CHAPTER – VI
THE AUDACITY OF GURCHARAN DAS: AN ASSESSMENT

The stature earned by English Drama in India is a recent achievement. “The multifaceted opus of Asif Curriombhoy, Girish Karnad’s’ own translations of his powerful Kannada plays, the biting social commentaries of Mahesh Dattani” (The Hindu, Sunday, July 01, 2010) and the personal ethics assorted by also the corporate Guru- Gurcharan Das has made Indian English drama attain recognizable richness and solid dramatic substance. Though it is very difficult to keep track of all the plays and playlet’s published in book form and in periodicals so far, some 400 plays have been included in the latest Bibliography compiled by the present writer and published in Perspectives on Indian Drama in English (OUP, 1999) under the auspices of Karnataka University, Dharvar. Contemporary Indian dramatic writing is now growing richer in quantity as in well as quality. Much experimentation is seen in treatment of themes, techniques, the use of models and language. Of this lot Gurcharan Das degree of success is equally commendable. His three plays span three distinct dramatic models – Larins Sahib- the history play; Mira – the Total theatre and 9, Jakhoo Hill – Social Realism. Each of these plays is a measure of his distinct versatility and skill as a playwright.

Of the three plays Larins Sahib is a work of recognizable stature. This play has been performed in major Indian cities and at the Edinburgh Festival. It depicts the confrontation of two cultures represented by Ranjit Singh’s Widow- Rani Jindan, Sher Singh Attariwala and Henry Lawrence. The action of the play takes place mostly in and around Lahore and briefly in Calcutta, in the year 1846. It is a fascinating reconstruction of the rise to
power and influence of the British in the state of Punjab in the year 1846-47.

The fascination for the history of Punjab led Gurcharan Das to explore the events of 1846. The period after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh forms the backdrop of the play. Das notes how during his travels in the bazaar of Punjab, marketing Vicks Vaporub, he began to delve in the history of Punjab by screening *Larins Sahib: The Tale of a Fallen Man*. It was then he came across the unusual Lawrence brothers; out of whom Henry Lawrence was the most interesting and less imperial. His brother George was a soldier in north-west and John was an empire builder who went on to become Lord John Lawrence, Governor-General and Viceroy of India.

After the death of Ranjit Singh, the Sikh Kingdom was plunged in chaos. The British, having avoided a need of clash with Sikh, till Ranjit Singh was alive for they knew of his capabilities, saw their chance now. In 1845 the first Sikh war began with the help of traitor against the backdrop of political chaos. The action of the play is based on “… the real events in Punjab in 1840-47. The play is recreated from the documents and events exchanged by the principal characters (*Three English Plays*). On surface it is a love story of Rani Jindan Kaur and Henry Lawrence, an Agent of East India Company to the Government of Dalip Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Lawrence as a witty administration instead of using violence, attracts natives though various reforms which Das describes in his afterword of the play as the talk of even today” Lawrence’s rule is still regarded as the rule of justice and generosity. He exploits Indian mentality and sensitivity to his full use and benefit. To Sher Singh, he describes his observation as –

One’s always afraid of hurting you, you know Sher Singh, there’s a hunting bird who is so sensitive… even if you are
standing a hundred feet behind it and if you move an inch, its neck will cringe. An Indian is like that, one has to be careful with you

*(Three English plays, 50)*

His deliberate act of arranging Darbar which is only the privilege of a king is an outcome of his hidden wish to become king and a way to transmit a message of power much after the fashion of the deceased king. He organizes the Darbar according to Indian taste with loud tempting colours;

That’s the way to rule India... with dignity... yes, Indian’s like colour, pageant style. They respect it. That’s authority for them... They like to be ruled through The heart, we rule through the head. They like to be dealt with at the personal level; our basis of administration is impersonal law. They respect tact; our laws and settlements are crudely blunt. You can’t change a people’s view of the world just like that; particularly if they’ve just lost a war.

You’ve got to make them forget they’ve lost a war. (69)

Notwithstanding the fact that Sardar would not like to see Ranjit Singh’s royal robes to be worn by a foreigner, Larins dares to wear the royal clothes. It is his concealed wish to see himself as the second “Lion” of the Punjab, as the “King” of animals is associated with vigilance, power, strength and authority. By capturing Punjab, Lawrence has hunted “one-eyed Lion” He roars at the end of the play:

I have the Punjab, Angrez Badshah: The new lion is here I am the Punjab (96).

Finally his deep-desire to promote the self-interest results in his complete dissociation from the welfare of his natives. His moral degradation goes
steep down once he succumbs to the orders of the “white – Sahib” consequently his reformatory actions become unnecessary and his fire, imagination vigour and enthusiasm goes off. He is instructed to collect revenue strictly, tender an apology to Wazir Lal Singh and Tej Singh to collect the authority and superiority of both, to behave cordially with the fellow British officers even if they create trouble, not to employ and be friendly with native officers even if they are faithful to separate Rani Jindan and her son Dalip singh, to send the Rani to prison, and above all, to surrender koh-i-noor – the symbol of friendship and loyalty to British Empire” (Contemporary Indian Drama, 232)

His ugly face is pointed by Rani as –

You’re just like the rest of them. I thought there was something different in you Larins. You were simple, austere, single-minded. Now you’re behaving the way the other Firangees did when they got power under my husband. (64)

And later she adds:

God, now I understand your robes, your Darbars, and your ‘Angrez Badhah, it all fits and your obsession with my late husband. You’re drunk, my friend. Power’s gone into your head. And you’ve forgotten your friends (90)

Sher Singh despises Lawrence’s unhealthy practices as angrily as does Rani Jindan:

You hypocrite! You never loved anyone, you don’t deserve anyone’s friendship. You turned into a hypocrite when you saw how powerful you’d become. You imagined that you had become Ranjit Singh. (93)
Lawrence’s appearance before the imperialist court in response to the Summon issued in his name adds another element of drama to his characterization. The stage direction here reads as –

He (Lawrence), is wearing Ranjit Singh’s jewel and Chogah. Other parts of the Lion’s dress, including a turban, are nearby. The mental transference is nearly complete (48)

The soliloquy with which the scene ends clearly indicate that he has reached a point of no return:

Bow down to the Angrez Badshah! Bow down, your Lal Singh and Tej Singh. You can kiss the jewel. The Punjab is mine, as surely as the Koh-i-noor is mine. Where is my Rani? Oh, She’s is in the haven so much the better where is my son? Asleep. Let him sleep. He needs his sleep. The tribes are restless they are dealing with a great Badshah of a great land. Let’s go on to battle. The new lion has come (And he yells), Arhh! (90)

Lawrence’s loyalty to the company Government later hardens him against the Rani. This transformation of his attitude to the Rani is not only unexpected but also dramatic. By ordering her to go away from her son to Sheikhpur because she is a naughty woman as well as a trouble maker, Lawrence deceives the native for the imperialistic cause. Once Rani realizes the futility of having friendship with Lawrence, she curses him for his betrayal.

You can’t do this to me; Angrez or the Angrez’s father can’t touch me. Does the Angrez realize who I am (Slowly, deliberately imperiously) I am the mother of
Punjab. I am the wife of one Eyed Lion. You won’t dare. I am the Mother of the Khalsa. Touch me and you’ll have mutiny on your hands. Once I leave a curse falls on the Angrez. And the first one to go will be you Larins ... you are intoxicated Larins: something demonic is urging you on to your destruction. Believe me. (pause) God, now I understand your robes, Angrez Badshah, It all fits. And your obsession with my late husband. You are drunk, my friend. Power’s gone to your head. And you’ve forgotten your friends. (98-99)

Sher Singh accuses him of callousness in separating the mother from the son of severing his friendship with Rani in his attempt to pave the way for annexation of the Punjab Kingdom. He loathes him as “you don’t deserve anyone’s friendship. You are incapable of giving. You turned a hypocrite when you saw how powerful you’d become. You imagined that you had become Ranjit Singh (102). Once again Lawrence’s behavior is put to stern analysis when he adds: “you could have chosen the way of the heart. Because she was your friend- you won’t deny that? Or you could have chosen to obey your country’s order. Your duty to her or your duty to your Queen. You’ve chosen. In my terms Larins Sahib, it’s a choice between the Punjab and England your queen and my queen. That’s where we part. I won’t have anything to do with the company Raj. Farewell (103-104) At this decisive stage, Sher Singh shuns his loyalty to Lawrence and warns him of dire consequences in the near future. “We are enemies. Farewell, Larins Sahib. Before I leave let me tell you: I shall return. When I do, I shall be on the other side. I shall come to revenge my queen. So be prepared. Shall be armed and the whole Punjab army will be behind me. The Angrez will be
thrown out of the Punjab or I shall die. Larins Sahib, you’ve made a man of me, and I thank you. It was another Sher Singh who wanted to be an English gentleman He’s as dead as the Larins Sahib… Farewell, Larins Sahib we shall meet on the battlefield again”. (105)

Dejected by Sher Singh’s final departure, he moves to his hubris. He swaggers about displaying his jewel triumphantly and expresses his callousness as –

But I still have Punjab. Let them go away. I don’t need then I don’t need the Rani. Nor Sher Singh. I have the Punjab, Angrez Badshah; The New Lion is here I am the Punjab (106)

This vanity is shattered by a special mail from the Governor General at Culcutta through a special message read out to him by Edward’s whereby his services are terminated in the Punjab. Reduced now to the state of a tragic hero he is forced to sacrifice his power, a well–deserved punishment for irrational behavior and self centered perspective. His fate turned dismal as Das describes in his Afterword’ –

Henry Lawrence was transferred to Rajsthan from the Punjab: a demotion in the eyes of his contemporaries. His younger brother, John Lawrence (mentioned in Act I), succeeded him in the Punjab and rose brilliantly to become the famous Lord Lawrence, the Governor–General and viceroy of India. Lawrence flickered once more briefly into history when he died defending the Residency in Lucknow in the 1857 Mutiny.

The metamorphosis is now complete the Lion of Punjab changes into a meek lamb.
Lawrence is recognizably a dynamic character. There are as many as three phases that we come across – “Lawrence – the enlightened empire-builder, Lawrence – “the Lion of the Punjab; and Lawrence – the little cog in the wheels of the East India Company machine. In all three facets Lawrence appears as a round character with striking kinetic features.

Rani Jindan escaped from Sheikhupara jail but she was recaptured and as a stern Punishment was banished to a fortress in Banares. Once again she escaped this time to Nepal where the king gave her asylum. From here, she never returned nor was given an opportunity to meet her son. She died after sixteen years of confinement in May 1863. Her physical remains were handed over to her son who carried it to Nasik for immersion in compliance to her last wish.

Sher Singh was successful in launching a successful attack on the British as pledged to Larins Sahib. His indefatigable force was countered by British troops from all over India to fight essentially one man in what historically come to be called the Second Sikh War. Though he fought gallantly yet could not counterattack the gigantic contest. With his defeat the spirit of Ranjit Singh finally died in the Punjab and the British formally annexed it in 1849. Nevertheless, Sher Singh had salvaged the honour they had lost in Sobraon; and they were thankful to him. The fate of Dalip Singh appears in “Afterword” as:

Dalip Singh was converted to Christianity and sent to England as a young boy where the British Government gave him an annual pension and the Elvedon Estate in Sussex. He grew up a dandy – mildly ostentatious, favouring black velvet jackets (he was affectionately called the “black Prince”) – and the was rumored to be a
great favourite of Queen Victoria for many years. He married a German Ethiopian girl! Bamba Muller, who gave him two sons and three daughters. But he lived far beyond his means and ran up large debts.

In his later years he realized he had been attached by the British, and reverting to Sikhism, made a ludicrous effort to enlist the help of European powers and Indian princes to win back his kingdom. He called himself an ‘implacable foe of the British people. His efforts, however, did not come to much and he spent his last years frustrated and angry. He died in Paris in 1893 of paralysis, and was buried a week later at Elvedon. (98)

The play *Larins Sahib* is set in Indian history and talks about that phase of Indian history when the country was under the colonial rule. This makes Indian political consciousness as the vibrant India throughout the length of the play. Das takes identifiable pride in the greatness of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the loyalty of Rani Jindan and Sher Singh. In the portrayal of his feel of patriotism, he goes to the extent of portraying Henry Lawrence as a man who is obsessed with the personality of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He (Ranjit Singh) “was the greatest ruler Hindustan has known”. (31)

The play points the richness and grandeur of India which was later looted destroyed and even sabotaged by invaders in the 19th century. The cited discussion between Rani Jindan and Dalip Singh arouses the patriotic feelings in the hearts of Indian People:

Dalip : I thought we were the strongest and the richest country in the whole world

Rani : We were in the days of your father. (40)
Likewise a comment on Indian people appears, once again with noticeable assertion:

Lawrence: You Indians are the most touchy people in the world. Sometimes it is so difficult to talk to you. One’s always afraid of hurting you. (50)

Political ideology is also put to recognizable praise. Das wants the politicians of the day to follow the ideals of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in *Larins Sahib*. The rule at Punjab in idolized by Larins who speaks of a constructive rule which brought richness and prosperity:

Lawrence: ... you are a great Queen, Rani Sahiba. You’ll always be a queen. Your husband was the Lion of Punjab. He was the lion of victory and left great unified nation to his people. You must redeem his life. Your people – you must think of them. You’re all they have now in this troubled land.

Lawrence declares Indian as a safe place for “Firangees” he asserts:

Lawrence: ... Fortunately Indians are civilized people and don’t resort to violence easily. In other land we would have been burnt alive. (69)

At another juncture Lawrence praises Indian religion when he praises their religious tolerance That the public wrath on the incident of killing a cow – holy animal for Hindus – allows him to survive is enough an illustration. He finds that the Indians are more tolerant and peaceful people in comparison to the English one. The killing of the cow was an emotional issue and he chooses to apologize to the people-

Yesterday’s killing of a cow on this spot has grieved me personally. On behalf of the entire community, I assure
you that this will not happen again. Please accept my sincere apologies. (40)

In order to convince the people of his sincerity he’s announces that he has decided to waive one month’s land renew from the citizen of the district. The crowd shouts slogans in favour of Larins Sahib and describes him as an honest friend of India. This impresses Larins who promises to make canals, bridges and roads too.

The theme of Indian-ness get a further stimulus when Das delineates an image of “a pucca Indian” through a dialogue between Henry Lawrence and Sher Singh:

Lawrence: A Pucca Indian is a Englishman full of curry and bad Hindustani, with a fat liver and no brains but with a self- sufficient idea that no one can know India, except through a long experience of brandy, gin frame-fed mutton, and cheroots. (69)

Lawrence also asserts the self-reliance of India when he chastises the English community for ruling India in order to serve their foul greed and power-mindedness –

The average Englishman thinks that he’s doing someone a favour by being in India. But I thought you were here because, you liked being here. If I’m mistaken, let me know now better still, get out of India by the next boat. Undeceive yourselves, if you think by remaining in India you will shoulder someone’s burden and march into a hero’s sunset. Rest assured Mr. Abbot, the Indian doesn’t need anyone’s shoulder to lean upon. He can do without the Englishman… (69-70)
Lawrence is well aware of India’s strength of nation—building in spite of caste and language differences. Caste initiations were prominent due to adherence to hereditary occupations and norms of purity and pollution. The imprint of social differentiation and status hierarchy based on occupational exclusiveness widened and depend social and cultural cleavages. Politicization of people on one hand strengthened the power of the elite class like Brahmins and marginalized the subordinate sanctions like the women. To expose the inherited weakness of Indian social system, Gurcharan Das brings the incident of ‘Sati’ into focus; here an innocent woman is being forced to kill herself in the name of religion and questions about the very institution of the religion. Larins Sahib is dazed and flabbergasted when two Brahmins come forward with the request that the woman who refused to offer Sati should be burnt alive. The then prevalent social ill is seriously contemplated upon by Larins and he does not delay in ordering measure to eradicate it. The situation is presented very emphatically and much convincingly:

First Brahmin : Maharaja (Larin Sahib) it’s a custom of our land that a holy-wedded wife performs Sati on The Pyre of her Lord and Master, her holy-wedded husband.

Second Brahmin : Yes, your Highness it’s the custom. And this irreligious immoral woman refuses to abide by the custom by which her ancestors have conducted themselves.

Lawrance : My nation also has a custom. When men burn women alive, we hang them. Let us each act according to our national customs.
First Brahmin : This is not justice. A man has a perfect right to do whatever he wants with his wife. She is his property. If he is angry with her, he can throw her in the well. (Laughs. Others join in.)

Lawrence : Well, I’m angry. Why shouldn’t I throw you in the well?

(Sepoy comes forward and take them away)

(69).

Das also paints the superstition spread in Hindu religion.

Abbot: The native aren’t Christians, Sir their odious religion has thousands of ugly Gods and rituals (69)

Along with the play also takes into account the history of Punjab but also certain aspects which refer to the clash of the Indian and the western cultures. The cultural and moral codes of the British and the native population were inherently in conflict with each other, British being rulers of a large empire certainly had an edge over Indian. The British were far much superior to the Indians in all respects and measures. The Indians were naïve and could be taken in easily. No doubt a large section of Indians were fairly educated yet they lacked the curing which the rules of the one half of the world had. Certain factors such as presence of different cultures, traditions, castes, colours and creeds sometimes resulted in conflicts. The white maintained and asserted their superiority and denounced the natives as inferior. So much so that the British always referred to their race and everything associated with them as superior whereas the natives as well as their possessions were termed low and unworthy’.

Hardinge : Oh!
Damn these bloody tribes! Damn this bloody country! Damn the whole world…

This brandy’s no good.

Eliot : It’s recently come in from London, Sir.

Hardinge : it’s devilish air then. Everything in India is second rate. Even travellers’ best becomes second-rate in India. (27)

On the other hand The British are also condemned for their unethical practices. The British know that the Sikhs are known for patriotism and bravery and to defeat them in battlefield would be almost impossible. Therefore by under hand practices, they conquered the Punjab. Lawrence fully knows this and objects to ugly play of power by saying – “… for a fairly fought battle would have resulted differently”. (32) Ironically unfair use of power was the only practice of the British. The lust for power is also brought on surface through Henry Laurence’s ambitious rule. At the outset Henry Lawrence is humble, visionary and progressive. He is one of the witty colonizers who instead of using violence attracted natives through various reforms and tried to keep control. Lawrence is clever enough to exploit the psychology of Indians. He says – “you Indians are the most touchy people in the world” … one’s always afraid of hurting you, you know Sher Singh, there’s a hunting bird who is so sensitive … even if you are standing a hundred feet behind it and you more an inch, it neck will cringe.

An Indian is like that. One has to be so careful with you? (50)

Henry’s transformation from being an imaginary reformer to a crude manipulator is not sudden and unthinkable. It is the British Empire’s authority that makes him an insensitive ruler
In the initial stage of the play, Lawrence has been portrayed as a man with philanthropic approach who wants to uphold the ideals of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh through introducing social and economic reforms in the society for the betterment of the natives. Unlike any English official, Henry seems to be more dedicated to the services of the natives. The reason for his generosity and kind heartedness towards the native may be his inherent desire to be looked like his late Maharaja Ranjit Singh. His gesture may be either for humanitarian reason or may be to attain some long political interests, but his generosity towards the natives can never be questioned:

Lawrence : Most honored citizens of Lahore; yesterday’s killing of a cow on this spot has grieved me personally. On behalf of the entire English community I assure you the this will not happen again. Please accept our sincere apologies. (Shouts and booing form the crowd)

My dear friend Sher Singh who, as you know, comes from one of the noblest families… (Shouts: ‘Sher Singh, Angrezi todi)

To convince you of our sincerity I have decided to waive one months land revenue for the citizens of this district. (Shouts: Larins Sahib Zindabad)

… We want to build canals bridges, roads. We want to ensure as much justice as possible to each citizens. We want to prevent the soldiers from interfering in your everyday affairs. (61)
An another instance in his Diwan-a-aam, he attempts at bringing another reform. He announces:

Sher Singh, we are issuing a proclamation: Sati is with immediate effect abolished in all provinces and districts of the Punjab. And the Hindu Reform Bill is with immediate effect extended to all parts of the Punjab. (72)

Pranav Joshipura in his essay, “Gurcharan Das’s Larins Sahib writes in this context –

One may wonder why Henry Lawrence being British wanted to bring reformation for the people of Punjab. Was reformation a part of “civilizing mission of the white race” (32). Or had he certain other political benefits in mind? Had he no idea about himself becoming unpopular among the British think-tank? or did he take reformation as a political device to become popular? Or was he genuine? All these possibilities may not be overruled.

(Contemporary Indian Drama, 230)

However Larins Sahib’s reformation won the hearts of people so much so that Punjab sided to a noticeable strength with the British during the mutiny of 1857. His generous gestures and promising words wins the faith of Rani Jindan who finds in him a savior, a well-wisher and a provider. He tells Rani Jindan:

Yes, yes just as it was in the days of the Lion. We’ll make it rich and happy. We’ll build, build.. build roads, canals and the land will sing with joy. (65)

Because Larins is able to impress the people they glorify him out of reciprocity.
Larins Sahib make a direct hint at the policy of Clive, who had operated a ‘dual’ system of administration - Company power and a puppet Nawab’. Later Warren Hastings displaced the Nawab and took over direct administration. The higher ranks of administration remained almost entirely British until the 1920s when the Indian civil service exams began to be held in India as well as the UK. Lawrence Dalip Singh equation fits in this slot. The ruin that comes later when Tej Singh and Ramlal turns traitors affirm what Thomas Schmidt says in his Report on India entitled. “Ruin of India by British Rule”:

The British rule in India is the most striking example in the history of the world of the domination of a vast territory and population by a small minority of an alien race. Both the conquests and the administration of the country has been exceptional and although the work has been carried save in a few directions wholly in the interest of conquerors, we English have persistently contended that we have been acting really in the interests of the subdued peoples. As a matter of fact, Indian is and will probably remain the classic instance of the ruinous effect of unrestrained capitalisms in colonial affairs.

(www.marxist.org/arcice/hyndman/1907/ruin-india.html)

The traitors are therefore eloquent on the fact that India was conquered for the Empire not by the English themselves but by Indian under English leadership, and by taking advantage of Indian disputes. Native ability was utilized in every department of the administration unhesitatingly even through foul ways.
Colonialism, by definition, is exploitative and oppressive, with the rulers enriching themselves at the expense of those they rule. Colonizers dominate a territory’s resources and many a times impose structures-cultural, religious or linguistic to maintain control over the indigenous population. Some historians uphold the belief that economic disparity is the ill begotten by the East Indian Company. Economist Luis Angeles has argued that the higher the percentage of the Europeans at the acme of power/authority the greater is the drain out of resources through selfish reaping. Economic exploitation is there by strikingly projected to paint English rule as predator. The victimization is double-edged – (a) Harassment of the general masses through heavy taxation and (b) deprivation of Dalip Singh of his territory through inheritance. The economic exploitation is extended through heavy taxation, building grandeur and transfer of cash and kind to their native land. E.g. Koh-i-noor episode is illustrative of this feature.

This way the Kohinoor- diamond episode adds another dimension to economic deception and exploitation. This unmatchable jewel is India’s incessant claim no relief. Of the numerous speculations the most widely circulated says that Shah Suja, Grandson of Ahmed Shah Abdali and the ruler of Kabul was banished by his brother Shah Mahmud in 1809. To recover the throne of Kabul, he bought the support of Ranjit Singh and passed on the Koh-i-noor to him as acknowledgement of his assured services. In the end Shah Suja could not revive Ranjit Singh’s help as he smelled the latter’s ill intentions and ran away. What happened to him later is another interesting phase of history. But the fact remains that the Koh-i-noor remained Ranjit Singh’s enviable treasure. The play understudy suggests that this priceless jewel was given to the British Agent as a token
of friendship and loyalty. Rani Jindan says to Henry Lawrence, “This is a symbol of our friendship and yours for safe-keeping. It belonged to his Highness and I value it greatly (56)

For reasons unknown Das does not project the vast and strong Sikh empire under Ranjit Singh regime. The Expanse of Sikh Empire is not properly ceremonised. Historically, the Sikhs came into prominence in the middle of the eighteenth century. During the years of struggle against the Mughals and the Afghans, the Sikhs evolved a peculiar constitution of their own. They formed bands called misls unde misaladar. The misls grew large in number and divided most of the Punjab between them. Born in 1780, as the head of Sukerchaika misl, Ranjit Singh united the misls and established a Sikh monarchy.

Ranjit joined Zaman shah (grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdali) during the latter’s invasion of the Punjab in 1789. The invasion failed, but Ranjit seized Lahore in 1799. The grateful Afghan king conferred on him the title of Raja with possession of Lahore. In 1802 Ranjit captured Amritsar. He soon threw off the Afghan yoke and gradually brought under his authority all the Sikh misls west of the Punjab. But Ranjit Singh failed to bring under his control Cis-Sutlej misls excepting Ludhiana. Alarmed at Ranjit’s aggression, some of the Sikh chiefs solicited British protecting. The fear of British arms and the possibility of the Sikh chiefs taking up arms against him in alliance with the British, unnerved Ranjit. He concluded a treaty of perpetual friendship with the English protection and pushed the latter’s frontier from the Jumma to the Sutlej. The fate of the Sikh-rule needs to be enumerated to understand the backdrop of the play.
First Anglo – Sikh War (1845-46)

The death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in June 1839 was followed by a period of utter confusion in the Sikh Kingdom. The army became the arbiter of politics. Two rulers died violently till Dalip Singh, a minor and the youngest son of Ranjit Singh was raised to the throne with his mother Rani Jindan as the Queen Regent (Sept 1843). But the situation did not improve. Thus towards the end of 1845 Punjab showed the spectacles of boy kind under a licentious queen-regent and an equally licentious and treacherous prime Minister: an unruly arrogant and unscrupulous army posing as the all-powerful director in both civil and military affairs of the state: and a group of selfish chiefs who looked only after their own interest and cared little for the true welfare of the state.

The Lahore Darbar was anxious to be free from the control of the army. It encouraged the army to fight against the English in the hope that its strength would be exhausted. In December 1845 the Sikh army crossed the Sutlej and invaded the Company’s territory. But the Sikhs were defeated in repeated encounters. The British army occupied Lahore on the February 20, 1846. The Sikhs concluded the treaty of Lahore on March 9 with the British. Dalip Singh was recognized as the Maharaja and a British Resident established at Lahore. A supplementary treaty was signed on December 16, 1846. A Regent Council of eight Sardars was to conduct the administration under the control of Sir Henry Lawrence. The British Resident.

Second Anglo – Sikh War (1848-49)

The terms of treaty did not prevail long. In April 1848, Diwan Mulraj. Governor of Multan, took up arms against the British. The crisis became acute in September when a large Sikh force joined Mulraj strengthening his
patriotic rebellion. The local rising had now become a national one. On October 10, 1848. Lord Dalhousie declared war. The two costly battles of Ramnagar and Chillianwala led to the decisive battle of Gujarat (February 1849). On March 29, 1849. Dalhousie annexed the whole Punjab by proclamation. Dalip Singh was pensioned off. The pacification of the country which followed must be regarded as one of the greatest triumphs of the British administrative system in establishing colonial regime.

**Cause of the Downfall of the Sikhs**

Ranjit Singh’s death was followed by a period of anarchy in the Sikh Kingdom. The army which became the arbiter of political destiny had no regard for national unity. Ranjit Singh built a mighty Kingdom, but did not care to maintain it. Hence the Sikh Kingdom was destroyed within ten years of his death.

The Sikh army after 1839 was not actuated by any national ideal. Ranjit created one of the finest armies India has ever seen. But all the able generals of the Sikh army died during the life –time of Ranjit Singh and only crafty designing men either weaklings or traitors, survived to command his force. The Sikhs by their own folly threw away the first chance of uniting the Punjab.

**Political and Economic Organisations of the Sikhs**

The most important feature of the Sikh polity during the misl period was the meeting of the Sarbat Khalsa (assembly) twice a year at Amritsar. Here the Sardar of different misls discussed matters of common interest. Each individual chief considered himself as a member of the Khalsa and Ranjit conveniently acted in this insignia.
Structurally *Larins Sahib* has a well made discourse world with characters sufficiently of the size of the plot. Neither large for the story nor too made up to fake structural unity. Though the geographical scale is small but is strongly supported by a vast scale of standpoint. The plot moves us smoothly from the world of personal –social relationship to the conflicting world of political bargains making a dense network of east in direct confrontation with the west. As a bleak picture of humanity it undermines the Indian notions of friendship, civility and mutual trust. Rani Jindan’s friendship fails her and so the concept of “vasudev kutambakum” Shatters.

Rani Jindan expects political security, royal shelter and her son’s sacred rights ceremonially honoured. As a political order the Rani expects triumph but is humiliated. She spares no expense to reveal true courtesy and love to Larins but instead of Kudos is crushed to the extent of a “bleeding heart” and a muddle-wit”. Like Aziz of Forster’s *A Passage to India* becomes convinced that friendship is impossible with the English until they leave India. Likewise Larins exemplifies the utilitarian religion ponny Heaslop represents whose “heart is for his own people” (*A Passage to Indian, 302*)

Rani’s rejection by Larins can be an issue for another debate. She embodies on element of uniqueness among the characters for she poses modern and progressive – a type of New Woman much surprisingly in India. By being on active but shadowed ruling force to a mannequin- like ruler 77(Dalip Singh –her son), she makes an overthy masculine enterprise not only traditionally undersirable but also sexual aggressive. She is almost and impossible figure to colonial sensibility. The traditional model of this imperial society demands Rani Jindan to be powerless and not ostensibly a forward –thinking challenge to British rule. Her inability to confirm to the
dictates of imperial power threatens the most masculine world and results in physical and psychological trauma, social castigation and forced expulsion from native land. Rani crushed by “British India” pays for uncustomary exploration, venturing into a make - space challenging gender role which is virtually unthinkable to natives like Tej singh and invaders like Elliot, Currie and Hardinge.

_Larins Sahib_ has a praiseworthy contemporary appeal. Pranav Joshipura elaborates the beauty it beholds as;

With a lot of contemporatry relevance, it reflects the ugly fight amond political leaders to the advantage of foreign agencies. Political leaders for their petty and selfish interest can undo anything, however great it may be … it seems that most of the political leaders utilize their energy in maintaining themselves. If they divert their enery for the betterment of people unselfishly, then that would certainly bering a positive change in the country.

_(Contemporary Indian Drama, 236)_

Certainly, such plays offer a great deal of contemplation and introspection into the ‘wrongs’ of historical past, such probes interpret a caution for contemporary reality and projects ‘message of the past” with articulatory alertness. A strategic alertness echoed by history saves a nation from breaking and safeguards great heroes from undue psychological ruin.

The image of the Indian woman put to further introspection in _Mira_. The protagonist, again is the invention of a hegemonic patriarchal society which prevailed all over India, expect in certain areas. She is regarded as subordinate, denied rights, and excluded from the affairs of men. In ordinary life, she is required
to perform the functions of sex-partner and child-bearer, but is otherwise regarded as unimportant. A woman is thus seen as a necessary evil and willfully and cleverly kept out of the centre stage of life. As Luce Irigaray points out in “Sexual Differences”: “It is man who has been the subject of discourse, whether in the field of theory, morality or politics… (119).

This image was reinforced by the representation of women in Indian literature, including Indian English literature. In most works, “the emphasis is on woman’s behavior in relationship to men: wife/husband; mother/son; daughter/father; sister/brother” (Jacobson and Wadley 120). The stereotyped woman has little in common with the real woman. In most cultures, women are categorized as two distinctive, yet paired types: the wife and the mistress, the lover and the vamp, the good mother and bad stepmother. This hides the fact that women’s roles and functions are diverse.

A change began to be perceived in the post-Independence phase of Indian literature. This was reflected in Indian English literature too. The plays of Bharati Sarabhai, Nissim Ezekiel, Asif Currimbhoy, Dina Mehta, Girish Karnad, Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani reveal a truer image of the real Indian woman who is in conflict with the conventional fictional image. There is thus a demystification of the earlier idealized image that was mainly visible in the pre-Independence Indian English drama.

Socialization leads to a woman having a poor image of herself. The process of inscription begins at birth and is reinforced throughout life. It is through the institution of the family that feminine qualities are inculcated in girls, and masculine tendencies cultivated in boys. Psychoanalytic theories also buttress the myths of femininity and lead to an appropriation of woman’s selfhood. A negative self-image leads to lack of confidence and makes a woman dependent on a man. Sarabhai, Ezekiel, Currimbhoy, Mehta, Padmanabhan and Dattani present such
women in their play. Anuradha in Sarabhai’s *Two Women*, Mala and Malti in Ezekiel’s “Marriage Poem” and *Don’t Call It Suicide* respectively, Rita in Currimbhoy’s “Doldrummers”, Miranda in his “Goa”, Laxmi in Mehta’s *Brides Are Not For Burning* and Pramila in “The Myth-Makers”, Nittilai in Karnad’s *The Fire and the Rain*, the two wives in Padmanabhan’s “Lights Out” and Dolly and Alka in Dattani’s “Bravely Fought the Queen” are examples of such women. Such dependence causes insecurity and uncertainty and makes a woman demanding, suspicious, cynical or neurotic.

But some women are assertive and of stranger mettle. They struggle against male oppression and discrimination. Most men are insensitive to women’s sense of self, and are reluctant to view them as anything other than objects of pleasure, bearers of embryos, rearers of children and guardians of the hearth. To many men, women appear as objects of sex. Bharat and Raj in Ezekiel’s “Nalini”, Alphonso and Krishna in Currimbhoy’s “Goa” and Joe and Tony in his “The Doldrummers”, Joglekar in Mehta’s “The Myth-Makers” and Yavakri in Karnad’s *The Fire and the Rain* exemplify this attitude. However, in some cases, the withholding of a sexual relationship in marriage is used by husbands to wreak vengeance on their wives as seen in Karnad’s *Naga-Mandala* and Mehta’s “The Myth-Makers”. Women are also deceived into marriages with homosexuals in Dattani’s “Bravely Fought the Queen” and “On a Muggy Night in Mumbai”. The sexual exploitation of women at the work place is dealt with in Mehta’s “Getting Away with Murder”.

Domestic violence or wife beating can be seen in Ezekiel’s *Don’t Call It Suicide* and in the plays, “On a Muggy Night in Mumbai”, “Bravely Fought the Queen” and “Final Solutions” by Dattani. Rape, the prerogative of the male, is used to display his strength and power over the female, as exemplified in Currimbhoy’s “Goa” and Padmanahan’s “Lights Out”. The trauma of gang rape, the helplessness of the victim and the voyeurism of the men, are fully brought out
in “Lights Out”. Child sexual abuse forms the theme of Mehta’s “Getting Away with Murder” and Dattani’s 30 Days in September.

Most of the plays reveal ambivalence towards Sexuality. While male sexuality is celebrated, female sexuality is repressed and subsumed in reproduction. Naresh in Ezekiel’s “Marriage Poem”, Tony in Currimbhoy’s “The Doldrummers” And Apparna in Karnad’s Naga-Mandala brazely flout the moral sexual codes of society but their peccadillos are condoned. Childlessness is always held to be the wife’s fault. The Queen in karnad’s “Bali: The Sacrifice”, the father’s first wife in Mehta’s Brides Are Nor for Burning and Raziya in Mehta’s “Getting Away with Murder” are victims of this attitude.

Those women who dare to venture beyond the demarcated phallocentric parameters are considered aberrant or deviant. This bias against women can be seen in Currimbhoy’s “The Dumb Dancer” and Thorns on a Canvas, and Ezekiel’s “Nalini” and Dattani’s “Tara” where Bharati under moral compunctions rises up to Shelter her daughter but weakly succumbs to the throes of mortality.

Western education, participation in the freedom struggle and women’s movements have encouraged women to assert themselves. Such women can be seen in the plays of Sarabhai (Anuradha in Two Women), Ezekiel (Mala in “Marriage Poem”), Currimbhoy (Rita in “The Doldrummers”, Prema in “The Dumb Dancer” and Rose in “Goa”), Mehta (Pramila in “The Myth-Makers” and Sonali in “Getting Away with Murder”), Karnad (Vishakha in The Fire and the Rain and the Queen in “Bali: The Sacrifice”) and Dattani (Dolly and Alka in “Bravely Fought the Queen”). They redeem themselves by rising in conflict against their restraints.

With indefatigable will they wither land the nexus of society, religion and psychoanalytic theories as well as the nefarious schemes of the opposite sex to quell them. Sarabhai’s Urvashi, Ezekiel’s Nalini and “She”, Currimbhoy’s Malti,
Mehta’s Malini and Mallika, Karnad’s Padmini and Rani, Padmanabhan’s Jaya and Dattani’s Uma, Smitha, Lalitha, Tara and Kiran reveal different facets of the educated, self-thinking, decision-making woman. They demystify the feminine mystique which claims that women can be happy only in subservience and effacement in a patriarchal society.

Interestingly the female dramatists tend to show their women characters in a more positive light than the male dramatists. Though women characters are prominent in the plays of the male dramatists, they are, in effect, often marginalized due to the point of view of the dramatists. However, there seems to be no noticeable difference in the use of language. The dramatists, irrespective of gender, often use similar words in specific dramatic situations of heightened sensibility to articulate the emotions of their women characters. There is an uncanny resemblance in the words spoken by the submissive women character in their plays when they plead with their men not to forsake them. Similarly, when the women characters rise in protest, and also when they look forward to a more fulfilling future, their emotions find expression in very similar words. Thus, it is not possible to essentialize the gender of the dramatists under study through their use of language. The existence of Woman’s Language or WL is, therefore, called into question.

The relationship between women in the plays also makes for interesting study. Mina_Jhali and Mina-Uda testifies it. When a woman does not find fulfillment and happiness in her relations with man under prevailing circumstances, it is only natural to assume that she finds consolation, support and friendship among the members of her own sex. However in “Marriage Poem”, “The Doldrummers”, “The Dumb Dancer”, “Goa” and This Alien--- Native Land, there is no love lost between the women characters. Mother-in-law and daughters-in-law are seen at loggerheads in Don’t Call It Suicide, Brides Are Not for Burning,
“Getting Away with Murder”, *Harvest*, “Bravely Fought the Queen” and “Where There’s a Will”. In these plays there is hostility, jealousy and rivalry between women. These feelings are mainly present in women who have a poor self-image created by lack of self-confidence and self-worth. It is insecurity that makes a woman see another as an enemy or a rival. This misogyny is also a fall-out of the patriarchal tutelage which leads to the immasculation of women. However, the plays reveal that moments of crisis erase such feelings of hostility, and result in female bonding as can be seen in *Don’t Call It Suicide*, “The Doldrummers”, “Goa”, *This Alien --- Native Land*, “Getting Away with Murder” and “Where There’s Will”. The coalition of women results in a better perception of their self-esteem. Uda therefor is the first to label Mina as a blessed being.

The man-woman relationship in any society is influenced by the belief system of that society. In India, social customs, religious traditions and literature portrayals – all picture woman as inferior to man. Post-Independence literature, including drama, throws fresh light on and gives new direction to this relationship. Woman is capable of having her own identity, and man has slowly begun to recognize and accept this fact.

Apart from the concept of identity of women and sexuality, love’ is also brought under strict contemplation. The play, *Mira* is of much importance for the contemporary society for one more reason. In his play, Gurcharan Das has tried his best to uphold the feminine values. It appears that Gurcharan Das has used the legend of Mira in his play to have its say on the critical condition of women in the male dominated Indian society. Through his powerful female character Mira, Gurcharan Das wants to awake the Indian women for their rights. This theme of asserting women’s rights comes forefront in the play. The play supports the cause of women for their empowerment. According to the playwright, for the betterment
of the society as well as for the better human relationships, it is pertinent to raise the status of women up to the level where they can feel themselves economically as well as politically secure in the society. Gurcharan Das’s Mira is not such a typical Indian woman who will follow her husband in every circumstance rather she is so strong a woman to rise her voice against all the misdoings of patriarchal society. Soon after her marriage, Mira proves herself as a strong woman who is much conscious about her individuality and who refuses to follow her husband’s order to bow before the family Goddess kali:

Actor 1 : Bow to mother.

Actress 1 : She hesitates.

Actor 1 : Bow to her. Kali is our family Goddess.

Actress 1 : I doesn’t like her face (104).

Here, Mira puts an example before all those women who easily surrender against the tyrannies of male chauvinists. Unlike other typical Indian women, Mira asserts her value and follow her instincts.

The play also presents the real picture of the society where women are considered just the thing to produce heirs. In such a society women have been give only duties and obligations and not any rights. Even in our modern age, that boasts of its scientific progress and developments in many other fields, women are still being subjugated by their male partners. Every time and in every field she has to face the same repeated situation in her life that she can’t do this because she is a girl; she should not go outside, enjoys immense power over her. When she is a child there is a authority of her father over her, after the marriage it is husband that dominates her and then it is the turn of her own children. And this vicious circle of male domination over her goes on without stopping and she remains subjugated.
throughout her life. In such a society, the birth of boy child is given importance. According to them, it is only boy that can give the economic as well as social security to the family. For such a pathetic condition of women, according to Gurcharan Das, it is not men who are their enemies; rather it is women themselves who, more than one occasion, prove themselves their own enemies. In the play, Uda, the sister-in-law of Mira, hates Mira out of jealousy. She even tries to kill Mira twice. Though Mira has to face all these difficulties, she never let herself go down and instead she fights for the right cause. As an individual she asserts her feminine values and when she finds that her husband is indifferent to her, she chooses to go into introvert where she can uphold her individuality in the company of her God, Krishna. In the end of the play, it is Mira and not Rana or saying in other words, it is feminine values and not the patriarchal system that has been shown victorious by the playwright:

   Actor 1      :      I have lost the war;
                        I have lost my wife (133).

   And moreover, Rana is compelled by the circumstances to accept the dignity of his wife, Mira. At the end, he is shown as a tragic husband who seems to repent over his faults:

   Actor 1      :      I remember the day she arrived she brought Youth, love so much of it…. She used to follow me like a shadow, wherever I went…. She wouldn’t eat until she had fed me by her hand (136).

   The play also gives importance to the Indian tradition and philosophy. Gurcharan Das has presented the great Indian tradition as a value that is to be preserved and upheld. According to him: “Although saints like Mira subverted the traditional ideals of Indian womanhood and challenged the social order, her mystical love for Krishna did not create the sort of problems for her as Saint John’s
vision did in the West.” It appears that Gurcharan Das has firm belief in Indian tradition and philosophy. Through his play, Mira, he wants to spread the message that there is no equal to Indian tradition in the world. Indian philosophy, mathematics, science, etc., has supported the intellectuality in the world since time immemorial. One of the most famous contributions of Indian philosophy to the world civilization, is the philosophy of devotional love where saint like Mira transcends herself into saint through her devotional love.

Gurcharan Das explores the theme of love through Mira, who is portrayed as going through two types of experiences in love. In her first experience, Mira seems to be more attached and sensuous towards her husband. Even the text of the play, at times, becomes more vulgar and sensuous in presenting the sensuous love of Mira:

Actress 3 : The doctor’s advice to the lovesick is: first drink the nectar from his lips; then follow it up with his warm hand on your breasts; cup it with a soothing massage of loins and hips (106).

and further,

actress 1 : My long black hair on my round white hips (125).

In her second experience in love, Mira’s love becomes more devotional. Though her love to Krishna is sensuous-cum-devotional, there is no vulgarity in her expression of her love towards lord Krishna. Actually, it is her bitter experiences in her love with her husband that compels Mira go outside in the search of her completeness in love. And she can find it only in her devotional love for her Lord Krishna. At one juncture, Mira herself accepts that she is attached to
Krishna emotionally as well as sensually. But later on Mira succeeds in converting her sensual love into devotional one through her determination and devotion in her worship of Krishna.

Actress 3 : Who are you attached to?

Actress 1 : Krishna…. I want him in a different way (129).

Towards the end of the play, Mira seems to be totally lost in her devotional love with Krishna. She feels satisfied and finds her completeness in the company of Lord Krishna’s image. She accepts Him as her second husband:

Actress 1 : …. The time has come. I, have waited all my life for the Is moment…. I am a bride today and I am going to his Home of infinite happiness (138).

9 Jakhoo Hill, the last of the collection is the most representative of Das plays. The play has a political backdrop – India’s demoralizing war with China, the gradual decay of Nehruvian ideals and the sharp propagation of materialistic values. Das paints the badly – affected Indian family structure as the aftermath of continual political turmoil. To elucidate this cause and effect relationship Amita – Anusuiya family as victims is juxtaposed against Deepak – Chitra, the crystallization of class pattern in the society. Describing the main interest of the play – Das himself says –

The old middle class consisting of people like my grandfather and father, first emerged in the 19th century with the spread of English education. It produced the professionals who stepped into the shoes of the departing English in 1947 and have for long monopolized the rewards of our society. Its chief virtue
was that it based on education and merit with relatively free entry but it was also a class alienated from the mass of people and unsure of its identity. The new middle class on the other hand is based on money, drive and an ability to get things done. Whereas the old class was liberal, idealistic and, inhibited, the new under is pragmatic and refreshingly free from colonial hang–ups.

(Three English plays, 17)

The play reverberates with Nehru ideology, promoting the policy of non-alignment and The Panchsheel to make India a power. The Chinese incursion, Indian defeat and mortification hurt the Nation’s consciousness beyond imagination. It also laments at Nehru’s lethargic display of leadership acumen at the Indo-China war 1962. The devastation produced by this phase of Indian history is commented upon as –

I think this was a great turning point – the war ended our age of innocence and shattered our Nehruvian dreams. Nehru died soon afterwards and our society also began to change. With the coming of Indira Gandhi values began to depart from our political life, and Governance became immoral. A new personalized style of politics came into being. (Three English plays 19).

Therefore 9 Jakhoo Hill presents the most tumultuous and demoralizing phase of Indian history where a once-well to do family sinks into shambles in the face of a brash new social climbing middle class. Along with the traumatic experiences of partition, it talks about the nostalgia of grandeur, not of one but the community in general. As the play open, Ansuya’s family breads over the ugliness of partition and the loss of their better days – “.... We have lost everything.... We’ve lost the
way we lived. But there was a time … oh yes, there was a time. But it is gone now. All we have left is ourselves, the three of us… we have suffered, and we drew to each other in our suffering. You are trying to take ever that…”

This state of ambivalence is also seen in the memoir of Girish Karnad in “In search of New a New Theatre”:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until there had come in the open demanded to be resolved without apologia of self – justificati

Anusuya’s family is economically diseased and are forced to sell their house to pay off their debts. This economic debacle can be studied as a macro projection “Maintaining a proper equilibrium between economic and social development, amusing that this economic development was shared by the whole society serves the very purpose of this growth. These economic reforms must take into consideration the apprehensions of every segment of the society. Regrettably, Indian Government’s structure of socio-economic growth turned out to be a failure and proved to be a nightmare. The result was enormous delays-years – with staggering opportunities for corruption …” (The Times of India 6)

Accelerated urbanization has transformed Indian society. A highly noticeable feature of India’s social structure is highly inequitable division of the nation’s wealth. Access to wealth and power varies sharply. People like Rai
Saheb/Bunty misuse their rich status and power to exploit the needy or the marginal. The ugliness inherent in such foul practices is painted by Das with much force and assertion:

Rai Saheb : We merely carry out policy.
Mamu : Ah, but ‘we’ love the policy. It gives us the power to have the likes of Deepak grovel before us: yes ‘sir, ‘No’ sir’.
Rai Saheb : I admit it’s awkward – this licensing business. But Someone has to do it.

(Three plays, 181)

Gurcharan Das stresses on the effect of economic changes on the characters and deduces the belief the social relations were based earlier on emotions and ‘we-feeling’ but the recent times have been excessively fertile for avarice and greed. To make Deepak rise on the ladder of ‘big salary’ Chitra deprives her only son of his ‘lady love’ and marries him against the bargain settled for license to Deepak’s company. The ill-matched marriage would provide them with a handsome dowry—“… not going to be under two takhs And may be they will also give a car, a fridge and an air-conditioner. Uff ! Main to Khushi se paagal ho rahi hoon. I don’t think I shall be able to sleep tonight “(192)

Superficially, the deal may be devastating but underhand ethically ignoble and denigrating Chitra offers herself unhesitatingly to lecherous Rai – Saheb, who would “proudly tell us of sexual escapades “(181). To this hypocrite of Indian bureaucracy, Chitra spends “Ek Ghanta” to Place Deepak’s career above everything. Profit-wise Deepak soared high up—“became the Managing Director of his company and gave glittering parties, over which Chitra, and not his wife, presided as the hostess” (198).
Projection of parenting demands contemplation in terms of social change. Traditional drama revered parents as an equal to God. In the opinion of S. F. Wright-

“Reverence for parents is a prominent feature of medieval Indian way of life and form the quintessence of Indian religion and philosophy.

(Five plays, 63)

Selfish parenting is also the key idea in Murli Das Melwani’s Deep Roots. The protagonist Arvind is repelled by his father’s obsessive interest in money-making. Strangled by their dictates, he escapes to London to ‘find himself there’ as he doubts “whether a thing like love exists”

9 Jakhoo Hill is all about how the baton of power and responsibility changed hands after the implementation of economic reforms in India. The process of old middle class giving way to the new began covertly in India in 1960 but became explicit in 1980 and 1990. This shift in social and economic paradigms is described by Heibmath, an eminent sociologist as –

In India, social reform did not ordinarily mean a re-organisation of the structure of society at large as it did in the west, for the benefit of the underprivileged social economic class. Instead it meant the infusion into the existing social structure of new ways of life and thought: the society would be preserved; while its member would be transformed.

(Social movements in India A Review of Literature New Delhi: Sage Publisher 2004.)

Undoubtedly, status is an important by-product of aristocracy and has its roots deep down in mid – century. But by the end of 20th century a man was ready to overlook all more, values and virtues to acquire status that he desired. This mid
– century’ phenomenon “holds a tight noose around the society so much so that it has become a common man aspiration. To him:

The world is like a toy especially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favorite tunes.

(Cry the peacock. 44)

Resultingly, a few grow up to a full – fledged personality ‘accelerated by efficiently and gratified by seeming contentment. The Indian society witnessed a paradigm shift in the twentieth century’ from a dominant rural agrarian society, it transformed partially into an industrial urban one. Industrialization, Globalization, political freedom, rise of urban centres, arrival of multinational companies and migration of people from rural to urban areas made a tremendous impact on the Indian social structure. The increasing amount of money erased caste consciousness and brought in the western incurable ill namely, status discrimination.

As literature and society are inter – related it is essential to explore the structure of Indian society and its myriad form from ancient to the modern In ancient times, the Indian society was based on the caste or Varna system, inhibiting form categories – the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. This division was in accordance with the deeds and qualities of each individual person and women enjoyed similar rights. The system later degenerated and the practice of determining the caste on the basis of birth rose up as ill – directed stratification. Stanley Wolpert in his book observes:

As more and different tribal people were absorbed within the spreading boundaries of Aryan Society, it soon became necessary to add still a lower class, one whose occupations were so unclear that Shudras did not wish to touch them. This
led to the emergence of the class of untouchables also called panchamas.

Social stratification is seen strikingly in the plays of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya’s Raidas wherein lies the caste – conflict between the simple and honest soul. Raidas and the set of insolent and vainglorious Brahmans. His next play Chokha Mela presents a variation of the same theme. Once again the blind-to-reason- Brahmans arrogantly humiliate and oust Chokha from the temple for having polluted the image of Vithoba. Surprised at this lecherous belief, he says

How can you believe that
He who dwells
I’m every speck of dust and
Spot of star
Beyond our little strife of
Caste and creed
Can ever be polluted by my
Presence.

(Poem and plays 297)

Gurcharan Das also tries to explain how economy reflects in human relationships and thus constitutes the prominent theme in 9 Jakhoo Hill. The great economic and political questions of the time, the play set in, werfe to eliminate poverty through economy reforms and social changes. As happened in the European countries after the Industrial Revolution, so is experienced in the post independent India in terms of socio-economic changes. As the consequences of the economic reforms, introduced by India in 1960s-70s, there was the rise of new middle class, which is famous for its materialistic and money minded approach to life, brought drastic changes the socio-economic set of Indian society and in turn,
also affected the human relationships. In this regards, Gurcharan Das has a point when he asserts: “The most striking feature of contemporary India, is the rise of a confident new middle class, which is full of energy and drive and is making things happen.” The noticeable effect of economic changes on human relationships is that the relations, that are traditionally used to be based on emotions and feelings, start disintegrating after they came under the influence of materialism. Now what constitutes the relationships is not love and affection but money and what makes the thing happen in the modern world is all money.

The comparative study of the two families of Chitra and Deepak and of Ansuya and Amrita shows that the poor economic conditions of Amrita and Ansuya bring the members of their family more close to each other. They support each other in the time of economic crisis. Though economic factors more of less, affected them also, they do not let themselves go down as happens in the case of Chitra In play, Amrita and Ansuya are emotionally attached to each other and also support each other in their economic crisis:

Ansuya : What difference does it make, Amma, what she thinks?
We have to learn to live without our mills and our lands (159).

Moreover, towards the end of the play Ansuya wants to calm down her mother:

Ansuya : I’ve been thinking Amma. All day, I’ve been thinking.
I’m going to be strong. I’m going to look after you. This House will never be sold (196).

For the family of Ansuya, the economic crisis plays a special type of positive role. Economic crisis compel the family of Ansuya to give up their passiveness. Now after some economic jolts, they realize that if they want to survive, they will certainly have to be economically active.
Gurcharan Das, in his play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*, seems to take the side of Deepak and his market and business orient thinking. Though implicitly, he tries to glorify the achievements of the economic reforms and its positive impacts on the Indian society of the 1960s-70s forms another important theme in *9 Jakhoo Hill*. Describing about the opportunities for an educated man in India after the initial economic reforms, Gurcharan Das say:

After college we were ready to join the IAS or industry or the professions all the pleasant niches for which the older Indian bourgeoisie groomed it’s young. With secured jobs in our pockets, we were married off to good middle or upper middle class girl.

To show the positive aspects of economic reforms on the life of people, Gurcharan Das has created the character of Deepak in the play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*. Now and then, Gurcharan Das seems to portray Deepak as the representative of the youth of modern India who are aware of all those opportunities in career and life which are provided and created by the economic reforms. Unlike the old middle class these people are much conscious about their career and are much more practical. They do hard work to attain what they want to attain in life. The following statement of Deepak shows how confident the youngsters are about the new opportunities in life:

Deepak : Sir I am proud of what I do and the company I work for...
I believe we care more about our people than any Academics do for their students (167).

Thus, through Deepak, Gurcharan Das has tried to explain that the new economic and business approach of Indian youths is doing greater job for the Indian society.

The most striking thing about the modern economy is that it infuses new guts and courage in youth and makes them go better in life. They believe in always
deriving something positive out of all negatives with the help of their technical skill, for example, Deepak has a plan for 9 Jakhoo Hill, the house of Ansuya’s family, to convert it into hotel so that they can make best use of if in their critical financial conditions. Deepak infuses a kind of enthusiasm in Ansuya by suggesting her:

Deepak : You can work. You could start by converting this house into a hotel …I can see it ‘Jakhoo Hotel’ (174).

Ansuya takes Deepak as her role model because of his activeness and positive approach in life. Ansuya accepts:

Ansuya : Deepak you know, you remind me of my father. You smile like him. You have his same sense of life …and hope.

The interesting thing Gurcharan Das has done in his play is that in glorifying the positives of new economic approach, he never forgets to highlight the problems of red-tapism and bribes in the economics and administrative system of India. He highlights the drawbacks in government’s economic policies. In 9 Jakhoo Hill, he shows how difficult it is for a company to attain a license. With this he also exposes the reality of bureaucrats like Rai Saheb, who does not hesitate even in making the necessities of others the opportunities for themselves for their personal benefits. Thus, we see the playwright attacks the red tapism in the economic policies of the Indian government and exposes the Indian officialdom where officer like Rai Saheb exploits the people sexually as well as economically, as Karan accuses Rai Saheb:

Mamu: Will you (Rai Saheb) take a bribe in awarding the license to Deepak’s company (180).
These fundamental questions regarding bribe, red-tapism, sexual exploitation, opportunism, etc., which Gurcharan Das has focused on in his play *Jakhoo Hill*, still have the social and the politico-economic relevance.

*Three English plays* provide a large picture of man–woman relationship. Most of such relationships are failures in the plays understanding. The most prominent and striking reason is the failure of meaningful interaction between the two – be it Larins and Rani (*Larins Sahib*); Mira – Jai and Mira – Rana (*Mira*); Ansuya–Deepak and Ansuya-Karan (*Jakhoo Hill*). Such incompatibility can also be traced in *Harvest* (Manjula Padnamabhan). *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Where There’s a Will* (Mahesh Dattani) and *Brides Are not for Burning* (Dina Mehta) to name a few. In all instances the spouses fail to reach out to their partners, and cater to the basic needs for companionship and intimacy. Fruitful relationships eludes their efforts and enterprises.

However, there is a faint ray of hope too. Deepak suggesting effective measures to Ansuya to fathom out of their economic slump provides a glimpse of compatible partners in a love relationship. Such an instance can be seen in Dattani’s play *Where There is a Will* where woman assists a man in his judicious discharge of economic responsibility. Likewise in Dina Mehta’s Plays women are assisted in their struggles by men. This is a definite indication of the emergence of new woman and new man. Men like Deepak or Sher Singh has overcome the masculine mystique that projects dominance as manliness. Complementarity of the sexes is the new articulation S. Abid Husain describes this radical change as:

> The new culture not only ended her seclusion, which was a comparatively recent institution, but also reduced the traditional distance between men and women which had been kept in India from time immemorial, it not only brought her into ‘Society’ but took her to club to dance with ‘strange’ men.
Das’ Rani, Mira Chitra, Amrita and Ansuya reflect the consciousness of their age. Das brings traditional and modern concepts of women in apposition to build the superstructure of Indian womanhood. An Indian woman enjoys high status in religion and in Mythologies of which *Mira* is a revision. By reinterpreting ‘past’ Das shows how women like Rani Jindan and Mira are dumb to patriarchal aggressive norms. Though economically dependent throughout their lives, Indian society respects them as a mother and a wife. The Syntax of her life changes when Ansuya-like woman leap to self-autonomy, worth and self-assertion. A comparison between a traditional and a modern woman is painted by Kalpana Wandrekar in the essay entitled “Towards Indian Feminism” as:

**Traditional Image of Indian Woman**

- Economically Dependent
- content to live within domesticity
- Role – playing as wife mother daughter
- unaware of self-hood

**Method**

- No freedom of choice
- Absence of intellectual Striving
- Blinding religious faith
- Feminine weak and sacrificing
- Blind faith in patriarchy

**Modern Image of a Woman**

- Economically independent
- Aware of self-actualization
- Playing a ‘subject’ role not Intellectually active
- Free to make her choice
Method

Detraditionalizing the image of the past centuries
Restructuring and correcting the Stereotypes
Reintegrating the established images
Developing new perspectives on human experience

(Literary Theory and Criticism, 205)

Though Ansuya Das upholds the belief that Indian womanhood needs to ceremonise her contributions to society and assertively exercise the freedom to make decisions. Vijay Tendulkar Projects woman of substance and “… they are from the unbelievably gullible to the clever, from the malleable to the stubborn, from the conservative to the rebellious, from the self-sacrificing to the grasping” (Indian Writing in English, 209). Das, like Tendulkar believes that an evening at the theatre would not change the society, but a good play certainly raises public awareness.

Locale is another dimension characteristically singular to Gurcharan Das Spaces Functions in different ways within the discourse world. On the one hand, it may be only a frame- a place of action. In certain cases space becomes an acting place especially when it is thematized. The fact that ‘this is happening here’ is just as important as “the way it is here”, which allows these events to happen. In both cases, where both frame-space and thematized space are concerned, space can function steadily or dynamically. A steady space is a fixed frame, thematized or not, within which events takes place but a dynamic space is a factor which allows for the movement of characters.

Strategically, the movement of characters can constitute a transition from one space to another. One space can be the other’s opposite. For E.g. 9 Jakhoo Hill is ‘Shelter’ a cosy corner’ to Ansuya and Amrita but to Deepak it is a valuable property that can be invested for big profits. Therefore he visualizes 9 Jakhoo Hill
transformed into a hotel to mint money which Ansuya does to combat financial bankruptcy.

‘Space’ is a signal to social change and gender liberation. Earlier space was gender specific as well: in traditional plays men travel, whereas woman stay at home. Mahesh Dattani’s Where There is a Will shows house as confinement for Preeti and her mother –in-law, so does Mira when Rana goes out on military expeditions. Likewise for Mira’s romantic and passionate love, Garden and meadows are the choicest hunts for such expeditions. This also points at the fact that space and event make stereotypical combinations. For E.g. Ansuya and Deepak, Chitra and Rai Saheb and Rai sahab and Amrita step out of the steady space- Drawing room for the so–called ‘locus amoenus’. Such a ‘topos’ (combination) adds dimensions to characterization whereas as Karan’s presence depicts the deplorable state of their living, in-coming of Rai Saheb and Chitra’s family add a colour of hope and suspend for some time the air of melancholy.

‘Space’ takes up clear design when connected with time and moreover combined in a relationship add “definiteness” to information. The titular house becomes a significant subject when placed in between ‘time –elapsed’ and ‘time-prevailing’. The change of house from a shelter to a family into ‘a rental accommodation brings into focus the social and economic changes on the primary institution called ‘family’ and its corollary- ‘marriage’. On micro terms ‘space’ in a traditional home is ordered according to the caste hierarchy as well as the hierarchies within the family. Karnad says –

Whether a person is permitted inside the compound, allowed as far as the outer verandah, or admitted into the living room depends on his or her caste and social status… From Ibsen to Albee the living room has symbolized all that is valuable to the western bourgeoisie. It is one’s refuge from the socio-political
forces raging in the world outside as well as the battle ground where values essential to one’s individuality are fought out and defended.

*(Three Plays, 10)*

The drawing room in *9 Jakhoo Hill* is the “the no-man’s –land, the empty, almost defensive from the family presents to the world outside. The economic incompatibility is widely portrayed here with each character succumbing to its fatal blow except Ansuya. Rejected by money –monger Chitra and her tongue –tied nincompoop son, Ansuya reshapes her life and livelihood.

Space is also related with “marriage”. Marital discord appears in *Mira* once she is out of her bed-room. So does extra-marital relationships, once the characters step out of the domain of house/shelter. Be it *Mira* or *9 Jakhoo Hill* nowhere does Das seek to polarize men and women into categories antagonistic to each other. *Mira* is the hope and will to live an inspiration from the past that affirms both her independent and her identity as a good Indian woman.

To conclude, Gurcharan Das is a playwright with authentic voice and creative craftsmanship. He has the skill to write crisp dialogues and can translate complex modern themes as theatrical performances. Regrettably, he has moved on to other forms of writings with well merited success and sustained appreciation. A ready audience awaits his another show of wide –eyed reading to capture memory and merit.