CHAPTER – III
Gurcharan Das play *Larins Sahib* is a fascinating reconstruction of the rise to power and influence in the Punjab in the years 1846-7 of Henry Lawrence, who was appointed Agent of the East India Company to the Sikh Kingdom. The publishers note on the cover of the book serves as an introduction to the play:

It is 1846. Seven years after the death of the formidable Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the Sikh Kingdom has suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the East India Company. Henry Lawrence, already a legend on the North–west Frontier is appointed the company’s Agent to the Government of the late Maharaja’s boy son, Dalip Singh. Preferring Indian officers to British in an attempt to restore Sikh self–respect and endeavoring to root out corruption in the court, Lawrance alienates his superiors. This prize winning play traces the development of the hubris, which together with Lawrence’s love for the beautiful Rani, brings about his downfall.

*(Three English Plays, 7)*

The colonial encounter between the Indians and the East India provides the general background of the play. The main action focuses on the dilemma of the hero Larins Sahib who is torn between his professional loyalty to the East India company and his sympathy for the Sikh Singh Dalip Singh. The play dramatizes the conflict between two forces—the British Imperialism represented by the East India Company with all its authorities like Hardinge, Curie and Elliot, and the Indian King, Dalip Singh, Henry Lawrence, who is
known for the administrative efficiency and dutifulness is promoted as the Regent of the Sikh Kingdom and directed to be the caretaker of Dalip Singh. The play captures the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which is marked by political contempt and hatred on the one hand and by emotional sympathy and understanding on the other. It falls into the category of Raj nostalgia mementos, as it recalls the fabled splendor of the British court in India as well as the sad, sordid story of how kingdom after kingdom was taken over by the British because of backstabbing intrigues among India Princes.

The play embodies the three avatars of Henry Lawrence; Lawrence – the enlightened empire – builder, Lawrence – the latter day Loin of the Punjab and Lawrence – a support to the East India Company. Right from the beginning of the play we learn that Lawrence is known for his sympathy for the under – standing of the native problems of India. It is primarily for his non – imperialistic habit that he has become a butt of ridicule among the East India Company officials. When Lord Hardinge, Governor General, camps at the bank of Sutlaj, halfway between Lahore and Delhi an 20th March 1846, he is eager to meet Henry Lawrence and discuss the details of administration of the Sikh Kingdom with him. Everybody has heard about his reputation and admires him for his efficiency. As Elliot describes to Lord Hardinge, Henry Lawrence-

… has built up a phenomenal reputation. Just two years on the border as a minor clerk with the Revenue Survey and he’s become a legend. I believe he’s on the first name terms with most of the nobility of the Punjab. They swear by him, and the Peasantry of the Ferozpur district thinks he’s same kind of savior (3)
Tough a servant of East India Company Henry is known for his sympathy for Indians and for his adoption of Indian dress which make him unpopular with his own British officials and colleagues. Hardinge chides Lawrence for his uncanny ways as –

Why, this is disgraceful, you look like a bloody native. Your hair needs cutting. Your boot needs shining your shirt needs button (softly) I hope your breeches stay up.

(4)

Currie comments upon him to Lord Hardinge, “Your Excellency, We should be thankful Mr. Lawrence is at wearing his regimental colours. Normally, I am told he finds native dress more comfortable.” (Larins Sahib, 4). In recognition of Lawrence’s impressive and effective ability he is appointed by Lord Hardinge as the agent of the North – West territories of India –

In consideration of your generous services is the Punjab, in view of your knowledge of the North – West territories. I, Henry Hardinge, Governor-general of India and her majesty’s the Right Honorable Privy council hereby appoint you Agent of the Honorable East India Company to the Government of His Highness Dalip Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh… come an, Show some sign of life, you’re promoted to the Resident ship… the destiny of the entire North– West is in your hands.

(Larins Sahib, 9)

Now as Henry has been appointed as the Resident, he has greater opportunity, greater power, greater scope to complete certain reformatory
tasks left unfinished by the late Maharaja. But Henry knows that this is not going to be easy as the Punjab has been happened badly by the local feud. He learns the harsh truth that Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s kingdom lost the battle on account of internal betrayal rather than an account of the so-called military Powers of the East India Company. As currie puts it:

It is clearly a matter of racial superiority. Every Pagan power, no matter how formidable in appearance must succumb to the civilizing mission of the white races. (7)

But Henry Lawrence looks at Indian and their life from a sympathetic point of view:

Ranjit Singh died seven year ago. Since his death there’s been chaos everywhere and a fierce struggle for succession. The sardars have been quarreling like dogs. And understandably sin. For he not only created the Punjab from a mass of Petty states but in fact his personality united the kingdom. He established no institution which would live apart from him. When he died the Punjab died. (8)

This sympathetic attitude is misjudged by the East India Company. Mr. Currie calls Lawrence a clown and an Orientlist, thereby gives vent to his imperialistic contempt. He warns him as –

A word of advice, Mr. Lawrence. I hope you restrain your orientalism and keep the natives at a distance. Keep them in their place if you have to rule them. (25)

Currie half- heartedly sanctions a native officer Sardar Sher Singh as assistant to Henry Lawrence. Lawrence knows the enormity of his responsibility and decides to do his best to continue the work of one eyed
Lion of Punjab. He is much impressed by the late Raja Ranjit Singh’s personality that he wants to raise himself to that level so that people may compare him to the late Maharaja. Whether this is an identity crisis or some type of complex, one thing is certain Lawrence’s idea of comparing himself with the Lion is related to acquiring fame. He tells Rani Indian –

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

To Unify Punjab, to bring their faith back, to make them happy, Lawrence decides to being certain reforms. To him reform means abolition of certain evils and bringing of prosperity. Reacting to the incident of killing of cows by a British officer, he sees this as an opportunity to start with his idea of reform. He declares:

To convince you of our serenity, I have decided, to waive one month’s land revenue for the citizens of this district… we want to begin by listening to you honoured citizens, rather than by ordering you about like “Lord Sahib’s. We want to build canals, bridges, roads. We want to ensure as much justice as possible to each citizen. (60)

Unfortunately the waiving of revenue infuriates the Governor General’s office, as they believe is not winning the heart of the people, but cellaring or to be precise, looting as much money as possible at bringing another reform –

SherShing, he are insuring a proclamation: ‘Sati is with immediate effect abolished in all provinces and district of Punjab : And the Hindu Ratna Bill is with immediate effect extended to all parts of the Punjab (72)
Such a reform raises a few important questions regarding the category of Henry Lawrence. Being a British, what political benefits would he desire from the marginalized and coppered native. Would such a reform not infuriate the British think – talk? Is this a political strategy to gain immediate popularity amongst the masses? Is this a genuine attempt to better the ruled society? All these questions cannot be answered through wild conjectures. However, as history unfolds, Henry’s reformation not only win him applause but also hearts of people so much so that during the 1857 mutiny people of Punjab stand by the British. His generosity and goodwill makes him dream of a progenies world for the native. He echoes his dream to Rani Indian as:

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)

In real, his instant is something different. He is so much impressed by the late Ranjit Sigh’s personality that he wants to imitate his personal and image himself as the ‘like’ of late Maharaja to the mons. This may be diagnosed so identity crisis – the effort to compare himself with the Lion and acquire the measure of his fame. In the from Henry Lawrence his to face a number of challengers in his administration. The conflict between Christian culture and Sikh culture and that between British law and Sikh law create a variety of problems for him. For instance, when a small detachment of English soldiers was coring the Shah ‘alami Gate, the road was blocked by a herd of cows. The officer in command being ignorant of the Hindu renounce for cows cleaned the street the quickest possible way by shooting the cows. The Hindu religions sentiments being deeply hurt, the natives create a grand hullaballoo over the vulnerable issue. The resultant chaos and
confusion generate a lot of tension perfect peace and harmony in the kingdom. He therefore, rushes to Rani Indian kaur to explain the unhappy event and wants to apologies publicly the next morning. The Rani and her Wazir Lal Singh feel angry and hunt by the unhappy slaughter of cows. There in addition to I cultural conflict there is also a regal conflict. Lal Singh ensiles that the young officer who killed the cow should be tried according to the like law. By Henry refutes it as “I’m afraid that way not be possible. He can only be tried according to the rules of the Honorable company. However I intend to local with him as surely as I can. Please rest assured that will not happen again” (23).

Henry Lawrence who understands the sensitivity of the cow- issue takes the young officer Lumsden to task. He slaps him and even theaters to suspend him from duty if he repeats the mistake. But the other officers of the East India Company are not very sympathetic towards the Indians. Abbot, for example, wonders “…why is heaven’s about the cows?” (26). To this he starts –

Mr. Edwards, I am her cancerred with the integrity of Mr. Lumsdan than with the fact that there are at least a thousand persons ant side who would be glad to have his head. Fortunately Indians are civilized people and don’t resent to violence easily. In other land, by now we would have been burnt alive (28).

He emphatically advisers his colleague to serve India whole- hearted by or return to their country. But he does not hesitate to tell Sher Singh :

You Indian are the most sensitive people in the world. Sometimes it is difficult to talk you. One’s always afraid of hunting you. (29)
He is sternly contemptuous of the narrow – minded British Imperialist when he describes as a “… Pukka Indian … an Englishman full of curry and bad Hindustani, with fat linen and no brains, but with a self – sufficient idea that no man can know India, expect through long experience of brandy, gin, gram fed mutton, and cheroots” (28). He adds –

The overage Englishman thinks he is daring someone a favor by being in India. But I thought you were here because you liked here …. Undeceive yourselves, if you think that by remaining in India you are shouldering someone’s Burdon and marching into a hero’s surest …. The Indian doesn’t need anyone’s shoulder to learn upon. He can do without – The Englishman, who as sawn as he sets his foot in India eternally pires for London fogs and survey green. Your mission to civilize “the crafty Hindu” will only result in his losing faith in the English

(28-29)

Now a days cultural studies take into account all respects of living sure as dream, food mean of entertainment etc. But in the British era when India was colonized, culture was only associated with the way and values of the upper crust of society. Larins Sahib foregrounds the contrast between the aristocracy and the lower class people. The aristocratic class is represented by the British and the lower class by the natives. The play also highlights the way the British humiliated the natives in the first Act, Henry Lawrence is portrayed as a strong advocate of the principles of natural justice, a lover of the natives and a just and efficient administrator. There is a suggestion of subtle irony in the reference that his face has been self – tanned is the heat of the subcontinent and that he can easily be mistaken for a native.
Lawrence’s appearance at the Governor General’s Darban make the white occupants of the room look suspiciously as if they are about to receive a stranger from another land and not one of their our real. Their snobbery and prejudices against the Indians are apparent is the observations, they make about Lawrence.

The play also highlights the sensitivity and devotion of the people of those things to curtains

_Larins Sahib_ untold against the backdrop of political chaos and murky intrigue that marked the time immediately following the death of Ranjit Singh. Here Das has created his protagonist Henry Lawrence almost on the lines of a tragic hero. In his “we see the struggle between personal ethics duty and India as Lawrence, AL strived to balance the three facets of his self, the enlightened empire builder, an age in the British Government’s unprincipled relented augmentation of its Indian tensions, and the part of line self which long to be the Lion of the Punjab. I the and, there can be no resolution and are enterer the moral degeneration of are who had truly, here potential. The play more swiftly the dramatic torsion being restored from one seen to the next and is peopled by high – impact caracals Ranjit Singh window, the brave soldier Sher Singh, the boy Dalip, and of course, Lawrence himself.

The play is an effective improvisation of history. The rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is looked up with fervent admiration so much so that European lauded at his Fecund administration. Das details the applauses is Introduction as –

> A European Traveller, Baran C. Van Hugel called the empire ‘ the most wonderful object in the whole world other contemporaries impaired Ranjit Singh to Bonaparts.
A French traveller referred to the one – eyed Sikh as a miniature Napoleon. .. The Sikh monarchy was Napoleonic in the suddenness of its rise, the brilliancy of its success, and the completeness of its overthrow : (There plays, 8)

To the “historically curies” reader the skill of Gurucharan Das has much to offer. The play has a meat design and simple but informative and interesting discourse palter. Structurally, the play has a curious plot and recognizable symmetry. First play is the longest with 36 paged divided into three scenes. Second Act is the shortest, with 22 pages but it has the largest number of scenes – the Act being divided into five short scenes. Third Act with 28 pages certain, like the first Act, three scenes.

The opening scene rightly serves as ‘Exposition’ and the stage direction easily and with immediacy constructs the “British Raj” in the 19th century. The locate is “the Governor – General’s camp on the banks of the sutlaj, half way between Lahore and Delhi and the time is “20th March 1846, a month after Sikh was. The East- West conflict is rightly suggested by poles – part images. On one hand is the picture of the ‘Coolie’ who is the ‘drowsily pulling the cord of the swaying punkaj (a typical Indian scene) and on the other is Hardinge holding a glar of brandy in one hand and a cigar in another”. Amidst this appear Lawrence on the stage who Elliot, before his coming on stage, describes him as “quite a character” and Curie as “Practically a native”. Lawrence is portrayed as a man of forty with younger looks, dressed though not smartly in his regimented uniform. Here Lawrence’s attitude is set against Hardinge to build up the room to come class for which Punjab would be the battleground. This scene also Establishes Lawrence as Larins Sahib, when Sher Singh announces:
Wah wah Larins! It is written. I said to myself, Larins is to become a great man. Evercare the day my grandmother read your horoscope, I said to myself Larins will become great. It is written, you fruit of your past likes Larins. I mean Larins Sahib. Now you one a big man I must call you ‘Sahib’- president Sahib (12).

Larins has much ‘that gives him easy acceptability amongst the natives. His native- like personality reminds of what Handinge say as room as he see Lawrence : “you look like a bloody native your hair needs cutting. Your boots need shining, your shirt needs buttons (29). Not only he ‘look’ like a native but he also thinks like and. His humanitarian outlook is described by Elliot as :

... this man has built a phenomenal reputation. First two years on the border as a minor clerk with the Revenue survey, and he’s become a legend. I believe he’s an first-name terms with most of the nobility of Punjab. They swear by him, and the peasantry of the Ferozapur district think he’s same kind of a savior. (28)

Lawrence dedication to Punjab is once again established in the scene when Currie remarks carter ptuously – “your Excellence we should be thankful that Mr. Lawrence is at least wearing his regimental colors. Normally I am told he finds native dress more comfortable (29). His philanthropic attitude is further despised as:

Currie : (Angrily.) we have a clown to contend with, Elliot, in addition to an oriented. Mr. Lawrence, the days of clive, Hastings and the Nabobs – are gone. This is the
age of administering India. India is no more one great adventure. We need regular sorts, not Charltans (34).

Scene 2 shifts to Lohare and with a month elapsed. Here all the natives are exposed – Dalip singh, Baba- Dalip’s mother – the widow Rani Jindan. The opponents are placed against one another and the stage is set for conflicts between Christian culture and Sikh culture. The scene also reveals accepted by the twelve years old Maharaja with easiness although he had been antagonists to the East Indian company:

Baba: (Reading) … and the crane asked’ what is the road to heaven?

Dalip (Interrupting) I know can I answer?

Baba: What?

Dalip: Truthfulness!

Dalip: (Bored) Bas, Baba. Why do we read the same old thing every night? Why don’t you tell me about the war with the Angrez.

Baba: No, Your Highness. There are dark corners … (39)

Here Das also makes it clear that India was a rich country before the invaders came and created political and economic gaps:

Rani: We’ve lost a war child. The state threasury is empty.

We owe the Angrez more than one crore rupees.

Dalip:How much money is that, Mai?

Rani: It’s a lot of money, my son. And the Arony still has to be paid.

Dalip: I Though we were the strangest and the richest country in the whole world.

Rani: We were – in the days of your father

(40)
Dalip’s bad wutg Larins Sahib is soon build an he pretext of learning shooting. This affection is is effectively revealed in “Master trap” – a prady of the curtain –scene in Hamlet. Not only is it well –built but also effectively concocted through an undercurrent of irony. When Lawrance administers a huge kick to the end of the curtain with Hamlet’s cry. “How now? A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead! (20) he is truly speaking about the traitor Lal Singh who had been spying on them. Lawrance also informs Rani, firstly about the Khalsa in Bannu who isolated the difficult tribes under the leadership of English officers. He also tells her about on unfortunate incident in which the officer in command killed the cows which is nothing short of sacrilege for the citizens of the area. He clearely hides the fact that Lt. Lunsdan had Killed the cows deliberately.

Scene 3 shifts to the Residancy at Lohara, an hour later. Here we observe India through the gaze of Lawrance’s Youngman like Lumsden Edwards and Abbot in the common Room talking of nautachi and nautch girls:

Lumsden: Are you going to the nautch tonight, abbot?
Abbot: (Yawning) The nautich girls sing too long. By the time it get interesting I’m half asleep.
Lumsden: Pretty awful business if you ask me.
Abbot: Hows your black wench Lumsden?
Lumsdan: Not good.
Edwards: oh?
Lumbsden: She is pregnet
Abbot: So soon.(47)

Here the ‘cow incident’ is once again brought in an the insensitivity of which Lawrence had hinted in the earlier scene is overtly brought before he
readers. They do not realize why ‘Cow’ is a sacred animal and how important is he safety of life whether it be an animal a human being. He political drama now takes up additional hue of religiosity:

Abbot:… why in heaven’s name are the higgers so touchy about cows?

Lumsden: I don’t know. You should have soon then the earth and swarmed behind us like bees as we son here.

Abbot: Why didn’t you fire on them?

Lumsdan: We were running for our lives.

Lawrance: You killed the cow deliberately and perversely

Lumsden: It was blocking my way.

Lawrance: No, sir

Lumsdan: Yes

Lawrance: You lied to me. You went out of your way to kill the cow, knowing all the time that the sensitivities of the people there would be outraged by this (48)

This incompatibility of actions to a direct confrontation between the British and the native Pope Paul VI has rightly said – “if you want peace, work for justice” – the British threatened us with their baton of power and the natives had no option but to defend themselves against attack. In this midst of this social dilemma. Lawrance tries to stimulate renewed and peaceful relations. He openly warms the two officers that such unbridled show of power and authority could be determinate to their lives. Das, by juxtaposing Edwards, Lumsdan and Abbot on one side and Lawrance on the
other, he shows how despicable brutality and equitable justice stand as contradictory forces. The British are affected by ingroup bhias and they –

(a) See their goals as supremely important
(b) Takes pride in ‘US’ and intensely devolves ‘them’
(c) Celebrate self interests and suppress criticism

And
(d) Elevate apathy and group need against solidarity.

Lawrance realizes that toric –force attitude and warn them of dire consequence to bring in a hasty resolution:

The average Englishman thinks he doing someone a favour by being in India. But I thought your were here because you liked being here. Rest assured, Mr. Abbot, the Indian doesnm’t need anyone’s shoulder to lean upon. He can do without the Englishman who as soon as he sets foot in India eternally pines for London fogs and survey green… if you have doubt, go for God’s sake, go to your ‘fresh mornings’ ‘gorgeous moons’ and ‘dewy eves’ (28-29)

Alongwith such self –revelatory speeches of Lawrance depicting his positive attitude towards India. We also trace his obsessive interest in the “Lion of Punjab” Rani Jindan is impressed by Henry Lawrance’s Sympathetic understanding of the native of of Punjab. She is eager to befriend him hence disguises herself as Zubheda Begum – a professional singer, meets him privately. The Rani –Lawrance slot of conversation reveals a growing affection between them in the exchange of witty pleasantries. Though Rani describes her husband as totally illiterate, Lawrance honours his memory as a king of royal magnitude with fifty years
of great work – “He was the lion of victory and he left a great unifies nation to his people” (35)

Rani is impressed by Henry Lawrence’s civility and modesty whereby she gifts a diamond to him as a mark of her friendship with him. She requests him not to wear it publicly but it to keep it as a moment of their friendship. Act II shows how Lawrence touched by Rani’s gesture, he philosophically talks about the Punjab. He thinks that Emperors like Alexander Kanishka, Harsha, Timur and Babur may come and go, but the peasant of Punjab will remain permanently:

Yes, the Punjab peasant will always be there. Isn’t it reasonable then, that we win him to our side? To win him, we must work for him, for his sake. The memory of British should rest in the peasant’s heart, in his limetarrer.

(58)

But such a sympathetic paint of view of a servant of the company is not accepted as a science one by Sher Singh who see on element of hypocrisy in it and who thinks that “even the wisest men forget where good ends and power begins” (59). The diamond which is secretly given to Henry Lawrence by Rani Jindan with a warning not to wear it publicly symbolizes the band of friendship between the two. But Lawrence is flattered by the beautiful Koh-i-noor and wears it publicly desiring the freshly avowed premise of loyalty to Rani Jindan Lawrence’s fascination for the Koh-i-noor is connected as and analogy to his fascination for Ranjit Singh” for when he is told that “only his Late Highness carld wear it”, “Lawrence’s fce shows him struggling with himself” (59).

Scene 2, of Act II puts Lawrence amidst the natives gathered as crowd, offended by the killing of a cow. He apologizes to the people of
Lahore for the cow – killing episode and is wounded in the shorting. Yet he
refuses to weak his vengeance on the Indian crowd and once again appears
as Lawrence – the enlightened Englishman. The koh-i-noor again comes to
be discussed here and it is made the means through which the difference
between the patriot Sher Singh and the traitors Lal Singh and Tej Singh is
brought out. The scene once again concocts the atmosphere of political
intrigue. The Queen and the resident are exonerated from the accusation of
the tritons by the efforts of Sher Singh. Two minor character are filled in to
add more dimensional weight age to the character of Sher Singh. In this
respect, Tej Singh and Lal Singh justify then soles. In the classing of the
Act, we find Lawrence openly exulting in the fact that the people labeled
him “the Angrez Badshah”. He tells Sher Singh, “I’m here”, thus indicating
that he is playing the lion again. He passionately adheres to the image of the
deed Maharaja and once again displays his obsession with the “Lion of
Punjab”.

Rani: yes Larins; Together we will make something great of the
Punjab. You are may Resident and I as the Rani. We’ll make it
strong and prosperous – just as the days of the lion.

Lawrence: (Excited) 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 bridges. The land will sing with joy.

Rani: oh Larins that will be wonderful, I know you will do it too, then
they’ll say the Lion has returned.

Lawrence: (glowing) yes, they’ll say the Lion has returned! The Lion has
returned!

(Pause Rani watches Lawrence glowing face).

Rani: (tenderly) oh Larins… Larins…
(Lawrence kisses her passionately). (67-68)

Meanwhile Lawrence tries to win the hearts of the native population by wearing typically Indian garments including the chogah. But the Rani dissuades him from doing that an account of the possibility of Sardar’s resentment to it. Yet the Rani lands her moral support to his plans and Lawrence seen to here faller in lone with Rani Jindan spontaneously.

This scene also show a “Changing Lawrence”. The Queen say:

Rani: I thought there was something different in you, Larins, your style. You are simple, austere, single minded. Now you’re behaving the way the other Ferangis did when they got power under my husband. They became bloated and swollen. (Lawrence makes no answer attempting to hide the traces of an liner conflict. Rani comes closer). Larins, are you alright? [Pause] You were so free of verity. That’s what I liked about you. You were different. (64).

It is this “changed Lawrence” that takes full shape in the next scene. Scene IV open on a role of further choose. Lumsden to curb the violence at Shah alami Gate has killed twenty four people. When Lawrence remonstrates him for behaving so irrationally, he answers “Yes taught a lesson” (49) this gives a jolt to Lawrance’s sympathetic approach to the natives that he instantly terminates his services at Lahore and sands him to Culcutta. As a strict administrator he orders the anest of Wazir Singh for the conspiracy of firing at the Shah alami gata. Sher Singh warns him to be caoutious last he might put himself into trauble. He expl;ains how wazir Lal singh is a very
influential and dangerous teraitor but Lawrence remain callous to the impending danger signaled by shersingh. Here Lawrance appears Judgemental and dispenses justice in the case of traitorous and erring wazir and his lieutenant.

This stern judge appears sagacious wise and generous is the succeeding scene – 5. He now conducts the Durban in an Indian fashin and heres the cases. He humanitarianly helps a poor woman with her sick child in her lap. Demanding monetary help for medical aid. The natives dispise her but Lawrance comes immediately to her aid:

Old women: (Pleading) Hazun Sahib. Larins Sahib! I have a sick child in my arms. Can you help me ? you will live a thousand years. Please help him!

Finest Brahmin: Don’t push! I want to see what’s happening.

Second Brahmin: I’m not pushing.

Old women: (Waiting) Larin Sahib, help my sick child. May your walk an lakhs...

Sher Singh: (Abruptly) Bibi, this is a court of Law, not a hospital. Next case!

Old woman: (Pleading) But what can I do, Sin? My Child it will die.

Sher Singh: (Annoyed) Bibi, what can we do? Next case!

Lawrance: (Producing a small purse) Her Child’s Sick, is it?

Sher Singh: Yes’
Lawrance: Given this and tell her to go to the doctor for medicine.

(Sher Singh does so. Speaks softly to her. She leaves, bowing low and shouting: ‘may you live a thousand years, Larins sahib’)

In this scene he also appears as a strict administrator twice once when he hears the case of a young Hindy widow who refused to commit Sati when her husband died. He demands to bring Hindu reform Bill into force with immediate effect. Likewise he adopts a strict demeanour when he orders Lal Singh and Tej Singh to be brought up before the Durban and labels them with three charges: one, of an attempt to abouct. His Highness Maharaha Dalip singh and subvert his Raj; two, of conspiracy of firing at the English offices; and three of exploiting the war against the English to subvert the Raj. At this the infuriated accused spit at him contemptuously. Hanry Lawreance, therefore, puts them behing the bar.

In Act three, the scene shifts to Calcutta where the Empire builders – Hardinge, currie and Ellipt plan to expand annexation and Lawrance stands helpless with his loyalty to Punjab his first duty. The three predators challenge Lawrance’s authority stands and slippery grounds and is charges with six mistakes: on, the unauthorized and unnecessary arrest of thir most faithfull allies in the Punjab kingdom, Wazir Lal Singh and Army commander Tej Singh; two, the unsanctioned release of one month’s revenge of Lahore district: three, unbecoming behavior in the cow – raw; four, pre emptory dismissal of Lumsdan – one of the best officers of the company. Five employing and favouring Sher Singh – a native of Punjab and sixt accepting valuable gifts without informing the Headquarters. Technically this scene adds enough significance to the character-
development in the play. Stage directions act as authorial voice in developing Lawrance’s character:

1. Lawrance sits troubled in one corner Diwan-e-Khas… He is warning Ranjit Singh’s jewel and chogah. Other parts of the Lion’s dress including a turban, are nearby. The mental transference is nearly complete. (83)

2. Anger and Lawrance’s face turns to pain. He gets up paces the soon, then sits down and corners his face with his hands. Letting out a soft moon. Continues to brood. Quickly gets up again and paces the room more furiously. He goes to the window on the left. Resists a temptation to break it. Returns. (83)

3. Suddenly gets up in anger goes to the window and breaks it. Blood begins to run from his hand. He tries to wipe it off with chogah. But only stains the robe. Lawrance quickly hides his bleeding hand. (83)

4. Begins to dress himself in the Lion’s armaments slowly and deliberately. Finally he puts the turban on his head, very carefully. Sher Singh looks an disappointed and helpless. Lawrance goes in front of the mirror looks admiringly at himself and shouts “Angrez Badshah”. White spotlight on his glowing face as other lights fade. (85)

Along with such extra-literary devices, Lawrance lapses into a monologue and declares himself “the Lion of Punjab”, claiming the achievement of complete indetification with the Late Maharaja Lawrance’s desire to gain popularity amongst the natives and admiration as the one-eyed Lion had, makes him crazy and obsessed. His Maharaza snobbery bloats with false identity beyond proportion. It is this identity weakness that makes. Him
borrow the personality of Maharaja in terms of garments and ornaments. Publicity the exhibits this glorifies self and consequently grows megalomaniac -”Angrez Badshah; (put his hand with the diamond condescendingly before him Bow down to the Angrez Badshah; Bow down, you Lal Singh and Tej Singh. You can kiss the jewel the Punjab is mine, as surely as the Kohinoor oh, she’s in the haram, is she? So much the better. Where ios may son? Asleep. Let him sleep. He needs his sleep. The tribes are restless? We shall teach the tribes. They are dealing with a great Badshah of a great land. Let’s go on to a battle. The new Lion has come. (and he yells) Ahh!” (85) obviously Lawrance tries to overreach himself by identifying himself with the Late Maharaja of Punjab.

This scene brings in the sudden and ignoble transformation of the lion into a meek lamb. It projects the end of Larins Sahib career in the Punjab. The Diwan-e-Khas is still the locale of action which adds an element of continuity to the proceeding scene. The young Maharaja ‘Dalip Singh’ occupies the centre of the stage as his “Highness”. All the four major characters - , Lawrance, Rani Jindan, Sher Singh and Dalip Singh appear for the appearance for the incantment of the climax. Rani Jindan and Lawrance store at the equally fatel options personal esteem or patriotic obligation. Lawrance is also made to confront Sher Singh at the cross road of personal friendship and political contingency. The noose of choice is made clear by Sher Singh when he says:

It, is a matter of choice, you’ve chosen. You 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 your queen. You’ve chosen, in my terms,
Lawrins Sahib, it’s a choice between the Punjab and the England. Your queen and my queen. That’s where we part. In wan’t have anything to do with the company raj. Farewell! (83-84)

As a part of further mental transferance’, Lawrance meekly apologizes to Lal Singh for having subjected him to imprisonment. This dramatic change of his attitude is repulsive not only to the Regent Rani but also to his highness Dalip Singh. Lawrance’s apartment and public display of loyalty to the company infuriates the young Maharaja, as a result he embraces Lawrance by insulting Tej Singh with offensive impudence/insolence. When Lawrance personally takes the golden plate containing the saffron to Dalip, the Latter expresses his annoyance by turning it upside down over the head of Tej Singh. Then, he Kicks Sardar Tej Singh with his left foot. Tej Singh loses his balance and falls down. As a result the entire Darbar mocks at Tej Singh with a roaring laughter. Tej Singh is shocked at this insolence whereas Lawrance is embrassed at this lowly behavior. To shy away from further insult, it dismisses the Durbar.

Dalip Singh’s offensive behavior puts Lawrance to serious contemplation, whereby he reaches to the conclusion that Rani had made Dalip her tool to offend Lawrance for his shift of loyalty to imperialism. When he meets the Rani, she confesses that she did the schooling and there was a reason for that. Referring to Tej Singh she says: that son of a ping deserved it. You want to know if I put Dalip up to it. Yes, I did. And I’m not at all sorry or ashamed for what my son did” (75). She chastises Lawrance for shifting his loyalty and deceiving them –

You Angrez have been helping that traitor from the very beginning. Now you’ve made him a Raja. It’s disguising.
Half the Punjab knows he’s a scoundrel and just because he does your dirty work... and apologizing to Lal Singh like that. I’ve never been so humiliated. (87)

Lawrance, then, orders her to go away from her son – to Sheikhpura, because of her foul deed and malice against the British authority. Rani is thunderstruck by this order and is speechless for a moment due to his unexpected shift in loyalty. She reails at Lawrance as:

Rani: oh god! What have I done? Why are they doing this to me? (suddenly calm) yes, I know, I know they’re angry in haven. I betrayed the Punjab ... why do you pick an me? The pings Lal Singh, Tej singh- they are all responsible. They’re equally, the biggest scoundrel, you’ve made him a Raja. Is this your English justice? Tej Singh, the commonder-in-chief,, who cut his own army’s retreat. What could be a bigger crime? Why blame only me? I didn’t even fight. ... Larins, I don’t want to leave you. (puts her head on the chast) I want to love you. Why are you sanding me away? Don’t you love me anymore... (89)

Though Rani uses her personal intimacy to sway Lawrance’s changed loyalty back again to her political advantage but v remained lapsed in silence. Realising the helplessness of Lawrance, Rani demands her koh-i-noor back as she understands the futility of having friendship with him. Once again Lawrance cheats her when he refuses to return the precious diamond:

“I can’t. The governor- general has promised it to queen victorya” (79). She loaths his behavior as – “you are
intoxicated larins! Something demonic is urging you on the your destruction. Believe me. (pause) God. Now I understand your robes, you Durbars and your Angrez Badshahs’. It all fits. And your obsession with my late husband. You’re drunk, my friend, power’s gone to your head And you’ve forgotten your manners.” (79)

Dalip hears his mother’s hysteric yells and rushes to Lawrance sever yells and rushes to Lawrance his friendship with him for all times. He rejects Lawrance as:

Larins sahib, I don’t like you any more. You make my mother cry (Rushes towards Lawrance as if to kick him, but Rani pulls him back before he can touch Lawrance). You dismissed my Darbar – for I am the king. From today Kutti! (and he strikes his right thumb nail to his upper teeth to convey that they are no longer friends… And he doesn’t go on shikar with me any more, Mai! I’m going to make Baba write to his London Queen to change him. She shall sign the letter, and the Queen will do as I say – for I am the king and queens listen only to kings (91)

Rani again pleads before him not to separate the two from each other. To pacify matters. She expresses her willingness to forgo her kingdom at the cost of her only son. Than she makes a suggestion – “why don’t you take us to England? Let’s leave this dirty place to the Angrez” (81). But Lawrance remains as fixed in his decision as the North Star and to make it worse, announces her banishment. The Rani, therefore, helplessly bids goodbye to him and goes away from there.
Neset Sher Singh encounters him and calls him a hypocrite “You never loved anyone. You don’t deserve anyone’s friendship you’re incapable of giving you turned into a hypocrite when you saw how powerful you’d become. You imagined you had become Ranjit Singh” (82)

Lawrence becomes impatient and asks him who he is talking t:

Your Angrez Badshahs, your chogahs, your jewels, purple cushions – they were signals. I understand you now! You’re evil. (Laughs bitterly) you still think you’re doing it for the Punjab – as though… as though nothing had happened. If you realized it, I’d call you ambitious. Not evil. But you don’t know yourself and that terrifies me.

(93)

Sher Singh takes up the vein of protest when the Rani had left with equal vehemence “You were our hope – our golden evening. You gave us a sense of life – to me to Rani, to Dalip. We returned it with the only one thing we had our love. But we were mistaken” (94). The defeat of Lawrance on the level of human relationships is complete farewell speech –

I shall return. When I do, I shall be on the other side. I shall come to revenge my queen. So be prepared. I 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… I shall rally every son and father. We shall kick out the Angrez. And we shall save our land. Farewell Larins Sahib, we shall meet one the battlefield again” (85)

Lawrance is dejected hearing Sher Singh’s chastisement but soon takes control over his low spirits and once agains goes back to his neolionism – “But I still have the Punjab… Angrez I am the Punjab (86)
The unexpected blow to his Lion-snobbery comes at this decisive moment in the form of a special mail from the governor general at Calcutta. As a Lion he directs Edwardes to read the letter aloud to him which contains his order of termination:

My dear Lawrance, I regret to inform you that the court of director of the company are persuaded that the Government of India no longer require your services in the Punjab. Mr. Currie will temporarily assume charge at Lahore until a suitable successor is appointed. He will prepare grounds for the formal annexation of the Punjab. You are requested to proceed to Calcutta at the earliest.

(86)

Lawrance is intensely aware of his extreme sense of loss of power and repute when he utters the last line of the play “you’d better go now Edwardes) I’ll take off the Lion’s chogah. It’s grown to hot for me.” (86) Now Lawrance’s humiliation is complete.

The play is documented historical by the addition of “Afterword” that records the existence of the major characters Henry Lawrance was shifted from Punjab to Rajasthan, that Sher Singh attempted to overthrow Angrez, that Dalip was sent to England as a young boy where British government gave him an annual pension and the Elvendon Estate in Essex”. (87-88)

The play closes on a note of a very heroic but human note. Lawrance is a fascinating protagonist and “even today people talk about him in many villages of the Punjab” (Afterword). The play demands a copious memory for Lawrance who grapples with the very real feelings of loyalty, humanity and passion on one side and the call of the empire along with the mystique
of the dead emperor on the other. His flaws are much under cover therefore his dead his speech and his actions are worth speculating upon.

In the initial stage of the play Henry Lawrence has been portrayed as a man with philanthropic approach who wants to uphold the ideals of his late ideal Maharaja Ranjit through Introducing social and economic reforms in the society for the betterment of the natives. Unlike any English official, Henry Lawrence seems to more dedicated to the service of the natives. The reason for his generosity and kind heartedness towards the native may be any it may be his inherent desire to be look like his late Maharaja Ranjit Singh, it may be only for humanitarian reason or may be to attain some long political interests, but no one can question his generosity towards the natives. He wants, under his command, to introduce more and more socio-economic reforms in the Punjab to uplift the life standard of the natives:

To convince you of our sincerity, I have decided to waive one month’s land revenue for the citizens of this district.

(Shouts: Larins Sahib Zindabad)

We want to begin by listening to you, rather than by ordering you about like Lord Sahibs. We want to build canals, bridges, roads.

We want to ensure as much justice as possible to each citizen (60).

But after the Act III, there comes a twist in the story when the reader of the audience meet a totally different Henry Lawrence, who is the same old Henry Lawrence in appearance but totally opposite to the earlier one in his approach and behavior. Now he seems to be more interested in looking like a real Raja with all his power and appearance. Now he does not hear the people, as he used to be, but just issues commands and orders indifferently.
Here the million dollar question that arises in the minds of the reader is, “Who is to be blamed for this?” The answer is, certainly it is not Henry Lawrence. Rather it is the game and pressure of power politics, not only on the part of the English but on the part of the English but on the part of the native also. The answer to this question lies in the fact that it is not Larins Sahib who is to be blamed for rather it is the game of power politics on the part of both the sides, of ruling class as well as of the native, that is to be blamed. It is representative officers of the East India Company of the English authority who compel Larins Sahi to behave differently, as Henry Lawrence himself accepts: “There are reasons of state policy. Sher Singh”(93). And further: “I am executing my government’s policy”(93). Now Larins Sahib seems helpless under the pressure of political power. In this critical stage of his life even Rani Jindan and his friend, Sher Singh, fail to understand him. They accuse him for his changed behaviour towards them as well as towards the natives. Noticing the changing behavior of Larins Sahib, Rani Jindan surprises: “Something’s wrong. Why has my Lawrence changed? Next he will want to put his own name on the list”(88). Without taking the causes behind the changed behavior of Henry Lawrence into account, Sher Singh, out of emotions, charges Lawrence of hypocrisy: “You hypocrite! You never loved anyone you don’t deserve anyone’s friendship”(93). This sudden changed behavior on the part of the character of Henry Lawrence could be taken as a total degradation in the character of a man like Henry Lawrence, who earlier was famous for his higher political and social values.

*Larins Sahib* is a fine example of historical play but as the other contemporary dramatists do, Gurcharan Das has used the history for its contemporary relevance. The age of 1960s and 70s in Indian politics was the
post Nehruvian age, infamous for its failure of idealist dreams of Nehruvian era. This period was infamous in history for its economic and political instability too. Amidst such circumstances, Gurcharan Das had something to share with the economists, politicians, social reformists and many others through his masterpiece work of *Larins Sahib*, which was staged in 1968. In this regard Gurcharan Das has something to say:

We lived the innocence of the Nehruvian age when we still had strong ideas. We believed in socialism, democracy and the UN. We were filled with the excitement of building a nation. Even though the dreams soured, Nehru’s idealism left a next permanent mark on us.

The play, *Larins Sahib*, has something for everyone; be it politician, economist, social reformist or even the philanthropist, to offer. Politicians of the day have before them the politician like Henry Lawrence to have an ideal for themselves. Larins Sahib presents a picture of an ideal politician. He is not only a generous and kind hearted man but a shrewd politician also who makes plans and tries hard to implement them justly. He proves himself shrewd in politics when he is in arguing with Hardinge over the political conditions of the Punjab:

Lawrence : Annexing the Punjab at this time will not be in our interest either.

Hardinge : Why not?

Lawrence : Because the Punjab borders Afghanistan is too close to Russia. I don’t think we want to take on either... If we live in the Punjab alone, it is there problem. Thus, the Punjab serves as our cushion in India (78).
This type of farsightedness, shown by Lawrence, is must in politics and one can learn it from the life history of the great politicians like Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Larins Sahib.

Power corrupts man is the other important theme in the play. Power has more than one faces and one may be powerful in terms of political power, the other may be in term of money or economic power. The problem of corruption in politics is not a new phenomenon. It has always been there in politics since time immemorial. People say that it is the inherent virtue of power to make corrupt those who possess it. Gurcharan Das has explored this theme, once again, through the central figure of the play, Larins Sahib. When one looks back into history, the thing that strikes most is that under the impact of Industrial Revolution some European countries like Britain and France became economically powerful and they sought the way of colonization to make more and more profits on the cost of human values. Now in our day, though the scene has totally changed, the power is there, the corruption is there.

The corruptive effect of the power seems more influential and powerful when one finds that even the man like Henry Lawrence who is otherwise famous for his idealism and humanism, surrenders himself against the power. One finds it unbelievable to see Larins Sahib behave indifferently towards Sher Singh, Rani Jindan and the native. As Sher Singh complains:

Sher Singh : Your Angrez Badshah, your chogahs, your Jewels, purple cushions-they were signals I understand you now! You’re evil...If you realized it. I’d call you ambitious. Not evil.
But you don’t know yourself and that terrifies me (93).

Beside Henry Lawrence, there are other characters in the play, like Lal Singh, Tej Singh, Hardinge, etc., who are negatively affected by the power and its allurement. It is the temptation for the political power that makes Lal Singh and Tej Singh corrupt. They misuse their official power to meet their own selfish ends. Lal Singh is corrupt in his power as a Wazir and Tej Singh is in his position of the Commander in Chief of the Khalsa. They betray even their own army in the pursuit of their dreams for becoming Maharaja of the Punjab. It is their betrayal that costs heavy on the whole Punjab because the Punjab army was defeated by the British in the first Sikh Was:

Baba: Your commander in chief fled back across the Sutlej along with the Wazir and also broke the bridge over the river. The Sardar thus, not only betrayed their soldiers but also cut the retreat of the army!

Dalip: Traitors! The dirty traitors Lal Singh, Tej Singh! I’ll kill them (39).

The theme of East-West divide in terms of ideology constitutes the next perennial theme in the play Larins Sahib. In the play, there are two sets of characters, one who represents East, i.e., Indian Society and the other who represents West, the English. Except Larins Sahib who seems to be presented by the playwright as a ‘pucca Indian’, all the characters who are from the English class hate the Indains and their way of life. They call them dirty Indians and their-Gods “thousand dirty gods”. Unlike the other invaders of India, the English did not mix with the Indians. The Western people are in India for only one purpose and that is to make maximum
profit. Being the ruling class the English exploits India economically as well as politically. It is this reason that the Indian hate the English. As Rani indicates, though indirectly:

Rani : (Disappointed), you are just like the rest of them. I thought there was something different in you. Single minded. Now you are behaving the way other Ferangis did when they got power (88).

There are political and economic gaps between the East and the west represented by the Indian and the English in the play, Larins Sahib. Toward the end of the play the dialogue between Sher Singh and Larins Sahib is most pertinent in showing how different are the two sides!

Sher Singh : That’s not the sir. It’s matter of choice. You’ve choice. You could have chosen the way of the hell ... your duty to her or your duty to your Queen. You’ve chosen. In my terms, Larins Sahib, it’s choice between the Punjab and England. Your queen and my queen. That’s where we part. Won’t have anything to do with the Company Raj (94).

Here, once again we find Gurcharan Das echoing with E.M. Forster, as Foster also presents the two opposite views of the east and the west through the dialogues between Fielding and Dr. Aziz as presented by Gurcharan Das in the above quoted dialogue.

On the other side, the English community hates Indians and their superstitions, religious practices. As Lumsden says:

Lumsden : (Shrugging his shoulders) Twenty four
natives! I’d burn a thousand filthy natives! Mr. Lawrence, I’ll tell you something: The entire English community here and in Calcutta will be on my side when the time comes (67).

Finally, after going through the above mentioned explanation of East-West divides, one needs not any extra efforts to find out how different the two sides are.

The play brought him rich accolades and resounding applauds. C.V. Venugopal welcomes his commendable effort at history as – “The Singular achievement of Das which got him Sultan Padmasee Prize in 1968 is not so much for recreating history faithfully but for his portrayal of the essential human elements of the historical characters, captured in all their subtlety: colour, variety, hypocrisy, love affection, patriotism, contempt and egoism through the medium of a play”

(Perspectives on Indian Drama in English, 166)

*Larins Sahib* is interesting in matters of technique too. The play immediately strikes a note of all –prevailing curiosity when Hardinge shouts “where the devil is Lawrence? (IV) and the entire play is an attempt to answer – “with the east or the wet” *Larins Sahib* can boast of enough elements that makes Das a playwright of cognizable stature like telling dialogue, code-switching, pathos and plenty of action to make the dramatic and discourse worlds convincing and entertaining. The historical past of the orient is created when Rani appears as Zubheda Begum and offers her salaams to the Resident Sahib. The interesting pun on Queen’s address to Dalip as “My Lal!” Dalip retaliating as – ‘Don’t lal me, Mai. Haven’t you already got a lal? (Rahi’s relations with Lal Singh). (Iii. 39). The currie as a substitute for soliloquy to speak-aloud Lawrence’s preoccupation is another
effective experiment in technique. Here Das shares similarity with Dattani who loves to engineer ‘newness’ in draping of technique. The use of prop like showl’ in *Dance Like a Man* accelerates the flow of action and adds thrill to the plot. The showl becomes a time-machine tool to narrate the past and predict the future.