Indian English Drama has introduced a large number of playwrights who have taken it to the high pedestal with their fruitful contribution to Indian English Literature. A sensitive writer of any age or country never avoids the serious issues of his or her age. The socio-cultural scenario of every nation keeps on changing with time and major events. Asif Currimbhoy believes in the fact that literature is meant to represent the society. Thus the literature influenced by its milieu reflects the contemporary social structure. Drama has been considered as one of the best mediums to fulfil the purpose of literature. Many writers take up this genre to make the people aware of the evils prevailing in the society. Among these writers, Asif Currimbhoy and Manjula Padmanbhan are also the two famous ones who have successfully dealt with the social issues in their remarkable plays.

The plays of Currimbhoy are based on the issues related to the society, politics, religion, human life and relations etc. He takes up particular incident happened in the country and presents it in a realistic way. The play *Inquilab* presents an imitation of the violent Naxalite Movement that overtook Calcutta in 1970. Another play is *The Refugee* which deals with other major incident happened in Bengal i.e. the influx of Bangladesh refugees into India during 1971. The play *The Hungry Ones* is one of Asif’s social plays which aim at depicting the real picture of the city of Calcutta during the 1960s.

Currimbhoy puts his effort in presenting the reality on the stage. The play *Inquilab* raises several questions regarding this violence in the city. The first question is about the cause of this Maoist revolution. Asif emphasizes on the reasons which compelled the characters Amar, Shomik and Ahmed to adopt the nefaricious path of Naxalite Movement. They become violent Naxalites in order to make the peasants being exploited by the greedy landlords, free. They feel that the laws in the
constitutions patronize the inequality in the society directly or indirectly and, however, the laws which are formed for the betterment of the poor class, are not implemented successfully by the government. Apart from this, they believe that the domination of the landlords on the peasants and the poor people has become one of the norms of the society.

In the play *The Refugee*, the chaos in the society is due to the heavy influx of Bangladesh refugee in India which led to the dissatisfaction among the common masses. The rising number of refugees creates a serious concern in the people.

The origin of any turbulence in the society is always due to some clashes. The clashes or the conflicts occur among the groups because of the contrasting approaches and principles. In the play *Inquilab*, the focus of Asif is on the clash between the two different approaches of bringing change in the society. He raises questions about the cruel ways of Naxalite rebels whether it is appropriate or not. The opposite approach is non-violence which is represented by Prof. Datta. He presents both the sides impartially and leaves it to the readers/viewers to choose the right one. Another conflict in the play is between the rich and the poor. This class struggle has been existing from ancient times in India and has always remained the cause of turbulence in the society.

The play *The Refugee* portrays several conflicts at different levels. One of the main conflicts is between Sen Gupta and his son Ashok. The former is selfish, cold, hypocritical, and suffers from a crisis of conscience. The latter is concerned very much with the problems of refugees. We see the internal conflict in Yassin who is unable to choose the right path. Later, with the help of Mita, he is able to come out of the dilemma and decides to join the Mukti Bahini. The internal conflict can be seen in
the play *Inquilab* also. Amar was in the dilemma of adopting the right application or theory for reformation. In the beginning, he is the staunch follower of Naxalite Movement and has faith in its principles but after the killings of Prof. Datta and landlord Jain, Amar also feel that reformation can be brought about in Bengal society only through democratic ways and not through the orgy of Naxalite violence. Through the character of Amar, Asif Currimbhoy has conveyed the idea that the Naxal shortcut is no solution and that we should harbour feelings of love, compassion and pity for one another.

Currimbhoy has criticized the society on several grounds. As he highlights the prejudices deeply rooted in the society and has turned out to be the established order of the society. There are several wrong notions in the society which has been accepted by people and has become one of the set norms. For example the exploitation of poor or labour class is continued from generation to generation and thus it has been set as an established order of society.

The exploitation has turned out to be the established order of the society. This established order of exploitation of peasants is represented by Jain in the play. In the similar way, the play *The Hungry Ones* also throws light on the pitiable condition of the poor. As the hungry act in the first scene is in itself an example of the extent of poverty and misery. The two Americans continue their struggle to understand the mystery of India. In their journey, they come across the ugly sight of poor natives. Asif presents the atmosphere of gloom, melancholy and despair.

Currimbhoy criticizes the proceedings of political leaders as they are unable to sort out the problems which lead to the destructive outcomes. In the play, *Inquilab*, the political leaders fail to take the right decision on the right time because they are
afraid of losing their votes. Currimbhoy delves into the root of the problem and bring it out before his audience. He believes that the problem is not related to the law and order. It occurs because of maladministration.

Currimbhoy combines the major issues with other problems. In the play *The Refugee*, besides creating social unrest, the influx of refugees also led communalism. The refugees brought along with them other problems. Cholera epidemic broke out and Indian economy was adversely affected by this. Asif Currimbhoy observes the reaction of the political incidents on the social life and depicts it very artistically and naturally in his plays.

In the play *The Hungry Ones*, the conflict between Hindu and Muslim is evident through the relation of Razia and Ramesh as both are not allowed to have a happy life in the society. The dramatist wants to show that love is possible even in an environment of arson. Asif, as a social critic, throws light on the serious issues related to the society. He has taken different themes from contemporary Indian society and presented them in the realistic manner.

The women writers intend to highlight the causes behind the violence against women. Manjula Padmanabhan is one of these women dramatists who expose the ugly picture of the society and its indifference towards the sufferings of women. The play *Lights Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan exposes the violence against women. It is based on an eyewitness account; the incident took place in Santa Cruz, Mumbai in 1982. A group of urban middle class people watches brutalization of a woman in a neighbouring compound but fails to perform any meaningful action. The dramatist’s purpose is to highlight man’s growing indifference towards his social commitments. Social apathy has become a common characteristic, especially of the newly grown
rich middle class people. They remain engrossed in their life so much that they get no time to think deeply about their surroundings.

The most famous play of Padmanabhan is *Harvest*. It deals with one of the most unusual theme i.e. organ selling. The play consists of the third world donors and the first world receivers. The four Indian donors belong to the same household: Om, his wife Jaya, Om’s mother, referred to as Ma and Om’s younger brother, Jeetu. Om, the main character in the play tries to protect and provide for his family. It shows how poverty can compel a man to go to any extent to earn his livelihood. In the play, the character Om is willing to exploit himself as well as his own people in order to live a comfortable life.

Manjula Padmanabhan has again targeted the social evils in her another play *Hidden Fires*. Padmanabhan has made an experiment in her dramatic art that she has written *Hidden Fires* in the form of monologues. In these monologues, she brings out the disastrous results of violence and riots in the nation. Each monologue highlights different aspects of violence. She raises a number of questions regarding violence. The purpose of the dramatist is to bring out the futility of violence. As a social critic, Padmanabhan takes up the unusual and controversial issues in her plays. She focuses on every aspect of the problem and exposes the follies and response of the people towards the existing problem.

Currimbhoy and Padmanabhan are socially conscious dramatists. Their purpose is to convince the viewers to change their mind set and get rid of the outdated laws which make no sense in the present time. Both take up social issues which are based on some deep-rooted vices in the society. Currimbhoy is a vigilant observer of society. He has tried to depict the people from the lowest to the highest
strata of society. He believes that each political incident has its influence on the society, so he relates the chaos in the society with a particular political incident. Thus he differs from Padmanabhan on the grounds of the choice of theme. The Naxalite Movement in the Eastern India is the subject of the three act play *Inquilab* (revolution) which throws light upon the origin and development of the revolutionary activities of some agrarian communists who opt for violence.

Manjula Padmanabhan also takes up social issues but they are slightly different from those of Currimbhoy. Her plays are not based on any particular political issues. Though the play *Hidden Fires* is about violence and riots but Padmanabhan largely focuses on the violence against women. The plays *Harvest* and *Lights Out* are the examples of it. The play *Lights Out* is about what we normally preach, we do not practise. Men usually pretend that they care for woman but they really do not.

The plays of Currimbhoy present a variety from the view point of structure also. He has written one act plays, two act plays, three act plays and also four act plays. Similarly, Padmanabhan does not adhere to the conventional dramatic structure of five acts but takes up the form and acts which suit to the theme of the plays. The plays *Lights Out!* and *Harvest* are written in three acts but the play *Hidden Fires* is totally different from this pattern as it is written in the form of monologues.

Realism becomes an inevitable part of the plays of Padmanabhan and Currimbhoy. The plays of Currimbhoy are inspired by some major political and social incidents of the contemporary times. Similarly, Padmanabhan takes up a current issue and projects it in her plays in a realistic manner.
Manjula Padmanabhan, in her plays, gives importance to female characters rather than the male ones. Her plays are mostly woman centric. They deal with the lives of women, their status in society as well as family and their mind set. Her plays expose the pitiable condition of women in every stratum of society. The plays *Lights Out!* and *Harvest* are the examples of Padmanbhan’s sympathy for the female section of the society.

On the other side, in Currimbhoy’s plays, though the primary characters are generally men but he endows his women characters with strength and power. In most of his plays, women dominate men. In other words, the female character is responsible for the transformation in the male character. Though in the centre, there is always a male character caught in conflict but female character is shown as equally important in resolving the conflict. In the play, *Inquilab*, Supreya plays an important role in resolving the conflict in the mind of Amar, the male protagonist of the play. Similarly in the play, *The Refugee*, Mita, the female protagonist and daughter of Sen gupta, helps Yassin in resolving the conflict. In the play, *The Hungry Ones*, Razia is another strong female character who enhances the curiosity of the two beatniks to understand the mystery of India.

In Padmanabhan’s plays, we see a gradual change in the female character. In other words, the character does not remain the same as she appears in the beginning. In the play *Harvest*, Jaya is the best example of women empowerment. When she realizes that she is the actual target of the buyer Virgil, she lays down her own conditions. Jaya’s empowerment comes with the fact that she is ready to win by loosing but it is also on her terms and not according to the wish of others.
Manjula Padmanabhan and Asif Currimbhoy, both introduce some kind of conflict at different levels in their plays. Thus, the conflict is in the centre. Unlike Padmanabhan, Currimbhoy has thrown light on the internal conflict in the characters which is more prominent in his plays than those of Padmanabhan. On the other hand, Padmanabhan has also projected the conflicts among the characters in her plays. In the play, *Lights Out!*, the conflict is between the approaches of the male and the female sections towards the plight of the victim of gang rape. The sensitive attitude of Leela for the victim and the insensitive attitude of her husband Bhaskar and his friend Mohan come in clash with each other.

As both the dramatists aim at exposing the ugly picture of the society, therefore, their plays are infused with some messages. They do not simply express their views but suggest their thought of line through the characters. The play *Inquilab* is about the clash between a professor and his students but the idea conveyed by the dramatist is that violence is not the solution to any problem. Through love and generosity only, the evils and hatred of the world can be eradicated. Currimbhoy’s purpose in *The Refugee* is to suggest that refugees are not masses of people merely but they are individuals having their uniqueness. The idea of the play *The Hungry Ones* is that love and hunger remain unaffected in an environment of loot and rapine.

Manjula Padmanbhan’s plays also convey her message. The play *Hidden fires* is about the violence and riots in the nation. The idea of the playwright is that the violence is futile. It brings no good to the society. The play *Harvest* throws light on the pitiable condition of the poor in a developing country and how they are being used by the rich class of the developed countries.
Apart from society, these dramatists also target the vices prevailing in politics. Asif Currimbhoy very skilfully depicts the failure of the political leaders to tackle the revolution. Similarly, Padmanabhan has exposed the hypocrisy of the politicians that they show false concern for the people but their aim is to protect themselves and their position first. They can leave nation in the time of despair in order to save themselves.

Both the dramatists make an effective use of different dramatic techniques in their plays. Asif Currimbhoy successfully uses the technique of parallel and contrasts to strengthen the structure of the play. Yassin and Sen Gupta are both refugees, but they differ in their attitudes to life. Both Yassin and Mosin are Muslims but the dispute is evident in the last scene when one identifies himself with the Pakistani Muslim and the other with the Indian Muslim. In the plays of Manjula Padmanabhan also, we find the technique of parallel and contrast. In the play, Lights Out, Naina and Leela are in contrast to each other. On one side, Leela is unable to call the police as well as can’t convince her husband to stop the crime going on near their residence. On the other hand, Naina is in contrast to Leela. The moment, she looks out of the window, her immediate reaction shows her assertion when she boldly calls out it a gang rape and asks for the urgent action against the crime.

Currimbhoy gives more importance to action rather than speech which Padmanabhan does not. In the play, The Hungry Ones, When he wants to convey the deeper feelings of the two Americans, he gives them action rather than speech. In comparison to Currimbhoy, Padmanabhan has made use of advanced techniques in her plays. The objects used by her are very significant as well as absolutely new in Indian English drama. Padmanbhan and Currimbhoy create the horrible picture of violent acts in the minds of the audience through such devices that it evokes the fear
and pity in their hearts as per the definition of tragedy given by Aristotle. In the play, *Hidden Fires* by Padmanbhan, the description by the character in the first monologue is in itself very frightening.

Another similarity between both these dramatists is that they portray the East-West relation in their plays but the difference lies in their approaches. In Currimbhoy’s plays, the sympathetic attitude of the people of the West is shown towards the poor people of India as in the play *The Hungry Ones*, the two poets from America feel sympathize with the hungry people and try their best to help them. On the other side, Padmanabhan exposes the extent to which the poor people of developing nations are exploited in the hands of developed nations in her play *Harvest*.

Currimbhoy at several times introduces the inmost mind of his characters through soliloquy. Whereas Padmanabhan uses silence as other aspect of language which is prominent in her plays. Through Naina in the play *Lights Out!* Padmanabhan shows how silence can be used as a tool for subversion. Currimbhoy and Padmanabhan exhibit their excellence in giving title to their plays. On one side, Currimbhoy makes use of *Hindi* or *Urdu* words in the title of his plays such as *Inquilab*, an *Urdu* word which means reformation. On the other, Padmanabhan uses ironic titles for her plays. The title *Lights Out!* is symbolic. It suggests darkness in the physical as well as mental world.

Thus, Asif Currimbhoy and Manjula Padmanabhan are the two famous dramatists in Indian English Drama who have occupied a respectable place in the world of English theatre. Though both aim at exposing the vices of the society yet there is difference in the issues they take up. Both portray the problems prevailing in
the contemporary times. Asif Currimbhoy is known for variety and versatility in his plays. In regard to style and technique, both have their distinct qualities as both are innovative in their own ways. The common aspect of their writing is their social commitment. Manjula Padmanabhan and Asif Currimbhoy both prove themselves truly social critics.