst of fissiparous tendencies which had been kept suppressed during the British rule. This necessitated serious thinking by cool-headed patriots about national integration in many fields. This forms the theme of some plays in the post-Independence phase.
In her play *My Sons* (1963), Mrs. J. M. Billimoria presents a picture of five students of Bombay University who, in spite of sharp differences in their religion and language, live like real brothers; they are, Rehman a Muslim, Ramesh and Ramu two Hindus from Gujarat and Maharashtra respectively, Rustum, a Parsee and Reuben, an Anglo-Indian.

With the help of these characters, the playwright develops her plot round the nucleus of her ideal of national integration. In her design of characterisation she makes all the five share both the joys and the sorrows of their life; in this they are fully supported by their mothers, sisters and other members of their family. To project an image of their permanent brotherhood, the playwright presents some relevant sequences like their response to the call of the nation during the Indo-Pakistan war, the moving scene of the death of Rehman and his brother Abdul (now on the Pakistan side) who fight each other in the war, the breaking out of communal riots and the working for peace by the remaining four friends, their joint venture of running a co-operative store, the death of Rehman's mother and their carrying of her body to the burial ground even amidst the prevailing atmosphere of terror. The playwright has obviously taken a dreamy-eyed view of her subject. The five-act structure with many scenes is unwieldy and the dialogue is often stilted and literary.
National integration is the theme of Husenali Chagla's *The Mussalman* (1966) also. A 3-act play *The Mussalman* deals with the need for Hindu-Muslim unity and the Muslims' loyalty to the country. Salim, an Air Force pilot is the only son of Dr. Mohamed Yakub, a nationalist Muslim of Bombay and his Hindu wife Sushila. His stubborn pro-Pakistani views raise a storm in the family. He changes his mind only in the ensuing Indo-Pakistan war; but is shot dead. Meanwhile, the father is also killed by the mob in his attempt to protect the life of a Hindu in a communal clash. Both the father and the son get posthumous gallantry awards.

The play is rather weak in character and motivation; Salim's sudden change of heart is not adequately explained and in any case, the playwright has obviously an axe to grind here.

Hushmat Sozrekashme takes a broader view of the concept of national integration; in his long verse-play *Vikramjeet* (1970), he presents a symbolic hero with a lofty ideal. Vikramjeet travels to different places in the country and sees everything through his glasses of national integration. He tries his luck—

"By uniting varied parts
Of my land thick and large
In one language, in one feeling,
Leaving small and petty dealings".  

The major portion of the play contains conversations on political, religious and cultural aspects of Indian life as viewed from the angle of national integration symbolized by Vikramjeet.

The author seems to concentrate on creating an ideal character as a symbol of national integration; and there is no development of plot, except in the scenes of the killing of the wicked Narang by Azimunnissa (which involves Vikramjeet also), the consequent trial and the hero's death. Even the minor characters like Shatrujeet, Sanyogta (the woman in power) and others help further idealisation of the hero, but do not contribute to the development of the plot. The play as has many as 103 scenes (without any Act-division) and there seems to be no structural principles at work in the plot. Hence, the whole play reads like an essay (of course, without much story and suspense) about the symbolic hero Vikramjeet around whom some threads of dialogue are woven.

Sozrekeshme's dreamy-eyed idealism stands in sharp contrast with the pessimism of Anil Saari's Prefaces (1969) which has been published in an abridged version. The Author's Note says: "This (Prefaces) is a special adaptation for Enact; and the scenes 4, 5 and 6 have been omitted. Their omission does not alter the frame in which the prefaces have been fitted, for they add not in depth but in circumference ... The idea was to give a seminal list
of Prefaces that are verbose, inverted, perverse — apart from being ostentatiously exaggerated. The four scenes in the adaptation have some typical characters (a Speaker, a Heckler, Grey-Hairs, a Young Man, Girl etc.) engaged in light conversations about problems of the present, social customs, the social conditions during the British regime, films, smoking, the urban and the rural life and the problems of over-population, corruption and unemployment.

Saari's work is without a logically-developed plot and suspense. The author appears to satirise the barrenness of the methods employed in solving the current problems of the country. He shows that there are repeated discussions both at private and public levels, and nobody appears to be serious about any topic. In contrast with the earnestness shown by some people, there are persons like 'Somebody', a character ready even to go 'three thousand miles away from my culture, my prejudices, my privileges etc.' Prefaces is evidently a play dominated by the 'Waste Land' spirit and mood.

The life and career of Mahatma Gandhi is a subject which has naturally fascinated many post-Independence playwrights. Apart from Lakhman Deb's Murder at the Prayer Meeting which has already been considered, there are plays by K.S. Rangappa,

73. Ibid., last scene, n.p.
Shiv Kumar Joshi and K.A. Abbas on this subject.

In this three-act play, Gandhi's Sadhana (1969), Rangappa concentrates on the boyhood of Gandhi and his subsequent fight for the rights of Indians in South Africa. The three acts bear the significant names: I The Prelude, II Sadhana and III Towards the goal. The sequences in the play point at various stages of Gandhiji's life at home and in South Africa. They also throw sufficient light upon his firm belief in truth and non-violence, and the sanctity of the means. As Gandhiji honestly attempted to take even politics to a higher plane, the playwright rightly calls his central theme Gandhiji's Sadhana, which is a comprehensive Sanskrit term meaning 'striving, generally towards artistic or spiritual ideals'. In the play, Gandhiji makes the meaning clear in his words to Kasturbai:

"... In a life that would give itself all the service, there is no room for common passions or vain luxuries. Even normal wants and normal duties become mere obstacles. A husband has to become a brother. A dutiful father has to become a server of all, with his faith anchored in the justness and mercy of God. Otherwise his Sadhana will not arrive at fulfilment." 74

The playwright views Gandhiji's political career from the angle of his Sadhana, his striving for an

ideal goal. But the picture is not complete, as only a few sequences are dramatised. Also, a proper link is not provided between the young man in the first act and the Barrister in the subsequent acts. The playwright neither deals with Gandhi's whole life nor concentrates on a single unit like his career in South Africa. In addition to this imperfection in the plot-construction, the playwright often fails to provide action in proportion to the dialogue. Some of these factors may come in the way of the success of the play on the stage.

In his _He Never Slept So Long_ (1972), Shivkumar Joshi extends the myth of the _Bhagavata_ so as to include the political career of Gandhiji. The playwright imagines one more incarnation for Jaya and Vijaya from the _Bhagavata_ "who seek their ultimate salvation which can be achieved only through initial enmity towards the True, the Blissful, the Beautiful."  

According to the play, the spirits of Jaya and Vijay have assumed different incarnations and assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. Unable to tolerate the worship offered at the Rajghat by the people, they try to remove the slab with the words 'He Ram' inscribed on it. 'Mahakal' (The Spirit of Time) checks their course of action, and, in order to make them realize the greatness of the Mahatma, takes them to different places in the country:

First, to the Sabarmati Ashram, next to Sevagram where they could hear the Ashramites' talk about many facets of Gandhiji's life and lastly, to the Eastern Region which experienced his healing touch during communal riots. Next, after their return to Rajghat, the People's Court holds a posthumous trial of the Mahatma with Mahakal as the judge. Mahadev Desai and Martin Luther King, a staunch supporter of the Mahatma are examined as witnesses. In the end, the latter is shot by someone in the mob, and his spirit too joins the Mahatma's. Meanwhile, Jay and Vijay succeed in their attempt to make the liberated souls of the Mahatma and Martin Luther accept rebirth in their place and thereby gain salvation.

The playwright exploits the ancient concept of rebirth and incarnation to the best advantage of his plot. As his character Mahakal says to Vijay, "And he (Mahatma) too will be glad to wake up again; you know, he never slept so long and never under such a huge heap of flowers". True to the spirit of our scriptures, the playwright highlights the final triumph of good over evil. The conflict is indicated at the very outset when Mahakal checks Jay and Vijay's attempt to remove the important slab from the Rajghat. From this point onwards up to the scene of the posthumous trial of the Mahatma, there is suspense as Jay and Vijay are made to see some important

76. Ibid., p.49.
places of Gandhiji's activities and hear the people talk over various aspects of his greatness. Also, even amidst a serious situation like the trial, a little humour is naturally introduced to show how the mob cannot easily comprehend the speech of a great man: loosely commenting on the word 'battle' in Martin Luther's deposition that "non-violence is a desperate battle", someone from the crowd shouts, "Hey, he wants a battle! Why not oblige him?" Thus the playwright makes a novel use of an old myth for a contemporary purpose. But the supernatural element is sure to make the staging of the play difficult.

K. A. Abbas is another playwright who draws his theme from the life of Gandhiji. His four-act play Barrister at Law (1977) (written in collaboration with Hragji Dossa) deals with the historical events in South Africa that turned a young Indian Barrister into an uncompromising fighter for human dignity and freedom. The playwright does not fail to dramatise almost all the incidents connected with Gandhiji's successful experiments in Satyagraha. He properly employs a crisp dialogue and techniques like the Prologue, voices and commentary. But, with its large number of very short scenes and elaborate stage-directions, the play seems to be fit more for a film than for the stage.

As the foregoing analysis shows, even after Independence, Indo-Anglian playwrights do not seem to

77. Ibid., p.45.
have fully tapped the rich source of the history of our country. Some plays like *The Siege of Chitor*, *Tiger-Claw* and *To Anchor a Cloud* have their themes from the history of the Mughal period, and contain incidents relating to the history of the Rajputs (*The Siege of Chitor*) and the Marathas (*Tiger-Claw*) also. But these plays only touch the fringe of the vast material available. While drawing themes from the history of the British period, the playwrights of the phase achieve a greater success. As already shown, *A Passage to India* by Santha Rama Rau is just a dramatic version of Forster's novel. But *Lal Bagh Sahib* is an original historical play in which Gurucharan Das vividly portrays the political developments in the Punjab after the death of Ranjit Singh.

As already discussed, the phase also presents a few plays on the post-Independence political conditions of the country, the consequent need for integration and Gandhiji's sacrifice. Though there is neither much of plot nor characterisation in *The Goddess Speaks*, Gokak shows his concern for the innumerable problems of the newly freed India and also his optimistic vision of the future. The same theme is successfully presented by Javenthinathan in the form of a mock-trial where the playwright stresses the need for co-ordination between the State and the common man in properly executing the development plans. While a rather dark view is loosely presented in the scenes of *Prefaces*, the need for national integration
forms the theme of *My Sons* and *Vikramjeet* in different
degrees. Of the three plays on Gandhiji, those by
Rangappa and Abbas present only partial portraits
while Shivkumar Joshi's play is an interesting
experiment in the application of an ancient myth to
an evaluation of Gandhiji.

Social Themes

Even in post-Independence India, our society has
continued to be at cross-roads on account of the
conflicts between the old and the new concepts and
customs. As in the previous phase, the playwrights
seem to have attempted to tap the resources to the
maximum extent possible in this phase also so far as
the innumerable social problems are concerned. In
some cases, they are inclined to offer merely frank
discussion of their topics. Also, in addition to
allegory and dramatic dialogues, we find recent
experiments in 'mini-plays'.

V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar most of whose plays were
written before Independence, also with his *The Jolly Club* (1950) a
burlesque mostly written in doggerel verse, on the
effect of compulsory prohibition. To show to the
Minister his promptness in discharging his duties
regarding prohibition, the Police Commissioner (himself
a member of the night club) pretends to raid the club
one night. In connection with the initiation ceremony
of the first lady member to the club that night, all
the members drink to her health. Hearing a signal as pre-planned by the Commissioner, all run away to the thorough disappointment of the Minister who then enters.

The author says in his preface: "The practice of a virtue from external compulsion not only ceases to be a virtue, but as an irresistible tendency of promoting and multiplying in its turn, trains vices of a much more serious character such as lying, deception, secretive violations, self-indulgence and demoralisation of a particularly objectionable brand ..." There is no characterisation, nor do we find any suspense as the Police Commissioner's instructions are already made known to the audience. To heighten the humour, the Club (formed mainly for drinking) is given a significant name: SIPSRI (South Indian Psychic and Spiritual Research Institute), in which the playwright humorously puns upon the words 'psyche' and 'spirit'. To provide a touch of the mock-epic, the Bottle-wallah of the play is asked 'to invoke the spirits'. At best, the playlet can give only a light entertainment to the audience.


79. Ibid., p. 39.
Apes in the Parlour is a play in five acts. The plot is woven round a film star Indira who becomes a cynosure of all eyes, and has connection with many big officers like Dubey the Superintendent of Police, Major Bose the Civil Surgeon, Zaidi the Assistant Collector and others. During her Christmas picnic with these persons, she loses her diamond. Under the pretext of arranging a treasure hunt, she plans to search their belongings. In the process, she is murdered in an atmosphere of confusion and terror created by them for their amorous pursuits and escape. In an on-the-spot trial conducted by the Judge Kurshed, all escape with clever explanations. At one stage, even the judge is suspected, and finally the Police Officer is about to be declared guilty. Zaidi rescues him by explaining that, as Indeera had stolen the diamond from a temple, the priest's men strangled her to recover it.

The playwright exposes the hypocrisy and the craze for sex, and power, rampant among the elite; hence the title 'Apes in the Parlour'. The play is a mixture of a detective drama and a drawing room comedy.

In the three-act play The Family Cage, Prabhu throws light upon the selfishness of man. Leela, a widow spending her days in her father's house, is now suspected of leprosy. The spreading of the news badly affects the education and the marriage prospects
of her sisters, Jaya and Lekha. While she runs away from home with a packet of poison, her brother, the weak-minded Inder makes vain attempts to commit suicide. After sometime, hearing the news of Leela's winning a big crossword puzzle prize, all including Rukmani change their attitude towards her and wish to have her back. Meanwhile the absconding widow gets herself cured of leprosy and surprisingly returns home.

A potentially powerful theme viz. the trials of a leprosy patient is handled here in a very crude and superficial manner.

In the 3-act play *Flags of the Heart*, Prabhu seems to give prominence to inter-caste marriage and the power of love. In his attempt to save his beloved Lacia, Raja, a low-caste student suffers imprisonment. His friend Bimal, who succeeds in marrying Lacia, is killed by two burglars who escape, while Raja is accused of murder. At the critical moment, they make a dramatic appearance in the court, confess and save Raja's life; and the two lovers are happily united.

The whole play is full of action. But here again, there is an artificial twist given to the ending where a tragedy is crudely averted; the judge's verdict is just: "This is turning out to be melodrama when burglars become philosophers and self-accusing murderers are found to be misguided lovers .... I pronounce sentence that there are no caste marks, no flags for human hearts, that love is destiny".  

80. Ibid., p. 92.
Prabhu treats the same theme in a different manner in his *Winding Ways*. The play is about the inter-religious marriage of Teresa, a Christian with a rich young Hindu by name Sundar, which is celebrated only after his father Chakravarti's tough opposition and subsequent capitulation.

Lobo Prabhu's passion for melodrama mars this play also. Only to justify the title, the playwright brings in some characters like Pather Ignatius and Maharishi who (like Pather John and Chakravarti) 'find happiness by winding ways': there seems to be a forced ending in this play also. It is full of protracted conversations, and we find some action and suspense only in a few scenes like the Police Inspector's arrival to arrest Pather John.

The incompatibility of temperament and the difference of intellectual potential existing between an idealistic husband and an uneducated wife forms the theme of *Love Becomes Light*. Roshan, a rich idealist highly dissatisfied with the low intellectual level of his wife Dipti, permits her to learn reading and writing from his servant Kala's educated wife Joti *(sic)*. Gradually he falls in love with Joti, and Kala with Dipti; but ultimately reason prevails and the conjugal bliss of neither couple is destroyed. Here again, the characters are painted in extremist colours, so that the entire action looks unconvincing.

81. Ibid., p.108.
Dog's Ghost is the last play in the collection, contains only five scenes, and the playwright calls it 'a play for non-vegetarians'. How a weak-minded person can be upset even by a trivial incident, constitutes the theme of the playlet. Ariel, a merry-making youth entertains the idea of a dog's ghost haunting him after his car kills it. A yogi cures him of this psychic fear, by making him think of thousands of animals ordered to be killed by him for his food and by asking him to compare that big slaughter with the killing of a dog.

Though the theme looks somewhat unnatural, the playwright rightly conceives the psychiatric treatment given to the patient. It is natural that the comparison drawn works as an indirect suggestion to his mind and his brother's wife Meera's, and both give up eating meat. There is more suspense in Meera's falling down unconscious (consequent on her husband's action) and getting up after sometime as if from a long sleep. The playwright has failed to treat an unusual theme with the subtlety it demanded. The philosophical musings in the last scene are not adequately motivated: e.g. "You are all more than ever alive because all have passed through death. Life begins where self ends." 82

82. Ibid., p.140.
Loobo Prabhu's plays show a variety of themes; but unfortunately, as already pointed out, his treatment of them is usually superficial. A strong dose of melodrama also gives an air of artificiality to them, though they do contain some effective scenes.

D. M. Borgaonkar, whose Image-breakers (1938) has already been considered, experimented with the one-act play after Independence. In his collection One-act plays (1957), there are ten plays of which as many as six deal with social themes: Bhasmasura, The Birth of a Play, Cancelled, Savitri and The Temple Entry.

Bhasmasura is a tragedy dealing with the dehumanising effect of science on man. In his eagerness to broaden the frontiers of knowledge, Professor Dinesh Chandra Buddhisagar, the typical man of Science, sacrifices human values and eventually loses his wife Shanti.

The playwright rightly interprets the Indian myth of Bhasmasura from a contemporary point of view. Like the demon who was made to kill himself, the man (of science) destroys the man (of ethics and emotions). The conflict is shown in the beginning itself when the Professor engaged in inventing a destructive weapon, firmly rejects her request to go on a picnic on their daughter's birthday. While there is considerable excitement in the unexpected results caused by Shanti's meddling with the apparatus, there is the climax when an uninsulated high voltage wire kills her during her second outburst of anger. The playwright's portrayal
of the Professor's excitement over the accidental invention is natural; and it is no wonder if Shanti is deeply perturbed at his words ("Eureka! Eureka!.. Greater than Newton, greater than Marconi, greater than Einstein, the world will salute you as the greatest among the scientists ..."), and, thinking that he has gone mad, calls for the help of her daughter and son-in-law. The play which is full of suspense and action concentrates on its theme throughout.

In *The Birth of a Play*, Borgaonkar gives an amusing picture of the actual difficulties experienced while organising histrionic entertainments in educational institutions. Professor Mitra who is in charge of the Drama Association of his college, holds a meeting of a few students (Ramesh, Mathur and Miss Vyas) to select and stage a play. Meanwhile, Prof. Day (in charge of sports) tries to take away Mathur who is to accompany the Varsity Sports team to Kanpur. This leads to a quarrel between the two Professors before their students. In the end, Miss Vyas gives a touch of humour to the quarrel over a cup of tea and remarks that the committee meeting could itself be an amusing comedy. This is an interesting piece in a lighter vein.

*Cancelled* presents a contrast between two points of view, the realistic and the romantic; men, the dramatist seems to believe, usually tend to the former,

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and women to the latter. Kailash, an young I.A.S. officer does not find sufficient time to give his company to his newly-wedded wife Leela, who is very much upset by this. One evening she decides that they must go on a honey-moon and boldly writes 'cancelled' against a dinner engagement column in her husband's diary. This leads to a quarrel between them; and the deadlock is finally resolved when Kailash's boss himself sends a phone message permitting him to be absent at the dinner.

In Rakhi, Borgaonkar satirises the medieval notion of the superiority of blue blood. In spite of his critical condition, the Rana of Vijaygarh flatly refuses to accept the offer of blood by the Rana of Vishalgarh for transfusion on the grounds of the inferiority of the donor's status and also of the hereditary hatred between the two families and, unable to bear the strain of his excited speech, he falls unconscious. Then, his queen ties a rakhi (according to the Rajput custom) round the wrist of Vishalgarh, makes him stick to his offer and save her husband's life; and in the end, both the Ranas become friends again. The play is neatly constructed and makes its point effectively.

A devoted wife's decision to sell away her golden ornaments and save her husband (Deputy Collector Pamesh Chandra) from a pressing creditor, is the theme of Savitri. Apart from this, there is not much of story.
in the play. The playwright makes a rather half-hearted attempt to interpret a myth (of Savitri-Satyavan) from a contemporary point of view. But, in this regard, he is not so successful here as in his *Bhasmasura*, on account of the trivial nature of the incident as compared to the lofty ideal of the Savitri-Satyavan episode.

In *The Temple Entry*, the title itself suggests the theme. As Gandhi's anti-untouchability movement spreads all over the country, Mira the innocent daughter of the priest of a temple leads the cobbler Bijan and other 'untouchables' into the temple. In the encounter that follows, the priest who is pushed by Bijan in self-defence falls and dies on the spot. Pandit Adityanath brings the police; and before Bijan is arrested, he is allowed by the Police Inspector to enter the temple and sing. The Pandit who obstructs his path, is advised by the Inspector to see the new light dawning.

The plot is developed in such a way that the play is full of suspense and action. It reaches the climax when, during the temple entry, Mira with her hands badly burnt by the inhuman action of the priest, clings to Bijan for protection, and the priest pushed by Bijan, dashes against the stone step and dies on the spot.
Borgaonkar's one-Act plays are compact and neat in construction. He is, however, sometimes tempted to put long discussions in the mouth of his characters as in The Great Coward and Savitri.

Another playwright who employs the one-act play form is V. Subba Rao. In his The Tool of the Gods (1958), he imagines the intervention of the supernatural to contrast man's greed for money with the noble principles to be followed in life. According to the play, Siva and Parvati the divine couple entrust their son Ganesh with the task of making a principled beggar Sambhudās a millionaire before sunset. Ganesh fulfills the task by maneuvering the whole thing in such a way that the greedy Dhanlōbh is taught a good lesson in the process.

The play is diverting fantasy, though the unwarranted digression of the episode of Ganesh's abnormal appetite spoils the unity of effect.

A similar theme appears in The Carnival (1960) by M.V. Rama Sarma, a play in 3 acts dealing with the conflict and complications that arise in the affairs of men owing to their different attitudes towards life. The idealistic Shobha, the only daughter of the industrialist Shiv Lal falls in love with his Secretary Suresh, but the money-mad father puts all sorts of obstacles in their way and tries to match her with Ravinder a capitalist but fails in his attempts.
In his preface, Sarma explains his aim thus:

"In the earlier formative years, man is drawn towards beautiful objects; but as he grows into youth and manhood, he gets entangled in the strong current of love ... Gradually the storm and stress is overcome. He becomes an intellectual and looks at things dispassionately from a sense of justice. This gradual development from a sensuous existence to an intellectual one, with the intermediate physical life, is no doubt the heritage of man .... This play has presented different approaches to life; but the stress is on the purely mercenary one. The title is indeed an interrogation — Is life a carnival? But the ambitious theme of the author is not brought out well in the play. The only dramatic scene in the whole play is the scene of the conflict between Shiv Lal and his daughter regarding her proposal to marry Suresh. Further, though the sequence of the flirting girl Asha contributes to the development of the plot as Lal tries to keep her away from Ravinder, the sub-plots of Rekha and Pratima are loosely connected with the main plot. Thus, devoid of both action and proper structure, the play cannot be a complete success on the stage in spite of its lofty theme.

The Accused (1961) by Kaiwara Raja Rao is a Bhavan's Journal Prize-winning play dealing with the sufferings of an idealist who is a victim of

maladministration and man-made laws. Gopal, an educated idealist, suffers much without a job on account of his noble principles. Even his wife Radha (now with a child) divorces him and falls a prey to the lust of a village level worker. In his frustrated state, he plucks off the mangala-sutra (the sacred symbol of marriage) from his wife's neck. Unable to recognise him in that state, she gets him caught red-handed and hands him over to the police. During his trial, Radha recognises him, realises her mistake and emotionally pleads for stopping the trial. But Gopal is sentenced to the minimum punishment of simple imprisonment for six months.

To highlight the typical character of the hero, the playwright creates some neatly drawn minor characters: his wife Radha who, first inclined to wealth and status, repents in the end; the rule-minded lawyer Raju and the Public Prosecutor who strongly uphold the letter of the law (and not its spirit); Shobha a humane lady advocate; and the shrewd judge who can sympathise with the lot of the accused. Of course, the play suffers for want of action, and Gopal talks a little too much throughout.

Husenali Chagla's The Director General (1968) is a farce on the principle of honesty in industry, the relation between the employer and the employed and the probable misuse of power. The main plot of the play hinges on Sudhir Munshi the ideal proprietor of Munshi
Boots, who has won the love of all his employees. Desiring to go abroad on a long holiday, he appoints Bal Gupta the Director-General of his company on the conditions demanded by the latter. During his absence, Gupta thoroughly misuses his power, persecutes all the good employees and brings disrepute to the company by introducing defective manufacture and other short-cuts to amassing wealth. Cutting short his holiday, Sudhir returns and sets everything right. Though the play deals with the world of business, it has frankly an air of romantic comedy about it.

Satya Dev Jaggi's two one-act plays, viz., *The Point of Light* and *End of Hunger* appeared in 1967. The theme of both is the presentation of romantic psyche.

In *The Point of Light*, the plot is woven round a dreamy teacher and artist, Rajan. His wife Mohini consults a psychiatrist about her problematic husband, but in vain. Leaving home, he becomes an inmate of a Guru's ashram at Haridwar, where Miss Brown an American lady-visitor causes him embarrassment with her amorous advances. His wife dressed as a nun meets him, but he fails to recognise her; and cleverly attempting to make him return home, she plans to reveal her identity there.

Jaggi appears to concentrate more on the psycho-analysis of his exceptional hero than on the plot-construction. The dialogue is a mixture of spoken
language and blank verse. While the use of verse is appropriate in the case of the speeches of the romantic hero, an impression of artificiality is produced when some other characters are also made to use verse.

**End of Hunger** contains 9 scenes which revolve round the complex character of Surinder as the pivot. He talks of love and poetry all the time. While he first attracts Nandani with his flirtations, his friend's sister Vasumati becomes the next target of his amorous attack. Shocked to hear of his intention of marrying Vasumati, Nandani commits suicide; and finally Vasumati reconciles herself to the sexual beast in him.

As in his previous play, Jaggi seems to be less interested in the development of the plot than in projecting the image of a complex character in this play also. In his attempt to present Surinder's reactions to different situations, he creates an unwieldy number of characters (15 in all) for such a small play. However, compared to *The Point of Light*, a greater care seems to have been taken in *End of Hunger* to make the dialogue more realistic.

Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) contains: *Malini: A Comedy, Marriage-Poem* and *The Sleep-walkers*. The first two plays show the contrast between dream and reality, between the fake and the genuine while the last
one is a satire on excessive Indian fascination for everything that is American.

_Nalini: A Comedy_ is about the hollow life of two advertising executives, Bharat and Raj. Hoping to win the favour of a young woman painter Nalini, Raj approaches Bharat to ask for his help to organise publicity for an exhibition of her art and Bharat too agrees for the same reason. Totally ignorant of art, he tries to deceive the people by manipulating words. He expresses his misgivings while talking with Raj; and finally betrays his hollowness and insincerity in his encounter with Nalini, who walks out rejecting his offer of help.

The playwright projects two pictures, viz., the hollow world of the young executives and the contrast between the two Nalini's — the one of the dream and the other of reality. With nothing sincere and real in their life, Bharat and Raj are portrayed as friends well-versed in the game of deceit; and their pretence at culture (love of the best books, films and abstract paintings) cannot prevent them from compromising with anything and everything in the world. As David McCutchion says, "Ezekiel handles their dilemma with sophisticated skill and ironical complexity." The dialogue is easy, rapid and natural; here is an illustration where the playwright tries to show the

disappointment of Raj and Bharat:

Raj: She's gone.
Bharat: What next?
Raj: Call the second Malini.
Bharat: Wait a minute. Let's drink and recover from
the first Malini. We shouldn't have upset her. She can't help being what she is, just
as we can't help being what we are.

Raj: All the same, call the second Malini.
Bharat: Are you sure you want her? She'll be even
more difficult. She may upset us.

Raj: Do you think so?
Bharat: Certainly, certainly. But you're right.
Let's call her. We have no alternative.
We can't stop now. 86

In a sense, the theme of Marriage-Poem is domestic.
Naresh makes a show of his love towards his wife Mala
in spite of her real affection, but always flirts
with Leela. Malati a socialite and her husband Panjit
are introduced in the middle of the play to show a
contrast in marital life and the play significantly
ends with the entry of Naresh's children.

As in the previous play, Ezekiel attaches more
importance to discussion and characterisation than to
plot-construction here also. Again he draws a contrast
between illusion and reality, which Naresh, symbolising
the flirting nature, fails to realise. As Annaiah Gowde

86. Ezekiel, Three plays, p.51.
points out, Naresh slightly resembles Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly of The Cocktail Party, he is portrayed as one that behaves in such a way as to show how the extra-marital adventure and misunderstanding can wreck a family. However, for want of a proper plot-construction and action, the play cannot be a complete success on the stage though the dialogue is convincing as in Nalini.

The Sleep-walkers is a one-act farce satirising the visiting Americans, the kind of Indians they visit and also their hosts' excessive fascination for everything American. Here, Mr. Morris an American journalist and his wife visit Bombay; and they are greeted by some Indians like Mr. Verma, Mr. Prem and Miss Ganguly. The relationship between the hosts and the guests is represented in a satirical manner. The farce naturally ends with the slogan give us this day our daily American. As in the other plays, there is very little action, but the satire is diverting.

In all the three plays, Ezekiel seems to be content with providing glimpses of a cross-section of the contemporary society; and his plays are just 'situations' (in the words of Verghese). He does not


give as much importance to the development of a plot as to the composing of brilliant conversations. Thus, in spite of the stage-directions and sound-effects suggested by the author, these plays may fail to meet the full demands of the stage. However, as Prema Nandakumar writes, "their stageworthiness apart, the plays make pleasant reading matter, for Mr. Ezekiel handles his tool, the English language with polished expertise".  

In Ezekiel's The Song of Deprivation (1969), only two characters He and She converse about hypocrisy and other drawbacks of the contemporary society.

As opposed to Ezekiel's picture of urban society, Arati Nagarwalla's 3-act play The Bait (1969), deals with the unpolluted loyalty of an aboriginal villager and his love of natural justice. Learning that his wife is killed by a lion in a forest nearby, Panna suddenly takes an unusual but firm oath to avenge her death. He kills the animal, offering his own boy Sona as a bait (who marvellously escapes unhurt). As the news spreads, the police arrive and arrest Panna on the charge of attempted homicide.

Though the theme looks a little unusual, the playwright does not seem to be totally wrong in her picture of the extreme loyalty among the aboriginal tribes as the

values of our modern artificial civilization do not generally matter for them. As Adal Faramjee, a farmer moralises, "We are too self-centered, we lack that glorious old-fashioned virtue — loyalty .... (like) Panna's loyalty to his wife, Sona's loyalty to his father, and the loyalty of the entire village to one of their own ...." Panna, the hero of the play is the symbol of loyalty and a man who sticks to his guns once he takes a decision. The play seems to seek mainly the development of the hero's character set against the natural background of unsophisticated village life. To create an authentic environment of rural life, the playwright introduces a good number of innocent villagers; Mukhra the village Headman, Baha his wife, Pookhroo a close friend of Panna; and also the Faramjees, the estate-owners and their friends. But the play lacks suspense as everything takes place according to the plan announced, except the unexpected escape of Sona from the jaws of Death. The staging of this play does not pose a problem as even the exciting event of killing the tiger is made known to the audience by means of a report as generally done in Classical Sanskrit plays.

The Myth-Makers (1969) a 3-act play by Mrs. Dina Mehta is a prize-winner in the Padamsee play-writing competition. Its theme is the violent Maharashtrian agitation in Bombay against the people that have come from other States.

and settled there. The playwright constructs her plot around the incident of the manhandling of Krishna Murthi, a South Indian residing in the city. Anand, a writer who happens to go there, brings the police and the miscreants are arrested; but the victim succumbs to the injuries. Some interested persons indirectly attempt to silence Anand's tongue in the court; the foremost of these, Sandip Joglekar (a film-producer) even goes to the extent of using his wife Pramila in luring him to his side. After a keen conflict between Joglekar and Pramila in this regard, the play ends leaving the conclusion to the imagination of the audience.

Mrs. Mehta brings to light the extremely parochial mentality of some residents of cities like Bombay. She also portrays the foul politics played by selfish persons like Joglekar who, in their design to win prominence at all cost, do not hesitate even to seek alliance with rogues. The expected conflict between Joglekar and Pramila takes the story to a climax. The playwright naturally imagines how, at one point, Pramila even decides to leave his house once for all; but is disheartened by her past history and advanced age. The sudden ending of the play at this point is really suggestive; and probably we have to conclude that at last Pramila helplessly yields to her husband's pressure and vile tactics. The dialogue is crisp: for example, the height of selfishness and villainy of Joglekar cannot be better described than by his own
words to Pramila:

"If I can use them to my advantage, they are my friends. With their support — for they are the stalwarts today — there is no height I cannot attain, I who have already been chosen by the multitudes. If I can do them this favour, get the boy's silence. I am on my way". 91.

There is a heightening of tone in moments of stress, as:

when a sudden realisation of her situation and age makes Pramila change her earlier decision to run away from home:

(To her servant Muktì) "... Look. (cranes forward into the mirror) There are so many wrinkles round my eyes. Do you see them? Don't lie to me. My face looks old, Muktì, old! (she turns away from the mirror, and with anguish in her voice) I'm old. I'm old. It is too late for me, too late, I know it. Only a moment ago I felt on the verge of brave, reckless actions. . . I know too late that courage needs to be exercised, faith needs to be exercised, not only flabby muscles. Peaks are not for my habitation — I've had to scamper down before I began the climb, retrace my feet back to this remembered stool". 92

Shree Devi Singh experiments with poetic drama in her

The Purple-Braided People (1970). But it is more a poem than a play and the characters are explicitly the mouthpieces of the author. The decay of aristocracy being its theme, the play deals with two families, one of which is fast losing its status and fortune. Reena the sensitive daughter of Birendar Singh, the ruler of


Snehghar is married to Yeshwant Rao, the uninspiring son of the Rajmata of Kherpur. Meanwhile, Reena's brother Vikram is disinherited for his relationship with Milly, the daughter of an Anglo-Indian railwayman.

As Shama Futehally remarks, "the whole play looks like a pageant, consisting of eight short scenes giving a glimpse of India's lost aristocracy". On account of the deficiency in plot-construction as also lack of suspense and action, the play can hardly be a success on the stage.

Murli Das Melwani's Deep Roots (1970) is a 7-act play exposing the hypocrisy of our tradition-bound society in general and the marriage customs in particular. First, there is a lengthy discussion among Popsy, Arvind, Ahmed and other friends about topics like the Indian English, lack of thinking and sense of priorities among Indians, the customs and finally about a friend 'N.S.' who lacks courage in marrying a girl of his choice. After a heated debate, Arvind flatly refuses to accept his father's choice. He exposes the money-mindedness of his friend Ahmed in marrying a rich lame girl, and then marries Neena according to his ideals.

The playwright's theme is, no doubt, thought-provoking as he intends to portray the generation gap as well as the conflict between the rigid customs of

our society and the free thinking of our youth. Whether it is merely the chatting of friends over wine (as in the first act) or the serious discussions between the father and the son (as in the second act), the audience can get much food for thought. The characters are adequately realized: Arvind a free thinker who hates hypocrisy and would like to break the established canons of society; Ahmed who is not sentimental and romantic about marriage; N.S., too timid to encounter the matrimonial conflict; Popsy an easy-going chap; and Arvind's father who symbolises the traditional society. Also, the conversations of the young people are often witty and humorous. Here is a prayer to God to illustrate the point:

Ahmed: O Lord of the world, whose Name may be Money ...
Arvind: Increase the natural resources of this country ...
Ahmed: So that we may have more stones to break heads and wreck public property.
Arvind: Bless our creative faculties ....
Ahmed: So that we may think up new hypocrisies and lies, and the government new stupid laws and taxes, and people's means how to evade them ...
Ahmed: and ways and means to cheat everyone around us.

But, while the playwright tries to project the usual conflict between tradition and modernity, he fails to highlight the merits and drawbacks of both the extremes and thereby indicate the common ground where they could meet. Further, while he can compose interesting dialogue, he does not seem to bother himself much about action.

Thus, the whole play looks more like a debate on some current topics than a real play.

Rajinder Paul employs a new technique to present the theme of love in his play (in four 'episodes') Ashes Above the Fire (1970). He says in the Preface that these episodes were written during March-June, 1966; and in this regard he was encouraged by his friend-playwright Mohan Rakesh. He gives significant titles to these 'episodes': 1. Tea Leaves in Cold Water which presents Anju, a beautiful girl of nineteen expressing her desire to marry Shammi, a young man of twenty three; 2. Boiling Kettle showing the attraction felt by Mrs. Anjali Kumar of thirty three for Sham Kumar who is twenty five (both are writers); 3. Amber Light which projects the image of Anjali just nineteen attending to the domestic work of Prof. S. Kumar forty five years old and willing to have him as her life-partner: 4. The Duet which presents an old couple of sixties, Anjali Devi and Sham Nath, and the latter's affair with the young maid-servant Nikki which causes her dismissal from the job.

There is no conventional plot-construction in the play. The playwright presents four realistic situations to depict the theme of love where love is conceived as a kind of killing. As the author himself explains, "To offer love is to offer something of a suicide of some part of yourself, and to deny love to another person is to murder some part of the partner". The four

scenes depict a picture of aspects of sexual relationship, showing the waxing and waning of sexual passion in different phases of the life of the characters. The playwright suggests that all the female roles in the four scenes (Anju, Mrs. Anjali Kumar, Anjali and Anjali Devi) and all the male roles (Shammi, Sham Kumar, Prof. S. Kumar and Sham Nath) are to be played by the same set of actors: hence only three actors are needed for staging the play. This is an interesting technical experiment.

Pratap Sharma's two plays deal with the theme of sex. In *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970), Sharma deals with the theme of sex in a different way. The play is set against the background of the horrible sequel to the partition of India; but this is obviously not a political play, since Sharma's emphasis is more on the sex-motif than on the political theme. The chief characters are: a Professor in his sixties and a young man Virendra, who is a victim of circumstances. It is said that the play was inspired by a factual report that appeared in a leading daily.

The play starts with Virendra cremating his mother's dead body. Professor Gopal who arrives at the spot behaves in a peculiar way so as to make Virendra suspect him to be the probable cause of his mother's suffering. Virendra attempts to kill him in revenge; but fails on account of the intervention of Sally Gunther, an Anglo-Indian lady. His second attempt is interrupted by the Professor's narration of the past history of Virendra's illegitimate birth. Virendra again entertains
his thoughts of revenge; but this time, Sally who intervenes again, becomes the victim; resulting in the mutual killing of both the Professor and Virendra.

Obviously bent upon shocking the public by his uninhibited treatment of sex, Sharma resorts to gross exaggeration and melodrama. For example, we learn that Virendra's mother who has the professor as her lover is raped by Saleem, a Muslim and then by an English officer, so that Virendra is flabbergasted by the discovery that he is not a child of marriage or love but of rape. Sharma's technique is experimental in the play. He presents the story of Virendra's birth in a flashback by means of a diary. Also, in order to show the mental conflict of Virendra, he symbolically uses the mimic demon of the Indian folk-dance Katakali, but is not successful as the symbol is not properly integrated with the situation.

In his second play (of 8 scenes) —> A Touch of Brightness (1973), Partap Sharma tries to portray the life in a brothel of Bombay. He builds his plot around Rukmini, a beggar-girl, who becomes a victim of Bhabi Rani, the brothel-keeper. The business however dwindles as a result of the new entrant's queer behaviour towards her customers. Sri Bharateendra, an ex-Sadhu and quack doctor persuades her to marry him, but in vain, on account of her idealistic views. After some time, she becomes pregnant; and in her critical condition, even the medical treatment given is found useless.
According to the Author's Note, the play was banned in 1966 by the Maharashtra State Government as it deals with "matters which it is highly undesirable to show on the stage"; but the ban was subsequently revoked under the High Court's directions. About the title, the author tells us that he was inspired by a stanza of Yü-T'oo's poem Dead Water; and "it served to provoke my search for that redeeming touch of brightness." In the play, Sharma focusses light on the dark side of the sophisticated city life that perpetuates the existence of brothels; he presents a realistic picture of a typical brothel like that of Bhaiji Ram's and also its surroundings with pavement-dwellers like Benarsi Baba and his 'adopted son' Pidku. The game of chess, the four-anna coin and the stove beginning to smoke followed by the flames leaping from it, seem to have been symbolically used, as each item is connected with the changing phase of Rukmini's life. However, on the whole, the play handles its explosive theme in a very superficial manner. There also seems to be some superfluous talk in about half of the third scene (where Dr. Dariwalla talks to Benarsi Baba and Pidku) and also the whole of the last scene (containing a conversation between Baba and Pidku) as these conversations do not have much bearing on the development of the main plot. Also, there is not much of suspense in the play excepting in the sequence of the last stage in the heroine's life; and the excessive talk appears to reduce the scope for

98. Ibid., p.ix.
action. However, the play has gripping dialogue which employs the speaking idiom effectively. To illustrate,

Shri: .....When would you like to start?
Pidku: Tomorrow.
Shri: Tomorrow night then. We only work at night.
    (Pidku looks at him sharply). It's ... cooler.
Pidku: Can I start now?
Shri: Yes, of course. But there's no hurry.
Pidku: Do I get a cut?
Shri: You're a bukka businessman. Yes, you'll get a commission.
Pidku: Then I'll work tonight. I need the money.99

Thus, even with its defects (as stated already), the play is stageworthy on account of its gripping situations and snappy dialogue.

Dr. Lover, a self-styled specialist in love-sickness attracts to his newly-opened clinic many pairs, like Mirza and Muntaz, Rajan and Chalam. Without caring for his prescription, Prof. Vaidya marries Gunasundari. Meanwhile, Dr. Lover's wife who had left him, returns; and thus everything ends well.

If in Aiyanger's farce The Surgeon-General's Prescription remedy is suggested for the love-sickness of one pair, Gaffoor's hero has a regular establishment and prescribes for many pairs visiting his clinic.

99. Ibid., p.44.
Because the work is a farcical comedy, there is fun throughout and everything ends well — including the return of the specialist's wife and also the compromise between Kareem and his wife. But a question remains unanswered: with his experience of curing many love-sick pairs, why should the doctor fail miserably in the case of Prof. Vaidya? Also, the Principal's plan for fabricating a story about the Professor's love-affairs is left unfinished; or rather left to the imagination of the audience. To heighten the humour, the playwright brings in the compounder's venture (of course, during the doctor's absence) in prescribing 'elopement' as a remedy for the love-sick Gopi and the consequent arrest by the police. Dr. Lover is certainly an amusing play, though the level of its humour is not very high.

Among recent plays on social themes, Shiv K. Kumar's The Last Wedding Anniversary (1975) is notable. It is a study in marital incompatibility and its consequences. Among the main characters are Lalit, a sensitive editor of a popular magazine; his wife Rupa, a shrewish and ambitious socialite; and Neela, Lalit's first love whose re-appearance completely breaks the relationship of the couple on the evening of their second wedding anniversary. The dialogue presents a clash of wills and personalities. But the play is limited to three brief scenes and does not appear to have room enough to develop its theme to meaningful proportions, though the dialogue is crisp and effective.
Deben Laha's one-act play *Naked in the Mirror* (1975) is a conversation among three characters, Lip, Audit and Santa, which exposes the hypocrisy of modern life and the frustrations caused. What is to be appreciated in the play is the employment of the Narrator technique, though there is hardly any action.

**Miscellaneous Themes**

In addition to the various kinds of themes discussed, there are a few plays in the phase with miscellaneous themes. Also, some playwrights have experimented with forms such as dance-drama, the allegorical play, dramatic dialogue and mini-plays.

*The Cloth of Gold* (n.d.) by M.Krishnamurti is the only philosophical dance-drama in verse found in the field so far; the setting is the feudal past. In obedience to an oracle granting permanent virginity to the daughter of a local chieftain, all the suitors for her hand are turned away; but the father does not dare to refuse the offer of marriage coming from his feudal lord the Rana himself. The play opens with the visit of the royal bridegroom to the temple of Ambaji the Goddess-Mother. As the rite of consecrating a cloth of gold to the Goddess draws to a close, the Priest feels inspired and prophesies the doom, and the play ends with the death of the bride in the bridal chamber.

The play has two scenes (with 69 verses in all), the action of Scene One taking place at the temple of the
Goddess and that of Scene Two in the bridal chamber; and it has a Prologue and a Dream-Drama The Spirit's Odyssey. The Prologue gives the necessary introduction to the play and explains the circumstances under which the inspired Priest spells out the doom. There cannot be any suspense in the plot as the doom is forecast in the Prologue itself, and its working out is presented in the two scenes through the Chorist's singing and the actors' dance. In support of the tragedy indicated by the consecration of the cloth of gold, the author aptly brings in the evil omen of the screaming of eagles. The Dream-Drama serves as an Epilogue where the spirit of the dead bride in its odyssey, experiences different stages like utkṛṣṭa and evaṣava in the process of liberation till it gets the bliss of the Eternal Brahman or the Cosmic Soul according to the Vedanta Philosophy; and in the words of the playwright,

Ah! broken is my spell,
And shattered lies the shell,
Its magic all undone!
Let sound and colour merge
Back in the eternal surge
Of Being — All-in-one.100

From this penultimate stage, the spirit goes still further and enjoys final liberation. When the Dream (illusion) disappears, Brahman the Reality reveals itself and hence the Spirit's Odyssey ends with the lines —

100. N. Krishnamurti, The Cloth of Gold (Vermont & Tokyo, n.d.), p. 35.
Further, as Rukmini Devi remarks, "It is remarkable how he (the playwright) uses English metrical forms with complete case." The graceful six-syllabled verses used here respond to every mood and pace desired by the author. Also, there are two sonnets entitled "Black Flames" and "White Flames," one in the beginning and the other in the end of the play; the former referring to the tying-up of the tresses of Prêchêli of The Mahabharata and the latter to the story of Magdalene; but they are very loosely connected with the play. On the whole, the author seems to follow the simple narrative mode of our folk-play and also the Noh play of Japan giving more importance to the poetic and musical aspects than to the drama. Anyway, apart from its dramatic element, the work is, in the words of the British poet G.S. Fraser, "a successful transmutation of the spirit of one culture into the language of another...."

The propagation of MBA (Moral Re-Armament) ideals forms the theme of K.S.Kelaí's three-act play "The Little Dictator" (n.d.), which has a modern setting. The plot is woven round Mr. Pandit, a clerk in a commercial firm, whose dictatorial attitude towards his wife Shanta and his children, Mohan and Mala creates an atmosphere of hatred, fear and disgust (at home). After sometime, a small incident turns his ears towards the

101. Ibid., p.56.
102. Ibid., Foreword, p.5.
103. Ibid., Back cover.
Inner Voice of God; by which he realises his mistake, and all "start a new life under God's guidance". ¹⁰⁴

Pandit underlines the moral of the play thus:

"...the inner voice is the voice of God. He speaks to us through our conscience ... In the beginning, the din and noise of our pride and vanity may prevent us from listening. May be, some silly thoughts come and confuse us. But it will not be long before. His voice becomes clear to us, as soon as we tune our hearts towards Him."¹⁰⁵

But one doubts as to how a thorough change like this could take place in Pandit so suddenly without the occurrence of an event more serious than the mere transference of his neighbours' experience (their apologising to him under the guidance of the Inner Voice for hurting him).

Narayan Prasad employs allegory in his one-act play *Battle for Light* (1964) to present Sri Aurobindo's spiritual vision and message against the background of Indian Philosophy. Sattwa (the good) revolts against the Queen-Mother Maya's evil design of dominating the world, and is therefore banished. Then, the Prime Minister Ahankār (Ego) and Lōbha (Greed), start their wicked activities on earth. Instructed by Mahā-Māyā the Supreme-Mother, Jñāna (Knowledge) takes the help of other good elements like Virakti and Bhakti, and fights with the evil forces ('the giant sons of Darkness'); and a powerful light appears on the horizon revealing

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 65.
the appearance of the Supreme Mother of a blissful era of the Life Divine.

As Shree Krishna Prasad says about the play, "its message is essentially for the spirit of man and intended to point out the way to victory, once and for all, of Light over darkness, Truth over falsehood, Knowledge over ignorance." To bring in the Aurobindonian overtones, the playwright inserts some quotations from the former's magnum opus Savitri. Thus, in the thought-content he shows the direct influence of Sri Aurobindo; while, regarding the allegorical form, he seems to have indirectly taken his cue from the works like Krishnamisrayati's Prabhadhacandradayam, and Tagore's The King of the Dark Chamber. The playwright fully visualises his allegorical characters in a proper perspective, and introduces a scholarly dialogue in keeping with the theme. To create suspense, he rightly conceives the temporary triumph of the evil over the good. But, what is lacking throughout, is action, which he seems to have neglected in his over-enthusiasm for impregnating the dialogue with learned discussions. Further, as for his dramatis personae, he seems to be confused about the two characters Virakti and Vairāgya as both the words have almost a similar connotation.

Krishna Gorowara's short pieces like *Indo-Anglians in Anglia* (1964) and *Call It a Day* (1966) can hardly be called plays as they are mere discussions without plot-construction.

As the title *Indo-Anglians in Anglia* suggests, it is a piece of light-hearted talk (condemning everything that is Indian) among a few rootless Indians and Mr. Bryce, an Englishman who is back in England after a stay in India. As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, it is "about the rootless Indians in England, the mimics who wander about like ghosts among the ruins." Some of the shafts are well-aimed and go home, but it is clear that brilliant talk alone does not constitute drama.

Like *Indo-Anglians in Anglia*, Gorowara's other work *Call It a Day* has no plot as such. It is also an attempt to project an odd mixture of characters (mostly Indians influenced by the West) through a discussion. The talk is spread on topics like the treatment given by Dr. Gomati Kargish in a casualty case and the invitation extended to her by two middle-aged men. As in her previous play, Gorowara seems to be very particular about giving a description of her characters in the beginning as follows: Gomati Kargish a doctor in the Medical Institute; her mother an old-fashioned woman; two middle-aged men who are portrayed as swindlers; Linto, Dr. Kargish's mischievous young nephew: Shanti,

Pinto's aunt an indeterminate woman; 108 But her
dialogue (let alone the action) is too poor to make her
characters unfold themselves. Both the pieces thus give
us an impression that Gorowara seems to be content with
composing dialogue for short discussions, but is not
much bothered about the dramatic values.

New Experiments: Mini-Plays

In addition to the plays already discussed in the
post-Independence phase, we come across a number of
Mini-plays published in periodicals like Enact in the
sixties and early seventies. Going against the
convention of lengthy plays, the authors of such modern
works appear to be content with presenting a situation
in brief.

P.S. Vasudev's mini-play The Forbidden Fruit (1967) is
a farce highlighting the red-tapism in the official
machinery even in urgent matters like the family
planning programme and the consequent havoc caused.
A Gramsevak dedicated to the work of spreading the
family-planning programme in a village seeks urgent
help from the Central Govt. to take precautions about
the local lovers in whose case 'the love-god has gone
on war-path'; 109 to which an Officer in the Ministry
of Health replies that he will hear from them 'in due
course'; 110. Twenty years later, a man and a woman

108. Krishna Gorowara, Call It a Day, The Literary Half-
Yearly, VII-2 (July, 1966), Dramatic
Personae.

110. Ibid., n.p.
(both doctors attached to the Ministry) go to the village on their mission. But, under the impact of sylvan scene, they too forget their duty, and are tempted to eat the forbidden fruit of a mango tree: the climax is reached when a few young men (born twenty years earlier as a result of belated family planning programme) shout slogans of revolution and attempt to destroy their van donated by the Ford Foundation. Thus the playwright employs the myth of Adam and Eve, and makes the forbidden fruit the symbol of sexual passion. Though a mini-play, it can surely be a success on the stage because of its concentration, suspense and climax.

Unlike The Forbidden Fruit, Mrinalini Sarabhai's Vichar (1970) contains no plot as such; it is just a short conversation between a Man and a Woman about the philosophy of life, Truth and existence of the Divine Principle. What Man states, is in turn contradicted by Woman. Though they appear to be different characters, they represent the two faces of our mental conflict and this interpretation is corroborated by the Sanskrit title of the play, viz. 'vichar' meaning discussion, thinking. The conversation starts with the Upanishadic saying 'Satyam eva jayate' and ends with 'God's Lila (sport)'.

Som Benegal's Caesarian (1971) is shorter than the two already discussed; here the playwright seems to intend focusing the attention of the audience on the meaning
of 'History'. First he presents in brief the famous sequence of Caesar's murder and Cassius' remarks about the scene which may 'be acted over in states yet unknown'. At this point, an American tourist and his wife burst upon the scene. The tourist remarks, "2000 years have gone by and they're still acting the same scene" and his wife adds, "History is something by itself"; refuting her statement, the Butler quotes Henry Ford's words, "History is bunk".

In addition to these mini-plays, periodicals like Enact have brought to light some modern authors whose variety of experiments could be glanced at here and there. (1970)

The Myth is the result of Gulshan Kapoor's attempt to write a piece for being enacted as a sort of prologue to the staging of the main play Surdas; which, according to Kapoor, got formulated in the course of his creative collaboration with the author of the latter. Shankara Pillai's The Lost Face (1971) takes us to a museum where a visitor loses his token given at the counter and struggles to get back his own mask which gives him a chance to think of human life. In his playlet The Knife (1971), Balwant Gargi analyses the action and reaction in the mind of a dejected young man (with a knife in his hand) attempting to commit suicide, but temporarily failing in his attempt on account of the temptation caused by an actress and her mother. Madhu Rye's

111. Som Benegal, Caesarian, Enact, No.51 (March 1971), n.p.
Saral and Shampa (1972) is a small attempt to take us from the transient, illusory world of senses to the world of the Vedantic Absolute Truth Brahman. In this way, we come across many authors who take to different kinds of unconventional methods of presenting situations, psycho-analysis and discussions.

Models and Techniques

As in the pre-Independence phase, most of the playwrights in this phase also seem to have ignored the Classical Sanskrit Drama and the folk-stage so far as models and techniques are concerned. Of course, nobody in the phase appears to have followed a particular model of the West in toto like Sri Aurobindo. Yet, as already discussed, the works of many playwrights including Currimbhoy show some Western influence though it is rather difficult to pinpoint these exactly.

Though there are many 3-act plays in the phase, the five-act structure of the Elizabethan Drama and the western one-act play form appear to have influenced some playwrights. For example, V.V.S Aiyanger's Ramarajya, Sadar-Joshi's Acharya Drona, Lobo Prabhu's Apes in the Parlour and Gaffoor's Dr. Lover have been described as 'five-act plays' though, as already noted, the five 'acts' are, in most cases, just five scenes. In addition to its five-act structure, T.A.Krishnæswami's The Flute of Krishna employs the verse-form and also
lengthy speeches thus bearing evidence of the influence of the Elizabethan Drama. Also, some Shakespearian echoes are at times heard. To illustrate, Lobo Prabhu puts into the mouth of his character Benny in *Apes in the Parlour* the words of Mark Antony: "If you have tears, Zaidi, prepare to shed them now." Further, as already observed, some playwrights like Borgaonkar and Narayan Prasad employ the compact one-act play form with advantage. Also, there are examples like *Tiger-claw* where this form would have been more suitable than the 3-act structure.

Like Currimbhoy, other playwrights of the phase have experimented with different techniques, mostly western and a few Indian. In *Achyuta Drona*, Sadar-Joshi effectively employs the technique of an obscure figure's speech (a sort of asariravāni, voice of the invisible) to show Drōna's mental conflict between his ideal and the practical world; and here is an extract from the speech:

(From the doors of Drōna's ashram, a dark figure moves about and knocks at the door. It is the dead of night... The figure knocks again. The door opens and Drōna looks at the figure, but the light in his hand is extinguished. He motions to him in the dark. "Who are you fellow that visit me in the unseemly hour of night?" With these words he comes out. The shadow deepens).

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The Figure: How now, Acharya? You are now Commander Aehaiya, not the simple teacher. Ha, Ha!

Drona: (Startled) Who on earth are you? Why this hide and seek? Appear at once before me.

The Figure: Whoever I am, I have come to congratulate you, Sire!

Drona: (Curiously) Are you the denizen of the dark or the devil? I am myself an associate of the devil and the dead person. Stand, I say!

The Figure: (Laughing) No power on the earth can stop me, Acharya. I have transcended all your powers, dear sir!

Drona: (Anxiously) Are you my sin that has come to mock me? Avaunt! I am now capable of any sin. Come one, come all! I am equal to all of you. I am more than a match, mind you.113

In The Beggar Princess, Dilip Kumar Roy and Indira Devi use the Prologue and the Epilogue. But this play about an Indian princess-saint with an Indian setting would have looked more natural if our classical Sutradhara (Stage-Manager) had introduced the heroine to the audience. Further, folk-songs could have been inserted in order to indicate the popularity of the saint in The Beggar Prince.

While Gurucharan Das successfully depicts the troubled mind of Lawrence in Act 3 scene 2 of his Larins Sahib by the use of the disembodied voice, Arati Nagarwalla follows to some extent in the footsteps of the Classical Sanskrit Drama and employs the reportage technique in making the audience of her The Belt

113. Sadar-Joshi, Acharya Drona, pp.89-90.
know the particulars about the killing of the tiger.
Also, in his *The Professor Has a War Cry*, Partap Shrama shows the action and reaction in the minds of his characters by employing a mimic demon of the Indian folk-dance Kathakali; but the symbol is not properly integrated with the action, and hence appears like an excrescence.

As already observed, there are places, particularly in plays with mythological and historical themes, where some techniques of Classical Sanskrit Drama and the Indian folk-stage could have been used with advantage. While almost all such plays would have done well to have a Sutradhara who could introduce the play to the audience, some other ancient techniques also could have contributed to the staging in their own way. For example, in a play like Smt. Thakur's *Mother and Child*, the Pravēśaka technique would have conveniently provided a connecting link between the first two acts. Anyway, it is regrettable that the playwrights have failed to utilise these resources which were so easily available to them.

In this phase also, language poses almost the same kind of problems as were experienced by the playwrights of the pre-Independence phase. Yet, in overcoming the difficulties, some playwrights of the phase seem to show a greater facility in the use of the spoken language and thereby give a more natural colouring to their dialogue.
However, so far as the hagiological and historical plays are concerned, the language is more stylized; here are a few illustrations: Dilip Kumar Roy's Sri Chaitanya offers some romantic poetry in his verse-dialogue as in the saint's preaching to his wife, Vishnumpriya —

But how can the worldlings' hooded eyes glimpse
The iridescence of His rainbow Grace
Which shows me an exit into the Life Divine
Through the dark portals of death-agony. 114

In the case of some playwrights, there seems to be a lack of command of the language though their themes are interesting. One such is Padmanabhi Krishnamurti whose Uttar Geetha or The Geetha Reminded contains some Indian usages like "Are you not doing well?" 115 and some direct translations from the local languages like "What has happened, has happened" 116. But, as for the use of Sanskrit words (such as Prapitāṃśa 117 and Vaiṅkuṭa-samārādāna 118 etc.), the author cannot help using them for want of exact English equivalents.

Though much can be said on both sides as regards interspersing the dialogue with original a songs with

114. Roy, Sri Chaitanya, p.86.
116. Ibid., p.33.
117. Ibid., p.32.
118. Ibid., p.34.
transliteration, some playwrights have done so because they probably intend catching the melliflous effect of the original. As an illustration, Keshavadasji fills Sant Tukaram with Marathi devotional songs and Bhakta Sri Purandarades with Kannada songs.

As already said, the same principle can be applied to the use of Sanskrit and other Indian words, the comprehensive meaning of which cannot be fully conveyed by their English equivalents; and mostly the plays on myths and legends, and history are replete with such usages; for example, 'Purusva' and 'Prakriti'; 'Dharma'. Also, some playwrights show their keen sense of the Indian culture and customs, and coin some phrases accordingly: to illustrate, a Hindu wife does not address her husband by name and hence employs indirect methods; hence, Kasturbai addresses Gandhiji with the words 'Hari's father'. But there are instances where Sanskrit and other Indian words are unnecessarily used even though they have good equivalents in English: 'Nath' (Lord, Sire), 'Burra maza aya, yaar', 'Aag Jaga dunga', 'Acha jee'. Perhaps the idea is to secure an effect of local colour.

119. Sadar-Joshi, Acharya Drona, p.28.
120. Aiyangar, Ramarajya, p.65.
121. Rangappa, Gandhiji's Sadhana, p.49.
123. Melwani, Deep Roots, p.22.
125. Shazma, A Touch of Brightness, p.38.
So far as the use of spoken language is concerned, the playwrights in the phase show much greater expertise than those in the pre-Independence phase; here are a few illustrations: In Ezekiel's *Marriage-Poem*, Naresh and Leela flirt with each other and talk thus:

**Naresh**: You don't mind that we can meet only once a week?
**Leela**: I don't mind.
**Naresh**: What about my wife?
**Leela**: She doesn't exist.
**Naresh**: She does, for me.
**Leela**: As a ghost only.
**Naresh**: The ghost who talks.
**Leela**: The ghost who nags.
**Naresh**: The ghost who bore me two children. 126

In Vasudev's *The Forbidden Fruit*, some young men of a village (born about twenty years earlier on account of delay in the execution of the family planning programme) turn violent on seeing a Ford Foundation van sent under the scheme. The dialogue is quite crisp here:

**1st Lad**: What is it?
**2nd Lad**: Looks like a Ford Foundation family planning van.
**1st Lad**: It has come too late; and they are out to take over the country. Imperialists! CIA agents!
**2nd Lad**: Burn it!
**1st Lad**: No! we will do something worse than that. (Pause) Flatten the tyres! : ! : ! (The boys let the air out of the tyres of the van and move on shouting slogans). 127

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Using realistic language suited to the level and status of a character is another noteworthy experiment made in the phase; and this is what Indian Drama in English needs most. For example, no playwright could put a more suitable language into the mouth of a Constable than what Pangappa does in his Gandhiji's Sadhane; here is an extract from the conversation held in a park in South Africa when Gandhiji faces a Constable engaged in kicking another Indian by name Balasundaram —

(As Balasundaram falls, Gandhi rushes to the Constable and tries to restrain him).

Gandhi: What is the trouble, Officer?
Constable: (Sneering) What's the trouble! (Looking him up and down) Go are ya, chimp?

Gandhi: I am M.K. Gandhi, Barrister-at-law for Abdullah Seth and Company. He is Mr. Abdullah Seth.

Constable: (Demanding) Where is your pass, coolie?
Gandhi: (Giving him the pass) Here. (Picks up the fallen Balasundaram kindly).

Constable: (Examining and almost throwing back the pass in Gandhi's face) Oh, ya are the coolie barrister, are ya? Are ya trying to put teeth into these snivelling dogs? Ye've no more roits than all the rest of the bloody lot, let me tell ya. Why the 'ell don't ya taich the beggars to keep of white parks? Ye ought to know better.

Gandhi: I do know better, Officer. We are no beggars, and we are not dogs, if you please. We have every right to be here so long as there is no law against it.
Constable: Na? (Incensed) No Law? (Manhandling him)
Oi am the bloody law, ya stinking skunk!
Get the 'ell out o' 'ere! All of ya, ya damned dirty lot! (Pushes Gandhi off) Ya think ya becomes a White if ya'r tagged out loik 'im, don't ya? Na, ya don't — ya brown monkeys! Get ya out o' 'ere! 128

We need more and more of such attempts to use the spoken English suitable to the level of a particular character. This would perhaps be a possible answer to the misgivings of critics like K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger whose explanation for the paucity of good actable English dramas by Indians is:

"the natural medium of conversation with us .. is the mother-tongue rather than English, and hence, unless the characters and situations are carefully chosen, it would be difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound convincing". 129

Such experiments in the use of language would go a long way in lessening the magnitude of absurdity in demanding "that all characters in Indian drama in English must, in order to qualify, produce a certificate that (a) English is their mother tongue or (b) they normally use it in their everyday social intercourse." 130

Conclusion

As this survey indicates, the playwrights of the post-Independence phase also cannot escape the charge (which their counterparts of the previous phase share)

128. Rangappa, Gandhiji's Sadhana, pp. 34-35.
129. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 236.
that they have failed to tap fully the rich sources of our ancient literature and history for their themes. However, we find a few examples like \textit{Ramacarita Ramayana} and \textit{Alone in Ayodhya} the themes of which are from \textit{The Ramayana}; examples like \textit{Mother and Child}, \textit{Acharya Drona} and \textit{Uttara Geetha} from \textit{The Mahabharata}; \textit{The Flute of Krishna} from legends and a few hagiological plays like \textit{Sri Chitanya} and \textit{The Beggar Princess}. As shown in the analysis of the plays, there is an attempt to interpret the epic story or the legend from a contemporary angle of view here also as in \textit{Ramacarita Ramayana}. While Mrs. Thakur draws our attention to the inseparable bondage between a mother and her child in \textit{Karna-Kunti} episode, Mathuram Bhothalingam not only makes her Rama more human than divine, but also gives importance to neglected characters like Urmila; and, in the dramatic dialogue \textit{Gandharee and Kaikeyee}, there is an attempt to bridge the gulf between two different ages. But, as regards hagiological themes, most of the playwrights limit themselves to presenting one or two episodes from the saints' life, and not the whole picture.

As already observed, even the vast history of our country does not seem to be of much fascination to the playwrights of this phase also. Further, so far as the themes from the British period are concerned, there need not have been any cause now for a fear-psychosis after Independence; yet the output in this
regard is really disappointing. While there are plays like The Siege of Chitor, Tigerclaw and To Anchor a Cloud the themes of which are from the Mughal period, Gurucharan Das deals effectively with Sikh history in his Larin's Sahib, and Santhe Rama Rao makes a new experiment of dramatising a novel dealing with the British period; and Asif Gurumibhoy tries to fill the vacuum with a few plays like "Om Mane Padme Hum!" and Sonar Bangla. About the post-Independence political scene of our country, we can at best find a few plays like My Sons and Vikramjeet stressing the need for national integration, a mock-trial like Gurdinsilp of 'India', and Gokak's The Goddess Speaks showing an optimistic vision vis-a-vis the existing ugly state of affairs of the country. The contribution of Rangappa and Joshi is that they have drawn on Gandhiji's eventful life; and Joshi attempts to extend the myth of The Bhagavata so as to give a new interpretation to the Mahatma's death.

The analysis already made in respect of the social and other themes in this phase also shows that the playwrights have tried to tackle contemporary social problems like inter-caste marriage, untouchability, sex, power and wealth continuing the presentation of the usual conflict between the old and the new trends. While playwrights like Prabhu make their plays mostly melodramatic, a few like Borgaonkar achieve some success in writing one-act plays with social themes. There are
instances like *The Tool of the Gods* where men and gods are made to mingle in order to expose the greed of men. Also, plays like *The Carnival* and *Deep Roots* demonstrate how a mere discussion of social problems cannot make a play. While playwrights like V.V.S. Aiyangar and Gaffoor resort to farce to present the evils of drinking and sex respectively, Partap Sharma writes full-fledged plays on the latter. Further, many of the recent authors like Jaggi and Ezekiel seem to be concerned more with giving a picture of people and their psychology than with constructing a plot.

Among the miscellaneous experiments conducted in the phase, we find a noteworthy opera (*The Cloth of Gold* by Krishnamurti) and a striking poetic play—rather, more a poem than a play (*The Purple-Braided People* by Shree Devi Singh). Narayan Prasad employs allegory to preach Sri Aurobindo's message in *Battle for Light*. Mini-plays are also seen to be popular during the sixties and the seventies.

As regards the models and techniques adopted in the phase, it is, of course, difficult to find playwrights here who, like Sri Aurobindo, came fully under the spell of the Elizabethan Drama; yet some like Aiyangar, Prabhu and Gaffoor seem to have employed five-act structure though they use the one-act one-scene method. But, in the one-act play form, playwrights like Currimbhoy, Borgaonkar and Prasad maintain the compactness required. Of course, there are many authors like Currimbhoy who
have mostly resorted to the 3-act structure with some success, though most of the plays like "Om Mane Padme Hum!" are over-burdened with cinematographic devices. However, as already shown, a good stage effect can be expected by the techniques like the obscure figure’s speech in Acharya Drona and the 'Voice'-technique in Larins Sahib.

We find a very few playwrights like Nagarwella and Sharma who have, at least to some extent, employed the techniques of our Classical Sanskrit Drama and the folk-stage (Kathakali) respectively.

So far as the language is concerned, the analysis shows a greater inclination towards the use of the spoken tongue in the case of some playwrights like Currimbhoy, Ezekiel, Sharma and others though a more literary style continues to have its sway in this phase also. As already illustrated, some authors like V.V.S. Aiyanger use a rather stylized prose for their dialogue while the verse-dialogue of authors like Roy is competent. Rangappa, Sharma and others make a new attempt to give a natural tinge to their dialogue by adapting the language to the social level of a particular character.

As compared to the pre-Independence phase, plays have come out in equal number in this phase also though the number of major playwrights is rather meagre. But, as already shown, the playwrights of this phase also have failed to tap, in full, the rich sources of our ancient
scriptures, epics and legends, and the history of our country for their themes. Also, many do not seem to have overcome the temptation to compose dialogue for mere discussion of topics of their interest, rather than aiming at the construction of a good plot imbued with suspense and action. Further, excepting a few rare cases, many have totally ignored the tradition of our dramatic art which could have guided them in models and techniques. However, in this phase, some have succeeded rather well in the use of spoken language for their dialogue; and the mini-plays and the brief presentation of a single situation are new experiments. On the whole, this phase does not show any marked improvement over the previous one so far as the stageability of plays is concerned, nor are there any striking developments as far as the dramatic art is concerned.