

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Paper-VIII

(Option-i)

Section C & D

M.A. English (Final)

**Directorate of Distance Education
Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001**

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Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001

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M.A. English (Final)
Indian Writing in English
Section C & D
Paper-VIII (Option-i)

Max. Marks : 100

Time : 3 Hours

Note: Candidate will be required to attempt five questions in all. Question 1 will be compulsory. This question shall be framed to test candidates' comprehension of the texts prescribed. There will be one question on each of the Units in all the four Sections. The candidates will be required to attempt four questions (in about 200 words each), one from each Section.

The other four questions will be based on the prescribed texts with internal choice i.e. one question with internal choice on each of the units. The candidates will be required to attempt one question from each of the four Sections

SECTION C

Unit V THE SHADOW LINES
Amitav Ghosh

Unit VI SUCH A LONG JOURNEY
Rohinton Mistry

SECTION D

Unit VII TUGHLAQ
Girish Karnard

Unit VIII THE DUMB DANCER
Asif Currimbhoy

THE SHADOW LINES

Amitav Ghosh

UNIT-V AMITAV GHOSH: THE SHADOW LINES

The rise of the Indian Writing in English is, at the onset, to be located historically. The first connection that we should be looking at is the introduction of the English language as a medium of instruction in India and the introduction of English literature as a subject in the Universities. **Macaulay's Minute** introduced in 1833 provided for the introduction of English as a medium of instruction with the claim that "the English tongue would be the most useful for our native subjects." While presenting his famous minute, Macaulay admitted quite candidly that he had not read any of the Sanskrit and Arabic books and yet did not desist from making such a pronouncement:

"...A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. ...All the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less than what may be found in the paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools of England..."

India, thus became a kind of testing ground for the launch of English literature in the classroom at a time when English Universities were still steeped in the Latin and Greek classics. English was, as a result, introduced in educational institutions, Courts and offices thus dislodging the traditional use of Arabic and Sanskrit as a mode of communication and documentation. Lord William Bentick announced in 1835 that the government would "favour English Language alone" henceforth and would move towards "a knowledge of English literature and Science through the medium of English language alone." The Wood Dispatch of 1854 proclaimed the establishment of the Universities at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and thereafter made the English language accessible to students, professors and also the officials of Government offices. To begin with the introduction of English at these levels had some interesting repercussions. What is pejoratively called "Babu English" today became the first offspring of the unholy encounter between the British English language and the unwilling Babu. The 'art and craft' and discomfort with which they used the language in the offices in course became a matter of derision. In the arena of literary studies too English began to assert itself. **The first Indian novel in English** was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* appeared in 1864. This novel was set in a Bengal village. Through a simple domestic story it highlighted the central concern: that of the virtue of renunciation over self-love. Salman Rushdie referring to the same sense of artifice and discomfort of the earliest users of the English language calls this first novel written by an Indian in English a 'dud'. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) who went on to attain a high stature as a writer produced other novels in his mothertongue, Bengali, of which *Anandmatha* (1882) and *Durgeshnandini* (1890) deserve mention.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a gradual growth of the novel form in English in India. Romesh Chandra Dutt was an important figure writing at that time. He occupied important Government posts before retiring as the Diwan of the Royal Baroda State. He wrote six novels in Bengali, out of which two he translated into English: *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). Both these novels were published in London and were hailed as writings with dense plots and vivid characterization. Some other writers of this era include: T. Ramakrishna who wrote *Dive for Death* and Swarna Ghoshal who wrote *The Fatal Garland*. Krupabai Sathianandan wrote *Kamala, A story of Hindu Life* (1894) Bal Krishna, *The Love of Kusama* (1910), Sir Joginder Singh, *Nasrin* (1915), Rajam Iyer *Vasudeo Shastri* (1905) and A. Madhavan in *Thillai Gobindan* (1916). These are all historically valuable as links in this chain that was fast becoming the body of Indian Writing in English.

However one name that stands apart from this body is that of Rabindranath Tagore. It would be inapt to appropriate him as a writer of English because he wrote with equal felicity and grace in Bengali. As a matter of fact he was not known as a writer alone but as an equally accomplished poet, playwright and painter. He was above all a visionary, a man who conceived institutions like *Vishwabharati* and gave to the world an ingenious model of Education.

The Home and the World (1919), *The Wreck* (1921) and *Gora* (1923) have all been translated from Bengali to English. However, the book that made Tagore a world literary figure fetching for him the highest honour that can be accorded to a litterateur, the Nobel in 1913 and more importantly is considered as a significant ground that provided a spiritual interface between East and West and if the reader has still not guessed I refer to *Gitanjali*. Written in 1913, it elevated Tagore to a literary immortality.

The Big Three

The following years saw many a story of success in the field of Indian Writing in English. **William Walsh**, the English critic picked out three of the most famous writers of the literary circuit at that time.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-), R.K.Narayan (1906-2000) and Raja Rao (1909-) became the trinity of Indian writing in English. Speaking of The Big Three, Walsh said:

“It is these three writers who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumptions; they sketched its main themes, freed the first models of its characters and elaborated its particular logic. Each of them used an easy, natural idiom which was unaffected by the opacity of a British inheritance. Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain and transferred to a wholly new setting of brutal heat and brilliant light.”

However the three being early representatives of the use of English language in describing an Indian experience a struggle characterized their attempts. The sustained structure of the novel form too added to the arduous nature of representing Indian life in English. Moreover the novel being essentially a Western form, imposed certain limits and also subsequently modified the Indian experience. Rao pointed out in the preface of *Kanthapura*,

“One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language.” He further adds that even though English is a language of our intellectual make-up it is not that of our emotional make-up.”

Mulk Raj Anand started his career with the novel *Untouchable*. It was a unique work because the convention of Indian works having the highborn and the privileged as central protagonist was broken down. The hero, *Bakha* is a low caste sweeper boy and the novel is a description of the experiences that he undergoes in one day and as they impinge on his consciousness. The structure of the novel draws extensively from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the use of stream- of – consciousness technique. Apart from this Western influence (he was also a member of the famous Bloomsbury group of writers in London too) another important quarter, which affected his writing, was the idea of socialistic society as propounded by Mahatama Gandhi. The solution to Indian casteism that was given in *Untouchable* was in accordance with Gandhiji’s idea of dignity for the low-born. His other novels, *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) are also works with a reformative agenda.

Unlike the flamboyant Anand with Western influence was the unpretentious and unassuming **R.K. Narayan** whose first book was *Swami and Friends* (1935) He created the fictitious region of Malgudi – a small South Indian town – “a blend of oriental and pre-1914.” The characters are the small time residents of this town and go about their quotidian concerns. However out of this daily humdrum emerge certain life-affirming, brilliant flashes that the writer captures for the reader. Except for his work.

Waiting for Mahatama, which features the Quit India Movement of 1942, current political issues do not figure in his writings. *The Dark Room* (1938) is the story of Savitri married to a callous husband Ramani. *The Guide* (1958) was one of his most appreciated works. It tells the story of Raju the guide and his love for Rosie whom he first meets as a client’s wife.

Raja Rao has produced four novels and a collection of short stories till date. *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) and *Comrade Kirrilov* (1976) and *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947- short story collection). *Kanthapura* is the story of a South Indian town that is affected by the Civil Disobedience Movement. What is interesting about the book, however is the narrative technique used by Rao. The story is told through the voice of the old woman inhabitant of the village who uses the structure of the traditional folk epic, the *puranas*. The book fuses the spirit of the traditional religious faith of the village with that of the Nationalist Movement.

Writers of the New Writing

Between The Big Three and what is called the New writing in Indian English of the 1980’s some writers of the 1950’s writers like Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh and Arun Joshi have made their presence felt on the scene of Indian Writing. **Anita Desai** (b. 1937) is one of the established writers of this period. She has published eight novels till date

of which the most famous are: *Cry the Peacock* (1965), *Clear Light of the Day* (1980) which was short listed for the Booker Award and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) for which she was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978. **Arun Joshi** has four novels to his credit: *The Foreigner* (1963), *The Strange case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1981). Both these writers represent the modernist-existential strain in Indian Fiction in English.

Before **Khushwant Singh** made his foray into writing he dabbled in Journalism and law. His two novels: *Train to Pakistan* (1956: Published as Manomajra) and *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) depict the human tragedy behind the Partition of India in 1947. He is also recognised as an erudite Sikh historian.

Rushdie Era

“Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments, I have nevertheless done better than my grandfather because while Aadam Aziz remained the sheet’s victim, I have become its master.”

Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children*

The next watershed in Indian Writing in English came with the publication of **Salman Rushdie’s** *Midnight’s Children* which went on to win the Booker McConnell Prize in 1981. *Midnight’s Children* took its title from Nehru’s speech delivered at the stroke of midnight, 14 August 1947, as India gained its Independence from England. This is a book that talks about a man who is born on the midnight of 14-15 August in 1947 (the day on which India attained independence). The biography of a man is from its inception, therefore, entwined with that of the nation. The **self-conscious narrator**, Saleem Sinai, provides us with an alternative version of India’s modern history from his *point of view*. In the beginning of the novel, we are told that the protagonist “was born in Doctor Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947,” more precisely, “on the stroke of midnight...at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence.” The time of his birth matters because it has made him “mysteriously handcuffed to history, Thus Saleem born as he is on the fateful moment in Indian history is a special **autobiographer** because his life story moves in the same timeframe as that of the newly independent nation. Consequently we see that Saleem’s version of history is different from that which we know about. In his personal version of history, he largely draws upon Indian mythology and supernatural events, endows the midnight’s children with magic power, and employs the fairy tale opening “once upon a time.” (See the discussion of **Metafiction**) In addition (his)story reflects his desire to “achieve the significance that the events of his childhood have drained from him. He is an interested party in the events he narrates.” In fact, Rushdie here challenges the Western conventions of unity, continuity, and objectivity in writing history. The usual dichotomy between history and fiction gets blurred. In this novel and others in the Indian scene inspired by Post-Modern tendencies the trend of what is called **metafiction** is seen. Metafiction is characterized by the employment of a self-conscious narrator and the awareness with which (s)he uses ideology in structuring the novel. In 1970, it was the critic William H. Gass who wrote an essay in which he called the post-modern novel’s self-reflexive tendency as metafiction. Influenced by certain tendencies in Postmodernism even other genres like history have undergone a critical assessment through which they concluded that the features of history writing like objectivity are lost to the inherent alignment of the historian with positions of power. Patricia Waugh also provides a comprehensive definition by describing metafiction as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality”. Metafictional works, she suggests, are those, which “explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction”. Mark Currie highlights current metafiction’s self-critical tendency by calling it “a borderline discourse, a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, which takes the border as its subject”. Waugh further suggests that metafiction exhibits, “a self-reflexivity prompted by the author’s awareness of the theory underlying the construction of fictional works,” And that, “contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures. Therefore, history no longer functions as a discipline of the only legitimate documentation of the past events; instead, it is an **ideological** product.” This awareness about history and other realms of knowledge being ideologically motivated can help us restructure the conventional forms of these disciplines. As the current trends of Indian Writing in English show writers are keen to not only to experiment with the

form of the novel and destabilize the features that were considered as essential in conventional novel writing but also seek a rewriting of certain events in Indian history. So whether it is Salman Rushdie treating history and religion with a celebratory irreverence or **Mukul Kesavan** attempting a revision of the Civil Disobedience Movement from the point of view of the Muslim Congressmen, or the scores of personal memoirs, giving a personal record of public events, a sceptical look at history has characterized great deal of Indian Writing in English for the past few decades. Most of these authors have been a part of the infamous history-they have either witnessed or been affected by events like partitioning of the country and consequently the writing of it. It is not unnatural then that they as witnesses to the discrepancy between lived events and recordings of them become their natural critics to this entire enterprise. Some like Kesavan who is himself a historian claims to achieve through fiction that which history has denied to him. According to Jon Mee this rewriting of historical themes through novels are 'responses to debates currently circulating within Indian culture and from this perspective the desire to return to Indian History might be seen as the expression of a generally critical attitude to the form of nation-state that has emerged since 1947.' In 1983, Rushdie published the novel *Shame*, described by himself as "a deeply satirical fairy tale about Pakistan's ruling circles" It was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1984. On September 26, 1988, Rushdie published his novel *The Satanic Verses* for which he had to face the ire of many Islamic nations. Since the declaration of a formal *fatwa* against him by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini he has lived in an undisclosed location in London from where his subsequent works have come out.

We earlier talked of Saleem Sinai's reworking of history with the use of mythical elements, which is usually associated with the mode called **Magical Realism** in Literature. This Magical realism is characterized by two contradictory perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the belief in supernatural. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy because it is set in a normal, modern world with realistic depiction of humans and society. According to Angel Flores, magical realism involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic, "an amalgamation of realism and fantasy". The presence of the supernatural in magical realism is often connected to the primordial or "magical", which exists in concurrence with modern rationality. It is the fusion of polar opposites. The term "magical realism" was first introduced by Franz Roh, a German art critic. To him, it was a way of representing and responding to the mystery of reality. In his use of Magic Realism Rushdie is said to have been influenced by the author Gabriel Garcia Marquez who makes its extensive use in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956) has brought the rigour of scholarship in novel writing. From the first book *The Circle of Reason* (1986) that he wrote to his latest work of fiction *The Glass Palace* (2000), a thorough research on the sociological and historical aspects of the subject he deals with has characterised his writing. A winner of Sahitya Academy award for his novel *The Shadow Lines*, he has traveled extensively to Egypt, Myanmar and Cambodia to research his books. His early experiences in childhood that took him all over South East Asia were also responsible in giving him a broader perspective on issues than one fixed in New Delhi. Unlike his glib contemporaries, Amitav is known for keeping his narrative stable and at the same time achieving the criticism of issues in an elegant way.

Another important writer to emerge at this stage was **Arundhati Roy**, a trained Architect from Kerala. Her novel *The God of Small Things* (1996) tells the story of the Syrian Christians of Kerala and went on to win the Booker Prize in 1997. Set in Kerala in the 1960s, the book is about two children, the twins Estha and Rahel, and the dreadful consequences of a critical event in their lives, the accidental death-by-drowning of a visiting English cousin. In a delightful and lyrical language, the novel paints a vibrant picture of life in a small South Indian town, it talks from the perspective of small children and exposes the hypocrisy of the adults in their life. It also takes a look at the Indian Caste system from a non-hindu perspective. The book was lauded for its creative use of language and Salman Rushdie describes it as being "full of ambition and sparkle." Roy has built her reputation as an activist-writer and has articulated her concern on many issues like displacement of people due to construction of dam proposed over Narmada River (Narmada Bachao Andolan) and the repercussions of mounting nuclear weapons.

Others like Amit Chaudhari, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, I.Allen Sealy and Shashi Tharoor

have also, with their works, contributed to this burgeoning field and a discussion of their works will merit many more pages which is out of bounds for the present.

The developments taking place in the Indian Writing in English for the past two or so decades have been, to say the least, very exciting. These have belied the opinion of those critics who believed that English could never attain the height in expression that other Indian languages had attained. That view has to be done away with because English language is now being used with an ease and felicity that was not seen before. It is fast becoming the language of people's (those who use it) emotional expression; evidence to the fact is its elegant and creative use by the Indian writers today. Languages have to be viewed not as political but cultural objects. The growth that English has seen is fast making it an Indian language and the one, that is truly pan Indian on account of its being accepted, unlike Hindi, by both North and South. However the claim that English still represents a largely metropolitan experience cannot be wholly denied. In order for English and English Literature to function as an authentic medium of Indian experience it has to represent an India with its varied reality. Makarand Paranjape says in this regard, "Indian English literature needs to prove its credentials by aligning with people at large who make up this country. It must not end up becoming a creature of surplus elitism, sustaining and augmenting its unearned privileges. Instead of being an exotic, hot-house plant sustained only in the ultra-violet light of reflected glory, it should be able to survive in the soil of this country, in the harsh sunlight of self-reliance."

A Timeline of Amitav Ghosh's Life

1956	Birth of Amitav Ghosh at Calcutta
1976	Graduated from Delhi University
1978	M.A. (Sociology), Delhi University
1982	Ph.D., Social Anthropology, Oxford University, England.
1986	Published <i>The Circle of Reason</i> (a novel), Roli Books (New Delhi) Awarded the <i>Prix Medicis Etrangère</i> (1990).
1988	<i>The Shadow Lines</i> published, Ravi Dayal (New Delhi) Awarded the annual prize of the Sahitya Akademi (Indian Academy of Literature) and Ananda Puruskar, Calcutta.
1992	<i>In An Antique Land</i> (non-fiction, Ravi Dayal (New Delhi), Subject of 40 minute TV documentary by BBC III, 1992. New York Times Notable Book of the Year, 1993.
1996	<i>The Calcutta Chromosome</i> (a novel), 1996, Ravi Dayal. Under film contract with Gabriele Salvatores, Oscar-winning director. Won the Arthur C. Clarke award for science fiction.
1998	<i>Dancing in Cambodia & At Large in Burma</i> , (Collection of Essays) Ravi Dayal (New Delhi)
1999	<i>Countdown</i> , Ravi Dayal, New Delhi.
2000	<i>The Glass Palace</i> , Ravi Dayal, New Delhi. The famous withdrawal from the nomination race for Commonwealth Award. Awarded Grand Prize for Fiction at Frankfurt, 2001.
2001	<i>The Imam and the Indian</i> , Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black, (New Delhi)

Amitav Ghosh's Works: A Critical Sketch

Amitav Ghosh is one of the better-known Indian Writers writing in English today. Born in 1956 in Calcutta, he had his school education at the famous residential Doon School in Dehradun. Though he belonged to a middle class Bengali family, his childhood had varied influences that set him apart from the typical *Bhadralok* (middle class) value system. While growing up in his grandfather's Kolkata home where the sitting room was lined with bookshelves, (he talks about it in the award winning essay "The Testimony of my Grandfather's Bookcase") Ghosh became a voracious reader. By the age of 12, he had devoured Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, a gift from an uncle. He admits in an interview that in the Bengali culture writing is greatly valued and that was his inspiration. His father, Lt-

Col. Shailendra Chandra Ghosh served the British army in Myanmar and was an avid storyteller. These stories about the exotic lands told to him as a young boy were to greatly affect the canvas of his imagination. He also admits as to how these early family experiences were to have a far reaching influence on his literary creations. He quotes the example of *The Glass Palace* (2000) that grew out of his uncle Jagat Chandra Dutta's experiences as a timber merchant in Myanmar. The fact that the family was constantly on the move, owing to his father's official assignments, also had its effect on young Amitav. Even though he was in a boarding school he got to visit and live in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. "Because of that I could understand what it is like to be a Sri Lankan and a Bangladeshi in relationship with 'India,'" he says. This sensibility pervades many of his works and one sees that the Indian Subcontinent is frequently decentered from Delhi to other capitals like Dhaka and Mandalay.

He graduated from Delhi University and with an Inlaks scholarship went to Oxford for his DPhil in Social Anthropology and Philosophy. During his research he came across the papers of a 12th century Tunisian Jew, Abraham Ben Yiju, in a Cairo synagogue. He learnt from the papers that he had come to Mangalore via Egypt and lived there for 17 years. This formed the seminal idea of what would be Ghosh's third book, *In An Antique Land* (1992). Ghosh returned to India in 1982, and worked in the Centre For Developmental Studies in Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala) for a year. He describes the period as the most peaceful in his life. He started work on his first book *The Circle of Reason* (1986) while still in Kerala and completed it in Delhi. He talks of his days in Delhi and his struggle as a fledgling writer. He says in an interview "I was living in the servant's quarters on top of someone's house. With the Delhi sun beating down at the height of the summer, I would sit in a *lungi* and furiously punch away at my typewriter." His writing career began at the Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi and in 1986 his first novel, *The Circle Of Reason*, went on to win one of France's top literary awards, the Prix Medici Etrangere. His writing career had taken off well from here on and subsequent years saw him becoming a recipient of many coveted awards, including the 1999 Pushcart Prize and the Arthur C. Clarke Award for his highbrow thriller, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996). Witnessing the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination had a profound effect on him. "I think it was essentially after the 1984 riots that people recognised the dimension of the communal problem in India." He wrote about it in *The New Yorker* and it became a point of departure for his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Though the book does not deal with the '84 riots per se, it has dealt with the pathology of riots and civil strife in a more encompassing manner.

In the year 2001 he was in news for having withdrawn his book *The Glass Palace* from the shortlist of Commonwealth Writer's Award because he felt that such awards continue to abet the very institutions (the British Empire) that he tries to fight through his writings. In a letter written to the Prize Manager of the foundation he contests the very idea behind Commonwealth as a category... 'As a literary or cultural grouping ... it seems to me that "the Commonwealth" can only be a misnomer so long as it excludes the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives of these countries. ...the ways in which we remember the past are not determined solely by the brute facts of time: they are also open to choice, reflection and judgment. The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialization of Empire that passes under the rubric of "the Commonwealth".' The literary community hailed this withdrawal as being exemplary and worthy of emulation. On the subject of recreating historical events through his novels, he draws up the distinction between 'state history' and 'human history.' He says in an interview that the difference between the history historians writes and the history fiction writers write is that the latter write about 'human history' ... 'it is about finding out the human predicament. It is about finding out what happens to human individuals, characters...on the other hand is the kind of history exploring causes...Causality is of no interest to me.' In these times driven by media, Ghosh has consciously cultivated a low profile. He believes that the excessive pressures created by the *media circus* (as he calls it) on young writers cripple their creativity and take attention off the most important task: that of writing.

Ghosh is presently based in America, where he first met his wife, Deborah Baker, who is a senior editor with the publishers Little, Brown and Company. After teaching anthropology and comparative literature in various universities in America, Ghosh is now distinguished professor of Comparative Literature at Queens College, City University of

New York. He lives in New York with his wife and children, Leela and Nayan.

Critical Summary of the Novel

The Shadow Lines (1988) can be viewed at one level as a story of a Bengali family through which the author presents, analyses and problematises many issues that are being debated in contemporary India. The story cleverly engages in its main body characters spanning three generations of this family. The story of these characters is not told in a contextual vacuum, it instead corresponds to the growth of Calcutta as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades or more. Significantly, private events in the author's life and other important characters take place in the shadow of events of immense political significance. The family too is not there typically as a spectacle but as a means to 'discuss' these issues that are at the heart of this work. So there is Tha'mma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator through whom the issue of the Bengal Partition and the whole idea of **Nation**, Nationalism and Nationhood gets discussed. There is Tridib, the eccentric Historian cousin through whom the idea of **history** being problematic gets highlighted. Then there is the third generation Ila, the narrator's second cousin through whom the author brings to fore the issues of **diaspora** and **racism**. The role of the narrator is also central to the extent that it is he who articulates the ideas held by these characters and also integrates these subjective viewpoints and experiences to highlight that both public discourses like history and personal discourse like anecdotes are incomplete till they are integrated. The role of the narrator is also crucial to the structure of the novel, which is one of story within story told in a non-linear way. The novel has also been analysed by the critic Suvir Kaul in the essay "Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*" as embodying elements from the *bildungsroman* (coming of age) tradition of the novel. M.H.Abrams describes the term *bildungsroman* as a 'novel of formation'... 'the subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences –and usually through a spiritual crisis – into maturity and recognition of his identity and role in the world.' *The Shadow Lines* witnesses the growth of the narrator from an impressionable 8 yr.old in the Gole Park flat in Calcutta to an assured adult through the book. However, the growth of the narrator is not physical alone but seen in relation with the growth of ideas on '... nationalism, nation states and international relations... the narrator's itinerary into adulthood... is necessarily framed by these larger public questions... it becomes not merely a male *bildungsroman*, an authorized autobiography, with its obvious agendas and priorities, but also a dialogic, more open-ended telling of the difficult interdependencies and inequalities that compose any biography of a nation.'

The novel begins with the eight-year-old narrator talking of his experiences as a schoolboy living in the Gole-Park neighbourhood in Calcutta. He introduces the reader to the two branches of his family tree- the families of his Grandmother Tha'mma and that of the Grandmother's sister, Mayadebi. According to the acclaimed critic Meenakshi Mukherjee this rendition in the novel amongst other details helps the reader feel the 'concreteness of the existential and emotional milieu... the precise class location of his family, Bengali *bhadralok*, starting at the lower edge of the spectrum and ascending to its higher reaches in one generation, with family connections above and below its own station...' The grandmother is a schoolteacher and the father is a middle rung manager in a tyre company. The family of Mayadebi is more affluent, her husband being a high-ranking official in the foreign services, with one son, Jatin being an economist with the UN and the younger one Robi being a Civil Servant. Only Tridib of her sons is not successful in the material sense, however of his ability the reader is left in no doubt as even though eccentric, he is the one who is the repository of all the esoteric knowledge. He can talk on length about issues as diverse as the sloping roofs of Columbian houses and the culture of the Incas with equal ease. He is also the one who transfers to the young narrator a profound love for knowledge. The sisters Tha'mma and Mayadebi are thick with each other, however the former is perennially on her guard on the issue of accepting help from the latter. In this regard it is important to talk about her past experiences. As a young woman living in Dhaka (prior to Bengal Partition) she is married off to an Engineer posted in Burma. However she loses her husband very early and is left with the prospect of raising her only son single handedly. What follows is her struggle to make ends meet and her subsequent career as a schoolteacher in Bengal. She raises her only child independently and lives a spartan life where *wasted time stinks*. Her self worth goads her to abstain from becoming dependent on her affluent relations. In the midst of the narrative she retires from

school and her life really comes a full circle. One of the important facets of Tha'mma's worldview that we have to consider is her perception of historical events and her notions of Nationhood and Nationalism. As a young woman she finds herself in the greatly charged milieu of 19th century Bengal when the Extremist strand of Nationalism was in its full glory. As a college going young woman she upholds these young extremists as her true heroes and secretly desires to be a part of such extremist organizations as *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*. She idealises these young men who indulge in clandestine extremism with the larger goal of Independence in mind. At the same time as a product of Western Education, her idea of Nation as an entity is borrowed in its entirety from England. She tends to associate gory wars passion, sacrifice and blood baths with the creation and grandeur of nations. 'War is their (the English) religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that... that's what you have to achieve for India.' She particularly likes her nephew Robi who, according to her, has besides, a fine education a fine body that is essential for the enterprise of nation building. To the fact that she is a dislocated Bengali (from the Eastern side) she does not pay much attention and like a typical middle class character is too involved in matters of livelihood to bother about these issues. Life is simple for her- she believes in the values of honesty and hardwork and has been a tremendously scrupulous teacher and mother. She believes so completely in the ideal of hard work that when she meets her poor migrant relatives she can think of no other reason but lack of hard work as the reason for their penury. She gives no thought to the event of Partition that is partly responsible for the dislocation and destitution of the family. It is only when she plans to visit her sister in Dhaka and when she has to undergo the usual procedure of compiling her immigration papers that she is jolted into recognizing the reality of the Partition of her state. The author here delves into the whole idea behind physical and psychological spaces. Here the author talks of *Phantom distances* through the *shadow lines* that the state machinery creates in order to reinforce the idea of nation. Whereas in a large country like India where diversity abounds in every aspect of cultural, economic, social and linguistic existence nationhood is imposed over these *imagined communities* and ironically where communities exist naturally (like in the pre-partitioned Bengal) they are thrown apart with barbed wire fencing, passports and papers reinforcing a much greater psychological distance between the two. Her visit to her erstwhile home in Dhaka also turns out to be poignant in ways more than one. Her uncle (father's brother) is the only one languishing in that house because he is completely out of touch with reality and refuses to believe the fact that the country has split. Here the author echoes the idea of collective madness and normalcy. Whereas the uncle who refuses to believe in the Partition of the country is labelled mad by the so called normal people, it is in a way a collective madness that has endorsed the highly abnormal act of Partition and then driven the non conformists to the edge of madness. This old man also portrays the **violence** that **history** perpetrates. Whereas this violence is a part of the life of all the people who underwent the distresses of dislocation during Partition, it can only find an expression through the grotesque means of madness. And there is escape from it also through madness. The character of Tha'mma is crucial to the narrative in the manner in which it brings out some of these concepts and also provides a rallying point around which other ways of looking at these are built. Tha'mma embodies a conventional even though interesting belief system, which is challenged by the other characters as well as the novelist himself. For most part of the book she comes across as a frugal, no-nonsense woman for whom any wastage of time or money is abhorrence. She is a principled old woman whose views on nation and nation building are remarkably simplistic. She doesn't consider herself as a migrant belonging to the other side of the border; she has no sympathy for her refugee relatives living in a state of utter penury. Her notions of nation, nation building are straight from history books. She considers healthy young people like Robi as ideal nation builders. She is remarkably free from all traces of cynicism so evocative of victims of partition. She does not consciously criticize the phenomenon of Partition even once, there are no lengthy harangues: her critique of the Partition, nation and nationalism lies in her anecdotes. Often it is the anecdotes and the personal experiences that make her acknowledge the cracks and contradictions in her beliefs. Tha'mma as a child in Dhaka house makes stories about the disputed upside down house (the other half of the house occupied by the uncle's family) The artificial constructedness of the '**otherness**' of the house is very evident and many critics have seen it as a foretaste of a similar exercise that the state indulges in when the Partition of a nation has to be justified and difference has to be created if it does not exist. The two nations just like the two parts of a household were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divides them and for sustaining their separation the difference

has to be created. The case of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent has been very different because the state has been forced to create a difference where none existed and show the two nations as inherently opposed.

It is the fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can suddenly and without warning become as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world-not language, not food, not music-it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.

The house trope used in the novel is for obvious reasons of making the reader see through such an act when it comes to the country : what is ironic is that Tha'mma who should have *seen through* it is blissfully oblivious of the strategy. Perhaps this oblivion is tantamount to a deliberate non-admission of facts that are deeply disturbing to her. Here the two reactions of madness that we examined earlier can be compared to the non admission of events, a denial that the individual resorts to in order to avoid the madness that is bound to follow later. The oblivion of Tha'mma therefore becomes her survival strategy. However an indicator of this deep complex does surface later. Her decision to go to Dhaka in order to bring back her old sick uncle is a very upsetting time for her. Routine activity of furnishing her personal details while finishing the documentation for her visa forms raise fundamental doubts within her about her identity. The sane formulations of her life are threatened by some dull looking External Affairs Ministry forms. For the first time the sure shot, unruffled Tha'mma goes through pangs of some fundamentally disturbing introspection. She wonders as to how the 'place of her birth had come to be messily at odds with her nationality'. She cannot resolve the chaos that surfaces in the patterns that are so essential to her identity. The narrator at this point cleverly talks of certain language constructions in the Bengali language:

You see, in our family we don't know whether we are coming or going- It's all my grandmother's fault... But of course the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in the language. Every language assumes a centrality fixed and settled point to go away and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not coming or going at all : a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement.

According to Nivedita Bagchi there is 'a peculiar construction in the Bengali language which allows the speaker to say "aaschi" (coming) instead of "jachchi" (going)'... which is 'especially used as an equivalent to "good-bye"'. Thus a Bengali speaker while leaving a place is apt to say, "I am coming (back) instead of "I am going." The grandmother's Bengali verbs that confuse the simple acts of coming and going become a part of the family's lore. Young people in the family joke about this language feature that confuses movement of two opposite kinds. But interestingly, within this feature of the Bengali language lies a critique of the migration of populations during the Partition of 1947. If, therefore Tha'mma says "aaschi" (I am coming) before leaving for Dhaka, it is to be read as an announcement of her arrival to her erstwhile home rather than a *faux pas* that confuses coming and going. All going away therefore culminates only in a coming of a very different kind. The fault therefore obliquely points at the chaos of coming and going that there is in Tha'mma's world rather than in her language. This claim is further confirmed by the fact that the book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure. It is also interesting to note why a common language feature should invite ridicule from the speakers themselves. It is foregrounded to draw the reader's attention towards the *fault* of Partition, neither that of the language nor that of Tha'mma.

Specific addresses are remarkably highlighted in *The Shadow Lines*, the house at Raibajar, the narrator's house in Gole Park, 44, Lymington Road, the Price household, the Shodor bazaar in Dhaka and the feud-ridden Dhaka house. All these are real enough to be plotted on a street atlas. These intricate addresses have a strong power of evocation and add to the verisimilitude of the narrative. Infact these specific addresses have a power that emanates from their permanence. These addresses are more than a mere assistance in discovering location, they are the units that survive civil political and private strife and yet remain unchanged. In this way if compared to nations as entities, specific locations outdo them in endurance. Nations are born, nations die, the cartographers and politicians rearrange political

spaces but these locations are remarkably immune to these designs. They thus become the fixities and entities with 'semiotic signification' that provide meaning to several characters, their concerns and their identities. This further becomes an instance of a personal space (and if these addresses can be seen as personal narratives) outdoing a public one. Specific addresses in the novel subvert the idea of the nation in the novel.

The narrator's eccentric cousin Tridib is an unconventional character who does not fit into the genteel society of his family. He is conducting research into the ancient Sena dynasty of Bengal and is repeatedly shown engrossed in his study. Tridib does not merely happen to be a scholar of Ancient history writing a thesis on the lost Sena Empire, his' is indeed a voice that bears the burden of a historical vision. Right from the beginning of the novel there is in him a deep consciousness about the enterprise of knowledge. He not only collects esoteric bits of knowledge, the range of which stretches from East European Jazz to the intricate sociological patterning of the Incas religiously but also shapes his own and the narrator's orientation towards it. Tridib is a stock character Bengali literature and folklore is replete with. Images of such figures abound, so whether it is the distant uncle in Satyajit Ray's film *Agantuk* or as Meenakshi Mukherjee in the essay 'Maps and Mirrors: Coordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*' points out the 'traveller/imaginist reminding the Bengali reader occasionally of the *Ghana -da* stories by Premananda Mitra and ...*Pheluda* stories by Satyajit Ray in both of which a boy is held spell bound by a somewhat older person's encyclopedic knowledge of other lands and civilizations.'

The narrator gets his first lessons on the business of scholarship from Tridib-he is presented with a Bartholomew's Atlas as a childhood gift which remains a symbol of this transference and which resurfaces years later in the author's hostel room in Delhi-thus signifying a lasting influence that Tridib has on the narrator and the uncle's symbolic gift of *the worlds to travel in and the eyes to see them with*. That he receives Tridib's gift of this knowledge thereafter becomes a kind of metanarrative that the author will subsequently want to break out of and interrogate.

However there is another aspect of Tridib that the author shows- that of a glib talker. Tridib, the eccentric uncle of the narrator has an audience in the people of the *addas* in the Calcutta neighbourhood of Gole Park. Nivedita Bagchi in the essay 'The Process of Validation In Relation To Materiality and Historical Reconstruction in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* ' defines the Bengali word *adda* which is seen as the place of dissemination of the historian's (Tridib's) discourse. According to Bagchi the Bengali word describes 'long, leisurely conversations within a group of people which characterises a Bengali day.' She further states that the acknowledgement of the Bengali community within the narrative is a feature of the oral narrative where the narrative is the secret of the community which further links to the idea that narratives are connected to an identifiable group. He takes on the center stage in these public street corners where people pour over *chai* and talk quotidian concerns. He is more of a performer than historian in these spaces. The Tridib of the *addas* exaggerates and manipulates information for an audience that listens to him in rapt attention with their mouths gaped in awe of his knowledge. There is another space that Tridib occupies, that of his book lined quiet room in his family house in Calcutta. The narrator confesses 'it was that Tridib that I liked the best: I was a bit unsure of the Tridib of the street corners.' Thamma, too thinks this behaviour at the *addas* as totally abominable and a way of making his *time stink*. What is it about Tridib of the *addas* that is distrustful? The book in describing Tridib of the *addas* and his behavioural pattern there and by ascribing to him certain statements (he lies to the audience about his just concluded trip to London) only highlights a very important issue that the book deals with: that of the **seat of the Historian** and how he occupies it in **disseminating knowledge**. It is also significant to note that here we come into contact with two facets of a historian: the diligent, quiet fact-finder and the powerful, loud mouthed one in public sphere and through the latter the book goes on to throw some questions about the political role of history. (See the note on history)

The narrator gets a lesson in combining precision and **imagination** as a strategy of gaining knowledge from Tridib. The employment of imagination being necessary because a historian does not and cannot possibly has an access to all the relevant sites of the event all the time. The time and space of a historically important event may be removed many throws from the historian in which case the quality of his mastery on the event becomes dependent on his own imagination or either the imagination of historians before him. The compound word *precise-imagination* also becomes a paradox in bringing the limiting, exacting precision to bear upon the soaring, sky kissing imagination. The perspicuity

of vision that the narrator cultivates thereafter by this lesson is evident in his extraordinary reactions to the space of London during his visit. He not only recognizes old buildings that Tridib had merely mentioned to him as a child, but with the same eloquence questions missing ones, the ones bombed out in action and the like. The old club building that Tridib had fondly talked about to the narrator years ago is intact in his imagination decades later while on a visit to London. His suggestions of its existence are brushed aside by his cousin Ila whose opinion is supported by the club's absence, however the external evidence fails to satisfy him and after much effort they find out from an old timer that the club had indeed existed at the exact spot that he had pointed out and that it had been targeted during a war and reduced to rubble. The author's theoretical knowledge, therefore, of the existence of the building beats the Ila's very real but thoughtless existence. Tridib's vision works, at the same time he has the historian's itch to classify and know events *completely* rather than experience them spontaneously as Ila does. Tridib as a young man falls in love with May who is the daughter of the Price family of England. The friendship of the Datta- Chaudhary family and the Prices goes back to the Colonial times when their English grandfather, Tresawsen had come to Calcutta as an agent of a steel-manufacturing company and had later become a factory owner. The relationship between Tridib and May starts from exchange of friendly letters till the one that Tridib writes. In his letter he proposes to her by elaborately describing an intimate lovemaking episode between two people in a war ravaged theatre house in London. He proposes to meet her 'as a stranger in a ruin... as completest of strangers, strangers-across seas' without context or history. May is initially perplexed but cannot resist his 'invitation' and finally reaches India to see him. However soon the romance in the relationship is replaced by discord. They assign meanings to happenings and things around them differently. While driving along with the child narrator towards Diamond Harbour they come across an injured, profusely bleeding and badly mauled dog. While the narrator shuts his eyes to escape the *ugly* sight, Tridib drives on with a nonchalance that shocks May completely. She asks him to drive back to the mangled animal after which follows her extraordinary show of endurance and fortitude with which she relieves the animal of its pain by assisting it to a peaceful death. Exasperated by the whole experience she tells Tridib in a huff that *he is worth words alone*. The quality of activism that we see in May resurfaces in London years later when she collects donations for destitute children. This is in sharp contrast to Tridib who is an armchair historian and lives and feeds on ideas alone. A similar situation arises in Dhaka while they along with Tha'mma, Mayadebi and child Robi are trapped in the communal frenzy that takes place while they are bringing back the old uncle left behind in Dhaka since Independence. While they meander through the riot ravaged streets of the city in their chauffeur driven car, the old uncle is following them in a rickshaw steered by the Muslim who looks after him. May observes how the mob which first turned to them, on being repulsed, attacked the old man on the rickshaw and instead of saving him, Tha'mma displays the same nonchalance that Tridib had earlier shown towards the dog and asks the driver to drive on without looking back. May is struck with the old impulse and getting out of the car, she heads towards the mob to save the old man. Tridib cannot allow her to embrace death and therefore follows her. In the melee, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed. The incident powerfully evokes the earlier dog episode and the promise that Tridib gets from May at that time, about giving him too the peaceful death like the dog if a situation ever arose, uncannily turns true. Of this incident the narrator gets to know only in the end when dissatisfied with other people's versions, he asks May to recount to him the cause of Tridib's death. The incident as recounted by May becomes like that missing part of the jigsaw puzzle of Tridib's death that the author is trying to look for.

Ila, the narrator's cousin is another important influence on the young, impressionable narrator. She, owing to her father's job is a globetrotter and comes to settle in London. Her experience of places as diverse as Colombo and Cairo and her school years at all these exotic places woven into delightful anecdotes for the child narrator initiate for the latter his first ever flights of imagination. Along with Tridib's encyclopedic knowledge, it is cousin Ila's descriptions of her vibrant life abroad that give the narrator a flight outside the confines of his drab Gole Park flat. The cousin's colourful Annual Schoolbooks become his initiators into an unseen but alluring world outside. For Ila the immediacy of experience –personal/political is so overwhelmingly important that its context and historicity remains suspended in the background. Earlier the mere description of the city of Cairo brings to the mind of the atlas educated, historically aware narrator, the first pointed arch in the history of mankind whereas for Ila 'Cairo is merely a place to piss in.' She flits from experience to experience with a heightened sensual gusto but failing to 'arrive' at any stage in the novel to

a state of greater knowledge, insight or evolution. Tridib often said of her that ‘the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places she had not travelled at all.’

‘For Ila the current was the real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an airlock in a canal, shut away from the tidewaters of past and future by steel flood gates.’

However this uninhibited flow of experience in her throws up certain questions that the other narratives have either suppressed, not acknowledged or either failed to account for. This realm does not have history’s linear progression of and no casts to mould and reshape experience.

Her experience as an Indian in London becomes another model of citizenship that the book explores along with Partition Diaspora and the modern Calcutta Middle class. However her personal experience first as a student in London and later that of marrying a white man throws up an entire polemic about the diasporic communities. When she narrates the story about the fantasy child Magda to the narrator, it is quite evident that the child is a consequence of her mixed marriage (owing to the child’s blue eyes and fair complexion). The absolute dread that she associates with the imagined classroom of the child betrays her own sense of complexity as a woman faced with questions about race in a mixed marriage. In this regard it is important that Ila in this conversation displays a hyper emotionality, enough indication of some deep complex of feelings within her about race. Finally when Nick betrays her, her insecurity as a woman and especially as a one disadvantaged due to her race comes out in the open. Her life comes full circle from that anxious schoolgirl boasting about nonexistent boyfriends to the distraught adult finding it difficult to come to terms with an unfaithful husband.

‘You see you’ve never understood; you’ve always been taken in by the way I used to talk in college. I only talked like that to shock you and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow. I never did any of those things: I’m about as chaste . . . as any woman you’ll ever meet.’

The narrator is introduced as an eight-year-old child who is ensconced in a genteel middle-class existence where young children are concerned only with doing well in studies. However the narrator finds means to escape it through his uncle Tridib who sensitizes him to the exciting enterprise of acquiring knowledge. The narrator is gifted an Atlas as a birthday gift and that becomes a symbol of sorts for the ‘transference of knowledge’ that takes place between the two. What the narrator acquires from Tridib is an extraordinary sensitivity towards knowledge, which later becomes crucial to the role of narration that he undertakes. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the strand that brings together other available versions in order to make a complete picture. It is significant that the author himself comes across as more of a storyteller than a historian or an anecdote teller. Stories in this book are in circuitry, without definite beginnings and endings, they are indiscrete and seem to belong to no one. Here it is pertinent to point out that the author, in spite of his omniscience, is unnamed and his stories are mostly in the form of renderings of the other characters. These stories become more intelligible when the narrator joins them into meaningful wholes after collecting all the possible versions of the incident described from various sources. A case in point is the truth behind Tridib’s death in Dhaka. Tha’mma, Mayadebi, Tridib’s girlfriend May and Robi are the eyewitnesses to the lynching of Tridib during the Dhaka riots. His death, its cause and manner is however not made known to the narrator in its entirety: the parents are reluctant to reveal anything just like middle class people are used to avoiding all the talk of death in front of young children. The child Robi talks of the experience with a hyper emotionality characteristic of a traumatic childhood experience that he hasn’t let go off even as an adult. At a later time Robi as an adult recounts all that happens while on an evening out with the narrator and Ila. His account is complete to the extent that he as a child can only observe partially. His partial perception is not only a result of his intellectual inadequacy but also due to the fact that he is physically limited- ‘an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale’ - this makes him incapable of even observing the incident objectively. His account of the incident is therefore more of a cathartic outburst because it has been long repressed than an informative or insightful reconstruction of the past. The last strand in the experience is May to whom the narrator then turns for an adequate explanation. It is in London that the narrator gets to know the truth behind the death.

Another aspect of modern India that the narrator brings out through the novel is the typical 20th Century phenomenon

of **Civil strife** and rioting especially the one that results from communal discord. It is important to mention here that *The Shadow Lines* written in 1988 was the author's response to another unprecedented event in Post-Colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. To begin with allegedly State sponsored these riots in their magnitude were comparable to the earlier communal frenzy of 1947 partition. The novel situates the 1964 communal riots in Calcutta experienced by the narrator as a young school going boy centrally in the boy's psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers. The author does a brilliant job by the use of excessive and mundane journalese that drowns the powerful dominance that it exerts in the author's consciousness. The author finds an inadequate portrayal of such historical events in these sources and then goes on to analyze the reasons behind such silences:

By the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of 'responsible opinion', vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence.

The theatre of war where the Generals meet is the stage on which the states disport themselves :they have no use for the memory of riots.

Through an extensive description of a day during the 1964 Calcutta riots, the narrator tells us of his experiences of the day as a school student. Through the day he along with the other children are caught in a fear psychosis while going to school. He describes the empty bus ride home where the driver falters, drives into wrong lanes and makes all the unexpected detours into unknown, deserted lanes of Calcutta to escape the mad mob. Years later while talking of the incident to his College friends in Delhi he is surprised to find that none of them seem to remember the fateful day. Eager to prove his memory right he leads some of them to the archives where he digs out old papers to support his memory. To his dismay, the newspapers paint the incident in regular *journalese*. While reading retrospectively about his own experience of communal riots in Calcutta as a child, he stumbles upon other events of the fateful day, one of which is a description of a similar riot in Dhaka. It is at this time that he is able to link up the two seemingly unrelated events and the fact strikes him that it was indeed the same riot in Dhaka that had claimed its victim in Tridib. What the others in his college cannot even seem to remember owing to their location in places that are far from Calcutta, is ironically a mirror experience of people in another country (Khulna, Bangladesh, then in Pakistan), 'the two cities face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border.' What follows is the author's meditation on the idea of distance as a physical reality and as a political and psychological construct. The insignificant physical distance between the two cities (earlier one community) is stretched to an unfathomable, unconquerable political and psychological distance, often making them as different as two civilisations. Returning to civil strife and its portrayal, why are there these silences in History? Probably because, the author says, these do not cohere well with constructs like a nation that the state has so painfully nurtured earlier: 'the madness of a riot is a pathological inversion, but also therefore, a reminder of that indivisible sanity that binds people independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of the government, for it is the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relation between people...'

Is history, then an objective telling of the past events or choosing what to write in order that the underlying form is not distorted? It chooses to write about that which serves it while the rest is irretrievably silenced. The author points out that the silence he sees in history results when happenings cannot be accounted for in a given manner 'the kind of natural silence that descends when nearness /distance, friend /enemy become terms that are impossible to define. However these definitions in the first place become difficult because artificial differences are imposed by the state.

Riots and their memory become a case in point because as Ghosh puts it they are an instance of 'pathological inversion' -i.e. violence of a state turning inwards unlike in other conflicts like war where it turns outwards. The clear definition of enemy/friend, ingroup/outgroup, I/other becomes difficult. Who is to be described as a perpetrator and who the victim becomes problematic for the state and also the reasons, if documented, subvert the idea of the idea of

the nation, therefore having no value for the governments as historical object. It is because of this choice based reportage that history is said to have an underlying literary structure. In the event of wars, on the other hand there is a well-defined enemy, a self-righteous *we group* and a legitimate action that reaffirms our notions of nationhood and our projected ideology. So there is a glory to wars, which is also violence, but one that makes sense within our defined notions of the ideas described above.

Notes on Important Aspects of the Novel

I. Treatment of History

Simply put history is the recording of actions of human beings done in the past, however if seen as a discipline that is specific to societies, one can see its significance as a disseminator of ideas. The earlier definition sees the act of recording as essentially unproblematic which is what has driven Western Historiography since Enlightenment when the content and methodology of what constitutes the subject of history today first got formulated. It was only in the twentieth century that this act of recording got problematised. Collingwood in *Idea of History (1946)* was one of the early historians to shift the emphasis from the act of objective recording outside events to the subjective realm of the historian's mind. He saw history as the record of past thoughts reenacted within the historian's mind. According to him the knowledge of an earlier era becomes possible with the historian projecting him (her) self into an earlier context. He was also the first historian to see the past events with a greater sense of complexity than as being easily understood and verifiable phenomenon that it was hitherto considered to be. With the coming of what is called the **Postmodernism** the mode of History writing has also been challenged. The postmodernists question the basic presumption of objectivity in history writing. They argue that objectivity in a political discourse like history becomes impossible because the position of the writer becomes aligned with power. Also the historian writes from a *point of view* that he cannot wish away. Some thinkers like Hayden White have taken an extreme position on this line of reasoning and have suggested a complete obliteration of the line between history and fiction. History is written by a historian and made available to the common people through history textbooks. Here what we look at is the power connotations of history- that it flows from authority to the common people. Also the traditional subject matter of history has been the conquests of the kings and the kingdoms. As a result the traditional history writing has essentially been about kings (replaced by powerful governments in recent times) written by court (state-approved) historians in the public chronicles (textbooks). When we consider these problems of history writing, other sources of writing history emerge. In recent times the school of **Subaltern studies** has provided a solution. The word "Subaltern" literally means subordinate or low-ranking. What these historians have done is attempted to rewrite the Indian history from the perspective of the common people. The power of the pen is shifted from the "court historian" to the traditionally less powerful common people. The historians under Subaltern studies also make use of unconventional sources like stories, *kissas*, folktales, songs etc. to uncover a past written by those in power.

In recent time a sense of acute skepticism has come to play in our understanding of historical reconstructions which has abundantly got reflected in our literature. Salman Rushdie in presenting to us his story through Saleem Sinai of *Midnight's Children* consciously ascribes to him statements that are half-truths and at other times completely false. This deliberate injecting of falsehood in the story is a strategy to evoke mistrust in the reader who is indirectly made aware of unreliability of all sources. These new authors have signalled death of the once existent sage-authors, the know-all reservoirs brimming with all the knowledge of all the world. What reads like a Shakespearean anachronism (the famous one being about chiming clocks in Greek times in Julius Caesar!) is confirmed in course as being deliberate and intended. The book uses the analogy of the perforated sheet where it acts as a screen for the doctor to examine the diseased body of a beautiful noble lady. The perforated sheet allows the doctor to examine the relevant body part only and shroud the rest in parda. The doctor as expected falls in love with the hidden lady (infact her limited exposure adds to the fetish all the more!), but the whole is unfortunately not a sum total of parts as the doctor had imagined. The perforated sheet has since become a symbol of limited perception.

In the context of contemporary writing in English the pressing question is: what makes the author suggest a contest

between history and personal experience? As mentioned earlier the credibility of public narrations has of late come under scrutiny. Whether it is Salman Rushdie treating history and religion with a celebratory irreverence or Mukul Kesavan attempting a revision of the Civil Disobedience Movement from the point of view of the Muslim Congressmen, or the scores of personal memoirs, giving a personal record of public events, a skeptical look at history has characterised great deal of Indian Writing in English for the past few decades. Most of these authors have been a part of the infamous history-they have either witnessed or been affected by events like partitioning of the country and consequently the writing of it. It is not unnatural then that they as witnesses to the discrepancy between lived events and recordings of them become natural critics to this entire enterprise. Some like Kesavan who is himself a historian claims to achieve through fiction that which history has denied to him. According to Jon Mee they are ‘responses to debates currently circulating within Indian culture from this perspective the desire to return to Indian History might be seen as the expression of a generally critical attitude to the form of nation-state of has emerged since 1947.’

Amitav Ghosh is concerned with both these facets of history writing: its claim of objectivity and its alignment with position of powers. *The Shadow Line* tries to examine History especially the writing of Indian History and its treatment of certain events in Post-Independence India like Partition and Civil Strife. It is here that he shows the deceptive depiction of Partition by Indian History. Firstly the history writers justify partition by falsely creating difference between the two sides (refer: the upside-down house) and then completely ignoring the human suffering that it entailed. Similarly the depiction of Calcutta riots experienced by the narrator is not given any place in history inspite of the influence it exerts on his psyche. By providing stories and anecdotes as a means of relating history he provides an alternative to the public history that emanates from the centers of power and aligns it to the people.

II. Title of the Novel

The title ‘The Shadow Lines’ is evocative of one of the major concerns of the novel: that of the creation of nations with boundaries that are both arbitrary and invented. This issue becomes more pertinent when viewed in the context of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. That which, on surface, is projected as completely opposed to another is actually a part of it. The author uses the trope of house to explain this. As children Tha’mma and Mayadebi witness the family dispute between their father and his elder brother (Jethamoshai) that leads to the division of the house. Tha’mma as a child in Dhaka house makes stories about the upside down house (the other half of the house occupied by the uncle’s family) and narrates them to the younger sister. In the other half of the house, these stories talk of everything as being upside-down. The artificial constructedness of the ‘otherness’ of the house is very evident and gives to the keen reader a foretaste of a similar exercise in constructing the difference between the two sides of a partitioned nation. What is significant is that the two nations were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) makes them two and for sustaining their separation this difference has to be invented. It is ironic therefore that Tha’mma who was herself a creator of that artificial difference cannot see through the strategy of the state. “But if there aren’t any trenches or anything, how are the people to know?” The case of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent has been very different because the state has been forced to create a difference where none existed and show the two nations as inherently opposed.

It is the fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can suddenly and without warning become as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world-not language, not food, not music-it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror.

Perhaps this oblivion on Tha’mma’s part is tantamount to a deliberate non-admission of facts that are deeply disturbing. The oblivion of Tha’mma therefore becomes her survival strategy.. Nationalism too gets redefined in various ways through experience. Whereas the *great historical project* of nationalism first undermines community (here the Bengali Community that is common between the East and the West Bengal.) to formulate nation, it then ‘narrates the nation.’ The theorist Bhaba sees this project as comprising of the creation of ‘the narratives ... that signify a sense of ‘nationness’: the...pleasures of one’s hearth and the... terror of the space of the other.’ This idea however in the context of the Indian subcontinent gets problematised because the *otherness* being talked of has to be created rather

than merely alluded to. People in the newly formed nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh are prompted through narration 'language, signifiers, textuality, rhetoric' to create a difference where none exists. Therefore what the book looks at is the creation of artificial difference between two nations that are inherently one.

Another subtle manner in which the author exposes this strategy is by describing the experience of an Indian (Ila) outside India (London). While in London, she inhabits that space where the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh differentiation melts down. During their visit to London she takes Robi and the narrator out for dinner 'at my (Ila's) favourite Indian restaurant.' As it turns out the 'Indian place' that she has been talking about is a small Bangladeshi place in Clapham! A seemingly insignificant incident ridicules the intense feeling of difference that these two countries otherwise harbour and how these differences are reduced to a naught if viewed from a space that is outside the two. So these boundaries that are created due to political reasons seem tangible enough to be called *lines* but if analysed closely, fade away like *shadows*.

III. Structure of the Novel

Everyone lives in a story...because stories are all there are to live in.

The structure of *The Shadow Lines* comprises of two important characteristics: That of a non-linear structure and a digressive narrative. *The Shadow Lines* is a novel without a defined Beginning, Middle and an End, instead it relies on a loop-structure of a story- within a-story. This is in turn linked to the second characteristic of digressive narrative. This interferes with what is called the 'unity of theme and action' as a hallmark of good writing as perceived by the Western poetics. This novel is essentially told through stories. It is due to this fact that we can say that the narrator is more of a listener than speaker. His method of narration is in 'bringing together' available versions rather than telling new stories. Out of this coming together of varied and contradictory versions emerges a better version that is more representative and inclusive. It is without one definable speaker (see the note on history). Both these elements of an unnamed narrator and a non-linear progression are more characteristic of Indian than Western poetics. Indian works have also traditionally not used the Western cause-effect structures, the links in the stories are non-linear and so is their progression. The western ideal of a palpable beginning, middle and end is not present in the Indian works. A story as seen in this novel is a form that is not moving towards a preconceived culmination but as being constituted of several voices, all of which serve to make it richer. The narrator tells the story from various vantage points in time and space. Most of the stories begin like jigsaw puzzles with a limited meaning but conclude with an intelligible pattern. The various parts of a jigsaw puzzle or the incomplete story are supplied by various characters. The narrator is important to the extent of bringing all of them together a task enormously important and without which in spite of their existence these versions at best remain partially meaningful. In order to evoke an insight their coming together is inevitable. The structure of the novel that brings together many stories is also important in that the ideas that seek a definition through this novel (like Nationalism, Citizenry, community etc.) are given a fuller representation through this source than the partial view given by history and the disruptive and radical one of anecdotes. The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure.

IV. Theme of Partition in the Novel

"At the origin of India and Pakistan lies the national trauma of Partition, a trauma that freezes fear into silence, and for which The Shadow Lines seeks to find a language, a process of mourning, and perhaps even a memorial."

(Suvir Kaul in the essay "Separation Anxiety.")

The year 1947 spelt for India a heightened consciousness of the very idea of a nation. Not only was freedom from the colonial rule ushered in and a long cherished desire of a free country made available to the Indians, it also meant that the arrival of freedom signalled a virtual dislocation for a big fraction of the population: The birth of the free nation was accompanied by excruciating labour pains of the event of Partition. Histories of both sides portray this event in passing as a misfortune that arose out of the power interests of the 'other' side. In the history textbooks the struggle

for Independence is seen to have concluded successfully, it was hailed as a model of the practice of the new philosophy of *ahimsa*. It can however legitimately be called non-violent only if we chose to gloss over the very existence of the event of Partition that accompanied the midnight decree of freedom- the biggest migration of human population that the sub-continent or perhaps the world has ever witnessed. It entailed loss of human life on both sides. In its magnitude it was one of the most important events in the Indian history and it affected the life patterns of thousands of families who travelled in caravans, horses, carts and cattle from West Punjab and in homemade boats from East Bengal. How does history talk of these migrants? How does history justify this act of the state at that time? Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side of Silence* says that the state has strangely made no memorials to mark this momentous event. However the memory of Partition has very well been preserved by the communities in the confines of their homes through stories and anecdotes told by the way of mouth and passed through one generation to the other. Of late this interest in the documentation of the private experience of Partition has been performed by our Literature. Indian Writing in English has seen a spurt in the publication of Partition related Literature. *The Shadow Lines* is, among other issues, a book about the Bengal Partition. The experiences of Tha'mma through the trope of the divided house (as discussed earlier) clearly bring out her side of the story about the event. The story of the old uncle *Jethamoshai* captures the poignant side of the human experience of Partition and ofcourse the depiction of the penury and destitution of Tha'mma's poor relatives capture the economic effects of Partition.

V. Community and Communal Strife

The Shadow Lines takes up the issue of Partition (1947) and the author presents through it an elaborate critique of the whole idea of a nation as it emerged in the circumstances. **Community** as a condition prior to Partition is seen as an ideal state and the narratives that the community produces are seen as being more representative of their experience than history. The natural community in the Indian subcontinent across Punjab and Bengal got split into two nations following the call for Partition. What followed was the physical dislocation of 15 million people from the places that their communities had traditionally called home. Those who crossed over to the Indian side arrived landless, clueless and resourceless to be a part of the rejoicing in Delhi on the eve of country's Independence. The Partition had thus disrupted the existence of 'natural communities'. A classification about natural and interest oriented communities is used by Sudipta Kaviraj to draw up an elaborate case about the difference between *nation* and *community*. He draws heavily on the work of the sociologist Toennies to discuss two kinds of communities: *gemeinschaften* which is the primary, traditional group, and which according to Kaviraj 'one does not make an interest actuated decision to belong.' On the other hand is *gesselschaften*, similar to modern nations, which are based on the convergence of political and economic interests. The Partition necessitates the disruption of *gemeinschaften* embodied by the old communities in Bengal and Punjab in order to create *gesselschaftens*: India and Pakistan. Further, 'these imagined communities can place their boundaries in time and space anywhere they like.' ...unlike the former which have 'naturally limited contours.' So whereas the former state reflects a cultural bonding, the latter is based on political interest. To these groups are also then linked their own forms of narration. Narratives, according to Kaviraj 'are always told from someone's point of view...they try to paint a picture of some kind of an ordered, intelligible, humane and habitable world...literally produce a world in which the self finds home.' The *gemeinschaften*, therefore has its own community specific narratives and *gesselschaften* acquires it in due course. Whereas the former lives in age old stories, shared in various forms by the community, the latter finds a home in Histories.

Community also comes to us as a concept through the reading of the experience of Partition. Community, as it appears through the government documents gets reduced to numbers that bear the brunt of state policy. These communities are visualised by the state as characterised by one single characteristic-language or religion. These are the communities on paper and convenient as subjects for policy formulation. But 'real' communities lie outside the ambit of these documents and as Melville talks of places such as 'kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South' which is not 'down in any map because true places never are', these communities too are only lived, seldom represented. The Partition of India was based on the justification of communal tension between Hindus and Muslims but our literatures have presented to us far more complex designs of communities with composite structures that have for considerable time shared a common culture inspite of religious differences. In this regard Bhalla argues that there

are hardly any chronicles, songs, kissas and *tamashas* in Punjab, which record a long history of irreconcilable hatred between Hindus and Muslims. What the Governments never addressed was that culture instead of religion could be an equally valid characteristic defining communities, that culture far predated religion as a constituent of a community, that it was absurd to lump together culturally alien Muslims of Bangladesh and Pakistan as one nation and force the East and West sides of Punjab and Bengal respectively to be declared a part of India. Subsequently the Nationalists construct the other side as a country politically, ethically and *inherently* opposed to itself.

The Partition of India in this sense was an important event because it cartographically relocated what were once closely existing natural communities and instead formulated an *imagined community* of the nation. The history of India being the narrative of the modern nation rather than the primordial (and now secondary) community told the tale of the nation and obliterated that of the society.

Riots between communities as a characteristic 20th Century phenomenon figure in the book prominently. The author also focuses on how they are portrayed variedly by the newspapers and the author's imagination. Whereas in the author's imagination they have stood out as a single most important event of his childhood, in the newspapers and other sources they do not even merit a mention. The author looks for reasons that lead to this silence in portrayal of riots by the state. The reason, of course is not far to find: the difficulty in representing an enemy that arises from *within* rather than *without*. The new age stories (literature) therefore become the narrative of the communities and make up for the silence in history when it comes to the portrayal of events like partition and riots. It records what happened the partition victims and subsequently victims of the numerous civil strifes whose point of view always remains underrepresented because these incidents undermine the very *notion of a nation* that history purports to create. It is also ironic that post partition, people across the border share all their old stories but from a point completely separate histories. And as Ghosh points out the nature of this relationship is governed by

... that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other Independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of the states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between people. (230)

It is shown how when the communities give way to nation their narration is taken over by a totalizing history. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma receives her ideas about the new nation that she comes to inhabit after Bangladesh becomes another country.

Some voices in the contemporary Indian Writing in English have studied the writing and historical justification of partition in this light. Historians have tried to read a communal angle into the event and tried to trace a genealogy of such events with a 'retrospective intelligibility' that leads to a known and expected end. It is interesting to note, therefore, in this light that while they highlighted stray incidents of communal violence in the pre-partition time to give a historical justification to the inevitable phenomenon of Partition, in *The Shadow Lines*, on the other hand riots, civil strife and communal riots do not find expression in the official records. This happens because the same incidents, which at one time supported the political decisions will at the present only go on to, hamper its legitimacy. In both cases the community experience and its depiction suffers. The accounts of partition completely ignore the fact of the composite quality of relationships that existed between people of different religions and that there were other potent factors of their cohesion like a shared cultural ethos. *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh talks of such a definition of community in the village of Manomajra. Some of these books show the existence of an alternate religion with people of different faiths looking upon a common shrine (in this case a sandstone slab) as religious. Interestingly, this feature about close knit cohesive communities later gets transported to the imagined community of the state of otherwise riot-ravaged India.

VI. Postcolonial Literature

As students of History we have all come across the term *Colonial*. We also know that the germs of modern day economic progress of the first world countries really lie in the movement called *Industrial Revolution*. With the coming of this movement in 17th century Europe, several fundamental changes were made in the means and modes of production. With the coming of mechanical support and subsequently industry the medieval economic model of

feudalism was replaced by *Capitalism*. Capitalism was spurred on by the then pervasive ideology of *Utilitarianism* inspired by ideologues like Jeremy Bentham. The chief concern of this movement was “the greatest good of the greatest number.” Not only was this ‘goodness’ solely material in nature, it also did away with all faith in morality and right action. Therefore to look for material benefit became the chief concern of those who held the means of production i.e. the capitalists.

The coming of Industry led to quick production of a large quantity of goods. To begin with this seemed like a welcome change from the earlier arduous methods of production that were both labour intensive and time consuming. However soon a new concern began to plague the capitalists: that of depleting home markets and lack of raw materials. Simultaneously another development was taking place: the advancement of geography with the coming of sophisticated sea vessels and implements like magnetic compass. This meant that the Capitalists could not only get new places and markets to sell their mass produced goods but also find treasures of cheap raw materials. Thus began an unequal relationship between these two kinds of blocks of nations: one, mostly European, the beneficiary of Industrial Revolution looking for markets and raw materials and the other, belonging to Asia, Africa and America waiting to be exploited. This exploitation that lasted over two centuries did not remain merely material in nature. It transformed itself to other forms: it became ideological, cultural and also spiritual. If we talk of India, the colonial exploitation on the economic front included a systematic destruction of the existing Indian Industry and the exploitation of its rich raw materials that included crops, minerals and metals. Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian to criticize this gross exploitation of India as a colony by the British said in this regard that Britain had acted like a “sponge” sucking out all that was valuable year after year with impunity and depositing the spoils on its shores. Gradually the ambition of the Raj increased and what they desired subsequently was conquering the colony also culturally and spiritually. It is in this regard that they imposed English as a method of instruction and also introduced ‘the classics of English Literature’ into Indian classrooms. This total exploitation of India went on till the year 1947 when India attained freedom. Post World War II has seen many of these erstwhile colonies attain freedom partly as a result of sustained Popular Movements against foreign rule and partly because as a consequence of the economic ill effects of WWII most of these erstwhile colonies became incapable of supporting overseas rule.

For these countries in Asia, Africa and S.America, the experience of colonialism has become a major reference point in understanding their recent history. When we see this perception in the literature of these countries we study it as **Post-Colonial literature**. In their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), Bill Ascroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin say that though historically Post-Colonial means “after-colonisation”, in literature it signifies “all the experience affected by the colonial process from the beginning of colonisation to the present day.”

John Theime, the editor of the famous *Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literature* (1996) talks of two pivotal concerns of Post-colonialism:

1. Interrogation of Euro centric conceptions of culture;
2. Interrogation of former canonical orthodoxies of “English Studies.”

The methods, modes and means of analyzing information, perceiving life experiences and institutions have, under colonial influence always been affected by the notion of European superiority and native people’s inferiority. With the coming of Post-colonialism this placement of Europe in the center as a model has ceased. The cultural systems and ethos of these new nations are now being analysed not with an outside European standard but by their own standard. It is like the locus of control has shifted from without to within.

In India this talk of the change in the curriculum of English departments emerged and was first *appealed* by the introduction of a cursory paper on Commonwealth Literature. However the growing consensus on revising syllabus cannot be ignored for long. Recent years have seen a remarkable change in both the content and approach to the teaching of English in the entire country. The syllabii have not only seen an inclusion of more Indian writers writing in English but also that of Indian Writing in regional languages translated into English. Though in India we have not taken the radical route of “abolition of the English Department” as suggested by the famous Nigerian author Ngugi Wa

Th'ongo, we have certainly considered rereading the prescribed English texts and the new Indian and Other World writings with a renewed sensibility by which we are no longer the subjects. Indian Writing in English today has to shake off the western influence it has been wearing since it was first introduced and has to begin asserting its credentials more genuinely.

VII. Home /Homelessness

In the novel *The Shadow Lines* home is in an allegorical relationship with nation. Tha'mma talks of her upside-down house in Dhaka and the story of that house is in deed the story of partitioned India. As children living in a joint family in Dhaka, Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi are witness to the feud between their father and his brother. Things come to such a pass that they think of dividing their house. This division is so tangible that an actual line is drawn in the middle of the house dividing everything including the commode. In this ludicrous detail the partition comes out for the reader as an event that was both irrational and avoidable. Another aspect of Partition of the house that is later applied to the nation is about the ideological division that follows this material division. Once the Partition has taken place, the other side of the house becomes inaccessible to everybody including the two girls, Tha'mma and Mayadebi. Since Tha'mma is the elder one, she talks of the house as the **upside down house** in which everything is the opposite of how things naturally are. The two nations just like the two parts of a household were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divides them and for sustaining their separation the difference has to be created. These stories that Tha'mma creates to bring alive to her younger sister the situation of the other part of the house, are in spirit comparable to the modern version of fake national pride that is also likewise based on false stories of difference. Her decision to go to Dhaka, which is her erstwhile home in order to bring back her old sick uncle, is a very unsettling time for her. Routine activity of furnishing her personal details while finishing the documentation for her visa forms raise fundamental doubts about her identity. For the first time the sure shot and composed Tha'mma goes through pangs of some fundamentally disturbing interrogation. She wonders as to how the 'place of her birth had come to be messily at odds with her nationality'. She cannot resolve the chaos that surfaces in the patterns that are so essential to her identity. The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure.

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Suggested Questions

A. Give detailed answers to the following:

1. How is the novel "The Shadow Lines" both an example of and diversion from the *Bildungsroman* (novel of growth) tradition of novel?
2. What are Tha'mma's views on Nation and Nationalism? How do her experiences account for these? How are her views challenged in the novel?
3. How does the author use the trope of a divided feud-ridden house to discuss the issue of Partition of India?
4. Discuss the role of the narrator's cousin Tridib in fashioning the author's perception of life.
5. According to the author "The Shadow Lines" was influenced by the 1984 Anti- Sikh riots. How does the book deal with the question of civil strife and rioting in Modern India? Discuss in detail the narrator's description of his experiences as a schoolboy caught in the 1964 Calcutta riots, their lasting influence on the narrator and also his subsequent questioning of their depiction in history?
6. Discuss the growth of the narrator's relationship with Ila from being a schoolboy in Calcutta to an adult in London.
7. How does the book question the writing of history? Discuss esp. the portrayal of the Partition of India in history books and how in this regard "public chronicles" are challenged by "private chronicles"?
8. What are the "Shadow Lines" that the author talks about? How is the question of invented Nationhood esp. in relation with the Partition of India discussed in the book?
9. How does the non-linear structure of the book compliment its theme?
10. Discuss the relationship of the English family of the Prices and the Dutta-Chaudhary family of Bengal spanning three-generations.
11. Who is Tridib's love-across-the-sea? Discuss the relationship between Tridib and May.
12. Discuss Ila as a typical example of the cosmopolitan, travelling diasporic. Also highlight her experiences, including that of marrying Nick, which bring out her troubled racial and cultural identity?

B. Write short notes on:

Partition in the novel, Nation, Diaspora, History, Death of Tridib, Robi's account of the Dhaka riot, The Upside-down-house, Mrs. Price. Nick Price, Jethamoshai, The Shadow Lines, Community, Civil Strife, Communalism.

UNIT-VI ROHINTON MISTRY: SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

The Writer and His Age

Rohinton Mistry (1952) is an important contemporary novelist for a number of reasons. For one, he occupies a significant position as an Indian diasporic writer along with such names as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Sumiti Namjoshi, Bharati Mukherji, to mention a few. Secondly he is among the few contemporary writers who have written ‘back’ from his/her place of migration critically about India, Indian political scenario, minorities, regional identities, history, environment, cultural pluralism, the question of gender, among others. Thirdly, Mistry, as is well-known, himself belongs to minority community in India – Parsis to be specific – and he has lived through many complex variants of Parsi culture and history, and has a deep nostalgia about the Parsi past with all its richness and intellectual qualities, besides its elegance and sophistication. However, Mistry’s stance, far from being positive or self-assuring, is extremely suspicious of the role of dominant cultures and communities that systematically oppress and subjugate the minorities for their ulterior motives and nationalist agenda. In addition to this, Mistry is a fine story-teller, an absorbing writer of human experience and its complexities, for fictionalizing which he occasionally uses postmodernist technique and fantasy that shape his fictional universe. Mistry could certainly be said to have equipped himself with a contemporary imagination, in the sense that he is acutely conscious of the pulls, pressures, influences and compulsions that shape contemporary realities, both inside ones nation, and outside where one is a migrant, exile, expatriate, diasporic or simply a refugee. To judge Mistry’s unique achievement it is imperative in the beginning to acquaint oneself, with (a) Mistry’s life, (b) shaping influences, (c) and his Parsi background. This can help in no small way to relate Mistry’s mind, art, ideology and approach to a variety of issues and problems that are central to his work.

A Brief Life-sketch

As stated in the beginning, Mistry was born in 1952, (on 3rd July) in Bombay, where he was brought up in the wee years after India’s independence. As such, Mistry on the one hand grew up in the cosmopolitan Bombay, a melting-pot of competing cultures and communities, while specifically he belonged to the Parsi cultural and religious ‘enclosure’, from which he could never really separate himself – emotionally and psychologically. Also Mistry, like some of his contemporaries such as Vikram Seth and Shashi Tharoor, saw the after-effect of India’s promised freedom, won after long struggle against colonialism and war-like situation, the partition of India, while on the other hand, in terms of post-colonial theories, the writer was also to witness the fast degeneration of India as a nation, Indian political scene, and the fate of minority communities. So, Mistry being a Parsi ‘insider’ saw the glorious years of Parsi existence in which they enjoyed freedom, patronage and dignity, while he was to see the spectacle of criminalization of Bombay at the hands of Hindu fundamentalism through Shiv Sena in the last of three/four decades of the twentieth century. Mistry grew up in an average middle-class Parsi family, his father was in the field of advertising while his mother was a home-maker. She was, as Mistry say, a ‘miraculous woman’, making something bare seem abundant, and we find that Dilniwaz the wife of Gushad Noble in *Such a Long Journey* is fictionally modelled after such a woman with qualities of patience, endurance and balance. Such people help giving a feeling of dignity amidst the otherwise disorderly, indisciplined and oppressive world around. Mistry went to two very good schools in Bombay – Theresa Primary and St. Xaviers – a fact that corroborate the relative prosperity of the family. He didn’t live in Parsi Baag – housing estate – but had friends through whom he did observe a lot. He was not much of a writer in his school days, though he did scribble a few random pieces on sundry subjects. Both Mistry and the woman he later married, Freny Elavia, graduated from St. Xavier’s college, Bombay. As an Arts degree with literature was thought to be an indulgence for Boys then [and even now] he got enrolled in a more worthwhile course in Mathematics and he completed his degree in Science in 1974.

By this time Mistry was already involved in the music scene in Bombay, gave performance and was seriously contemplating a career as a musical folk singer. Freny, who was not as competitively trained with Mistry’s distractions,

had decided an year earlier after her graduation to migrate to Canada, where she had her relations. Mistry followed her to Canada a year later, in 1975 where they got married that very year. That year Polydor released a disc *Ronnie Mistry* on which he sang his own compositions and folk songs. He had initially wanted to become 'a star' in the musical world in Canada. But that was not to be. Mistry, to turn to another direction, took up a job as a clerk and accountant in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, from 1975 – 1985. He and Freny lived in a Toronto suburb Brampton, for twenty years, having a materialistically comfortable life. To make an exclusive comment, Mistry is known to be a very private and a reticent man, fond of quiet existence (and has lived without having children). He has lived thus even after his novels have gained 'international recognition and he has received prestigious awards, about which a detail shall be given a little later.

It was in 1978 that Mistry along with Freny took up evening courses at the University of Toronto. He studied English Literature and philosophy and got a second bachelor's degree in 1982. That was in the year 1983 in which he wrote his first short story 'One Sunday' which won him the Hart House prize. He got the same award for another story 'Lend me your Light'. In 1985 'Auspicious Occasion' won the contributor's award of *Canadian Fiction*. These awards resulted in publishers showing interest in Mistry's collection of short-stories. The ultimate was the publication of *Tales from Firozsha Baag* in 1987 by Penguin Canada, set in Parsi housing estate in Bombay, which was brought out later in Britain and U.S.A. under a modified title, *Swimming Lessons and other Stories from Firozsha Baag*. The book was short listed for Canadian Governor General's Award. Later on, *Such a Long Journey* was short-listed for the Booker's Prize and the Trillium Award, won the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth writers' Prize for the best book. *A Fine Balance* too won awards – it was short-listed for the Booker, won the Governor General's Award and the Griller Prize. It also won the Royal Society of Literatures' Winfried Holtby Prize, and the 1996 Los Angeles Times Award for fiction. As Mistry writes, 'writers write best about what they know. In the broad sense, as a processing of everything one hears or witnesses, all fictions is autobiographical of imagination ground through the mall of memory. Its impossible to separate the two ingredients.' Mistry has gone on record to convey that it was his brother Cyrus who made him realize that it is not necessary to write about New York or Paris in order to be a successful writer. Bombay is as viable a city for fiction! In a way, it is an important point. Many post-colonial/common-wealth writers did initially struggle (Black, West Indian, Australian) with the authenticity of their subject-matter. Could they write about 'unimportant' people, places, communities, experiences, histories or locales? The shadow of Western racial superiority, the celebrated history of the Whites, made all colonials feel ashamed of their unimportance and inferiority. But, this intellectually colonized state did manage to free itself from this feeling, so that writers and poets not only managed to write about people and places back home in the erstwhile colonies, but also won acclaim as authentic versions of experiences which were not given due place in literature and history. Hence, Mistry's decision to write about the subterranean, enclosed Parsi life in Bombay can be seen to have its own justification. You need to bring into prominence the little or small narrative of communities who are in danger of being wiped out, erased in the face of brute, dominating forces of religion and politics. Mistry's decision to turn to writing was the readers' good luck; his avoidance of the musical medias' glare turned out to be yet another of facet of his reserved nature. This has made Robinton Mistry an international celebrity, but he can still enjoy the aloofness and the poise of a serious writer. What is interesting and positive is that Mistry, in a short span of a decade or so, has become one of the front ranking writers and has won readership among many countries. What may be the reason for this appeal of his work. One of the plausible answers to this could be that Mistry writes about common people, ordinary experiences and palpable realities that affect us in contemporary experience. A reading of Mistry's novels does not betray this; on the other hand, an ordinary reader feels involved in Mistry's sensitive rendering and interrogation of human life involved or trapped in forces not always helpful or in control of an ordinary man or woman. Hence, Mistry's novelistic appeal cuts across several links of barriers – of caste, class, community, nationality or gender – to focus a powerful humanistic vision of the contemporary life at its crossroads. As he said in an interview with Stacy Gabson, "I'm interested in what makes a human being, and I don't have my agenda that I start out with" and all he wants "is to tell a darn good story". The second reason is that Mistry avoids linguistic jargon and difficult vocabulary. Though his works are equipped with rich symbols, powerful images and appropriate, fertile metaphors, he rarely tells a 'disconnected'

or discontinued narrative requiring to be first deconstructed and then reconstructed, in the vein of a Rushdie or Shashi Tharoor. Rather, his narratives draw their richness from their closeness to contemporary facts and a sensitive understanding of felt life. The disillusionments we all undergo, yet the hope of survival or betterment we all still manage to engage in. Two of his best works, *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* stand ample testimony to this argument; these are both novels which highlight either middle or lower middle-class life in cities, or the plight of the subaltern, underdog or the suppressed human being in a world full of violence, uncertainty and corruption. Another reason is that Mistry has identified himself with a specific cultural/political or national preoccupation, in this case, South-east Asian communities, and not like Naipaul, Rushdie or Bharati Mukherji, who have drifted into wider areas of interest, beyond their place of birth, upbringing or the metropolitan/western life they have chosen after their migration. What is clear is that Mistry has certainly imbibed or learnt a lot from his Parsi background, their history, exile, pre and post-colonial experience, and the somewhat disconcerting scenario in which the Parsis find themselves in India now. What however is surprising is that he has not written anything of note on Canadian life, culture, history or environment, considering that he has been living there for a long time. May be, Mistry will come up with a work of that order soon enough, much to the happiness of his readership. And now, some final comments on his life-sketch: In 1996 the Faculty of Arts at Ottawa University awarded Mistry an honorary doctorate, while the dream run of awards and honours continues. *Family Matters* (2002), his latest work was also nominated for the Booker Award but missed it yet again, however, it did win a couple of other awards. Mistry belongs to the younger generation of diasporic writers, and knowing the growing importance of diasporas and diasporic literatures, Mistry's work has been interpreted from interesting cultural, political, ethnic, national and historical stand points, besides its immediate relevance to post-colonial literatures and theorizing. Gauging his growth and upbringing, his exposure to multiple levels of experience, one can say with assurance that Mistry, like a variety of the writers of his ilk understands the meaning of hybridity, fragmentation, loss, deracination, exile and discontinuities more than what is continuous, monolithic or linear. Mistry does not acknowledge influences on his writing (though the realistic mode is certainly more prominent in his fictional form) and has said that when he is writing 'the only judgement he relies on is his own', but when 'it is done my wife reads it first and I value her opinion' (Interview with Angela Lambert). Another interesting remark that he made in the same interview was that he "is blessed that I'm able to follow this line of work. I didn't grow up with the burning ambition to be a writer – I never thought of this as a possibility. It seemed such a huge thing, it never occurred to me that I could aspire to it", yet it seems that Mistry became a writer because the kind of challenges he took up with and for his community, because art or writing was the only way to come to terms with it. How opposite this confession is in its simplicity and honesty, compared with the constant insistence by V.S. Naipaul over the years that he never aspired to become anything other than a writer.

The Parsi Background

As stated earlier, much of Mistry's work is both informed and influenced by his situation as a younger generation Parsi in India, and the related issues with Parsi background, culture, history, identity and experience. In order to have an estimate of Mistry's work, art and imagination it is therefore imperative to focus upon some of the above-related preoccupations as they surface as themes and narratives in Mistry's fiction.

Interestingly, it may be pointed out at the outset that Mistry belongs to a much older Parsi diaspora – beyond his status as a contemporary diasporic writer situated in Canada – a diaspora in the Indian Context, both pre and post-colonial. The British colonization of India, sometimes forcibly and at others voluntarily, displaced people throughout the British Empire. This displacement, as is well-known took place in different geographies. Indians were transported to the West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and other places to work as indentured work force on plantations, agricultural sites and so forth. Slowly, it came to be known as 'labour diaspora'. There are several reasons for this, but to cut it short, indentured labour was a kind of semi-slave situation, though minus the great oppression and brutality in the slave-system. However, most Indians transported abroad did not return home as per the contract, because crossing the 'Black Waters' (*Kaala Paani*) would have rendered them outcasts if they returned home. In post-colonial India too there have been migrations and movement from 50s and 60s of the twentieth century – search for jobs and higher education, petro-dollar diaspora to the middle-east and Gulf countries. In this subject that extends a

purely literary categorization one could include the addition or transformation of diasporization from labour, semi-skilled diaspora, to the skilled and entrepreneur diasporas/professional ones.

Diasporas, diasporic experience and the fluid diasporic identity has been well represented in creative writing, especially in English. Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherji, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, M.G. Vassanji, Michael Otdanji, Hasif Kureishi, David Dabydeen, Sudesh Mishra, to mention some of the leading ones, are diasporic writers who have represented different cultural/regional and national contexts in their work. Diasporic writing, as in well-known, problematizes the given place or space in which a writer locates himself/herself, and the native place and culture with which he/she retains irreducible or compulsive links. However, contemporary diasporic writing oscillates between two essential polarities: while it portrays strong links to one's homeland, yet there is also a keen desire to assimilate with a metropolitan/western set of values and compulsions. This creates a counter pull in the psyche of the diasporics and is obviously reflected in the fictional and poetic forms in which the writers produce that tension. This however also includes diasporic writings in languages other than English, both cosmopolitan and sub-regional/vernacular languages, including some from India.

In the above sense, Rohinton Mistry who now resides in Canada, is a writer of Indian Diaspora. Mistry is also a member of sub-cultural Indian diaspora – he is a Parsi Zoroastrian, whose ancestors were forced into exile by Islamic conquest of Iran, who ultimately landed (having fled from there) on the western coast of India centuries back. Thus, it must be understood that the Parsi background in India and elsewhere is one of multiple displacements. *Such a Long Journey*, for instance, is prefaced with three epigraphs that evoke a mystical quest motif resembling the Holy Grail. The Parsis' quest for place, roots, past and heritage is foregrounded in Firdansi's *Shah Name*, like the other ones from *Gitanjali* and Eliot's *Journey of the Magi*. The imperial past of the Parsis is recalled in Firdansi's lines with particular reference to Zoroastrian Parsis. Mistry is too much conscious of this historical backdrop of Parsi experience, the dislocated sense of belonging and its presence in multi-ethnic and multi-regional India, to be oblivious of his own roots and those of his ancestors. Hence, a collective memory of his community radiated into the present marks Mistry's keen sense of observation towards nations and modernity, the vast difference between past and contemporary experience.

The background and the history of the Zoroastrian migration from Persia to other geographies is a bit complex. To underline the main points: the 'Journey' began in the twilight years of the Persian empire when it was under threat from the crumbling Islamic civilization. Between 638 A.D. and 641 A.D. the Persian empire was repeatedly attacked by the Arabs. The Persian empire finally crumbled, so did the entire civilization, culture and the ancient Zoroastrian religion. Finally, Islam became the religion of Persia, but interestingly the Persian language and culture was retained by the conquerors. So while Zoroastrian religion was ousted, the Persian language and culture continued to flourish under the new regime, the majority of Persian people succumbed to the Islamic religious onslaught, but a tiny minority held its fort, so that it was pushed farther and farther from the centre to the margins. Flight was now the only way open to the Zoroastrians if they were to preserve their precarious religious identity. So a small group of people carrying urns with sacred fires, the symbol of Zoroastrian faith, set out on a sea route to India in search of refuge. The closeness of India to Iranian ports made it a natural choice for them. They first landed at Din in Gujarat somewhere 8th and 9th centuries. In Gujarat they came to be known as Parsis, probably after their spoken language *Parsi*. The name could also have come from Pars, the South Iranian provinces. From Din the Parsis' moved to another coastal town of Sanjan, where the local ruler allowed them to settle down, with certain pre-conditions. These pre-conditions centering on language, custom, dress, code, language and ceremonies somewhat restricted or dwarfed the Parsi identity. The ambivalent feeling of identification and alienation from India can be traced back to this early period. But due to a strange quirk of history, the Parsis were able to retain their Parsian language with the arrival of the Mughals in India, who were descendants of the very invaders who had overrun Persia and became the official language of Mughal India, and remained so till the mid-nineteenth century, when it was replaced by English, as the British Colonial rule tightened its hold over India and Asia. Conservatism, especially in the sphere of female life continued to exist, until the coming of the European empire, when the Parsis started identifying themselves closely with western patterns of life and culture. But this was restricted either to the Urban classes, or to the western-returned intelligentsia/upper-

classes. Boman Desai has illustrated this rural/urban, Hinduised/westernized divide among the Parsis in his novel *The Memory of Elephants*.

The language spoken by Parsis today is Gujarati, but its etymology is much older at the time of contact with Jadav Rana at Sanjan, which was old Gujarati. So the Gujarati dialect spoken by Parsis is different from standard 'Gujarati'. The Parsi diaspora in India thus predates European colonialism, being a direct result of the outgoing influences of Islam much easier than the former was anywhere close to India. The importance given to Parsi life in literature, is however, belated, and is related to their feeling of insecurity in the post-colonial/British India when Indian democratic/federal structure began to shape its own course, giving prominence to Hindi language, and regional identities. The other issue, which shall be taken up later, is the need for the Parsi writer to assert the Parsi identity, religion and culture in its uniqueness and separateness in an attempt to oppose the merging and evaporation gradually of marginal groups and cultural identities into the Indian mainstream religion and politics. Hence, the sudden prominence of the Parsi fictional sub-genre in the hands of writers like Bapsy Sidhwa, Farrukh Dhoudy, Rohinton Mistry, Firdans Kanga, Boman Desai and others. All these writers have been engaged in retrieving bits and parts, '*the broken mirrors*' of the Parsi past enroute its superiority and elegance the purpose is ostensibly to 're-write' Parsi identity as inextricably linked with that history and inter-ethnic, linguistic complexity out of which comes the distinct identity of the people. As it is, Parsis have been quite used to religious fundamentalism, oppression and threat whether from the Arabs in Persia, the Mughals in India, from the partition of India in 1947, or finally, from the Hindu dominance in post-colonial India. A connected subject, and one that is significant for understanding Mistry's point-of-view is the Parsi mind-set and attitude towards life and the idea of survival as a minority community. In post-independence era, with the ever growing and colliding regional cultures in India, the minority communities, including Sikhs have constantly been under threat of Subordination and intimidation. Likewise Parsis have had to tread carefully, not to antagonize first their Muslim hosts, and then, the Hindus. Further, the Parsis have had to face a situation of marginality, loss of elite status that they enjoyed in the British Raj. (This, incidentally is one of the major undercurrents in the narrative of *Such a Long Journey*). After the break-up of the Empire, like other Indian communities, a large number of Parsis opted to migrate to the First world centres in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in Britain, Canada, U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand. The brute majority of Hindus upto the late 80s was somewhat subdued ideologically, largely because of the long congress rule. However, the rise of Hindu hegemony and fundamentalism in 1990s, the destruction of Babri Masjid has generated fear and apprehension among the minorities, who are legitimately nervous and apprehensive about a secure future in this new dispensation.

The last notable subject in this overview of Parsi past and present, is their contribution to public life in India. Obviously, writers are part of a community, but more so when it is numerically small and its subject matter limited. However, as is well-known about Parsis, they are people of notable skill, learning, craft, intelligence and erudition. They have excelled in numerous spheres; one instance of this is the euphoria generated by Sohrab's impending future in the I.I.T., something that satisfies Gushad Noble in the sense that Sohrab would be able to enter a upper-middle class life in India that does not otherwise offer as an opportunity to people without force and power. This is another aspect of the literary 'silence' of the Parsis. They have remained engrossed in their inner lives, choosing not to exhibit their identity; it has been largely a self-preservation device of a community that has moved from one extreme to another, from one temporary refuge to another. To cut short the argument, the Parsis remained subdued for centuries upto the end of the Mughal period, creatively and politically. It was only after the arrival of the British that they puffed the liberal air, ironically in the colonial space that proved so uncomfortable for the Indians otherwise. This Parsi identification with the colonial ruling class has been documented in considerable detail by Parsis as well as non-Parsi historians, sociologists and anthropologists. Prior to the British/European colonization the Parsis had focused on agriculture and petty trade, however, under the imperial setting they moved rapidly into trade, ship building. Further, they emerged as the elite group, identifying themselves with the ruling class culture. But, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, the colonized can never completely become white, and it ultimately leads to his 'othering', which he calls the 'ambivalent' position found in colonial discourse. In the paradoxical rise of Nationalist movements, ironically, the agendas of subversive politics were initiated, nurtured and put into practice by the elite groups. So, along with the identification with the Raj among the Parsis, there was also a strong spirit of nationalism. Parsis such as Dadabhai Naroji and Pheroazshah

Mehta spearheaded India's Nationalist movement. Madame Bhikaji Cama, credited with designing and unfurling India's first national flag was a radical and was exiled by the colonial regime. There was Jamsetjee Nurseswarji Tata who laid the foundations of modern Indian industry and was met with opposition by the colonial regime. This resulted in the creation of such prestigious institutions as J.J. Hospital and J.J. School of Art and Architecture in Bombay. However, despite all this, by the end of the 19th century, well-to-do Parsi families had become anglicized. Hence, the distortions of identity, custom and religion presided over by colonialism resulted in the erosion of Parsi Persian past, and Indian past too. Parsi also set out towards internal reform of the community, spearheaded by Dadabhai Naroji, K.N. Cama and others. The Gujarati newspaper *Rast Goftar* established in 1951, became the mouthpiece of Parsi reforms, such as female education, abolition of child marriages, and widow marriages. Under this 'reformation' the Parsi roots in Zoroastrianism were stressed and its monotheistic nature was stressed. This brought back the self-esteem of Parsis who simultaneously started identifying with colonial rulers values, but were also able to retain their Parsiness and Zoroastrian faith. In the works of Behram Malabari, the poet, the Parsi biases towards Hindu community are also noticeable. Malabari, who wrote in Gujarati and English, called himself a 'Parsi Hindu', which was largely influenced by Nationalist movement. Malabari was also a premier journalist of India. He authored the much appreciated *Gujarat and Gujratis* in 1882. among other colonial writers of Parsi diaspora in India are Cornelia Aorabji, social reformer and novelist, Freedom Kabarji, and A.F.Khabardar, who were poets. Sorabji, who wrote *Sun Babies* (1904), *Between the Twilights* (1908) was incidentally also the first Parsi writer to have written out of a double diaspora, Indian and British. As in stated earlier, Parsi fiction had to wait till the 1980s to come to its own, in terms of authenticity and form to make a major breakthrough in world fiction. In addition to literature, politics and other fields, Parsis have made their mark in science (Homi Bhabha), industry (Jamshedji Tata), law (Nani A Palkhiwala) and music (Zubin Mehta). More discussion on the Parsi aspect of Rohinton Mistry's works will figure in the following sections.

II

Rohinton Mistry: Other Works and Major Themes

Other Works

Rohinton Mistry began his literary career in the late 1980s, as in the case with several writers from diasporas located in western countries. As such, his body of work is not very voluminous. However, this may not be misunderstood, as Mistry's works have had an immediate impact on readership abroad and in India, and as such, his fiction, apart from winning several awards, have been well-received, to win him acclaim. But, as stated earlier, Mistry draws his major source of material from the observed life in India, in particular, the Parsi experience in the metropolitan, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Bombay. This provides him with opportunities for rich exploration into the ethnic and cultural riches, where conflicting values, ideas, religious ways and ethnic contours of experience lend themselves to portrayal and interrogation. The major themes in his works will be discussed in the second part of this section, after a brief discussion of his works besides *Such a Long Journey* which will be taken up in the last two sections.

Mistry's first, or apprentice work, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), is a collection of short stories, but the imaginative center is 'Firozsha Baag' in the same vein as Narayan's Malgudi or as in John Steinbeck's Cannery Row, or V.S.Naipaul's Mignel Street. All stories center around the quality of life, as it generates from experiences undergone in a particular place. So Firozsha Baag is a site that allows Mistry to explore the contours of Parsi life and its complexities. It may be added that *Tales from Firozsha Baag* was written with the immediacy of experience that Mistry recollected about his community's past after his migration to Canada. One could stress upon the presence of 'local colour' in these stories in *The Tales*. Initially when *Tales from Firozsha Baag* were sent to Mistry's parents, they were very sad after reading them, thinking that their son must be very unhappy in Canada, since the stories heavily centered on the minute details of Parsi life in Bombay – a life Rohinton had closely observed as a child. This feeling was not entirely misplaced, since nostalgia and links with one's homeland and ethnic community forms a significant aspect in diasporic writing. In any case, Mistry like Naipaul began his career by observing from a distance the life he had most intimately known in the Caribbean. Mistry writes like an insider in Firozsha Baag, Bombay and the vignettes of life are totally authentic. The act of remembering, re-enacting,

re-sketching and re-creating the sense of time-place with accuracy, understanding and insight came naturally. A critic has rightly observed that *Tales from Firozsha Baag* is a 'comedy of manners and Firozsha Baag is Mistry's Malgudi'. Important stories such as 'Auspicious Occasion', 'One Sunday', 'The Ghost of Firozsha Baag', 'Of White Hairs and Cricket' and 'Swimming Lessons' testify to Mistry's focusing on different contours and variations of a community experience that connects itself with an overall pattern of life. Mistry peels layer after layer of the intricacies of residents' life in the Baag in A Block, so at the end the exposure leads to ones' deeper understanding of a minority community's life in all its comic, touching and poignant hues. Memory and remembering are used here as a narrative technique through which Mistry engages in what a critic has called 'identity construction' through a location. This is indeed (the Baag) 'Mistry's imaginary homeland'. For Mistry Firozsha Baag is no ideal place to breathe, no heaven, no paradise – but is only too human, and sometimes bordering on unlivable experience. Here is a brief critical survey of some of the story-sketches in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

"Auspicious Occasion' depicts the domesticity of Rustomji and Mehroo with close insight, not missing the underlying conflicting aspects of the relationship. The story excels in Zoroastrian rituals, Parsi customs costumes and cuisine, collective Parsi identity. But the Parsis here are not what they are often taken as – they are middle-class, ordinary, without importance, engaged in daily battle with interrupted water supply, dilapidated, old homes, peeling paints, falling plasters and leaking WCs – reminding us of the larger portrayal of the same disorder in *Such a Long Journey*. Rustomji, the central character is more farcical as a Parsee, a trait that has been exhibited in literature and cinema. The story also focuses on the bad conditions around the Parsee areas of residence and the inefficiency of the 'Panchayat' of Parsees. Flats in Firozsha Baag had been built in hurry by using cheap material, hence the moisture and dilapidation. Rustomji is decisively the more dominating of the characters in the story, while Mehroo his wife is more tolerant and patient. Indeed, after years of going around the country and cities, seeing the selfishness of average Indians, Rustomji now wants to live his own life. In this he is like the average urban, middle-class Indians who have developed an unfortunate unconcern with rural Indian scene. However, there is a sense of defeat and frustration which Rustomji seeks to hide under his comic mask and scatological humour, while Mehroo typifies the other polarity of being dignified and religious. Rustomji, despite his toothless gummy mouth likes to greedily glance of the young charwoman, hoping for the time when his wife would be away, so that he could be bolder and freer in stealing glancing adventures. He thinks the old priest Rhunjisha to be 'an old goat', though his pious wife detests to hear such things about a holy figure. It is obvious that he suspects similar things about women in other men. Mehroo goes to the prayer meeting on the auspicious occasion (title of the story) and discovers that the old man has been murdered and returns home. But as Rustomji is out in his gleaming white dress, somebody enacts another kind of murder; somebody chewing tobacco and betel nut on the upper deck of the bus spits the dark red stuff on Rustomji's dress. The blood red on sparkling white. The red-blood pan on the dugli of Rustomji and the red blood on the body of the murdered priest are connected in an interesting juxtaposition. The quarrel and the free-for-all abuses that result following the throwing of pan contributes to the local colour in all its variety of Indian-English-Parsi mix, while the dead priest lying murdered is a poignant one.

The second story 'One Sunday' introduces several Parsi characters as subalterns, but seen as elites by the even lower subalterns in the Indian social order. Parsis as is generally believed, are not rich, Albert with the exception 'of a minority'. They do not have access to upper middle-class domestic conveniences like refrigerators. This is particularly true of 1960s and 70s, the period in which Mistry has set his tales. Some interesting characters in this story are connected with the neighbouring Tar Gully life. Apart from the boys of the Baag, Kersi and Percy, we are introduced to the outsider, odd-job man – thief Francis. One so-called 'privileged' figure (owning a refrigerator) is Najmai: she can leave her flat under the care of others like Tehmina and Boyce family, thinking that everything is secure while she goes out visiting others on Sundays. Boyce family members on the other hand make good use of the fridge for their needs, like beef, though cow is sacred to them like Hindus. In return Najmai borrows newspapers from the Boyces, while Percy and Kersi at their command, rid her flat of rats by swinging their cricket bats. One day as Najmai did not lock the flat properly, the outsider Francis slips in, to do some odd thievery, but fearing Najmai's return, hides behind a door, and is discovered. This is followed by a drama, more farcical than serious, with the Boyces boys going after Francis to thrash him. After a few kicks and blows Francis is let off and the crowd disperses. Najmai discovers a pool

of urine behind the door. At the end one could say that Tar Gully, the abode of the destitute, appears as a counterpoint to Firozsha Baag, which means that relation between different classes among Parsis is a problem.

'The Ghost of Firozsha Baag' is generally considered a triumph in narrative technique, it being effective and powerful. The story is narrated by a simple-minded Ayah from Goa – an outsider to the Parsi world – and a devout Catholic. The life of Firozsha Baag is here observed from an outsider's point of view – a simple, honest, uneducated outsider. The English used by the narrator is quaint and authentic. For several readers 'The Ghost of Firozsha Baag' has emerged as a favourite. The narrator is Jacqueline – known as Jaykalee to her Parsi bosses. It was almost regular for Parsis to employ Goanese women as their ayahs for infants and children, a part of their colonial hangover. Ayahs like Jaykoalee had to perform multiple duties, like cooking delicious goanese curries, doing domestic chores etc. while Jaykalee's dishes whip up heat and sensuality it has obvious sexual overtones in the life of Seth and his wife loving sensuality and satiation. On the other hand, Jaykalee's own suppressed sexuality and frustration are presented as a contrast. In other words, Jaykalee's dull existence – grinding, cooking and sleeping on the floor very much like a subaltern, is in the story suddenly spiced up by the appearance of the 'ghost'. So, Jaykalee's ghost story appears very special – she talks about a most 'connubial' ghost – a 'bhoot' with a difference. Jaykalee has always believed in ghosts and reveled in 'seeing' them as a little child in her father's small field in Goa. But the Bombay ghost is different – it comes once a week, and always on a Friday. The ghost put an appearance on the night of Christmas Eve, when Jaykalee returned from the midnight mass. She is afraid of being rolled down the stairs outside the flat by the ghost. But she decides to wake them up, though she invites both their anger and hilarity. Jaykalee's tales about the bhoot ironically makes her life more difficult, adding colour prejudice by others to her own blackish skin. She keeps quiet and bears ridicule stoically till the ghost makes its reappearance on Easter. He sits on her chest and bounces up and down, a parody of sex act, she is barely able to push the bhoot away. Children living in the C block invent lewd tales about the Bhoot to tease Jaykalee and the neighbouring girls too. The adults ban the bhoot games. This makes the bhoot also docile and less troublesome for her. The 'ghost' is clearly a Freudian symbol of Jackalees' barren sex life. Jaakalee decides to make a confession to the priest in her church about the ghost. Meanwhile the ghost absents himself and the reader is kept in ignorance. Her (ayahs') hypothesis is that the ghost is afraid of the Father. Interest in the ghost revives when Jaakaalees' Bai sees him late one night when she is returning with her husband on the New Year. Measures are taken to rid the apparition from the C Block. Parsi priests are summoned and Zoroastrian prayers offered to scare away the evil spirit. But ironically, the ghost now captivates the Bai as much as it had earlier done the ayah. The climax comes when Jaakalee herself is taken for a ghost one night by her employer Bai. The racy narration, in simple Goan English makes a remarkable achievement. The half terrors, half-mocking ironic tone and its simplicity constitute a triumph in creating local colour of Firozsha Baag's Parsi community. 'Condolence Visit' extends the theme to poignant, tragic aspects of life, away from the lewd, humorous and playful tone of other stories. Story of the newly widowed Daulat Mirza, though set in India, also contains immigrant experience in the form of Sarosh, his nephew, known as Sid in Canada. It is customary among Parsis to be visited by relations after bereavement in one's family. So, Daulat begins to receive this exodus. She prepares herself for all she questions they would ask, thereby also preparing to relieve the trauma and the tragedy of her husband Minocher's last days. Najmai, her neighbour, offers chairs, glasses etc to cope with visitors. There is a carry over of characters from one story to the other (reminding us of Naipaul's *Mignel Street*) that makes it a small, familiar world of known characters. It also helps one to locate Mistry's pressing themes – ethnic patterns of life, alienation from post-colonial India, immigration to the West, etc. Daulat Mirza, despite her grief-stricken state, stands up bravely to the demands made on her by digma and riturla extended by 'concerned' relatives and others. She remembers her long married life and the intimate moments with Minocher, moments to cherish. She cannot separate herself from there memories, a visible conflict between her past and present. Further, she has to give Minochel's items in charity – his *pugree*, hat and other things. His *pugree* was a splendid spicemen of the Parsi past, no longer in fashion. There are buyers for the *pugree*, among them the hysterical and melodramatic Moti with the artificial smell of en-de-cologne. For Daulat, giving away Minocher's things is like giving his memory away. The ending of the story is Daulat sitting alone in the flat, dignified, finding the strength to put out the lamp and let Minocher go.

‘Of White Hairs and Cricket’ one of the last to be discussed here, is a story that weaves within itself several recurring motifs in the collection. First, is the loet motif of the Parsis as a dying race; second, the motif that influences all stories, of cricket standing for notions of honour, valour, manliness inducted by the British into Parsis, which in turn leads to immigration to the west. Last, this immigration by the young, leaves the old forlorn and alone; the loneliness of Parsis in India and the loneliness and lack of acceptance of Parsis in the west. ‘Then, there is the problematic father-son relationship. The story opens with young Kersi pulling out grey hairs from his father’s head, (Kersi the earlier character, the rat-killer in ‘One Sunday’ who puts in guest appearance in other stories too). Kersi hero-worships his father who used to play cricket with the Baag boys on Chowpatty beach on Sunday. The pulling of grey hairs means Kersi’s wish that his father could cling a little longer to the illusion of his youth. But in his grandmother’s eyes Kersi is committing a sin, for Parsis believed that hair was an evil thing and was used for purposes of black magic. But Kersi sticks to his views, though his delicate stomach is a source of trouble for him. Cricket also becomes rarer because Kersi’s father loses interest in them; neither can it be played in the Baag as too many windows are smashed with the ball. Kersi has to ultimately reconcile with change, and the idea of honour and the way Viraf, Kersi’s friend changes his mind. Kersi has to regret the shattered dreams, following his father’s ageing.

There are a few other stories in *Firozsha Baag* – ‘Squatters’, ‘Lend Me Your Light’ and ‘Swimming Lessons’, but they can be called ‘Canadian’ stories, set wholly or partially in Canada, enhancing the vision of the diasporic writers, in this case, of the Parsi/Indian writing. In another sense, they are also part of postmodern fiction. We get in them a glimpse of *Firozsha Baag* from the outside – from the distance of Canada. For instance, ‘Swimming Lessons’ is written in regular and italics, stressing the overt and covert meaning that underlie the narrative. ‘Squatters’ is narrated by the ‘master story-teller’ of *Firozsha Baag*, Nariman Hansotia. This places it in the orature tradition of the East – a tradition further exploited by Mistry in *Such a Long Journey*, using the Scherzadic features of the Arabian Nights narrative form. This technique has been used by other post-colonial Indian writers too – notably by Rushdie in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, and by Githa Hariharan in *When Dreams Travel*. Lastly, ‘Swimming Lessons’ is another self-reflexive story, not only because it is partially autobiographical, but also because it is about creative writing itself. Also, it is the story wholly set in Canada. The vexed question of cultural identity in the Indian diaspora is also further complicated in the context of Canada. Kersi in this story, before he encounters the water and the swimming lessons, has to go through the trials most immigrants have to face – racism and the bitter Canadian winters. Kersi’s stories that he writes take on a self-reflexive character. The diasporic writers’ need to write about the homeland left behind is evaluated by his father if you continue to write about such things you will become popular because I am sure they are interested in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different view point. . .’ It continues, that he should not lose his essential ‘difference’. Mistry has not lost, to date, the important difference; his subsequent work, rather than concentrating on Canada, has focused upon India from 1970s to 1990s – Mrs. Gandhi’s India of 1971 Bangladesh war, Emergency of 1975 and the post-Babri Masjid India. But the story under discussion also has a sad aspect – once you immigrate, you can’t return home.

A Fine Balance

A Fine Balance is a sprawling work, reaching out to a monumental, epic scale. After the acclaim received by *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry embarked on a work to be created on a wider range of characters, and a much larger fictional territory. *A Fine Balance* (1995) was the novel that truly established Mistry as a notable writer, and the one comparable to other diasporic writers who have made India their subject-matter; India looked at from a distance by a writer who recollects his memories and close observations. Not undeservedly, *A Fine Balance* in its range and panoramic quality, is comparable with Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* and Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*. A great deal of the novel is about the crazily mixed Indian life – its people, climate, cities, ethnicities, classes, castes, regional identities as they undergo the fast-paced changes in Indian life both in cities and villages, following economic and socio-cultural shifts. Yet, one could say that Mistry continues in *A Fine Balance* what he started with in *Such a Long Journey*: an exciting and absorbing, it also decisively pessimistic and sordid state of affairs in the Indian political system, despite all its rhetoric about federalism and democracy. Worst, the lower middle-class and the poor are unmistakable victims of oppression, neglect and brutality of those in power and economic domination, let

alone cartel superior that still rules the life-game in every aspect. The really remarkable thing about *A Fine Balance* is the way Mistry is able to absorb and then reinvent so much detail (the novel runs into more than 700 pages) to cover almost every aspect of human experience. Mistry's view, however, is poignant and humane, with a decisive concern, sympathy for the subaltern and the underdog, whatever his/her hue, variety or position in terms of caste, class, profession or gender. There must be at least two dozen major and minor characters in the novel, each of them having to perform some or the other role towards a collective vision behind the narrative, which in turn is not always easy to pin-point. Likewise locales and sites keep altering in the story, to give the impression of various 'journeys' of people, unrelated, but criss-crossing each other in terms of the mysterious ways of destiny. And the way these people are brought together in Bombay explain how the cosmopolitanism of Bombay becomes the center of experience, a kind of competing cauldron of fates and destinies, jostling for place and balance. The stories of each of these small and major figures have a chequered background, not always happy, which foreground the general message behind the lone narrative – that one has to strike a 'fine balance' between negatives and positives, defeats and triumphs, happiness and tragedy in order to go along with life full of uncertainties and contradictions. These 'stories' resemble those of *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* in all their interest, anecdote and humour and variety, the moral/religious overtones and the message ingrained in them. Truly, Mistry achieved in *A Fine Balance* which few writers at his age could have hoped to in terms of maturity, knowledge, technical skill and world-view that placed him finally in the category of front-ranking contemporary writers.

A notable feature of this novel is Mistry's widening the scope of his theme and preoccupations. While *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and *Such a Long Journey* focus on the Parsi inner life and its imponderables, *A Fine Balance* in its portrayal of India of the 1970s extends the focus to include other, non-Parsi minorities as they confront the post-colonial order (or disorder). As is well known, Mistry concentrates his attention in this novel on the criminalization of politics as it began with the Emergency in 1975, presided over by Mrs. Gandhi, and her son Sanjay, which again signaled the end of the humane and utopian Nehruvian era. Suspension of basic fundamental rights granted by the constitution led to widespread resentment by the opposition parties, spearheaded by the late Jayprakash Narayan. They branded it as the darkest hour in the Indian politics since independence in 1947, comparable to some extent with partition violence. The lower castes, villages and minorities in particular were the helpless, powerless victims of the rupplessness thus unleashed.

A Fine Balance is a record of this shameful episode that is rendered with remarkable poignancy and honesty. For Mistry this was another important 'date' in contemporary Indian history. Next, Mistry also intended to reveal the diverse and complex realities of India, to include people from several streams and occupations who reveal a collective pattern of the hybrid Indian panorama. Although the novel opens with Dina Dalal, a Parsi woman and her story in Bombay, it soon enlarges its scope to include her lodger Maneck Kohlah, a boy from a hill station in the North, and a little later, Ishvar and Omprakash, her apprentice tailors, who came from central India and are 'chamars' by caste. The narrative then opens up to include a number of identityless, less than common folk like ragpickers, beggars, thieves, shopkeepers, workers, presented obviously as victims and people at the receiving end in power politics. In a postmodern turn, one soon discovers that Mistry intends to reveal silenced histories, suppressed voices in centuries of violence and domination characterized by Indian caste politics – India of the teeming millions, the poorest of the poor. *A Fine Balance* provides a scathing indictment on the power of the elite and the moneyed, in which the marginalized and the powerless had no role whatsoever. Yet, most of these people have maintained a precarious 'Fine Balance' between life and death-like existence, in short, exercised tolerance and patience to pass through the impossible ordeal of life, the supreme example being of Dina Dalal herself, another power-gender victim at the hands of her brother Nuswan, and then many others. But she is the one who stands up for herself, her dignity and freedom, unlike many others. Those who are not able to maintain the balance, for instance, Maneck and his friend Avinash, are murdered brutally or commit suicide. On the other hand, those like Ishvar and Om who pass through extreme violence handed over to them which nearly destroys them (the cutting off of Om's testicles by the family planning/forced sterilization campaign is symbolic of the loss of this young man's future happiness) leaves them deformed and destituted. So, at the end of the novel Dina Dalal has grown old, lost her prized independence which reduces her to a state of dependency. Om Prakash's castration, points to the symbolic impotence of the populace. Ishvar is crippled by the loss of both his

legs and is reduced to begging on the streets of a changed Bombay, with Om carrying him in a little trolley for begging. The destiny of lesser beings (the above four being the major figures) is shrouded in ignoring and general flow of things; they do not matter. Is this the truth about the India of 1970s? *A Fine Balance*, had it been written in India's regional languages, might have become a classic of 'dalit' one of literature, which it is in the wider sense. Gender, caste and power oppression – these are the three broad issues confronted in the narrative details. In addition, the pathetic rape of Ishvar and Narayan's mother Roopa in exchange for a ripe mango by the lascivious watchman of the orchard, brings to the fore the age-old sexual exploitation in India (Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* provide different facets of it). There is a particularly moving aspect of the story when one looks back at the background of Om and Ishvar, who were never destined to be tailors in the first place, being chamars. It is Dukhi, their father who took cudgels against convention to release his sons from caste stigma to make them tailors. The way their brother is burnt alive, their house put to flames speaks of the power of the high-caste people not to allow the lower castes to cross the 'barrier' they are supposed to live in. In the same way the disillusionment of Maneck with the denudation of hills in Himalayas, and the so-called multinational interests, is foregrounded by his strained relations with his father. Maneck is the symbol of educated, skilled younger generation of modern India, who unfortunately get struck in problems of adjustment. Knowledge, in other works, is itself something dangerous. The murder of the dynamic student leader Avinash is a murder of the representative voice, which is silenced before it can effect a positive change in Maneck's views about contemporary reality. Interestingly, the novel ends, close on the heels of the Gandhi's assassination by her own Sikh guards in 1984, and the chaos that followed it. Maneck feels sick as a dog is run over by a vehicle on the Delhi road; this sickness is indicative of the larger dehumanized state to which man is condemned, as the novel illustrates.

Family Matters

Mistry's most recent novel, *Family Matters* (2002) can be called a retreat into the Bombay Parsi world and all the pressing concerns related with it. But, as the title indicates, this novel is much more personalized, being tied to a relatively smaller group of characters, as compared with the nation-wide canvass in *A Fine Balance*. It has been rightly called Mistry's most 'compassionate' book to date. However, the period has extended to a more post-modernist one, the 1990s of the Bombay world, and all that we know happened in the decade in the city. The Shiv Sena of *Such a Long Journey* is there, but in the post-Babri Masjid era, the former is replaced by the pan – Indian BJP Hindutva. Hence, Mistry 'closes in' in terms of time and has traveled to the realities of the recent times in India, as Naipaul wrote about similar issues in his non-fiction book *India: A Million Mutinies*. The city has been renamed Mumbai, though it holds its old cosmopolitan, hybrid character. However, no one who lived through the 1992-93 period of bomb blasts can help think about the change brought over by communal politics. Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* also recorded the consequences of the Hindu-Muslim riots in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid. Mistry's focus is not as pointed as Rushdie's for obvious reasons: Mistry's political consciousness does not endeavour to roll it into an ideology or a stance to or against Muslim fundamentalism. Secondly the focus in *Family Matters* is more personal than political, though the political fall out does leave an impact upon the life and profession of Yezard Chinoy, one of the central figures, and an other minor figures.

In this novel a child is presented as a 'Witness' a mature witness (Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* is a parallel instance). It is nine year old Jehangir Chinoy, the younger son of Roxana and Yezad. On the other entrance is the patriarchal figure of Nariman Vakkal, Jehangir's paternal grandfather. It is through these figures, that the reader is made aware of much of the action, or family, politics. The Chief motif of the story is the way the child tries to understand the quarrels and the puzzles of the family and wishes hard to once coherence, harmony and happiness. But this is abortive, as the elders fail to come together, and disharmony causes splits and lack of happiness. Another motif that comes up at different points in the issue of immigration. Yezad had once dreamt of immigrating to Canada but his hopes were dashed by unfair interview procedures at the Canadian High Commission. The third is the narrative technique of flashbacks, in italics that point to Nariman Vakil's guilt-ridden past.

The novel opens with Vakil's age being stressed, as also his love for words. Nariman's ostensible relaxation in the sun is matched by Mistry's luxuriant indulgence in language. Interestingly, Nariman has been a professor of English, who

speaks beautifully constructed sentences, and delights his grandson with newer vocabulary that he keeps manoeuvring. But the two step-children, Jal and Coomy do not think as comfortingly or with concern about the old Nariman, forbidding him to step out because of his Parkinson disease. Once, again the problem of abnegating ones' responsibility towards ageing parents becomes a sub-theme, pointed earlier in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. But Nariman in future would go out and fracture his ankle. And he tells Coomy, there is danger inside as well as outside, hinting at Babri Masjid riots. People, Parsis and others are targets of rampaging Hindu mobs, so Nariman's reply is not without significance. Coomy's arguments with Nariman have a background, for he had married Jasmin Contractor, their mother, and for her dead mother's torments and their own, she blames Nariman. In contrast to Coomy, her brother Jal is a compassionate voice of reason. In short, what emerges is how elderly parents are seen as a burden. Coomy resents her 'step' situation as insulting, for Roxana the real daughter is free because of her marital status. Roxana on the other hand, performs the healing role in the family, like Roshan in *Such a Long Journey*.

Nariman had an affair in his youth with a Goan woman, which was disapproved by his parents. After he ended that, a widow, Yasmin was found who had two children. That's how he became the father of Coomy and Jal, they in turn decided to retain their biological father's name. The narrative moves in these flashbacks. Now when the family gets together to celebrate his seventy ninth birthday, that is perhaps the only occasion when the family get-together is palpably pleasant. Amidst the family chatter, there is gossip of Shiv Sena and their double standards vis-à-vis Indian culture. Politics intrudes into the close family circle as do other events in the 1990s scenario, including the charged atmosphere of Indo-Pak cricket matches. As a point of reference to Nariman's past, the topic of contemporary problem among Parsis about inter-communal marriages also comes up. Yezad, who is liberated enough to realize the charged times, ironically becomes a bigot himself towards the end when he opposes his son Murad's relationship with a non-Parsi girl. Further, Yezad's failed attempt to go to Canada comes up sporadically in the text, and it gives Mistry with a chance to talk about the official Canadian policy about multiculturalism, which he did little to recede racism in that society. Like Gushad Noble's dream of Sohrab joining the IIT, Yezad too advises his son Jehangir to study worthwhile subjects – computers, M.B.A., instead of history, literature and philosophy. After Nariman's ultimate feared fall, he is taken to hospital where he is diagnosed by a fellow Parsi Dr. Tarapore, a one-time student of Nariman. Dr. Tarapore's interaction with Nariman in the hospital also provides Mistry an opportunity to discuss displacement of English from Indian University curriculum. This also brings up the bane of Indian hospitals – unhygienic condition, lack of staff, and poor care of the patients. The rest is Nariman's coming back home and the family difficulties in caring for him, giving him commode, bed pan, meals etc. Coomy meanwhile is fed up, calls in an ambulance and deposits Nariman to Roxana's flat till his plaster is removed. This may sound cruel, but it has also to be seen against the lack of state care for the old and the infirm, and the entire burden of caring falls on the children. Roxana's small flat is a further reminder of the congested Bombay city, where people have accommodation enough only to jostle and being into each other. Nariman's resentment in being thus thrown this way and that is natural. For Roxana's small flat the arrival of Nariman is nothing short of catastrophe. She and Yezad have been living in their idyllic private world without much intrusion. So that they can see through their sons' growth. So, precarious adjustments have to be made to fit in the immobile Nariman. But, it is Yezad who slowly starts getting irritated with his father-in-laws' presence, as he has to smell foul odours coming from Nariman's urine and stools while eating. Though far removed from the tragic proportions in *A Fine Balance*, Mistry here creates a close domestic and identifiable situation. The monthly budget of the family becomes more strained, the children start walking to school, while Yezad tries his luck at the 'mutka' lotteries. However, in a moral universe created by Mistry in the earlier two novels, the good and the just have to suffer and not those who are the offenders. Nariman is happier in Roxana's small flat, rather than digesting Coomy's sour remarks.

As the text moves backwards and forwards (much like *Such a Long Journey*), Mistry talks a bit about Yezad, his sons and the stresses and strains of Bombay life; moving in overcrowded trains, far from adequate salaries, difficult working conditions. One can see why Yezad was so keen to immigrate to Canada. Despite the criticism of Canadian policies, Bombay is clearly celebrated in *Family Matters*. Yezad's son Vikram Kapur lauds Bombay's tolerance despite grave disturbances, its sense of endurance in the face of fatal blows of violence. This is 'the ground beneath our feet' as Kapur says, Mistry having a dig at Rushdie and his well-known novel. Nariman gets closer to Roxana's

sons with his story-telling sessions which again disturbs yezad, for he suspects his sons getting away from him. Narimans' ankle has not healed as yet, so he will spend more time with them. Coomy meanwhile creates a situation by damaging the ceiling plasters of Nariman's room so that he does not come back to them. Water starts seeping from the overhead tank.

Finally, Coomy dies under the collapse the roof she had dismantled. Jal finds a way to adjust the whole matter. They could sell the Chinoy's flat and all move into the larger flat of Nariman. The unhappy family could now bask in the comfort of a spacious flat and sufficient money, though shortly after this, Nariman dies, and the details are recollected by Jehangir. Thus, the narrative moves in a complicated manner to record the ups and downs, emotional turmoil and maladjustment of a family set against more pressing, external events.

Major Themes

As can be observed in the foregoing discussion about Mistry's career and his works, his world-view and beliefs are built around many complex issues and experiences, partially biographical and partially literary and political. For one thing, Mistry now occupies a diasporic space as writer, and his identity for literary purposes is transnational, and as such he writes from an angle of hybrid/post modern imagination from a distance. Secondly, the whole idea of home and belonging is problematized in this space in the sense that the elision of national/ethnic boundaries and identities poses a question mark. The essence of 'difference' of diasporic beings (as Homi Bhabha opines) is rather heightened, which is true of most Jewish, Palestinian, Black, Asian and other ashes. So the post-colonial space from which these writers emerge and locate themselves in western metropolitan centers further necessitates looking forward (and backwards) as an essential pre-condition for literary creation. It involves importantly, the question of representation – both of oneself, one's nation and community, alongwith serious questions about race, politics, location, gender and existence in globalized space. While most writers underline to redefine their relation to native space and narrative against western hegemony, those who belong to marginalized groups and minorities have to further take up the matter of dominant national ideologies geared to race, class and religious fundamentalism. The role of English language likewise is no less crucial to making the world audience aware of its indegenization in the hands of the post-colonial writer, whatever his race or linguistic background. It involves a re-writing of histories and reality, as there have been under maximum violence and suppression.

In this sense, what Mistry's writing effects is what is understood as 'contrapuntal' or oppositional reading of reality and suppressed histories of communities such as those of Parsis. Another aspect of Mistry's writing concerned with the same facts is the way it becomes an Ethnic discourse within post-colonial theoretical and critical space. For Parsis in the Indian diaspora, the fact of being Parsi Zoroastrians is a racial and religious identity, only then comes the larger Indian identity. There are different writers, for instance, in Canada and elsewhere who belong to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and those from India are no exception. They do write with an awareness of being Punjabis, Gujaratis, Maharastrians, Muslims and so forth. It is a different matter though, that several diasporic writers have chosen to merge their identity with the western place of their immigration. An instance is Bharati Mukherji, whose fictions increasingly show the Americanization of her female character in their urge to assimilate their Indian/ethnic identity with the American multiculturalism. Mistry, on the other hand, has so far restrained from such an act, for whatever reasons. One visible thematic strains in his writing clearly shows that the Parsi memory, ancestry, history, religion and culture is still very strong in him, and he continues to concentrate on his inalienable belonging to that community within a specific historical and political framework.

In view of the above-stated critical overview, it is obvious that one can list Rohinton Mistry's major themes in his fictions only briefly for want of space. The first major theme that emerges in Mistry's writing from *Tales From Firozsha Baag* to *Family Matters* is the Parsi life and its varied contours, especially in the context of post-colonial/post-independence India. There are two or three related aspects that Mistry highlights in his works. In *Tales* it is more or less a celebration of Parsi life in a locality which is done at the level of selecting ordinary characters in all their comic, eccentric and poignant traits, but with humour, irony and invention to provide local colour. Yet *Tales* do provide a clue to Mistry's strong memory of childhood and communal life of Parsis in Bombay he so intimately recollects, something which he takes up in greater detail in the major works.

The second related theme within the Parsi theme is Mistry's growing sense of disillusionment with the Indian post-coloniality, the domination by the major Hindu race, the marginalized status of minorities, and the general unease of the Parsis having been reduced to unimportance and inconsequential existence. The chief source of this thematic strain emerges from *Such a Long Journey* which lays bare the crude Indian political system hijacked by racial-communal-religious groups. This is done against the backdrop of the glorious, rich Parsi history and past, particularly after the advent of British colonialism that patronized the Parsis. The fall of the elegant community to nonentity and their bulldozing like other minorities and smaller racial groups is a cause for deep concern in Mistry's writing. In a way, it is post-colonial writers' critique of modern nations and their so-called unified and national spirit. The third and the final aspect of the Parsi theme is the ghettoized existence of the Parsis – a negative feature of this community going on the defensive – that is controversial. In all Mistry's works from *Tales* to *Family Matters* one finds Parsis living in enclosures and privation and failing to opening out towards the wider realities of Indian culture and environment. Some critics feel that the Parsis are themselves responsible for their situation, having insulated themselves this way. In *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters* this increasing threat from external sources is more than palpable. If in the first it is the desecration and violence directed against Parsis in-between the Indo-China, Indo-Pak and the Bangladesh war, in *Family Matters* it is the Bombay riots and blasts that unnerve the average Parsis like Nariman, Yezad and others. In short, while Mistry eulogizes the Parsi history and cultural richness, he overlooks the Parsi lack of resilience, or their failure to be realistic and pragmatic enough.

Another major theme that pervades Mistry's fiction is the relation between the public and the private lives, the inner and the outer, the subjective and the social world. While *Tales from Firozsha Baag* tentatively touches upon this problem, it is in *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* that the theme is really tackled with intensity and seriousness. Gushad Noble's family/private life is constantly interfered with, is disturbed and problematized by outside events, and he has to strike a balance between his dreams, aspirations, personal and domestic peace, and the intrusions that threaten to disintegrate it. The whole novel shows Gushad's attempts to maintain his inner nobility, tolerance and restraint against the disturbing events that are basically evil and violent in character. In *A Fine Balance* too we have the dreams and desires of Dina Dalal, Om, Ishvar and Maneck getting thwarted by external agencies and political changes. The canvas of *A Fine Balance* naturally necessitates a wider treatment of the theme of conflict between the public and the private, in the sense that Parsi and other characters in the story undergo inhuman attacks on their identity and physical self, leaving them destitute and paralyzed. In *A Fine Balance* the vision is far more pessimistic; there is little hope for the individual to effectively and positively carve out a personal destiny in the face of the politics of revenge, violence and caste-class divide. In *Family Matters* though the personal life-world is more pronounced and protective, and the novel deals generally with filial complications, yet public and impersonal events do obtrude and influence human lives. Despite the innocuous and relatively small crises hit the Nariman Vakeel family, the focus on external events such as the Hindu R.S.S. Agenda, the Bombay riots of Hindus and Muslims remains throughout. It is the Parsi world-view and point of view as minority that dominates the question of human existence in a world beset with conflict, revenge and violence.

Another major theme in Rohinton Mistry's fiction is the treatment of subalterns, poor and underdogs in the social hierarchy. In almost all his works Mistry's major characters are ordinary people, who do not possess much power or money, and are thus dependent on small means to lead life under a variety of pressures. Many figures in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* are less than ordinary-servants, ayahs, shopkeepers, vagabonds, rogues, and slum dwellers – who have to depend on others to make life livable. In *Such a Long Journey* though Gushad is a clerk in a bank, he subaltern existence, so underlined time and again. Khodadad building – ramshackle dilapidated, crumbling, old – is itself a symbol of decay and neglect. Those who live in it are also without importance or power or a 'side' to protect them. In fact the wall of Khodadad building which is urinated upon by passers by stands for the inhuman and unhealthy attacks on ones privacy and decency. Gushad Noble, the survivor of the once elegant Parsi family, is reduced to subalternity as he has to keep together his family in slender economic means. There are real subalterns in the story as will – Miss Kutpitia, Tehmul, to name only two. *A Fine Balance* is the novel full of such figures – Dina Dalal, Om Ishvar, the lesser beggars, rogues, working class people – all stand for subalternity in its different forms, that of gender, class, caste, economy etc. In *Family Matters* though subalternity is not present to this extent, yet

Parsis are themselves at the receiving end, being unprotected and politically weak. Nariman's ex-girl friend in his youth, Lucy is ultimately reduced to poverty and dependence. From this one can judge that Mistry has a deep-rooted concern for the poor, weak, underdog, politically exploited, economically dependent, and generally powerless, individual as a strong aspect of humanism. This also exposes, directly and indirectly, the villainy, evil, corruption and rapacious practices of those in power, others who hold the economic strings, or those who dominate and oppress the ordinary people on the basis of caste-religion superiority or dominance.

Lastly, one can say that Mistry is basically a writer of urban/city setting. This is natural, for he was born and he grew up in Bombay, in a mixed, interracial atmosphere. It is known that a writer can write best about what he has known intimately. As such, Mistry possesses the keen observation to recreate in his fiction the compulsions, tensions and contradictions of urban life – but as these effect and change ordinary lives of ordinary people. City life, in its crowded, varied, humorous and tragic aspects is something that given Mistry great opportunity to exploit his talent to create panoramic portraits of life caught between various bulls and pressures, yet there is an urge to make life look somewhat bearable.

III

Such A Long Journey: Detailed analysis of the Text

As stated earlier at many places, *Such a Long Journey* was the first major work of Rohinton Mistry, in which he explored in depth the various complex attributes of Parsi life, history, culture and character, as he recollected these from the Canadian diasporic space. Mistry set this novel at a sensitive point in contemporary Indian history, when the Nehrurian era had just ended after Nehru's sudden death, and soon gave way to degenerate politics of opportunism, nepotism and violence. Further, during the period 1962-1972 India had to engage in three successive wars, with China, Pakistan, and for the liberation of Bangladesh. This period also saw the rise of communal politics in various parts of India, the emergence of new political alignments, the slow but sure politics of votes by the dominant Hindu/Brahmin community of India. The result was the marginalization of smaller groups and ethnic minorities, so that these felt as outsiders and strangers in their own land. The important question of religious/ethnic identity symbolized by the Parsis in Bombay and elsewhere therefore provided Mistry the central point of view and vantage point from where to look at the contemporary Indian scene. But, as is well-known, Mistry's fiction is always represented with a human angle and the question of one's free identity. This he does by focusing on an average lower-middle-class Parsi family headed by Gushad Noble. The travails and sufferings, joys and hopes of Gushad and his family constitute the main exploratory point through which Mistry expands the pattern of Journey – personal and collective – of the Parsis. The result is a novel very rich in detailing the average, common man's aspirations and longings for happiness, and the way these are thwarted and defeated by unforeseen external forces that compel one to compromise against one's innate nature.

Such a Long Journey is told in twenty-two chapters, which further contain sub-parts to them. The story is not narrated in a linear way, rather it moves backwards and forwards, with flashbacks and memories going back into time and space. However, the structure does have a unity of tone and intention, because the novel shows progression in terms of the changing lives of characters, in particular, the central figure, Gushad Noble and his immediate family. The story is also interspersed with historical and political details about important events such as the China war, the Indo-Pak war, the war of Bangladesh liberation, the creation of new states, political corruption, etc. All in all, contemporary events in post-independence Indian history are placed as the background to personal life and small incidents. This way Mistry is able to balance the personal with the public/national changes. As is well-known, the novel opens with three epigraphs from Firdausi, T.S. Eliot and Tagore, each having a separate significance in terms of their relation to the leitmotif of 'journeying', which in any case is central to diasporic writing. Firdausi's work from *Shahnama* recalls the glorious Iranian heritage of Parsis and their now downgraded condition. Mistry has acknowledged his debt to T.S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi', for it is from there that the title of the novel comes. Tagore's lines from *Gitanjali* sum up the way Parsis have moved from one place to the other and have adjusted themselves to new realities.

As the novel opens, it is presented against the stark, everyday reality that hits one in a city of millions, with its grinding routine. The story is throughout kept abreast of the 'present', daily events, changes, social interaction and relationships, for it is this that provides the reader with its relation with the past. The novel begins at the dawn of a

typical day with all its familiar sounds and smells, while Gushad turns eastwards to the rising sun to offer his 'Orisons to Ahura Mazda'. The milkman is selling 'diluted' milk to women in the early hours, perhaps the first indication of contamination and corruption that is to take on greater intimations in the story. Reality, like milk is itself adulterated. The next is the limited water supply – another perennial Bombay problem with its burgeoning population. Gushad is content to live with all these problems with an air of resignation; nothing is going to improve much. Here a word about Gushad's personality would be in order. Gushad is a dignified, self-respecting, God-fearing, but obstinate and self-opinionated, not always prone to changing his views and ideas. This is what creates problems for him, problems of adjustment and accommodation that are necessary in this world. However, his sterling gifts far outweigh his small faults. Gushad is broad-shouldered, well-built, an envy and admiration of friends and colleagues in graver or happier times. Following an accident he had some years back, he even waddles with a little limp. With these personality traits though, he dearly loves his family – his beautiful wife Dilnawaz, Sohrab, nineteen, Darins, fifteen and the lovely daughter Roshan, mine. Now in his early fifties, Gushad is an employee in a bank where he has worked with dedication and relative distinction. It is also significant that he has had a spotless career, of which he is proud and legitimately so. For how many people do we find who are not prone to moral and economic temptations in this sordid and corrupt world? This aspect will have a damaging impact on Gushad later, when his old friend Major Billimoria gets involved in a corrupt deal of lakhs, and in which Gushad gets involved. Throughout, Gushad's sieve of memory connects and disconnects several big and small events that have affected his life, so that Gushad's maturity, his coming to terms with setback and problems, has been (as we are told) has been painful.

The day also opens with the news that his son Sohrab has been selected for admission at the prestigious IIT. This is the news that elates Gushad and to tell this he wakes up his wife Dilnawaz. As this goes on he recalls how nine years back he had met with an accident saving Sohrab's life. That was also the year 1962, in which the Indo-China war had broken out and the unsuspecting Indian army had suffered a humiliating defeat. This is in fact the first instance in the text when the personal and the public/political are linked. That was the time he had put blackout papers on his window panes and ventilators., which had still not been removed; they have got used to living in less light. The blackout papers became symbolic of the many difficulties that ordinary families like Gushad's had got learnt to live with. These are many small details that keep on recurring in the course of the narrative, generally brought as Gushad's memory of things guides him to the past. Meanwhile, Dilnawaz is extremely happy that Sohrab will get admission at a prestigious institute. Gushad is very proud of the intellectual potential of his son, Sohrab was interested in different things, like fish and butterflies, but Gushad had always insisted that he should pursue serious studies so that he could make a name for himself. Out of sheer enthusiasm of an exulting father, Gushad wants to wake up Sohrab to give him the good news. But Dilnawaz always patient and calm, wants the son to sleep a little while more. Gushad goes and looks at his son, sleeping calmly, looking innocent. He wonders if time would snatch his sons' happiness and innocence. Here it could be mentioned that Gushad is a fatalist, he believes in destiny and man is an instrument in its great power. He does not know yet what Sohrab's reaction to his selection at the IIT is going to be. Second, Gushad is also a bit insecure as a man, because his family was ruined after the furniture store that they had as a flourishing business, was burnt. So, he pins all his hopes on this new 'beginning' that Sohrab could make in the world. This shock had made his mother ill, after which she died. Gushad is never able to forget these set backs that so ruined him too, and he had to settle for a very ordinary life. He also loves his younger son Darius, who is a reflection of his father's muscular frame, is more carefree and optimistic. He prays for his children's health and happiness, peace and equanimity. However, that is exactly what is going to elude him shortly, and which creates an inner disturbance and a sense of defeat and distrust in him. This, despite what Gushad thinks, will be the result of all the sacrifices 'they' (the elders) have made. There are references to the formation of Bangladesh, it was proclaimed a nation by the Awami League years later, after the 1965 war with Pakistan, now there was again trouble in East Pakistan, as the daily newspapers informed. The news item suddenly reminds him of his old and closest friend Jimmy Billimoria who had one year back suddenly disappeared from Khodadad building where he used to be his neighbour, never to return again. Before anything else may be said about him, it should be clear that Billimoria provides the political context to the novel and through whom Gushad's Parsi world (and the inner domestic world) becomes involved with the wider Indian world. All this happens in the brief morning time as Gushad recollects things from his crowded memory. Billimoria had lived in the Khodadad building for

quite a long time. He was very friendly with Gushads' children who called him uncle, and was a sort of ideal for them. He used to entertain Sohrab and Darius with golden tales from the glorious army life. Billimoria's sudden disappearance from the building was a great shock for Gushad and his family, which perhaps only Dilnawaz could understand, considering the Jimmy was much more than a mere neighbour to Gushad. What Gushad cannot figure out is the mystery behind Jimmy's abrupt departure, without informing anyone. There is also reference to Khodadad building early in the novel, and the wall that surrounds it, an important symbol that runs throughout the novel. Khodadad building, despite its pious name, is more a hell than a place to live in, a prison with horrible noises and overpopulated with people. It is in bad shape. The Bombay M.C. wants to tear down the wall to widen the road. It is also used by passers by as an open urinal. The world is also a symbol of Parsi privacy from the engulfing outer world, but it also isolates the small number of people under it.

The next part begins with Gushad's optimism that his humble flat one day would be filled with merriment and happiness. But as shall be seen, the first shock comes with Sohrab's refusal to take admission at the IIT, to the anger and dismay of Gushad. He had decided on that Sunday to celebrate the birthday of Roshan who is a dashing of the family, to couple it with happiness over Sohrab's future.

But, before the small family party takes place, the reader is introduced to the typical Bombay institutions place, communities and things which make it what Bombay is in all its colour and variety. Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that *Such a Long Journey* is a novel which remarkably captures the sights, sounds, smells, colours, environments and landmarks of the city. In fact, it is the urban climate with all its variety, squalor and scenes that makes life in the city both exciting and miserable, for that is what Gushad often feels about being happy now and distressed at other times. As Gushad prepares to go to the famous Crawford market to buy chicken for the party, Mistry gets the opportunity to take the reader into this busy world. First, it is the Crawford market, the wholesale vegetable, fruit and meat market that dates back to the colonial period with a fountain designed by Rudyard Kipling's father, who was then the Principal of "Art School in Bombay. Gushad in turn, had been introduced in the market by his father in more simpler times in taxis along with a servant. Gushad recollects all those little details about live chickens being slaughtered at home in times of his grandma. That was in days before bankruptcy had claimed his father's business of Noble and Sons of Fine Furniture. Now it is a contrast, Gushad has to walk with a meager purse and a worn basket. He could only make small purchases which he no longer enjoyed neither did he like the dirt and the chaos of Crawford. After his father, his friend Michael was an expert in chicken and other varieties of meat and he had learnt things from Michael. Michael Saldana, tall and fair-skinned Goan worked in Bombay Municipal, the Goan culture and cuisine being another feature of the cosmopolitanism of Bombay. Michael has another taste that is common with Gushad: music. Michael's home was a haven for music-loving Gushad, and Michael played the piano and his brother oboe. It is there Gushad had learnt to love to eat beef. Michael makes a telling observation when he says 'we are lucky to be minorities in the nation of Hindus,' let them eat their pulses and grams. . . . We will get our proteins from the sacred cow. Malcolm's entry into the text provides Mistry a chance to talk about the introduction of Christianity in India over nineteen hundred years ago with a people Thomas landing on the Malabar Coast. There is an expensive piece on St. Thomas, indicating a solidarity among minorities in Bombay, in the face of the increasing force of the dominant community. This theme which is developed deliberately in the story for the obvious link it has with the minority identity of the Parsis. Anyhow, as Gushad recollects the past times with its farcical and humorous anecdotes related to chickens running away before being strengthened, we are also introduced to 'Technical Langra' as earlier we are introduced to Miss Kntpitia, who is a firm believer in magic, prophecy and superstition, and who has an intimate relation with Dilnawaz. Kntpitia, Tehmul and Mr. Rabodi are minor characters living in and around Khodadad building, and they create a world of humour, eccentricity and caricature to provide some relief from the obsessive cycle of events related with Gushad and Jimmy Billimoria.

Tehmul, though retarded and handicapped, has an important function in the story. For one thing, he is neither fully man nor child and lives on the charity of others. Second, Tehmul's vulnerability and weakness become a counterpoint to those who are inherently strong, physically and economically. Gushad, being human and caring, was the only few of the inhabitants of Khodadad building who had any patience with Tehmul, a victim of hip fracture that was never mended.

Tehmul's destitute and poverty-ridden state naturally makes him entirely dependent on others' help and charity. Though now in his mid-thirties, he plays with children nor having matured due to the fall that rendered him so. He has immense adoration for Gushad, who is like his foster father. Conversely, most adults in the neighbourhood despise him, especially women as he scratched perpetually like one possessed, his groin and armpits which suggests abnormality and aberrant behaviour. He is treated as an outcaste and a burden, an irritant to the more normal people who also felt irritated with his speech and he spoke in a breakneck language which did not make any sense. Tehmul also has a sinister and obnoxious side to the child-like Tehmul, who is also the rat-catcher in the building. Tehmul took home the trapped rats and drowned them in a bucket or poured hot water over them. But he is still a part of the character-gallery in *Such a Long Journey* reminding us of figures in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

After the expedition to the Crawford, Gushad has been meticulously planning the evening party of the birthday, partially because he is happy about Sohrab's future. They had been making plans for his future, how he would live in a hotel, come home over weekends, the beautiful scenery near the college. After he finished his IIT he would go to an engineering college in America, and so on. Such are Gushad's fond ideas. For the party he has only invited his closest friend after Jimmy Bithmora, Dinshanji who is a colleague of Gushad in the bank. Dinshanji, as shall be seen shortly in a complex, eccentric figure and has considerable role to play in the story.

Dinshanji's arrival is likely to liven up the party, because he has a gusto for all good things of life, and enjoys cracking jokes, makes people laugh, and occasionally, can also flirt with women, like he does with Laurie Coutino, the bank employee. In Dinshanji we have a kind of humorous Parsi character, who again reminds us of Mistry's early stories. Dinshanji is also used as foil in the story for mouthing two important issues: the indictment of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and corrupt Indian political system, and the humiliation of Parsis in the post-independence India. Much of the novel after this in fact focuses on these related, national and international concerns as these impinge upon the personal destinies and hopes of Gushad and others.

Gushad has made nice provisions for the party with chicken, basmati rice and rum to be served. The family wishes Major Billimoria was there to join the party. After the pleasant gossip and Dinshanji's jokes, the discussion turns to politics and the shape of Parsis. They used to have a lot of fun, says Dinshanji, and Parsis were the kings of banking. They had great respect, and now the whole atmosphere has been spoiled, since Indira Gandhi nationalized the banks. Nowhere has the nationalization served any good. He condemns Indira Gandhi, calling her a 'shrewd' woman who had done it as a vote-catching faction. She shows the poor that she is on their side. Recalling Nehru's line when he made her president of the Congress, she encouraged the demand for a separate Maharashtra which caused a lot of rioting and bloodshed. The result is that today there is the Shiv Sena, wanting to reduce everyone to 'second class citizens'. This condemnation of Indira Gandhi continues at the party. The atmosphere gets charged with Gushad joining the anti-Shiv-Sena tirade. He recalls how they had indulged in violence against the Parsis, broke their window panes showing 'Parsi Crow-eaters, we will show you who is the boss.' The watchmen did nothing to save the Parsis, however, it was their guess that prevented the hooligans to carry out their assault. After this, just as they begin to have food, the light goes out and an argument between Gushad and Sohrab about his IIT admission begins. Gushad is not at all prepared for a rebuff from his own son, whom he loves so much. Sohrab's violent misbehaviour causes deep injury to Gushad. Sohrab's sudden outburst that IIT does not interest him that he would like to change to arts, robs Gushad the only hope he had for the future. Gushad is prone to losing temper and cursing destiny and life; this occasion really amounts to a great hurt for the aspiring father. The son-father quarrel threatens to become violent and Dinshanji plays the clown to tone down the tempers, but it does not help much. Dilnawaz is pained at what was happening. When Sohrab talks about his friends with whom he would like to join the arts programme, Gushad is furious. He tells him not to talk about friends, for friendship is what has hurt him most. He is obviously recalling the betrayal by Major Billimoria whom he trusted like a brother - where has he gone, disappeared without a word. Friendship to Gushad is now something worthless and meaningless. The party ends in a fiasco; Roshan's birthday is spoiled with tempers charged and there is gloom and disappointment. Two things after this are pointers to what happens in the story. One, this can be seen as an omen for the unlucky and dangerous things which are to overtake Gushad's life, and two, the father-son discord ultimately results in Sohrab's moving out. Mistry underlines how an average man like Gushad all

the time hopes for some satisfaction, and happiness and peace, but in vain. The fissures between Gushad and Sohrab widen and the son becomes more rebellious, much to the dismay of Gushad. He even threatens to thrash Sohrab after the latter calls him 'stupid'. Later Gushad is on the point of breaking down, struck with grief at his sons' insolent behaviour. He develops a cynicism towards life after this, and two of these events related to Jimmy and Sohrab leave Gushad a pensive, defeated man, telling Dilnawaz '*My Son is dead*'.

Gushad's general attitude towards life after this is negative; life is full of sorrows and betrayals. Gushad the romantic, the dreamer, the believer in nobility and sincerely turns more aggressive, cynical and short-tempered. The defecation and urination on the Khodadad building wall, the general squalor and disorder turns to nothing the order and discipline Gushad had tried to maintain in his home and life. In his anguished moments he has to pray:

"O Dada Omuzd, what kind of joke is this? In we when I was young, you put the desire to study , get ahead, be a success. Then you took away my father's money, left me rotting in the bank. And for my son? You let me arrange everything, put it within reach, but you take away his appetite for IIT. What are you telling me? Have I become deaf to hear you? (P.62)

Sohrab had been a brilliant student at school, won the admiration of his teachers, earned many prizes, he even put up a home production of *King Lear*, employing local actors. But Gushad never had an eye for aseptic productions and such activities of his son, he never wanted him to be a writer, painter or artist. He had only seen his son as a future engineer, doctor or scientist. Perhaps it would be fair to comment that Gushad's vision is a bit defective, since his rigidity and self-opinionated bias is part of his problem and the reason for his fight with Sohrab. Mistry implies that grown up children can think in their own way and parent should also be understanding enough.

Once this disturbance is set in motion other things soon follow at an alarming rate. Soon Gushad has a row with the irritable Mr. Rabadi (close to being rabid) over the latter's charge that Darivs has an affair with his daughter. Gushad corners him whom he calls 'Dogwalla', for his dog Tiger. This at a time when Gushad is awaiting a letter from Billimoria anxiously which has yet not come. On top of it the horrid, name eating smell, the mosquitoes all coming from the wall side dig gusts 'Gushad'.

Now we move into the more serious side of things in the text, when Gushad is just going to receive a letter from Major Billimoria. Meanwhile Gushad carries on his daily domestic and professional routine. At home, things are none too happy. Sohrab's violent and disobedient behaviour has soured the atmosphere and Dilnawaz despite her calm nature feels suffocated and pulled between the son and the father. Roshan is a delicate child and her digestive system does not do well; her illness which will be prolonged, is first beginning to surface. At the office in the bank Gushad carries his home tensions and keeps brooding about Sohrab's betrayed of his hopes. Dinshawji by contrast is more carefree, and does not mix memory with sorrow like Gushad yet, office routine is a relief for Gushad, and Dinshawji entertains everyone with his spicy, and at times, lewd jokes, and even a song session. A significant point of talk between Gushad and Dinshawji is the way the roads and landmarks of colonial times have been renamed to Indian, and more particularly, Maharashtra ones. Gushad and Dinshawji feel their lives that they and lived have been erased by this renaming. After the heated talk centres around Pakistan's relations with America, seen as opportunistic, because everytime the Russian power balance tilts towards India, Pakistan gets closer to Americans. Such talk on national/international issue comes up time and again at different points in the text. Before the letter from Billimoria arrives, Roshan wins a school raffle prize, but Gushad is not much interested. There is also a petition filed by the Municipal Corporation for removing the Khodada building wall, and the papers are brought by the gibbering Tehmul. This is another source of irritation and tension for Gushad which carries till almost the end of the novel.

The much awaited letter from Major Billimoria finally arrives. In it Billimoria apologizes for the delay as he was away to the border. The gist of the letter is that he has been working for RAW, which has been given the jobs to check Pakistani atrocities in East Pakistan. The major task he assigns to Gushad is to go to Chor Bazar on any Friday, find out a pavement bookstall, where '*the Complete Works of Shakespeare*' will be displayed. He should open the book to 'hello' and open the line 'Put money in thy purse'. The man at the bookstall will give Gushad a parcel, which he should take home and then follow the instructions inside it. Gushad chooses to underplay the whole message to Dilnawaz. But Sohrab, who knows what RAW is, says 'our wonderful Prime Minister uses RAW like a private police force to

do all her dirty work'. Next day Gushad asks the bank manager for half day off, to go to Chor Bazar to collect the parcel. Gushad has no option but to help Jummy, because he is basically sincere and good-intentions. However, his wife and children smell some dirty business, some immoral thing that might land all of them in trouble. Meanwhile, Miss Kutpitia with her black magic tries to help make Sohrab more amenable to his father, because he reminds her so much of her own dead nephew Farad. The death of Farad was perhaps the reason for Miss Kutpitia's retreat into isolation and eccentricity. Dilnawaz accepts her help to bring reunion between the two, the contraption for which is lime and chillies and then a more dangerous magic potion. The potion is to be imbibed by someone who could then take upon himself Sohrab's ills. Poor Tehmul is selected on the sacrificial victim by the desperate mother to cure her son.

The place from where the mysterious parcel sent by Billimoria is to be collected enables Mistry to bring in yet another Bombay institution, the Chor Bazar. As Gushad prepares to walk the winding alleys of the Bazar, it allows him to recollect nostalgically his earlier visits to that colourful market. How for instance in the past as a child he bought a meccano set and used to make various shapes of automobiles from it. But everything else, the set was lost in the family bankruptcy. The further background is that the bankruptcy happened because his father handed over charge of business to his alcoholic uncle, before he went in for an operation. When he came back, his uncle had mortgaged everything. The family could never recover from this ruin. But his father was too proud to bend or cry which he thought was the weakness of women.

It is such train of memory that often over takes Gushad whenever he goes to a site associated with his past. This robs the narrative somewhat of a sustained focus on the subject under attention, but the narrative is written from Gushad's point of view, hence everything is reflected through his mental prison and crowded memories. At last he does find the stall on which 'The Complete works of Shakespeare' were displayed. The man whom he meets at the stall in Ghulam Mohammad whom Gushad had known earlier, when he had a hip fracture. He was with Jimmy Billimoria in the taxi some nine years ago, and he (Ghulam) helped Gushad being carried to Madhiwalla Bonesetter. But at that time Ghulam had acted as a taxiwalla to hide his real identity. In fact people like Ghulam Mohammad who did secret errands for other, often changed/camouflaged their identity. They have to do all things for RAW. Alongwith the big parcel Ghulam also gifts the complete works of Shakespeare to Gushad. He gives Gushad an address where he could be contacted. It is the 'House of Cages' and Gushad knows it well because this is where Dr. Paymaster's clinic is, who is their family doctor. Also, he knew Peerbhoy Paanwala who sold paans since years and years.

When Gushad gets home, his wife is eager to see what the parcel contains. Gushad on the other hand, is very unsuspecting and thinks the parcel could not contain anything harmful. However, on opening the parcel, he is shocked and finds himself trapped in an intricate and apparently inextricable share of difficulties. The parcel to his amazement, contains ten lakh rupees in currency. The note inside says that the money is to be deposited in the bank in an account under the name of a non-existent woman, Mira Obili. The whole thing – yet another of Jimmy's cruel acts – makes Gushad's and Dilnawaz's hair stand erect, who have no idea where to hide such a huge amount. The other danger is that others around can smell a rat in their home. The forbidden, unaccountable money thus drives away Gushad's peace and happiness, and he again feels annoyed and betrayed. He thinks of returning the money under severe pressure from his wife, but is unable to find Ghulam Mohammad. Gushad's discomfiture knows no bounds, as he has worked honestly in the bank, and now he fears a scandal and his possible involvement in it, something that could lead to his humiliation and public insult. However, another letter from Billimoria assures Gushad that this was not black market money but Government money, to be deposited in the name of Mira Obili (an anagram for Billimoria, as pointed out by Sohrab), ostensibly a help for the Mukti Bahini fighters in Bangladesh to use towards the liberation of Bangladesh. The tension mounts because Gushad cannot afford to deposit such a huge amount in his own name or anybody else's. so the money has to be hidden at home. After hiding the money in the kitchen for a while, he has to take Dinshawji into confidence to deposit it in the bank. He has to tell everything to Dinshawji, but the situation does not improve. There is utter turmoil in Gushad's life which ruins his rest and patience. Worst, on two consecutive days, he finds a headless bandicoot at the base of his vinca and again, a headless cat in his compound, both ill omens of some disaster. All this lands Gushad in a zone of suspicious. His daughter starts suffering from a worsening diarrhoea, which is a grave concern for the family. On the one hand Gushad is required to pay her attention, on the other, he feels

he is getting involved in something criminal. Gushad decides that the money will be deposited in the bank bit by bit, bundle by bundle, to avoid suspicion. But, at the end of the day, he cannot help exposing his disgust for someone he had treated as a brother, and he says, 'What a world of wickedness it has become'.

As he gathers strength to start settling Billimoria's murky deal, the famous Bombay monsoon breaks up, something Mistry recalls with nostalgia and irritation. For Gushad the rains also bring back memories of pain of his broken hip. That in turn make him remember the unusual skill of another Bombay personality, Dr. Madhiwala. His skills are now known to most Bombayites. Parsis and non-Parsis. Mistry does not miss anything while talking about incessant rains, not even the crows, pictured wet and half-flapping. In fact, *Such a Long Journey*, the moment it starts, is told against the portrait of changing colours of the sky, the changing seasons and temperatures and the kind of effect they have on human life. The one thing Gushad regrets and misses at this in excuse juncture is the security of his fathers' and grandfathers' home. It was a wonderful world of furniture world and the bookstore in which one could comfort oneself with confidence, but all that is gone now and Gushad feels abandoned and exposed to the cruel world. Next day, Gushad beings walking to the bank with the first bundle of ten thousand rupees to be deposited in the bank (it will take a total hundred days to do the job of depositing ten takhs). Gushad is tense as he walks past the crowds and pedestrians. On the way he also sees the pavement artist who makes portraits of different Gods and Saints of many religions, the same artist who at the end of the story will come to paint the Khodadad wall. Dinshawji has been ill and has returned to the bank after a gap of three months in the hospital. Involving Dinshawji in the money-scandal makes Gushad guilty for another reason – Dinshawji is close to his retirement, and breaking banking laws would mean jeopardizing his job and pension. But Dinshawji is positive, is willing to help Billimoria against the 'Pakistani butchers'. The money begins to get deposited. One day, Roshan is suddenly taken ill at school, has to be brought home by the school staff. This begins another round of worry for Gushad family, as it also means draining money on her illness. Taking Roshan to Dr. Paymaster's clinic also gives Mistry the opportunity to portray his busy routine in a busy place. Close by is the House of Cages – the notorious prostitutes' quarter in Bombay where women are displayed like so many cuts of meat, in tiny, barren rooms like cages. This is the Bombay ret light area. Outside lies another local institution – Peerbhoy Paanwala whose own mouth is the first indication of the several varieties of paan he creates for various taste and bodily needs. There is *Palang tor Paan*, for example, which has sexual connotations since the times of Kings and Maharaja's. Gushad has his own share of memories associated with Peerbhoy when he used to come with his father to the clinic of Dr. Paymaster for inoculations against smallpox, cholera, diphtheria, typhoid and tetanus. Roshan's sickness meanwhile becomes more and more intolerable, despite Dr. Paymaster's prescriptions and injections. One day Laurie Contino, who is by now fed up with Dinshawji's behaviour, discloses to Gushad what he had declared about his having lakhs of rupees for helping the Mukti Bahini as a secret service agent, etc. This upsets Gushad further, for any leakage of this thing because of Dinshaw's stupid behaviour could land them in trouble. For Gushad it is too much to bear, Roshan's sickness, Jimmy's treachery, Sohrab's behaviour, Dinshawji's stupidity, Laurie's complaint, everything pushing him to an edge, threatening to crush him. He meets Dinshawji and rebukes him for his brainless behaviour, for which he apologizes.

The pavement artist comes to Khodadad building, to paint and decorate the desecrated wall outside. The wall is three hundred feet long, so it is ideal for making pictures. Using assorted religions and their Gods, Saints and Prophets, he will make the pictures. Hindu, Sikh, Judaic, Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jainist, etc., will help promote tolerance among people. The idea is to dissuade the urinators and defecators. The wall from next day undergoes transformation, but ironically the artist himself grows restless, torn between continuing the project and his usual departure after the work is over. Gushad, on the other hand, waits for an uncertain future.

IV

Such A Long Journey: Detailed Analysis of the Text

It may be mentioned that the first half of *Such a Long Journey* is more absorbing and entertaining, compared with the later half. This has some reasons. First, the pace of events is faster in the beginning of the story; things happen in quick succession, so that the reader is kept engrossed in both the personal/domestic developments, in Gushad's family

and immediate neighbourhood. These details have a sense of immediacy and point of relevance, because much that is told is concerned with everyday details of an ordinary family. Second, the suspense about Major Billimoria's sudden disappearance also keeps the readers' sustained interest as to what will happen in future, as also, because it is through Jimmy's involvement that we get exposed to the national/international developments. Third, a variety, of interesting characters are introduced which not only supplement Gushad's individual narrative, but also because Mistry makes them a ploy to bring in exhaustive details about Bombay life, its colours, environment, landmarks, institutions and politics. All the above-mentioned factors continuously re-direct the readers' attention to this 'polyphony', which contributes to the total impact of the narrative. Gushad's journey or the Parsi journey through time and circumstance is matched by that of others too in their different ways. By the time one reaches the middle of the narrative, one is prepared to understand the oncoming results of what has happened in the immediate past: Gushad's sense of betrayal and disillusionment, Jimmy's connection with RAW, Sohrab's refusal to join the IIT, Roshan's illness, the desecration of Khodadad building wall, all head towards a sharp turn of events. What is more, what is impending to unfold in the narrative will be less entertaining and variegated, for the tragic will also contribute its share, in terms of the deaths of Dinshawji, Billimoria and Tehmul.

The wider world outside the Khodadad building seems to overstate control of human lives, for bigger events invariably overshadow and minimize the intensity of personal/smaller issues. The clouds of war and danger gather as India prepares to defend itself against a possible attack from Pakistan. Throughout the novel we notice that Gushad's world is invariably tied with the wider world of politics, war, violence, sectarian divide, money and the question of minorities in India. It is because Gushad is a far more well-informed and intelligent man, compared for instance with Dilnawaz and Miss Kutpitia, who are content to live in their private worlds of domesticity and black magic. Through his keen awareness and reading, Gushad is projected as a man who knows about rights, representation, marginality and falsely created divisions by politicians. Major Billimoria's close friendship further interlinks him to the big-time finance, national politics and the dubious links between power-politics and capitalism. It is because of this that Mistry is never oblivious of bigger events in *Such a Long Journey*. One can quite agree with Nilufer Bharucha that the novel is 'written from a male point of view', and the female characters are passive recipients of action taken by their male counterparts. Most decisions in the story are taken by males, while females quietly submit to them. Dilnawaz is the perfect wife, contented, decent and obedient, while Miss Kutpitia is shown as representing the irrational side of female behaviour. Finally, they are either completely domesticated, or are reduced to an inner world of gossip, local movement or being mere receivers of wider changes around. The female except does not represent the male drive or challenge, rather it is static and subject to being rejected or overruled. It is this important world of affairs and rationality that the text turns to when Miss Kutpitia's spells fails to use Roshan, and she is taken to Dr. Paymaster by Gushad.

After this, the text really moves into the 'crisis zone', as the political and the personal move towards a head-on collision. As Roshan's illness becomes graver and more intractable, Dinshawji brings the shocking news the Major Billimoria has been dismissed from RAW on charges of corruption. A hint is given about this prior to what the newspapers carry, when Peerbhoy Paanwala tells Gushad that Ghulam Mohammad was very upset about something, though he did not disclose the reason. When Dinshawji makes a surprise visit to Khodadad building, he carries a newspaper in which there is a headline 'Corruption Ripe in RAW', and which states the arrest of Jimmy Billimoria on charges of fraud and extortion. Gushad is numb in disbelief. The news says that Major Billimoria had impersonated the Prime Ministers' voice, telephoned the State Bank of India, identifying himself as Indira Gandhi. He instructed the cashier to withdraw sixty lakh rupees for delivering it to a man called 'Bangladeshi Babu'. The next day Major Billimoria impersonated himself for the man and took the amount. The report said that Major Billimoria had confessed to the fraud, in order to expedite the guerrillas in Bangladesh (East Pakistan). The gravity of the crime is the ease with which the whole 'operation' was masterminded, using the Prime Minister's voice. This amounts to looting public money, which will go a long way in eroding in public eyes the confidence in political leaders. As is well-known, this is the fictional version of the infamous Nagarwala case (which was the real incident) that Mistry used as a sub-text in the story of *Such a Long Journey*. Now, after this public exposure, Gushad is convinced that Billimoria was actually, nothing but a swindler and a crook, and he was taken in by his cleverness, thinking that he (Gushad) was doing

something for a good cause. He feels he has reached a dead end, for he cannot even go to the police to report the matter. The postmodernist mode is employed here to juxtapose fact and fiction; the newspaper report is carried verbatim, with a charge of names, from real reports in the press about the dismissal of real-life State Bank Cashier, Nagarwalla. Gushad is shattered because he fears his complicity in the case may be found out sooner or later, and out of this fear, and the desperation to wash his hands off the whole thing, he decides to meet Ghulam Mohammad.

When he meets Ghulam Mohammad again, at the House of Cages, his demeanour has changed; while he has 'lost' his bandage, he is not sporting a beard, Mohammad informs that Billimoria is indeed in jail, but a result of 'lies', rejecting the newspaper reports as false. Worse, as Ghulam tells Gushad, Billimoria's 'life is in danger' for he is surrounded by 'enemies' at the top. Mohammad asks Gushad to withdraw all the deposited amount, so that it could be sent back to Billimoria to save his life, as this the deal that has been struck by those who are questioning Major Billimoria. The money has to be returned in thirty days. Ghulam threatens that things might go bad 'for all of us' if the amount is not returned in thirty days. Dinshawji hears what has transpired, and advises Gushad to comply with everything quietly. Meanwhile the bank itself, from where Gushad starts withdrawing two bundles a day, is abuzz with the remarkable case in New Delhi. Especially, when a Parsi was involved, which now assumes the overtones of a scandal that has hit the community's reputation. Just when Gushad is half-way through the withdrawals, he finds his rose plant, vinca and *Subjo* hacked to the ground – another premonition of disaster. However, it is not this disaster, but another that overtakes his life. After a long time Dinshawji gave up his jocular, sexist self and style, and had become serious and sincere towards Gushad and the problem Jimmy had landed them in. It was only after Dinshawji had 'accomplished' the task and expunged all traces of the bank account, that Dinshawji suddenly collapses at lunch time, perhaps not able to stand his illness any longer. He is rushed to the hospital. Dinshawji tells Gushad on way to the hospital that he could sense 'not many days are left' (perhaps of his life), so he rushed through to clear the account.

In the meantime when the whole amount is collected back, Gushad goes to hand it over to Ghulam Mohammad. Gushad is full of anger and hatred, and he wishes nothing further to have with him and Billimoria, but Ghulam tries to convince him that Jimmy needs urgently to meet him in order to confess and tell him how and why he has been trapped in 'a system' which involves everyone at the top of the government. Ghulam also gives Gushad a letter from Billimoria, requesting him to come to Delhi. Gushad thinks he should take some time to decide whether he should undertake this journey to Delhi. The focus briefly turns to Dinshawji, whose condition in the hospital slowly worsens. As time passes Dinshawji is unable to eat anything, and is put on an intravenous support system. After a long gap of years, Gushad meets his old friend Malcolm Saldana, who takes him to pray for both Roshan's and Dinshawji's recovery at the shrine of Mount Mary. One by one, as we notice, all Bombay's landmarks are covered in the narrative. The contrast here is, of course, that once Gushad had met Malcolm when he was going to purchase chicken for Roshan's ninth birthday, on which Dinshawji was a special guest. And now, the two of them being ill, Malcolm is again there to take Gushad to pray for them – it is an ironic twist to life and change that we are exposed to. Ghulam Mohammad makes another visit to Gushad's home to tell him how urgent it is for him to meet Major Billimoria, who is now awaiting the final sentence for his crime. Despite Gushad's refusal to do anything with Billimoria, Ghulam hands over the return train tickets to Delhi to make the visit. Just then, he hears the news about Dinshawji's death, whom he then visits in the hospital. Here we have a glimpse of the atmosphere of death – Dinshawji the ever lively, chattering, joking, now lying still and cold. Preparations are being made to take the body to the Tower of Silence, where vultures will do the rest to the body, and after that, only memory will be left, so Gushad muses in his typical way. After the prayers are carried out, it is the last journey of Dinshawji that remains. Everyone who comes for Dinshawji's last rites had received something from him; friendship, love, companionship, but above all, Dinshawji has brought laughter into the life of almost person now sitting there. Mistry gets an opportunity to elaborately explain the Parsis' last rites, the ceremonies, rituals upto the end. Dinshawji's bodily remains are left at the Tower hill, while Vultures in large numbers start descending, to consume the mortal remains, as per the Parsi custom.

Immediately after that, Gushad decides to undertake the journey to Delhi to meet Billimoria, though very reluctantly. His mind is full of mixed feelings and reactions while taking the last plunge to meet Major Billimoria. It may be stated here that Mistry portrays his central figure as one equipped with tremendous patience and humanity, for, anybody in

place of Gushad would have firmly rejected more involvement with criminal activity. But, upto the end, Gushad bears everything with exemplary courage and acceptance, despite so many set backs and betrayals. Mistry now has the chance to describe the fabled Indian train journey, all its comedies, absurdities and inconveniences – bribing of coolies to get seats, the fleecing of passengers for buying eatables, the bad toilets, the heat, etc. The most memorable lines from this part of the text are ones that remind the reader of the multiple meanings of the title ‘Such a Long Journey’, personal, and collective. As the train speeds northwards while night descends, there are only faint glimmers of light here and there. Gushad thinks:

Would this long journey be worth it?

Was ever any journey worth the trouble?

This life-journey for most people ends up doing or achieving nothing, but for some like Dinshawji, who made people laugh, had been worth it, perhaps. Gushad is fast approaching his destination in Delhi. Meanwhile, behind his departure from Bombay, small crises grip Dilnawaz. She nearly burns her kitchen after the stove is left on, continues with Miss Kutpitia’s strange prescriptions without much help to sure Roshan. Mr. Rabadi, comes again, now to give a final warning about Darins misbehaving with his daughter Dimple, which creates a farcical scene of which Mr. Rabadi ‘the crackpot’ is quite capable. On an ice-cold December morning Gushad reaches Delhi, and then the jail to meet Jimmy Billimoria. On reaching the reception he is told by one Mr. Kashyap that Jimmy has been shifted to the hospital section of the jail, because of an undiagnosed high fever, and infection because of which he feels delirious. When Gushad finally reaches Billimorias’ room, he is in a shock. Jimmy is now a mere ‘shadow’ of what he was in the past. The way his whole diminished body is explained shows Mistry’s writing powers. No longer is Jimmy the strong, muscular, erect army man, but a shrivelled, emaciated, pale being. Worse, Jimmy is an absolutely broken man. It is the injections he had been given to cure the infection that have consumed all his energy. Jimmy’s sentence is for four years. Jimmy slowly tells Gushad how he was caught in the ‘dirty’ politics emanating from the ‘top’. It shows Mrs. Gandhi’s sordid involvement in corruption at the highest levels in the government, and the way she used men like Billimoria to further her own political ends. She was using RAW as her own private agency; spying on opposition parties, ministers, etc. All kinds of immoral, corrupt practices were done under the name of this agency even blackmailing her own confidants, such was the practice. She (Mrs. Gandhi) had indeed herself appointed Billimoria to work for the cause of East Pakistan guerrillas. There could be no supplies for the Mukti Bahini without money, a regular budget. It was she, as Jimmy tells Gushad, who told her to go to the State Bank, meet the Chief cashier and ask for sixty lakh rupees. Later, she got out of the business herself and trapped Jimmy. She used him for depositing the money elsewhere because this money deal could be used by her political enemies. Jimmy had trusted her, so she made him use her voice over telephone, and she even made him write a confession that he had use the Prime Minister’s voice. Jimmy found that the money did not reach Mukti Bahini, instead it was rerouted to a private account. Jimmy’s blunder was not to have exposed the whole thing, the goings on in RAW, to the press and opposition. It was then that Jimmy decided to use ten lakhs for his friends and well wishers, strongly reacting against political leaders and their corrupt practices. But he was found out, so was the missing ten lakhs, and was arrested and made a case on the basis of his written confession. After narrating this long ‘story’ and making a confession to his friend, Jimmy pleads to Gushad for forgiveness. Gushad, the ‘noble’, humane person that he is, forgives Jimmy, rather feels pain and remorse for what all Jimmy has suffered and undergone. Hence, if Jimmy’s meeting with Gushad serves to bring about a Catharsis, for Gushad it is the clearing of misunderstandings and the grudge he had against his friend.

Even as Gushad leaves his friend in deep troubles, there is a special radio broadcast by the Prime Minister, informing the nation that Pakistani air force had bombed Indian airfields as an act of naked aggression, and that India was now at war. The atmosphere is surcharged, and scarcity of things has already started hitting the market. Before going home in Bombay, Gushad sees the Khodadad building wall already painted, and there are flowers and garlands at the foot of the wall, in reverence to the seers, saints, babas, gurus, prophets and pictures of holy places. He wonders at the complete transformation of all the wall of old, where there was nothing but urine and excreta, ‘shit and piss hell’ that it used to be. In short, the black wall itself has become a shrine for all races and religions. Here is a religious postmodernism created by the pavement artist on the wall, in which all faiths, all narratives and cultures exist in equal

uniqueness. Meanwhile, in Gushad's short absence from home, in quest of the restoration of Roshan's health, Dilnawaz and Kutpitia have continued to invoke spells and the burning of things has resulted in a little fire which has been put out easily. But, as stated above, greater fires, rage as the war with Pakistan continue, as blackout papers once again go up; Gushad and Darivs repair the old ones. After setting down on coming back Gushad finds time to tell Jimmy's story to Dilnawaz. Gushad is really anguished to think of Jimmy's wretched condition. Dilnawaz is commenced Jimmy would get well and return to Khodadad building after four years Dilnawaz in her simplicity is feeling happy and lighthearted as she sees improvement in Roshan's health and after all the terror and shame and guilt she feels the gloom has been lifted. The only ranking thing was Sohrab's absence, who left home since his altercation with Gushad. At the bank, too the atmosphere undergoes a change; Mr. Madon issues air-raid warnings. Gushad remembers Dinshwaji with regret, how he would have created jokes and flirtation with Laurie from even this atmosphere. But all those jokes and songs were now missing.

The next part narrates the war developments: while Pakistan's demonical occupation of territory is condemned it is equally balanced by stories of Indian gallantry. Prisoners are taken by the thousands, people travel all the way to make contributions for the war relief fund for helping Mother India (or Mother Indira). The Prime Ministers propagandists see a bright future in terms of the next elections, farmers chant slogan of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'. International developments are not lost sight of either: U.S.A. orders its seventh fleet to the Bay of Bengal, people curse Nixon and Kissinger. Close on the heels of this as a balance, an armada of soviet cruisers and destroyers comes for India's morale-bossting. On one blacked out night Gushad catches Tehmul masturbating in his room with Roshan's naked doll, who had fascinated him for long. It is a pathetic, but also abnormal act by an abnormal-half grown boy, who finds it as a substitute for his suppressed sexuality. But Gushad is still tolerant, and excuses the Tehmul for this aberration. The war finally ends in India's victory; the liberation of Bangladesh is imminent. The two 'patients' – Roshan and Bangladesh – are both recovering, as Dr. Paymaster tells Gushad. The war, though had a bad effect on the 'business' of women in the House of Cages, with people rushing home early due to blackouts. The memories of India's defeat at the hands of the Chinese is how erased, with the euphoria of victory over Pakistan. Slowly, the atmosphere undergoes a change; the lights are back, blackout papers removed, victory paraded. Everywhere, the atmosphere is of jubilation and freedom. Newspapers carry out war analysis over the next few days – the crucial battle, the arrival of first Indian troops in Dacca to the cheering crowds. Keen reader that he is, Gushad scans every newspaper for details. One day, while reading war descriptions at lunch-hour in the bank canteen that gave him a sense of national pride, he comes across a small, unnoticeable news item. It is about Major Billimoria's death in New Delhi. Gushad is dumbfounded; the news stated that Mr. J Billimoria, a former officer with RAW, had died of a heart attack while serving his four year prison-sentence. Gushad quietly keeps the page in his pocket. The focus briefly shifts to the House of Cages where people organize a 'morcha' to protest against the unhygienic conditions prevailing around, a general public outcry against the callous attitude of the municipality. The very next day, Dilnawaz reads a news item in *Jan-E-Jam-Shed* that the funeral of J Billimoria would be held in the morning. The mystery is, how was Jimmy's body brought from New Delhi, and who brought it? Gushad at once decides to attend the funeral at the Towers of Silence. So, he decides to go to the same place for the second time in less than a month, with two close friends gone. This is a big test for Gushad's self-control and grief. But he fails in this mission, for Jimmy's funeral is already done with and over, just as everything about him is kept secretive by the government agencies. Mistry uses this occasion, the second funeral to write out some black humour on the vultures who eat Parsi corpses, the debate between those who support it, and others who oppose this disposal method. The vultures threw pieces of flesh on people's balconies while flying out of the Towers. So the debate between the 'reformists' and the orthodox continues. Yet it seems quite useless and irrelevant, seen against the demise of Jimmy Billimoria. Gushad is distraught but patient, on not being able to pay his last respects to Jimmy. So we note that Jimmy remains a shadowy presence behind the narrative, though he indirectly 'controls' most of the real action. We are also told that things at Gushad's home are improving; Roshan is well enough to resume going to school, Sohrab comes to meet Dilnawaz during Gushad's office hours. She implores Sohrab to stay and talk to his father nicely, who would be back soon from the funeral of Major Billimoria. But he sees another fight, because he had caused unhappiness to his father. He reacts, 'its no use. I spoilt his dreams. He is not interested in me anymore'.

As the novel draws to an end, there is another crisis brewing up, this one which directly involves the resident of Khodadad building and nearby localities, and the Municipal Corporation. It had long been known to the inhabitants that the Corporation had made a decision to widen the road near Khodadad building, and for that the demolition of the wall was necessary. But ironically, the instrument of this confrontation is none other than Malcolm Saldana, Gushad's old friend. Malcolm, in his official capacity as the employee has been entrusted with the task of demolition of Gushad's 'wall of all religions', Malcolm studies the maps and the roads for the purpose, but the name 'Khodadad building' fails to strike an immediate link in his mind. When he arrives on the first lorry for demolition and looks at the 'celestial' wall, it strikes him why the building's name is 'Khodadad'. The workers are given orders to proceed forward so that the team could begin the 'project'. On the other side, Gushad on his way back from Billimorias' funeral he could not attend, meets Ghulam Mohammad, and realizes that it is he who organized the funeral. He has reverted to being a taxi driver, but has decided to remain in RAW.

The first person who comes to know what is going to happen to the wall is the pavement artist. In the meantime, a procession in the form of 'morcha' is advancing towards the site, with banners and placards, shouting slogans against the Corporation. Malcolm has identified Gushad's flat. When the processionists realize that the wall of holy saints is going to be destroyed soon, they are full of indignation and outrage, and being thousands in numbers, their slogans pierce the air. On reaching Khodadad building Gushad is surprised to find Malcolm there, 'what is he doing here?' interestingly, all neighbours – Mr. Rabadi, Banji, Dimple, Mrs. Pastakia, Mrs. Kutpitia – despite their eccentric traits and differences with each other – gather at the palce. Sohrab, who has stayed back home on his mothers' pleading, comes out. Father and son see each other after a gap of seven months. When Gushad meets Malcolm and is told by him that he has been given charge of the demolition, another betrayal awaits Gushad. The stage is now set for beginning the demolition work, though the workers are far outnumbered by the morcha people. Soon, the work starts, so does the ugly protest by the morcha crowd. Tehmul, who had so far been told by Gushad to stay inside the compound, ventures out, and is hit by a brick on his head. Tehmul falls down as it hits his forehead. An ambulance is called to rush him to the hospital because he has lost too much blood. Dr. Paymaster is luckily there; he bandages Tehmul's head. But Tehmul is nearly dead, despite the injections Dr. Paymaster administers. Poor Tehmul's death is almost sacrificial, at the altar of the holy wall, he becomes the hapless victim of this senseless violence. It is Gushad who carries Tehmul's body to put it under a tree. The hearse is called to take Tehmul to the Towers of Silence, but before that, Gushad, who is overcome with grief for the poor dead man, carries the body to Tehmul's flat, despite his own limp. Once there, he takes off Tehmul's shoes, lays him on the bed, covers up the naked doll lying there, covers Tehmul's head, and recites Zoroastrian prayer with tears running down his face. He prays five times. At this significant moment, Gushad as though transcends himself to be one with death and one with life. He prays for all, cries of all – for him, for Tehmul, for Jimmy, for Dinshawji, for his papa and mama, for grandpa and grandma, 'all who had to wait for so long ...' He prays for God's mercy for all souls, for the end is to come, and it may be another beginning. As he is lost in higher things about birth-death-rebirth, he hears a sound. It is Sohrab, who has come back:

*Gushad turned around. He saw his son standing
In the doorway, and each held other's eyes ...
Then he went up and put his arms around him.*

This final reconciliation between the son and the father comes at a time when Gushad has 'seen' everything – relations, love, hatred, separation, friendship, betrayal – and realize, that pragmatism and acceptance are perhaps the only ways to deal with life's imponderables. That is perhaps the way to traverse the 'Long Journey' that existence is. The morcha, meanwhile, has melted away, Malcolm instructs his workers to begin the demolition of the wall. The pavement artist is passive about the demolition of the wall, packs up things and prepares to begin another journey, without mattering where he will go. The novel ends on a note of 'journeying', and also on being rooted. Gushad chooses to stay; by pulling down blackout papers from ventilators, he lets the light in, to make a new beginning in a world which is continuously changing, and demands several levels of adjustments.

V

Such A Long Journey: Some Important Topics for Study**A. The Merging of the Public and the Personal**

Such a Long Journey is written with the intention of portraying the individual/personal lives of characters in a socio-cultural and familial context. However, the novel successfully interweaves this context with the larger rhythms of life in universal and national terms. The reason for this is not explainable very easily. First of all, Rohinton Mistry being a diasporic writer, looks at reality from a vast distance of Canada where he is situated, hence it is imperative that his view-point is conditioned by a critical overview of things as he sees in a perspective. Nostalgia, memory, journeying and displacement – these are the most pressing or compulsive concerns of diasporic imagination. But also, because Mistry is not content with merely ‘reporting’ or detailing the facets of human experience; there is a strong element of interrogation and inquiry, questioning and probing that goes into his rendering of modern man’s (and woman’s) experience in a world beset with uncertainty and change. Secondly, Mistry is very closely tied to Parsi community, its history, exile, cultural patterns, rituals, customs, language and philosophical outlook. As a Parsi of modern generation living in post-colonial India Mistry has a keen observation and penchant for seeing Parsi facets of life in all its somber, poignant, tragic and comic variations. What is more, he feels a sense of regret and loss for the marginalized, unimportant Parsi situation and identity in the multicultural and multi-ethnic reality of India. Therefore, his rendering of Parsi life is invariably tied to what the Parsis have to confront and live with; opposing points of view, competing religious, cultural and political values against the big national and international issues.

Escape as a motif and exile as an experience is the mark of many immigrant and diasporic writers who see the ‘housing desire’ in the west at the latest trend of existential compulsion to overcome ones loss of roots or native belonging. But, as is clear in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Mistry does not appear to support the migration as a convenient alternative to replant ones dreams, for even in that situation one is unable to completely reject or overcome ones native identity back home. Mistry looks at this problem of adjustment through irony, comedy, mockery, or the absurd situation one finds oneself in alongwith other migrant people.

It was in *Such a Long Journey* that Mistry for the first time expanded his canvas, beyond the closed Parsi life in a narrow context, and opens up to a whole question of minority life and its exigencies. Here he speaks on behalf of the subaltern, underprivileged and marginalized human beings and communities. The center of the book is metropolitan Bombay, the Bombay of dreams and nightmares, of hopes and despair, of joy and suffering, of comedies and tragedies. It is the Bombay Mistry had known as a child and a grown-up, and the way the city undergoes change. But Bombay, as is presented in the novel is also one which had been created and developed by ethno-religious minorities; the buildings, the institutions, the landmarks and the overall character of the city, all stand witness to this multi-cultural character of the place. It is then that one can understand the later monolithic view of the city, which become the capital of Maharashtra, and thus sought to be taken control of by the Shiv Sena. It is this that brings in a confrontationist idea of belonging, a politically charged atmosphere that lies behind the narrative in a significant way. But, despite all this polemical politics about whose identity is threatened or is eroded, Mistry has the compassion and the broad world-view to celebrate each and every aspect of Bombay, and perhaps the only comparable work in which this is done (though through a different perspective) is Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Mistry’s Bombay is still the celluloid capital, of the lilt of famous music directors, the Carnavalesque, crowded Bombay of great variety and possibilities.

It needs little emphasis to state that the public/national/international, or the wider concerns in *Such a Long Journey* remain expressly related, and are even subordinate to the central focus of the narrative – Gushad and the personal world that surrounds him. In a sense, the story or the ‘life and times of Gushad Noble’ gradually open out to an awareness of the dramatic shifts in space and time as they take place in post-independence Indian history. Set against the commonplace life and circumstances of Khodadad building, but through the point-of-view of the extraordinary figure of Gushad, the narrative assumes significance, for it places before the reader the dual perspective: how successfully can a man balance his aspirations, desires, values and principles facing a world and circumstances which conspire to deny him happiness and peace and order. Gushad’s dilemma and struggle against odds are a result of his

extreme sensitivity to people, situations and relationships. Like an everyman caught between desire and its annulment, the abortive need for rest and clam, Gushad suffers internal and external disturbance, albeit with astonishing courage and patience, and not like the nauseated, negative and disillusioned modern western protagonists. He remains tolerant and positive till the end, perhaps due to his deep faith in prayer and the essential goodness of man. At the same time, Gushad also knows the impermanent, contingent character of all things, including pleasure, desires and happiness. The list of problems and setbacks that Gushad undergoes is relatively long as compared with his few satisfactions: the dilapidated, dirty surroundings of Khodadad building, Sohrab's ingratitude and insolence, Jimmy Billimoria's shocking betrayal, Roshan's illness, his involvement in the world of murky financial deals, the death of Dinshawji and Tehmul, and finally the demolition of the wall of religions. Add to this his none too pleasant relations with some of his neighbours and associates, this sums up the queer destiny of Gushad, who is addition, was once a son of a Parsi family that flourished in its furniture and book business and was a known illustrious name among the Parsis. The loss and the bankruptcy in the past is a fact responsible for Gushad's 'present', the way he has had to trim his desires and dreams in the face of economic disasters and tragedies. If this detail is sufficient, this sums up the 'inner' world that Mistry meticulously creates, with all its intricacies and contradictions. If *Such a Long Journey* can be called one of the contemporary classics, it is *not* because it delves into the grand and the important display of extraordinary lives; it is rather in its rendering of mundane realities and events that it acquires deep significance. Mistry recreates in a postmodernist sense the value of suppressed histories, identities and silenced voices, and it is this that makes the text valuable, pitted as it is against the more collateral and absorbing bigger events connected with political personalities, superpowers, dominant communities and war. What is more, the reader is always kept on tenterhooks to relate and connect the impact of big events on smaller human dramas, enacted on a smaller canvas, and how the progression from one to the other can be seen as possible, even necessary. It is here that Mistry shows a new turn in writing – to raise the level of one's situation, cultural and human identity to a point of reference, not insignificant. Mistry's awareness and analysis of contemporary social and political situation in India presents itself remarkably in the eventful years (about a decade from 1962-1971) of recent Indian past. However, Mistry's portrayal is tinged with a sharp irony and Satirical made with which he sees Indian polity, government and its affairs. His attack on Nehru and Indira Gandhi are unsparing, so is his snide remarks on Sunjay Gandhi, something he does in much greater detail in *A Fine Balance*. The dynastic congress rule through which Nehru pampered 'his darling daughter Indira' to ascend various positions is seen by Mistry as the undoing of the nation, because she promoted dissensions, power blocks in regions and parties, corruption and nepotism to keep her power intact. On the other hand, Shastri comes in for admiration for his moral uprightness and courage of conviction because of which India won the 1965 war. Further, Indira encouraged Shiv Sena and the likes of it in Maharashtra and elsewhere to facilitate the dominant community to rule over others, as Dinshawji says 'wanting to make the rest of us into second-rate citizens'. Throughout the novel there is regular diversion and reference to external events, public concerns, especially in the conversations between Gushad, Dinshawji, Dr. Paymaster, Malcolm Saldana, and of course, Jimmy Billimoria. As a youngster, Sohrab prescribes communism and military dictatorship to get rid of congress. The ultimate obviously penetrates into the narrative with the involvement of Jimmy Billimoria in the sixty lakh rupees scandal for which again Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister is involved. How she uses RAW as her private detective agency to spy on her opponents, even her own cabinet colleagues, gives a clue to the decaying political system which is fast moving towards anarchy and feudalism. Jimmy's dying confession to Gushad is revealing, in the sense that several like him are merely used, made instruments for a larger purpose, then discarded and tortured to death. His ignominious death symbolizes the degradation of a system in which human beings are valueless.

The same chaos, disorder and irresponsibility is seen in ordinary peoples lives Khodadad building and its stinking surroundings are indicative of the decay, greed, treachery and fraud being played on the general public. Ordinary folk have no say, no voice in deciding matters – the proof being the demolition of the Khodadad building wall at the end. Gushad, who is an ordinary citizen, exemplifies the total neglect on part of government, agencies, corporations towards their betterment or even the basic needs. But, unlike Gushad, there are hardly any people who can voice their protest and indignation against the wretched conditions, the loss of identity and the threats they see to their existence. Mistry takes pains to relate the public and the private from multiple angles and chain of events that accidentally involve well-

meaning people like Gushad into a network of crises. This is what makes *Such A Long Journey* an intensely 'political' book, from inside and outside.

B. The Motif of Journey with special Ref to the Parsi Character

Such a Long Journey, as its title indicates, is written with a view to underline the idea of 'journey' in literal and metaphorical sense. The three epigraphs with which the novel opens are indicative of Mistry's intention in narrating the complex but interlinked chain of events. At the end of the novel, Gushad prays before the dead body of Tehmul; he prays for all, his friends, father, mother, grandfather and grandmother, 'who made such a long journey'. Passing from life to death, from happiness to suffering and vice-versa, is a way to look at this journey. The journey from Firdausi's *Shah-Nama*, to Eliot's "Journey of the Magi", to Tagore's *Gitanjali* proves to be a long, classical journey in a cold and hostile world, from hope to despondency. Another connotation of journey is related (as stated earlier) to the situation of the diasporic/immigrant writer himself, who leaves his anchor, place, native memories and landscape to move away on a new 'route' to etch out a new graph of living. But he does carry the burden of those memories, history and setting. The precondition of diasporic writing is indeed the tension, the pull that sustains between the writers old and new links, the 'hyphenated' character of his writing. In this sense, Mistry's Indian-Parsi background adds a new dimension to the structure and intention in *Such a Long Journey*. The Novel obviously cannot be interpreted on any singly level; its understanding demands a multiple perception of this motif, so dominant everywhere. The journey is historical, personal, ethnic, national and personal/existential sense spills over to many levels, and this can be a useful reading of the novel.

The motif of journey in any case is very old in literature since the classical times. Homer's *Odyssey* is perhaps the first great epic that explains this pattern at several mythological, metaphysical and archetypal levels. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is perhaps the finest example of surveying critically the world and society, men and manners by undertaking a religious journey. Later, the journey pattern in search of moorings, success or finding one's lost parents became a stock theme in realist fiction. A tradition that began from before, continued through Fielding, Swift and Dickens and Thackeray which included the heroes 'journey' through several levels. It took the form of *bildungsroman*. In the twentieth century the journey motif became significant more at the symbolic level in which the hero is in search of self, identity, meaning and order in a chaotic, uncertain world. When we come to recent literature, particularly fiction, this theme or motif acquires a new intensity. Since the freedom of ex-colonies, people were looking for a national/communal/ethnic identity, by rejecting or discarding western notions of culture, history and values, and by looking at reality from a native/nationalist point of view. No less important has been the dislocated situation of many communities and ethnic groups such as Jews, Palestinians, Blacks, ex-slaves, indentured people under colonialism, and so forth. The question of representation and roots became paramount when it came to re-writing and interrogating the suppressed identities and silenced voices of ethnic groups and communities. Among these, in the Indian context the Parsi situation has been one such, people who have suffered double or triple alienation through time and history, and hence lost the purity of their original roots. Details about the Parsi past and present has been already explained in Unit I, the way their Iranian and Persian past was wiped out due to Arab attacks on Iran, and the compulsions under which they had to flee their native place. The Parsi settlement in India created for them a diasporic condition long back. They had to adjust to new geography, setting, culture, values, code, and languages, hence the hybrid or the mixed nature of Parsi people in India. *Such a Long Journey* is written with the immense backdrop of this historical 'journey' of the Parsis, from one to the other hemisphere, continent, geography and cultural setting.

Mistry's chief aim in *Such a Long Journey* was to assert in terms of resistance and interrogation the glorious Parsi background, and their present minority situation. Early in the novel Gushad draws upon the rich Parsi past in the form of his family's flourishing business and enviable status in society. The loss of that position in financial and social terms has reduced Gushad to ordinariness and subalternity, like any other ordinary person in the vastness of Bombay. Next, in conversations and heated discussions with Dinshawji the status of minorities in India is condemned and the cause is attributed to the callous disregard of the government and politicians to their dignity and identity. On the other hand, the rise of communal and fanatic religious Hindu groups like the Shiv Sena, promoted by ruling parties, have successfully bulldozed their way to dominance through violence by pushing back the lesser, weak groups like the

Parsis, Jews and Christians. *Such a Long Journey* is both a lament and a scathing attack on the insult and humiliation meted out to them. This is in sharp contrast to the privileged status of Parsis during British colonialism, and even earlier. Collectively, it is the many trials, exiles, journeys and dislocations suffered by Parsis that appear to fit in the idea of the ‘journey’ in the novel. The way Mistry evokes authentically the ancient Parsi rituals, customs, language and practice clearly reveal that the author intentionally desires to represent a way of life and beliefs that is under tremendous pressure in a modern nation. There seems to be little hope for improvement or healing the wounds of the past, but Mistry appears to convey that keeping close to one’s peoples’ authentic culture and values is perhaps the only way to keep one’s identity protected against all kinds of negative and violent forces.

At the more palpable and realistic level, *Such a Long Journey* sensitively details the ‘long journey’ of Gushad Noble, who undergoes a number of vicissitudes. From the beginning, as we read the text, Gushad is a bit touchy, prone to reactions, very careful about details, and bit eccentric. This mental frame Gushad has acquired as a result of a number of transformations in his personal life as a Parsi. Destiny no doubt has played a cruel part in his growth and maturity. The important thing about *Such A Long Journey* is that it underlines the absurd, uncertain, contradictory and negative interventions in the life of modern man. Gushad is not a hero who travels to the underworld of myth or hallucination or dream, neither does he fly into surrealistic or hypnotic zones of fancy. On the other hand, Mistry keeps Gushad’s aspirations and their constant thwarting by chance and fate at the realistic, everyday pattern. The motif of journeying in the novel is therefore close to the average readers’ understanding of his own life too. The other and notable point in this personal quest of the hero is the demands on one’s life in the urban setting. The continuous pressure, anxiety and tension in the average urban man’s life – and that too at the lower middle-class level – is reduced to domestic, professional, social and economic cares and needs. If we look at Gushad’s life-pattern in the novel, it is easy to note that part of his problems – his financially tight situation, professional status, the anxiety about Sohrab’s joining the IIT, and later Roshan’s lone illness – are geared to his weak economic position. The real test of modern day urban man is to compromise his none too satisfying existence and money constraints with his idea of self-respect, dignity and moral uprightness. This, as Gushad finds, is by no means easy to achieve, for one’s honesty and clean dealings do not allow enough room to go in for anything compromising or dishonest. There are some like Dinshawji who can joke or laugh away at life’s tragedies and problems, but he too hides his ill health and problems and dies fighting this long journey. Gushad’s anger and sense of betrayal are understandable when he is forcibly involved in Jimmy Billimoria’s money scandal, for he has never dreamt of becoming other than what he is – an ordinary, lower middle-class man who only wishes basic happiness and peace in his small family and circle of friends and others. Yet, as though chance and fate would have it, he has to face the absurd and strange/quirks of accidental assaults by destiny in this form or the other, so that he remains continuously dogged by crisis, one after the other. Mistry has done something remarkable to equip Gushad with resilience, patience, pragmatism and optimism in the face of all this. In the tragic sense, it could be said about Gushad that the good often suffer for things they are not responsible, while the evil and the corrupt flourish despite all their wrongdoings and bad intentions. This is shown even at the political and moral level in exposing the national problems. The ironic twist to this suffering, especially in handling ten lakh rupees secretly, then taking them out again, watching Roshan’s health go down each day, and tolerating Sohrab’s insults, is that originally Gushad has been a strong, muscular man, full of will power and resolve. But life’s setbacks have reduced him to carry all these visible and invisible burdens. The past reveals this – how he was meant for bigger things when his father was rich and famous, how he leapt to save Sohrab from a fatal accident on the roadside, etc. The ultimate test of Gushad comes when he is forced to go to Delhi by Ghulam Mohammad to meet Jimmy Billimoria, in spite of the fact that he is absolutely disillusioned by the latter’s betrayal, being a close friend. Yet, he goes and listens to Jimmy with concern and shock, and comes back a changed man. Lastly, Gushad’s shock and dismay at the demolition of the sacred wall outside the building is nothing short of seeing his world destroyed, a world he had sought to improve with the help of the pavement artist. It is Tehmul’s death which finally breaks him up and makes him resigned to fate to face the lone journey, like so many others have done. In view of the novel’s title, it may be said that the ending is both somber and positive, because life itself is a strange mix of the good and the bad, happiness and tragedy, hope and despair. While Gushad prays, like always, with an air of acceptance and regret, the return of the prodigal Sohrab heals his wounds somewhat, and so, remembering Tagore’s words from *Gitanjali*, one has to ever

move with change and drift of things, to know and understand that till finality, the journey must continue.

C. A Note on the Postmodernist Context

Rohinton Mistry cannot be called a post-modernist writer in the way Rushdie, Milan Kundera, Atwood or several other writers can be understood. It is in his understanding of life's character and complex, fragmented world that Mistry comes close to treating his subjects in a post-modernist sense. A Postmodernist stand celebrates alternate view of things and rejects all kinds of dominant, hegemonic ideologies and master narratives. This is the first point where Mistry's work is relevant. Since *Such a Long Journey* is written with a view to representing minority culture and marginalized people, Mistry is extremely critical of dominant political, cultural and religious ideologies in hegemonizing reality and things. His view of India after the idealistic Nehru phase is negative, since it serves only the political agendas and programmes of those in power. Hence, a re-writing of the real history and situation becomes imperative to challenge the passive acceptance of dominance and power in all spheres. The Parsi narrative, in the postmodern sense, is a small narrative, and it has its own authenticity and reality. Mistry seeks to authenticate and celebrate the Parsi 'narrative' in every sense – historical, religious, cultural, social and linguistic.

Another facet of postmodern view of the world is that all knowledge, reality and truth is contingent, in other words, it is subject to questioning or challenge. If no truth is final, it implies that we have as many realities and truths as may be interpreted and authenticated. The initial postmodern reaction was against the western notion of Enlightenment – progress and humanism in the world that was possible only through rationalism, progress and the advance of history towards a civilizational goal. But taking a cue from there different races, nations and cultures have developed this view to suit their own situations. Mistry's view in *Such a Long Journey* is that the world and reality are basically fragmented, mixed and opposing. Instead of a donolithic, fixed view, we have several versions of truth, meaning and experience that comes from any number of sources. The Parsi or the 'other' reality therefore confronts the dominating, oppressive schemes of controlling those who do not have power and voice. *Such a Long Journey*, through the broad outer themes of national/international politics contests the American-Pakistani alignments which are nothing short of opportunism and power-control, to the disadvantage of others. At almost every level in the story, the mixed, hybrid and broken reality of things is stressed, which incidentally is the view of diasporic writing itself; it sees reality from insider-outsider spectacle to understand its contingency or unfixed nature better.

A strong feature of literary postmodernity is the emergence of the 'hybrid' text – the text which cuts across all semantic and linguistic boundaries, to do a kind of 'free' writing, transcending the fixed categories of the literary and non-literary writing. At one level, the novel excels in carnivalesque details about Bombay markets, streets, institutions, festivals and other well-known aspects. We find all kinds of mixed-up rituals and practices, cutting across Hindus, Christians, Parsis, Muslims and others finding place in the narrative. Mistry devotes a lot of time and space to describe the English language to suit his own purposes. Several styles and dialects, forms of speech taken from Gujarati, Marathi and other languages are spoken, to contaminate the so-called purity of the English language. This is, as is well-known, a key feature of post-colonial writers too, who have indigenized the English language to bring in local colour, regional and ethnic flavour in their works. Mistry does not hesitate to use scatological details (connected with dirt, excreta etc) to expose the dirt and squalor of Bombay, another aspect of the writer's freedom to use language. There are lots of sexual details presented in all their frankness in an uninhibited way. Dinshawji's flirtation with Laurie Cantino, his sexually intoned jokes, the details about the House of Cages, and finally Tehmul's suppressed sexuality, his masturbation, brings in a sexual explicit writing. The wall of religions ultimately brings in the unconventional treatment of religion, where they have become both a source of prayer, inspiration and 'kitsch' or pure public entertainment, like the pictures of film stars. There is a sprinkling of journalistic language in the novel as well. Mistry does believe that the advertising world – from radio, advertisements about consumer goods, film songs and political news – have a tremendous influence on the general public. The serious is patted against the ordinary, comic and consumerist. The consumerist world of late-capitalism is, after all, as Fredric Jameson says, one of the 'cultural logics of late capitalism'. Mistry, in view of the above details, certainly represents the new breed of Indian writers who have opened out to personal memory, ethnic history, debunking of psychological, anthropological, cultural and sexual aspects of experience.

Suggested Reading

The Text

The text, *Such a Long Journey* is available in a number of editions, though it was originally published by Faber and Faber in 1991. The early available edition is available in Penguin Books and Rupa & Co. Students can buy any of these editions.

Critical Books

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TUGHLAQ

Girish Karnard

Unit-VII Girish Karnard: Tughlaq

A drama is a piece of writing which is meant to be acted on the stage but ironically neither the tragedies of Seneca nor the plays written by most of the poets including the poets of the Victorian and the modern age were “made to be acted.” Drama should not be taken as any form of writing which has ‘dialogue’ and other properties of drama, for instance, ballet, masque and pantomime or modern closet plays or poetic fantasy. They do have some of the qualities of drama but they are not strictly speaking dramas.

The two sources from which drama grew are “imitation” and “passion.” The imitation has a simple meaning, that is, to copy but the term passion calls for some explanation. It is used to signify the exaggerated, intensified, lyrical or rhetorical expression of feeling. Passion was expressed in primitive ages not only by voice, but also by rhythmic motions of the body and drama, all over the world, has grown out of dancing quite as much as out of song. Not only passion, but also imitation was conventionalized in the mimetic dances.

The modern realistic drama is a pure and logical art from where other elements of the primitive drama have been sloughed off and given the independent form of musical drama known as opera and ballet. They do have the element of imitation that happens to be the essential element of drama. The art of drama presents itself in precisely similar forms prevalent among primitive and even savage people through out the world. Sanskrit word for drama – *natya* – originally means a dance. Likewise, the Greek masks were not an invention of the Hellenic genius to lend dignity to gods and heroes, but were a legacy from the primitive times. They were, says Professor Murry, “first magical, then sacred, and in the end at least a matter of dignified convention.” It is not rooted in magic, religion and ritual, it originated always in man’s attempts to explain the obvious mysteries of life, to propitiate the forces that control them and to enforce a system of ethics by an appeal to supernatural authority. If these were the practices in the primitive communities, the formal drama originated in religious festivals. The Greek drama, which eventually included some of the greatest tragedies the world has yet known, developed out of the rituals of the annual festivals of Dionysius; British drama began with the bits of dialogue (The Trope) intended to make the Easter celebrations in church more vivid and impressive; and it is known that there were religious and ritualistic origins for the Jewish drama, the Chinese drama, all European Christian drama and probably the Indian drama.

Ritual, as known today, still includes an element of drama and is an expression of instinctive desires. It is inescapably communal. Aristotle’s simple definition of drama as “imitated human action” is still most relevant, as it constitutes one of the essentials of drama. Another well-known definition, which proves another point of view, is that “A drama is an epic told in lyric poems.” An epic, by and large, is a narrative poem, a story of deeds, told objectively by some one who has heard them. A lyric poem is an expression of the inner or subjective emotion by one who has felt what he or she expresses. Drama, in common with the epic, is concerned in telling a story; however, the story is not told in the third person, objectively but in the very speech, action and emotions of the participants and thus involves lyrical expression. Of course there are other elements in both epic and lyric poetry, which may not go hand in hand in drama. In other words, drama is a picture or representation of human life in the succession or chain of events, which form a story, and is told in drama through dialogue and presented in action that shows successive emotion.

Plot is essential for drama. It is that framework of incidents, however simple or complex, upon which the drama is constructed into an artistic whole with a view to creating unity of impression or effect Every drama involves a conflict between what may be called the universal and the particular, with the triumph in the end of one or the other. In tragedy, the universal is some law in general acceptance among men, whether ethical and of man’s making or founded or religious sanction. The struggle is, therefore, of a serious nature as it involves rebellion against Fate, God or at the least against accepted human codes. Hence, the tragedy deals with deep and turbulent passions, those that lead to violence and crime. In comedy, on the contrary the universal is some convention of men and a welter of circumstances, which are likely to lead to certain results. The struggle of the individual is against such things that wit, cleverness, follies and manner and other lighter traits of human personality play a diverting part. Consequently, comedy leads to laughter as irresistibly as tragedy to tears. And in an ultimate analysis, essential difference between tragedy and comedy lies in the nature of the universal. Marjorie Boulton has made a very perceptive remark in her

book, *The Anatomy of Drama*:

“A true play is three dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended and the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions which occur literally and physically on the stage. Though in fact plays are often read in silence, if we are to study drama at all intelligently we must keep this in mind.”

Thus, it is pertinent to note that drama is a composite art and it requires for its success various accessories such as stage, actors and audience yet it is “a cultural activity... in fact drama is almost as natural to human beings as breathing.” Indian theatre was occupied with plays written in regional languages to which the audiences responded spontaneously. It was easy for the actors also to play those roles in their own mother tongue. Early Indian English writers could not enjoy this prerogative. Hence the growth of Indian drama in English suffered. English language was not intelligible to the masses and the playwrights also found it difficult to narrate the situations or write dialogues in crisp and natural manner in English that was not the language of their emotional make up. Commenting on the paucity of Indian drama in English, the great scholar K.R.S. Iyenger opens the chapter on Drama in his famous book *Indian Writing in English* thus:

“‘Indo- Anglican Drama’: isn’t it like talking about ‘snakes in Iceland’? Not quite, – but the problem is there, for while poetry, novels and non-fiction prose can be read in the silence of one’s own study, Drama can come to life only in the theatre. Lately, however, a change in the climate is perceptible.”

About the scarcity of the dramatic literature Murali Das Malwani remarked in his article “Indian Drama Today” which appeared in *Quest* No 64, Jan-March 1970 that

“As against every play performed or published, three novels, or six collections of poetry (including anthologies) are published.” In other words Indian English drama lags behind poetry and fiction both in quantity and quality.

(a) Indian English Drama in Pre-Independence India

The Indian dramatists writing in English have not fully ransacked the rich fund of material from the ancient lore, myth, legend and history but despite these limitations and hindrances Indian drama in English had made a beginning in the early nineteenth century. It made a humble beginning with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerji’s *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* in 1831. M.K. Naik confirms in *A History of Indian English Literature* that Indian English drama dates with the publication of this play from 1831. Elaborating the theme of the play that is the “inconsistencies and the blackness of the influential members of the Hindoo community” Banerji claims that it is a social play which presents the conflict between orthodoxy and the new ideas ushered in by the western education. It remained a solitary dramatic effort in India and the first play to present the East-West encounter. From the point of view of technique it is somewhat crude presentation of the conflict in the mind of the playwright. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet, translated three of his own Bangali plays into English: *Ratnavali* (1858) – a version of Harsha’s well-known Sanskrit play, *Sermista; is this Called Civilization?* (1871) and *Nation Builders* which was published posthumously in 1922. Ramkinoo Dutt’s *Manipura Tragedy* (1893) was another play to join the history of Indian drama written in the nineteenth century. It is self-evident that Indian English drama could not secure a firm foothold and build a tradition of its own about which M.K. Naik says:

“Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English drama in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, grew sporadically as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing.”

Among these three great dramatists, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the first chronologically speaking. He is a prolific artist and his creativity is inexhaustible. In Indian drama Tagore is known for the English transcreations as he translated some of his Bangali plays into English; they appeared in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1936). He often made extensive changes while subjecting the texts of original plays to rigorous condensation. Tagore’s transcreations

form a class apart and should not be compared with the plays translated by other writers. Tagore's plays deal with the mystery of human existence and complexity of human emotions like love, faith and even religion and death. The plays make an attempt to solve the actual conflict in human situation. He focuses on one problem or another only to point out that problem being a reflective of life; no clear-cut solution can ever be given. Tagore's plays are divided into two major groups: First, plays based on a set system of thought and are theme-oriented called thesis plays like *Sanyasi* or *The Aescetic*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Chitra*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Natir Puja* and *Red Oleanders*, and secondly psychological plays which carry the substance through the symbols. Even the characters become symbolic. For example, take the play like *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devyani*, *The Mother's Prayer*, *Karna and Kunti* to name a few. Therefore, these plays are to be experienced and interpreted more in the theatre of one's own mind than in the theatre of the brick and mortar. Tagore being charged with the spirit of new humanism, challenged most of the secluded centres of thoughts and actions misleading the conduct of the practitioners in general. For instance, consider his play *Sanyasi*, which is the English version of Tagore's Bengali play *Prakitir Parisodh* (which means Nature's Revenge). The play propounds the thesis about the celebration of life through love which liberates human beings and enlarges their vision. Tagore never advocates the philosophy of a renunciation of life. He accepts life as it is and enjoys the manifold beauties of life and nature enthusiastically. According to him a participation in the humble activities of daily life is essential for God-realization. In the play *Sanyasi*, the hero failed to realize the truth that God's pervades everywhere. He feels that he has attained the infinite by ignoring this world altogether but when he goes back to the world singing the victory over the forces of nature he is humiliated and disillusioned in the end. *The Cycle of Spring* is based on the idea that change is the law of nature. Therefore, all the changes are to be joyously accepted. If *Chitra* presents an illuminating vision of true love, *Sacrifice*, *Malini* and *Natir Puja* expose the problem of religious fanaticism. Even *Sacrifice* once again questions the religious bigotry of the orthodox Hindus and propagates his own humanistic concept of sacrifice in the play. Tagore's views on sacrifice challenge the traditional idea of human sacrifice to propitiate gods and goddesses. In *Red Oleanders* Tagore glorifies human love and human values. The theme of the play *Mukta-Dhara* is self-evident that the free flow of the human values is a natural behaviour and to hinder it in any way is to invite self-destruction. Tagore's psychological plays reveal his deep understanding of the feminine mind. These plays present a remarkable range of women characters of different age group and position and insight into the feminine mind. For instance, take Queen Sumitra, Devyani, Kunti and the Mother who have been drawn with rare skill and psychological insight in the plays entitled *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer*. Tagore's characters are used as his mouthpiece to present his ideological stance. They do not evolve or grow drastically different from what they initially were but they present the inner conflict of the head and heart. The principal characters tend to be symbolic and even attain allegorical significance in the thesis plays and archetypal in the psychological dramas where they attain a certain universality. Even though they do not have a free and complete development but they have a rich psychological and spiritual delineation.

Tagore imbibes in his art the best of the dramatic tradition of the West and the East that reveals itself in three important aspects of the theatre: (a) the stagecraft: Being an actor, director, producer and playwright himself he fully realized the needs and limitations of the dramatic art and took a keen interest in all accessories including the costume and the stage settings which are mostly non-realistic, romantic and remote to suit the romantic and legendary themes. (b) the dialogue: Tagore's dialogue is spontaneous and lyrical and they express the typical Indian ethos and culture. They carry the religious, moral and philosophical controversies. At times the dialogue is charged with the moral and social note. The sincerity of expression and intensity of feeling mingled with keen artistic quality save the dialogue from being monotonous. (c) the language: Tagore uses for his plays either the poetic prose or blank verse. The medium suits the emotional intensity and spiritual zeal. The language does have a didactic air which is, perhaps, its purpose as the plays are deeply rooted in the Indian ethos in its themes and characters and are "eminently expressive of his deepest convictions in creative terms" to use the words of M.K. Naik from his valuable book, *A History of Indian English Literature*.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) wrote five complete and six incomplete verse plays between 1891 and 1916. He wrote them directly in English imitating the blank verse drama of the Elizabethans. Of these the earliest two fragments

written, when he was a student in London, are: *The Witch of Ilni: A Dream of the Woodlands* (1891) and *Achab and Esar* (n.d.) To his Baroda period (1893-1906) belong the plays *The Viziers of Bassora – A Dramatic Romance*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Rodogune* and three fragments: *The Maid in the Mill: Love Shuffles the Cards*, *The House of Brute* and *The Birth of Sin* (which appeared as a poetic dialogue in *Collected Poems and Plays*, 1942). *Prince of Edur* (a revised version of the *Prince of Mathura*) was written in 1907 while *Eric: A Dramatic Romance* and *Vasavadutta* were written between 1912 and 1916. With the exception of *Perseus the Deliverer*, the rest of the complete plays were published between 1957 and 1960, *Perseus the Deliverer* was first serialized in *Bande Mataram*, Calcutta in 1907. Finally it was included in the *Collected Poems and Plays* (1942) All the eleven plays have now appeared in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library Edition, Volume 6 and 7 – *Collected Plays and Short Stories: Part I and II* (1971).

Sri Aurobindo's plays are noticeable for their variety of period and locale, ranging from ancient Greek times to medieval India and covering diverse lands and cultures including Iraq, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. However, all the full-length plays are in blank verse and carry a stamp of a typical Elizabethan cast. In spite of the variety of settings, themes and characters, they "are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, – though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones."

Sri Aurobindo's fascination for the Elizabethan drama can be seen even in the early fragments – the *Witch of Ilni* and *Achab and Esar*. *The Viziers of Bassora*, based on a story from *The Arabian Nights* shows how a pair of young lovers is reunited after a series of trials, through the benevolence of Haroun Al Rasheed, Caliph of Bagdad. The contrast between the 'good' Vazier and 'bad' is the mainspring of the action. Similarly *Perseus the Deliverer* is "a romantic story of human temperament and life-impulses on the Elizabethan model" to use the words of the author himself. It vividly presents the conflict between the old and the new. The message of the play is that "the new must prevail – else chaos will come again" to use the words of K.R.S. Iyenger. Perseus too is located in Syria, but here the centre of attraction is not the hero, but Andromeda the heroine. *Rodogune* is Sri Aurobindo's only tragedy that is based on a love-triangle and is perhaps the most derivative of all Sri Aurobindo's dramatic creations. *Vasavadutta* is a variation on the story in the *Kathasagaritasagara*.

Sri Aurobindo's dramatic art has been crippled by profuse Elizabethan influences and in his plays he does not reveal the same originality both in thought and craftsmanship as in his poetry. They lack dramatic quality in language and dialogue. His characters "seem to think, speak and act less like authentic Indians than like Elizabethan personages in Indian garb" to use the words of M.K. Naik. As Prof. Iyenger rightly stated, "Sri Aurobindo was a prophet and a recluse, and he stood apart in unique solitariness, and anyhow his five plays were but a small fraction of his phenomenal literary output." However, Sri Aurobindo's plays have an appeal for the scholars and not for the common men. They display a great exuberance of thought and dialogue but they "they can not fully meet the demand of the stage and are at best closet dramas" to use S Krishna Bhatt's words from *Indian English Drama: A Critical Study*.

Both as a poet and playwright, H.N. Chattopadhyaya (1898—?) has always been noted for his fecundity and versatility. He has a number of plays and playlets to his credit. He began his career as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918), a light fantasy in prose and verse. *His Poems and Plays* (1927) contain seven verse plays on the lives of Indian saints: Pundalik, Saku bai, Jayadeva, Chokha, Mela, Eknath, Raidas and Tukaram; they are marked by a poetic quality as their language is remarkable for its sublimity. They are called hagiological plays and are less effective dramatically than his plays of social protest. His *Siddharta: Man of Peace* (1956), a play in eight acts on the life of Lord Buddha, is a good play but by no means a successful one.

H.N. Chattopadhyaya's *Five Plays* (1929) are in prose and are strongly coloured by his socialist leanings. *The Window*, *The Parrot*, *The Sentry's Lantern*, *The Coffin* and *The Evening Lamp*. They contain some of his characteristic features like his social consciousness, flair for realism, and his terse prose style. *The Window* and *The Parrot* offer glimpses into the lives of the poor as the former deals with the slum life of the brave Textile Workers of Parel, Bombay, to whom the play is dedicated and ends with the protest against the proposal to tax Light. They rush out shouting: "Light, Light in the worker's home — for ever, the latter is dedicated "to all those whose mortality is not

a parrot's cage." In *The Sentry's Lamp*, Chattopadhyaya probes into the consciousness of a bourgeois poet, a merchant and a worker, all the three awaiting the dawn when they are to be hanged. The poor worker says, "The Revolution will come...red like this dawn." The play is a symbolic expression of the hope of the dawn of a new era for the poor. *The Coffin* and *The Evening Lantern*. Although there is an uncomfortable alliance between symbolism and realism in the plays, they are too heavily coated with purpose. They have a tautness and intensity that is seldom found in Indian drama in English. They do manifest the 'new realism' of the early decades of the twentieth century.

Besides, Chattopadhyaya wrote an allegorical satire on the evil of modern civilization entitled *The Sleeper Awakened* (n.d.). His play *The Saint: A Farce* (1946) is a satire on religious hypocrisy as in the play an opium-addict is mistaken for a holy sage. *Kannappan or the Hunter of Kalahasti* (1950) is a 'lyric play' on the theme of the right of a lowly hunter to enter a temple. M.K. Naik rightly points out that

"Chattopadhyaya's plays fail owing to both his inability to create living characters speaking in an individual voice and to work out his themes in a viable dramatic terms. Their best claim to remembrance is a few passages of rich romantic verse."

However, it is indeed difficult to deny the fact that he was a creative writer of "infinite possibilities" as Sri Aurobindo affirmed.

When compared to Bengal, the early history of Indian drama in English is much briefer. Though the first theatre in Bombay, the Bombay Amateur Theatre, was built in 1776, its dramatic activity was exclusively confined to performances by visiting European touring companies. With the rise of Marathi and Gujarati drama heralded by Annasaheb's epoch-making production of *Shakuntal* in Marathi in 1880, the vernacular stage soon posed a formidable challenge to English drama. Still, there are some examples of Indian English drama in Bombay during the nineteenth century such as C.S. Nazir's verse play *The First Parsi Baronet* (1866), D.M. Wadia's *The Indian Heroine* (1877) based on the events of 1857 and P.P. Meharjee's *Dolly Parsen* (1918).

Madras began later than Bombay in writing plays in English but soon surpassed it. In 1875 Madras Dramatic Society was founded and Oriental Drama Club followed it in 1882. Krishnamchary of Bellary founded the first South Indian dramatic society, The Sarasa Vinidini Sabha, in 1890. The dramatists of this period were V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar (1871-1954), P.V.R. Raju, J. Virabhadra Rao, A. Srinivasacharya, Krishnamacharya, S. Ranga Iyer, A.C. Krishnaswamy, R.S. Narayanaswami, J.S.R. Sarma, T.B. Krishnaswamy and K.S. Ramaswami Sastri.

A bilingual playwright, T.P. Kailasam (1884-1946), who wrote in English and Kannada, was acquainted with the rich tradition of Kannada theatre and the glorious cultural heritage of his country. He made an outstanding contribution to drama and used myth and history for dramatic purpose adroitly. His significant plays are: *The Burden*, *Fulfilment*, *The Purpose*, *Karma: the Brahmin's Curse*, *A Monologue* and *Keechaka*. His plays are based on Puranic themes, which are interpreted in the modern context. He is very successful in rendering Puranic characters and it appears that in them "there is a touch of iconoclasm but actually the idealism is deeper than iconoclasm," to use the words of Iyenger who further adds:

"Although Kailasam's total output is by no means impressive, these few plays are enough to establish his claim to be considered an original talent that tried, not unsuccessfully, to achieve superb self-expression through the medium of drama."

Among the writers of verse plays, a reference may be made to here to Dhan Gopal Mukherji's *Layla majnu* (1916), Bharti Sarabhai's *The Well of People* (1943) and *Two women*, a play in prose which is often charged with poetic feelings and packed with thought. She was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and her plays highlight the conflict and tension caused by East-West encounter. J.M. Lobo-Prabhu's plays are contained in *Collected Plays*. His play like "Apes in the Parlour," which is a biting skit on the sophisticated life, "The Family Cage," that presents of a widowed sister in a joint family, and "Flags of the Heart" that is a sentimental piece based on love thwarted by caste and has a sentimental conclusion. As Iyenger points out, "Lobo-Prabhu's energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise situations; but his characters are rarely alive, and his denouements are seldom wholly convincing."

There is, then, S. Fyzee-Rahamin's *Daughter of Ind* (1940), which is a story of an untouchable girl's love for her master, an idealistic Englishman. The play has a power of its own as politics, satire, sentimentality, romance and imagination join hands. Above all, it is the character of the girl, Malti, "who was the candle that burnt itself to give light to other" which adds life to the theme of the play. Suryadutt's *The Trial Celestial* (1940), Surendra Nath Ghose's *Colours of a great City; Two Playlets – The Defaulters* and *Pippa Dances*, V.N. Bhushan's *Samyukta* and *Mortal Coils*, Armando Menzes's social comedy *Caste*, R.N. Narayan's *The Watchman of the Lake*, K.R.S. Iyengar's *Samti* and *Her Spouse or the Storm in a Tea Cup* and *The Battle of the Optionals* and D.K. Roy's *Life of Chaitanya* are some of the milestones in the development of Indian English drama.

Indian English drama, despite its persistence and some monumental achievements, could not attain the same artistic quality which its poetry, prose and novel could share. Prof. Iyengar himself gives one of its main reasons when he stated:

"The paucity of good actable English dramas written by Indians is mainly attributable to the fact that the natural medium of conversation with us – excepting for the sophisticated who live in the cities and larger towns, in the Universities or in certain Government offices or business houses - is the mother tongue rather than English, and hence, unless the characters and situations are carefully chosen, it would be difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound convincing. Of course, there are certain perennial situations that transcend place, time and language."

Only known Indian play written in English from North India during this period is *Death or Dishonour* by an anonymous author published in Dehra Dun in 1914. These are some of the playwrights who wrote during the Pre-Independence India. Their plays, though not very successful, have their own contribution in enlarging the frontiers of Indian English drama.

(b) Indian English Drama in Post-Independence India

Even in Post-Independence period drama, unlike poetry and fiction, has not registered very notable gains essentially being a composite art involving the playwright, the actor and the audience in a shared experience on the stage – something of which other literary forms are free. The Indian regional languages monopolized the theatre whereas Indian English as given the opportunity for occasional performance only. It is true that Post-Independence drama did benefit by growing interest abroad and a number of plays by dramatists like Asif Currimbhoy, Partap Sharma and Gurcharan Das were successfully staged in Europe and the United States of America. However, this did not lead to a regular school of Indian English drama at home. M.K. Naik makes a very candid though touching remark that

"This was mainly because the encouragement which drama received from several quarters immediately after Independence was monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages, while Indian English drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousin's tables."

Highlighting the problem of Indian English drama, Gurusharn says; "It is indeed laudable effort on the part of Theatre Group in Bombay and other agencies to stage the plays by some of the doyens of modern Indian English drama". Actually, the first Five Year Plan after Independence encouraged the performing arts as an effective means of public enlightenment and National School of drama was established in Delhi where National Drama Festival was started and the Sangeet Natak Akademi was founded in 1954. *Enact*, a magazine solely devoted to drama, has been rendering a memorable service to the development of drama. Its editor, Rajinder Paul, is also a noted playwright whose contribution to the promotion of drama in English is great and lasting.

Though Tagore – Aurobindo – Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continues But with a difference, in the hands of Manjeri Ishvaran, G.V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy. G.V. Desani's *Hali* (1950) is much more complex and singular piece of dramatic art, which has been highly admired both by European and Indian critics for its originality. It is an autobiographical play and Desani himself explains its genesis:

"I had a personal tragedy – a serious love affair. Hali is a monument to this affair and tragedy. It took me a very long time to write Hali. I planned it so carefully as to make people moved to tears and therefore reduced of the whole to the essentials without any padding whatsoever. I was then

carrying a deep hurt in my heart and Hali was to be a gesture of loyalty to the love I bore a friend. After this tragedy I felt so helpless that I would have been killed by the sorrow but for some kind friends.”

The play, *Hali*, received due praise for its originality, its symbolism, its rich imagery and its sheer “apocalyptic quality.” K.R.S. Iyenger has made a very insightful observation about the play when he says:

“A short poetic play, Hali, is an attempt to project the story of a ‘passion’: in other words, Hali’s confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communication with Love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place.”

Another important verse play, *The Flute of Krishna* (1950) is for the flight of imagination and the final message that “Utter dedication to the Lord is never in vain.”

Indian English drama of the post-independence era shows a rich diversity of genre like comedy, tragic-comedy, tragedy, farce, history plays and fantasy which makes drama a fruitful and thoughtfully cultivated field of creative activity. Asif Currimbhoy (1928), who is the most prolific playwright with a genuine feeling for drama and an outstanding sensitivity and sense for the theatrical value, has been able to establish himself as one of the greatest living Indo-English dramatist of our times. He has written more than thirty plays which are published in four volumes and the first among them being *The Tourist Mecca*. Variety and versatility both are the twin distinguishing marks of his plays. There can be no doubt regarding Currimbhoy’s fecundity as a dramatist. As he has written one act plays like *The Clock* and *The Refugee*, two-act plays like *Goa* and *Doldrummers*, three-act plays like *Inquilab* and four-act plays like *Sonar Bangla*. Currimbhoy has written plays on a wide variety of subjects such as history, current politics, socio-economic problems, the East-west encounter, Psychological problems, philosophical ideas, religious themes and art. He handles all the forms like comedy, farce, melodrama, fantasy, history, and tragedy, with ease as he has a flair for playwriting. Prof. Iyengar rightly comments, “He can contrive interesting situations, his dialogues are arresting, and he has a sense of atmosphere; and his plays are actable.”

Among the current themes the political issues greatly attract his attention. The major political events, which have special appeal for him, are partition and its aftermath in *The Captives* (1963), the liberation of Goa from Portuguese domination in *Goa* (1964), the coming of freedom to a tropical island in the Malaysian archipelago in *Monsoon* (1965), Indian freedom movement in *An Experiment in Truth* (1969), the Naxalite Movement in *Inquilab* (1970), the Bangladesh War in *The Refugee* (1971), and *Sonar Bangla* (1972), the Chinese invasion of Tibet in *Om Mani Padme Hum* (1972), the vicissitudes of Indo-China in *Angkor* (1973), the student agitation in Gujrat in *The Dissident M.L.A.* to name some of them. As M.K. Naik points out

“Most of these plays have a strong ‘documentary’ element about them and there is no attempt to understand and project in dramatic terms the ideological implications of the political conflicts dealt with. The dramatist appears to be primarily interested in the thrill of the exciting events rather than in the thought-process which shaped them. The result is sheer reportage; and when Currimbhoy gives free rein to his imagination, the upshot is often crude and contrived symbolism....”

Commenting on Asif Currimbhoy’s contribution as a dramatist, C.Paul Verghese writes:

“Currimbhoy is a craftsman who can move from subject to subject, but develops no vision of his own... Currimbhoy seems to seek as escape from the conventional rules of dramatic composition such as the unfolding of the plot and denouement. Not only in the construction of his plots but also in the choice of the subject matter he shows this freedom. ”

Like Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma (1940—) is also a skilled craftsman. His play, *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) presents a picture of the Red-light area in Bombay is to be commended for its thematic boldness but is marred by the sensational superficialities. The play was performed on two continents abroad, but was banned in Bombay. Similarly, another play, *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970) also deals with theme of sex. The play is a mixture of melodrama and tragedy. Here a young man Virendra comes to know that he is an illegitimate child of a mother raped successively

by a Muslim and an Englishman, after having been deserted by her lover, a Hindu professor, Gopal. Finally Virendra and Professor kill each other. However, there is a keen sense of situation and effective dialogues, noticeable local colour and pointed criticism of social hypocrisy.

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2003), who has made a distinctive and memorable contribution to poetry, has written five plays on his favourite theme – hollowness of the urban middle class, futility of social modes and the institution of marriage. *Three Plays* (1969) includes *Nalini*, a comedy in three acts, *Marriage Poems: A Tragi-Comedy*, and *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce*. *Nalini* is the only full-length play which has “the double personality of the artist” and two successful but immature business executives. *Marriage Poem* presents a middle class husband caught in the cross-fire of marital duty and love; and *The Sleepwalkers* is a diverting take-off on national preconceptions and prejudices. These plays provide a healthy social criticism through drama. Irony, wit and satire are skillfully used to expose the vanity of urban middle class. Ezekiel’s *Song of Deprivation* (1969), a short play, was published separately. Though he has a keen sense of the dramatic as his later poems also reveal, Ezekiel did not attempt at writing major drama.

Lakhan Deb has written three plays – *Tiger’s Claw*, *Vivekanand* and *Murder At The Prayer Meeting*. The first and the third are the historical plays. *Tiger’s Claw* is a verse play in three acts which dramatizes the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. *The Murder At the Prayer Meeting* deals with the murder of Mahatama Gandhi and reminds one of Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*. Deb skillfully employs blank verse but his rhymed verse is crude.

Gurucharan Das’s *Larins Sahib* (1970), a play in three acts, is a chronicle play that deals with the nineteenth century India, especially with Henry Lawrence of the Punjab and his three roles - viz, the enlightened empire-builder, the latter-day ‘Lion of the Punjab’ and the little cog in the wheels of the East India Company machine. What distinguishes this play from other Indian English plays is the successful use of Indian English. Das’s *Mira* (1971) vividly presents Mira’s selfless God-love with all the sophistication of contemporary theatre. It was successfully produced as a ballet in New York and as a play in Bombay. His play *Jakhoo Villa* deals with the theme of decadence in modern Hindu family in Simla.

Gieve Patel’s *Princes* is a study of the small Parsi community and deals with the conflict over the possession between two Parsi families of a child who becomes invalid and later on dies. The play is significant because it creates a situation that most Indians can identify with, that is the obsession with male children and also because it uses a language that characters can speak without straining our credulity. It shows that there is a possibility of using the English language of sub-cultures creatively and not merely for the comic purposes. His second play *Savaksa* appeared in 1982 and its extracts were published in *The Indian Express*, 28th Feb. the same year. The play is about the 60 years old Savaksa who wants to marry the 20 year old Perin, but her elder sister, Hutoxi, intervenes to prevent if possible this monstrous alliance. Once again, the play is about a Parsi family, and the spoken English has a nervous power, and the theme transcends the Gujarati or Parsi milieu.

Girish Karnard (1938 —), Kannada actor, director and playwright who wrote *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadan*. He himself translated *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) into English. *Tughlaq* is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq of the fourteen-century India. Karnard projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan and himself admitted that he found “Tughlaq’s contemporary”. Karnard deviated from history when it was the need of his artistic design. *Hayavadana* is a bold experiment in the use of folk motifs. It is based on the ancient *Kathasaritsagar* tale that Thomas Mann used for his novel *The Transposed Heads*. K.R.S. Iyenger rightly observes that

“In all his three plays – be the theme historical, mythical or legendary – Karnard’s approach is ‘modern’, and he deploys the conventions and motives of folk art like masks and curtains to project the world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements.”

Karnard’s plays are conspicuous for the skillful handling of the literary devices like irony and dialogue that has given him international praise as a playwright.

M.V. Rama Sharma’s *Collected Plays* (1982), which is a collection of eleven plays on a variety of themes, deserves

a special mention. His plays like *Youth and Crabbed Age*, *Like to Like* and this *Busy World* shows the influence of G.B. Shaw. *Shakuntala*, *Marpessa* and *Urvashi* are the plays based on the theme of love. *Towards Marriage* and *Carnival* are realistic and satirical plays and *The Mahatma* (1977) highlights the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi.

Santha Rama Rau brilliantly adopted E.M. Forster's famous novel *A Passage to India* to write a play. Among other plays of interest are: V.K. Gokak's *The Goddess Speaks* (1948); K.Nagarajan's *Chidambaram: Achronicle Play* (1955); Aarti Nagarwalla's *The Bait* (1969); M.D. Melwani's *Deep Roots* (1970) – a study of upper middle class alienation and hypocrisy; Dilip Hiro's *To Anchor A Cloud* (1972), and two one-act plays: *Apply, Apply, No Reply* (1977) and *A Clean Break* (1978); Pritish Nandy's *Rites For Plebeian Statue*; P.S. Vasudev's *Lord Ravan of Lanka* (1974); Shiv. K. Kumar's *The Last Wedding Anniversary* (1975); K.A. Abbas and Pragji Dossa's *Barrister-At-Law: A Play about the Early Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1977); Manohar Malgonkar's historical play *Line of Mars* (1978); and Syed Amanuddin's *The Kind who Sold his Wife* (1978) which deals with the ancient legend of King Harishchandra.

Here are several other plays, which have appeared in periodicals like *Enact* and others. The *Enact* plays include Anil Saari's *Prefaces* (1969); K.S. Rangappa's *They Live Again* (1969); Dina Mehta's *The Myth-Makers* (1969); Mrinalini Sarabhai's *Vichar* (1970); Kamla Das's *A Mini-Trilogy* (1971); Madhu Rye's *I Am a Butterfly* (1974); Snehlata Reddy's *Sita* (1974) and B. Narayan's *The Onlookers* (1975) to name a few.

Plays long and short continue to be written, published and occasionally even produced. There are also a few plays, which are successfully produced but not yet published. Some playwrights like Krishna Gorowara have a great promise and his various plays have appeared in journals and magazines. He has an inborn talent for comedy, satire and irony and he exposes urban sophistication in the plays like *The Way up*, *Call it a Day*, *Refineries Unlimited*, and *Indo Anglicans in Anglia*. Lawrence Bantleman's *The Award* (1973); K.S. Duggal's *To Each a Window: Six Radio Plays* (1981); Louella Lobo Prabhu's *Broken Melody* (1981) and other plays; Masti Venkatesa Iyengar's *Kalidasa* deserve a special mention. Prof. Iyengar makes an apt remark:

"In the light of what has been detailed above, it may not be wide of the mark to say that Indian drama in bEnglish will have but a limited vogue, a minority appeal, and yet on that score it is not to be written off as being of no consequence whatsoever."

Not only that, Indian drama has attained a recognizable popularity and it has become a thoughtfully cultivated form of writing in the field Indian Writings in English.

Girish Karnard: His life and Works

Girish Karnard has become one of India's foremost playwrights. He has earned international praise as an actor, poet, playwright, director, critic and translator. Born on May 19, 1938, in Matheran, a town near Bombay in Maharashtra. Girish Karnard hails from the semi-Marathi and semi-Kannada Saraswat community. While growing up in Sirsi, he had ample opportunity for watching plays in Kannada, the language that he chose to write in his plays in He used to go to Company *Natak* performances with his father, who was a doctor and had a free pass. His encounter with the *Natak* companies at the early stage of his life made a lasting impression on his mind as he himself says:

"It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, called Natak Mandilis or Natak companies, would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on. My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre, though some Mandilis still survive in North Karnataka in a very generate state. Bur in those days they were good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me."

However, his parents considered *Yakshagana* performances inferior to their taste, the young Karnard went to such plays with the servants. These two varieties of drama have gone into the shaping of the technical aspects of Karnard's plays, though he has imbibed the best from the Western theatre too. During his formative years, Karnard went

through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between Western and native tradition. It was in India of the Fifties and the Sixties that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life – adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. The choice, in other words, was between the classical tradition set rigorously by Aristotle and the native tradition. Karnard was fascinated by the traditional plays, nonetheless the Western playwrights he had read during his college days opened up for him “a new world of magical possibilities.”

Since his father was an *Arya Samajist*, Karnard did not have the orthodox way of life. For this precise reason, he is often drawn to the orthodox forms of life, especially those of the high caste, in his plays and films. In his early life, he had a serious ambition to become a famous poet in English but he turned out to be a dramatist and that too not in his mother tongue which is Konkani. As a young man studying at Karnataka University, Dharwar, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics and Statistics in 1958, Karnard decided to become a writer and earn an International literary fame by writing in English. Upon graduation, he went to England and studied at Magdalen College, Oxford as Rhodes scholar from 1960 to 1963 and received a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. On returning to India in 1963, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras. This offered him an opportunity to get exposed to various kinds of writing in India and elsewhere. Such influences made an indelible mark on the creative genius of Girish Karnard. He became a Bhabha Fellow from 1970 to 1972. He achieved international fame he had dreamed of, but not for English poetry. Instead, Karnard would earn his reputation through decades of consistent literary output on his native soil.

When he was preparing to go to England, amidst the intense emotional turmoil, he found himself writing a play. One day when he was reading *Mahabharata*, he read the story of Yayati. He started writing without any premeditation. His first play *Yayati* written in 1961 is retelling of the Hindu Myth on the theme of responsibility. It was written neither in English nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead, it was composed in his adopted language Kannada. The play, which chronicled the adventures of mythical characters from *Mahabharata*, was an instant success and was immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages. Here Puru as an obedient son accepts his father's old age – great sacrifice indeed. Yayati wanted someone else in his kingdom to accept his old age in exchange of money, land and even part of his kingdom. But no one is prepared for the sacrifice. Ultimately, Puru accepts with a great sense of respect to his father. But alas! His wife Chitrlekha can not cope with it. She drinks poison and ends her life. At the end of the play, Yayati takes back the old age from his son Puru who has to witness the death of his wife.

Karnard, who read all kinds of books, went through a book of Indian History. And when he came to Tughlaq, he said, “Oh ! Marvellous. That is what I want.” This was the subject in tune with the times. The result was Karnard's second play, *Tughlaq* (1962) which is the first in ‘New drama in India’ – a series which will comprise outstanding, contemporary Indian plays. It is based on history. The play explores the paradox of the idealistic Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, whose reign is considered one of the more spectacular failures in Indian History. Karnard deviates from history when it is essential to create artistic and dramatic effects. What is more interesting and striking in *Tughlaq* historically is the fact that Tughlaq is the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi and one of the greatest failure also. Within the span of 20 years this tremendous man had gone to pieces. This was due to both his idealism as well as his shortcomings such as impertinence, cruelty and the feeling that he had the correct answer. Karnard's main aim is to highlight the contradictions in Sultan's complex personality, who is both a visionary and a man of action, devout and irreligious, generous and unkind, human and barbarian. Tughlaq's two associates – Barani, the scholarly historian and Najib, the practical politician represent two aspects of Tughlaq's personality.

One can enjoy the play on the stage without paying much attention to its rich and complex symbolism and subtle weaving of its different motifs. The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle and has dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Aazam – the two opportunists who take the best possible advantage of Tughlaq's idealistic policies and befool him – to which theatre audiences respond readily. Another reason for Tughlaq's appeal to Indian audience is that it is a play of the sixties, and reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country. In other words, he found Tughlaq's history contemporary. Hence it is called “a compelling allegory on the Nehruvian era.”

The play tends to be more than a political allegory. It has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's character relates to the philosophical questions on the nature of man and destiny of a whole kingdom which a dreamer like him controls. Karnard's Tughlaq bears several resemblances with Shakespeare's Richard II as in both the plays the protagonists are temperamental and whimsical. The play was a tremendous success with the reading public and it achieved greater popularity on the stage as the actors have liked to do the role of the emperor. However, *Tughlaq* is noticeable for consummate and flawless technique, precision and compactness, irony and paradox, symbolism and modernity. Karnard's command over language is commendable which makes dialogue precise and crisp. By the time it was performed by the National School of Drama, Karnard had established himself as one of the most promising playwrights in the country. He soon quit his post at the Oxford University press, decided to focus all of his energies on his writing.

Karnard's third play *Hayavadana* (1970) is based on *Kathasaritsagar* – Vaital Pachavinshati, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. But Karnard had borrowed it through Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in *The Transposed Heads*, a short novel. The Sanskrit tale told by a ghost to an adventurous king, gains further mock-heroic dimensions in Mann's version. The original play poses a moral problem while Mann uses it to ridicule conception of life that differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. Karnard's play poses a different problem, that is of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. Devadatt, the intellectual and Kapila, 'the man of the body' are very close friends - one mind and one heart – as the Bhagvata describes them. Devadatta marries Padmini. Kapila and Padmini fall in love and she too starts drifting towards him. The friends kill themselves in a scene, hilariously comic but at the same time full of profound dramatic implications. Padmini transposes their heads giving Devadatta Kapila's body and Kapila Devadatta's. The result is a confusion of identities, which reveals the ambiguous nature of human responsibility. Padmini, after the exchange of heads, had felt that she had the best of both of them, but slowly she gets disillusioned, she has the capacity for complete experience, her situation is beautifully summed up by the images of the river and the scarecrows in the choric songs. The end of the play is quite interesting. A dual leaves both the friends dead and subsequently Sati of Padmini has been presented but this end is not tragic. The deaths serve the absurdity of situation. What Karnard wants to convey is that the world is full of incomplete individuals, indifferent dolls that speak etc. The world is indifferent to the desires and frustrations, joys and sorrows of human beings.

The sub-plot of *Hayavadana* has a great comic and ironical relevance. The horseman's search for completeness ends comically. He becomes a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the human head. Karnard deftly employs all the conventions and motifs of folk tales and folk theatre-masks, dolls and the story within the story. Commenting on the technique of the play M.K.Naik says in his book *A History of Indian English Literature*:

"Karnard does not succeed fully in investing the basic conflict in the play with the required intensity, but his technical experiment with an indigenous dramatic form here is a triumph which has opened up fresh lines of fruitful exploration for the Indian English playwrights."

Karnard has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience. This is the main theme of the play *Hayavadana*.

For four decades, Karnard has continued to compose top-notch plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary themes. To sum up it can be reiterated that the publication of *Yayati* in 1961 and especially of *Tughlaq* in 1964 established Karnard as a master dramatist. Subsequently he published *Hayavadana* (1971), *Angumalige* (1977), *Hittina Hunja* (1980) *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Tale-Danda* (1990) and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995) he wrote all his eight plays in Kannada; these have been translated into major Indian languages including the national language Hindi. Five of his plays – *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain* – have been translated into English. He has also forayed into the jungle of cinema, working alternately as an actor, director and screenwriter, and earning numerous awards along the way. At the age of sixty, however, Karnard is vowing to give up cinema for the stage. "I've had a good life," he says. "I have managed to do all I could wish for— even be a government servant! Now I feel whatever time I have left should be spent doing what I best like –writing plays." It

is a remarkable feeling and could come only to one who has been duly recognized and well rewarded for his efforts. Karnard has been exceptionally lucky and successful as the details of his awards shows.

Karnard's awards include the Mysore State Award for *Yayathi* (1962), the Government of Mysore Rajyotsava Award (1970), and President's Gold Medal for the Best Indian Film for *Samskara* (1970), the Homi Bhabha Fellowship for creative work in folk theatre (1970-72), the Sangeet Natak Academy (National Academy of Performing Arts) Award for Indian play of the year for *Hayavadana* (1972), the National Award for Excellence in Direction for *Vamsha Virksha* (shared with B.V. Karanth – 1972), the Mysore State Award for the Best Kannada film and the Best Direction for *Vamsha Virksha* (1972), the President's Silver Medal for the Second Best Kannada film for *Kaadu* (1974), the Padma Shri Award (1974), the National Award for the Best Kannada film for *Ondanondu Kaaladalli* (1978), the National Award for the Best Script for *Bhumika* (shared with Shyam Benegal and Satyadev Dubey – 1978), the Film Fare Award for the Best Script for *Godhuli* (shared with B.V. Karanth – 1978), the Best Bengal Film Journalists Association Award for the Best Actor in *Swami* (1978), the Karnataka Nataka Academy Award (1984), the Nandikar Culcutta Award for Playwriting (1989), the Golden Lotus for Best Non-Feature Film for *Kanaka Purandara* (1989 the National Award for the Best Non-Feature Film on Social Issues for *The Lamp in the Niche* (1990), "Writer of the Year" Award from Granthaloke Journal of the Book Trade for *Taledanda* (1990), Karnataka State Award for the Best Supporting Actor in *Santa Shishunala Shareef* (1991), the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work for *Nagamandalas* (1992), the B.H. Sridhar Award for *Taledanda* (1992), the Padam Bhushan Award (1992), the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Best Play for *Taledanda* (1992), the Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India Award (1992), the National Award for the Best Film on Environmental Conservation for *Cheluvi* (1993), a Special Honour Award from the Karnataka Sahitya Academy (1994), the Sahitya Academy Award for *Tale Danda* (1994), and the Gubbi Veeranna Award (1996-97), and the Jyanpith Award (1999). He also served as Director of the Film and Television Institute of India (1974-75), President of the Karnataka Nataka Academy (1976-78), Indian Co-Chairman for the joint Media Committee of the Indo-U.S. sub-Commission on education and Culture (1984-93), Visiting professor and Fulbright Scholar in Residence at the University of Chicago (1987-88), and Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy of Performing Arts (1988-93). This sort of enlistment of the awards is meant to convey only two things: (a) that he has been consistently busy in literary out on his native soil and (b) he earned his reputation through out the decades due to his integrity and efforts in various fields which made him eventually achieve the international fame he had dreamed of.

Girish Karnard as a Dramatist

In the "Author's Introduction to *Three Plays* Karnard gives a picture of the socio-political-historical context in which he began to write plays and observes:

"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 then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved."

It remains a fact that with political freedom did not come the personal and human freedom. In other words, the people were yet to feel themselves independent, the Indian leaders went ahead with their grandiose plans of national development and reconstruction, but their unscrupulous followers went along with their counter-plans of selfish development. The net result was complete disenchantment with the independent India, which has taken alarming proportions today. The noble ideals of patriotism, liberty, equality, justice, and so on were thrown to the winds. Consequently, every sensitive artist reacted to the depressive and oppressive environment in his own way. Karnard's deeply humanistic responses are reflected in all his plays. His latest play *Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, in fact, commemorates the Golden Jubilee of Indian Independence.

Girish Karnard originally belongs to the best tradition of Kannada drama, which found its finest expression in the plays

of T.P. Kailasam, Huyilgol, Garuda, Samsa and Adya. Various dramatic traditions amalgamated, grew and developed in Kannada literature. For instance, Garuda's *Paduka Pattabhisheka* and C.V. Venkata Ramia's *Mandodari* are based on *Ramayana*; Samsa's *Suguna Gambhira* and Masti's *Talikote* are historical plays; Huyilgol's *Shiksha na Sambhrama*, Kailasam's *Home Rule* and Adya's *Harjanwara* are realistic social plays and Karanth's *Garbha Gudi* and Mugali's *Namadhari* are satirical plays. Romantic plays, Comedies, tragedies, poetic plays and blank verse plays too were successfully attempted. Karnard was deeply influenced by these trends in Kannada drama and took legend, history and myth as the main source for his three important plays – *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*, but as compared to other plays in Kannada literature; Karnard's plays have new directions. In other words, Karnard has moved away from the regionalist tradition that had given Kannada literature its identity in the early years of the century. Not only that he has completely rejected the professional stage established by Kailasam and Sri Ranga and tried to bring in his plays a first-hand knowledge of practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique.

No doubt, contemporary Indian drama can boast of a host of great playwrights like Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnard. All of them are regional dramatists in the sense that they write their plays in the regional languages like Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada respectively. They have together produced in Karnard's words, 'the best plays in the last thousand years.' Like the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett who wrote his immortal plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, in French and then translated them into English to become an unassailable icon of contemporary British drama. Karnard has authored his monumental plays - *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and The Rain* in Kannada and then rendered them into English to emerge as the emblem of a vibrant and rich contemporary Indian English drama for the whole world.

Karnard could achieve so much due to his extraordinary dramatic genius and wholesome opportunities he had with gifted directors like B.V. Karanth, Alyque Padmasee, Ebrahim Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey, Om Shivpuri and Shyamanand Jhalan, to name a few. Above them all, it is Karnard's creative imagination which is thoroughly and originally Indian that made him say courageously: "my three years in England had convinced me western theatre had nothing to offer us." The creative writers and critics like V.K. Gokak and A.K. Ramanujan explore the characteristic qualities of Karnard's 'Indian imagination' – a phrase, which embraces the vast labyrinth of the multicultural sub-continent of India "encompassing the philosophical and religious beliefs, the flora and fauna, the historical developments and the political, social, and scientific transformations."

In his article "The Concept of Indianness with Reference to Indian Writing in English" Gokak raises two questions: "Who is an Indian?" and "What is Indianness?" He observes concisely: "An Indian, then, is a person who owns up the entire Indian heritage and not merely a portion of it. This integral cultural awareness is an indispensable feature of Indianness." Karnard was preparing himself assiduously to 'own up' the British culture, but he found himself "nailed to my past" to borrow his own words. In this sense it can be stated that he is a living martyr in the cause of Indian drama. Perhaps Karnard is the first Indian dramatist to reflect the typical Indian characteristics in his plays as he has consciously resisted the influence of the Western theatre. Karnard himself has drawn attention to this significant fact.

Indian imagination, then, is the holistic creative process that is deeply rooted in the Indian soil in all shades and shapes: geographical, racial, linguistic, stylistic, thematic, cognitivist, behaviouristic, and particularistic. For the discussion of these features in Karnard's plays a little more specific categories can be employed. These include subject matter, dramatic form, setting, myths and legends, literary allusions, habits and beliefs, karma and rebirth, caste and language.

Karnard has invariably drawn the subject matter for his plays from the Indian culture: myths, legends, folk tales and histories. *Yayati* and *The Fire and The Rain* are based on two subsidiary stories from *Mahabharata*, *Tughlaq*, *Tale-Danda* and *Dreams of Tipu Sultan* are concerned with three significant Indian historical personalities. If *Yayati* reinterprets an ancient myth from *Mahabharata* in the modern context as it deals with the existential theme of responsibility in the face of blind indulgence in the worldly pleasures, *Tughlaq* is known for the king's idealistic efforts to reform India politically and socially. *Tipu Sultan* is cherished for his revolutionary zeal to challenge the British Expansion. Both *Naga-Mandala* and *Hayavadana* are mythical and folkloristic. They are centred on women,

children and the playwright. They are also rich and strong in their flavour of indigenous tradition. While *Naga-Mandala* is framed on two Kannada folk-tales, *Hayavadana* is moulded from the story of *Vetalapanchavimsati*, of Thomas Mann and of Karnard's invention. It is pertinent to note that *Yayati*, *Naga-Mandala* and *The Fire and the Rain* experiment with Sanskrit drama and the *Yakshagana* theatre. Clearly, the regional form has an edge over other forms in Karnard's theatre. Karnard himself admitted that he is indebted to the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht for the composition of *Hayavadana* in the *Yakshagana* tradition. Though the inspiration may have come from Brecht, Karnard's experience of *Yakshagana* plays during his boyhood at Sirsi cannot be ignored. The need for essentially Indian experimental theatre during the 1960s is also responsible for Karnard's going back to *Yakshagana*. The immediate occasions, however, were Satyadev Dubey's desire for "a play in the Bhagavata style" from Karnard, and B.V. Karanth's suggestion to make a play out of the story of the transposed heads instead of a film as Karnard was planning. It did not take long for the playwright to realize that the story could "make a marvelous theatre." As the use of masks became a solution for transposing the heads, he began to employ all other conventions of *Yakshagana*: songs, music, the Bhagavata, Ganesha pooja at the opening, the Bhagavata *vakyam* at the end, stylized action, and others.

However, Karnard's first play, *Yayati*, which he did not translate into English, was first translated into Hindi. It is a story of the kind of Hastinapur who has been addicted to sensual pleasures, shuns his responsibilities as a ruler to his subjects, as a husband to his wife, as a lover to his beloved and as a father to his son. He searches his identity in the worldly pursuits and refuses to grow out of his weaknesses. He ultimately suffers and so does his wife Devayani who also shirks her responsibility. Sharmishtha and her son perform their duties and fully realize its significance that only one who honours his duty has a right to expect others to do theirs. It proves that it is a play based primarily on the theme of responsibility. The second important theme is that of human relationship which has undergone a serious shock in the modern age. The critics rightly interpret that the mind of the modern man has been so much vitiated by the worldly gains and the sensuous passions that it has corrupted it altogether. As a result man has totally forgotten the imperishable human values of life. It is not an exaggeration to say that today's man is not better than *Yayati* of *Mahabharata*. The play is highly relevant and impressive and the credit of reinterpreting the ancient myth in the light of contemporary concerns goes to Karnard who is a flawless playwright.

Karnard's second play, *Tughlaq*, is a historical play deals with the complex and paradoxical character of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq who ruled over India for twenty-six years. Karnard's account of Tughlaq's character, administration, politics, ruthlessness and even savagery is based on Zia-Ud-Din Barani's *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi*, Al Marchi's *The Maslik-al-absar*, Ibn Batutah's *Travels* and Badoni's *Tarikh-I-Mubarak-Shahi*. He makes some deviations from history, which he thinks essential for the dramatic purposes. Karnard's play spans nearly five years out of twenty-six years of Tughlaq's reign. This condensation was a dramatic necessity. The play has been written in the episodic, scenic division like Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. However, Karnard has used the Company *Natak* convention of the comic pairs, Aziz and Aazam. There is also the Company *Natak* technique of deep and shallow scenes, the interior of the place and the exterior of the street. The cat and mouse game between Tughlaq and Aziz ends up in an ironic equation between the two inside the palace at the end of the play. Karnard ingeniously creates the atmosphere of Tughlaq's days, an atmosphere of distrust, communal intolerance, frustrated idealism, endless corruption, religious bigotry and Tughlaq's mindless bloodthirstiness and final disillusionment.

Karnard found Tughlaq's history contemporary. U.R. Anantha Murthy says that:

".....it is a play of sixties, and reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism into the country."

Karnard himself commented on the contemporaneity of *Tughlaq* in *Enact*, June 1971:

"What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever come to the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failure also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him,

such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction – the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel.”

The play is decidedly the most successfully presented history play in Indian English literature.

Karnard's *Hayavadana* is a bold and successful play on the folk theme and its plot comes from the ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit entitled *Kathasaritsagara*. He uses various classical techniques like dolls, curtains and the story with the story and masks as he does in *The Fire and the Rain* also. Kirtinath Kurtkoti writes about the artistic use of the theme thus:

“The original poses a moral problem while Mann uses it to ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body and soul. He ridicules the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. The human body, Mann argues, is a fit instrument for the fulfillment of human destiny. Even the transposition of heads will not liberate the protagonists from the psychological limits imposed by nature. Karnard's play poses a different problem, that of human identity in a world of tangled relationship.”

The plots of Tughlaq and Hayavadana provide ample space for using the element of farce and satire in the plays in the manner of the tradition of Kannada drama. Karnard, being an artist himself, has brought to the art of drama a new life with “the living stage.” In the Introduction of *Hayavadana* Kirtinath Kurtkoti writes:

“With the new theatre going around them, new-playwrights like Girish Karnard have been able to bring to drama a first hand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique.”

Karnard, who is the pioneer of new drama, shows how drama is meant to fulfill a serious purpose of highlighting the disparities in our social life. Not only that it aims to reconciling paradoxes and contraries in life, which lie at the root of all the sufferings in the life. In this connection V.K. Gokak in his article “Kannad Literature,” which appeared in *Contemporary Indian Literature* (New Delhi, Sahitya Akademy, 1957) makes the following remarks:

“...life absorbs and transcends paradoxes and reconciles contraries. To see them in their confluence is to be aware of the complexity of the new movement and also its all embracing unity.”

Karnard's plays are built on such ideas and work out on their complexity in full measure. For example, consider *Tughlaq*, the whole play is structured on opposites and paradoxes of the ideal and real; the divine inspiration and the deft intrigues. In *Hayavadana* too the paradoxes are described in the very beginning. These plays are actable and extremely popular as the playwright has a wonderful knowledge and experience of the theatre. He correlates them easily with the exigencies of contemporary theatre.

As a playwright, Karnard is called an existentialist as he manages to imply consciousness of the self in the world of lived experience. Existentialism believes in depicting the urgent predicament of man's being in the world of tough conditions with the individual's crucial and terrible freedom of choice. It also affirms the problem of self, search of identity, frustration and isolation, loneliness and failure. Still it affirms the dignity of man. Karnard's plays are related to the theme of human search for identity and relationship. One of the leading critics of Indian Drama, Kirtinath Kurtkoti makes a very perceptive remark in the 'Introduction' of *Hayavadana* that Karnard's

“.. work has the tone and expression of great drama. He has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience, the quality of which, to use Joyce's vocabulary would be 'static' rather than 'kinetic.’”

These qualities make Karnard one of the most outstanding dramatists whose plays are noticeable for excellent dramatic techniques, which change according to the requirements of his plots. Karnard skillfully uses

“the conventions and motifs of the folktales and folk theatre – masks, curtains, dolls, the story within a story - to create a bizarre world. It is of incomplete individuals, indifferent gods, gods, dolls that speak and children who cannot, a world indifferent to the desires and frustrations, joys

and sorrows of human beings. What is real is only the tremendous, irrational energy symbolizing the powerful but monotonous rhythm of life."

The plots of his plays are precise which are worked out by the devices like parallelism and contrast, suspense and surprise in the logical progression. Karnard deftly organizes the incidents and situations into an artistic design and correlates them with the characters in such a way that it creates a unity of impression. For example, consider *Tughlaq* where the incidents and events originate from the paradoxical actions of the protagonist and the plot is based on the opposites and paradoxes. The devices of parallelism and contrast have been vividly employed and the intrigues and manipulated to create the discipline of art. In this context, Anatha Murty observes in the 'Introduction' of the play *Tughlaq*:

"Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealists; yet in the pursuit of the ideal, they penetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites; the ideal and the real, the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue."

Out of the tensions and conflicts, which weave the texture of the plot, emerges the climax that resolves into denouement. The plot of the play is well knit and is marked by the architectonic quality. Stylization of action is a major feature of some of the plays of Karnard, for instance, consider *Hayavadana*. Subtle and constant juxtaposition of the past and present is common feature of Karnard's dramatic art.

In depicting his characters, Karnard observes economy, precision and conciseness as they are meant to fulfill certain demands of the plot through their action and dialogues. Karnard creates a kind of report between the character and the situation ingeniously. For example, take the following dialogue of *Tughlaq* which reveals his disillusionment with himself to the same degree, as is the disillusionment of the people with him:

"I am teetering on the brink of madness, Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me, (shouting). And why should I deserve that madness? I have condemned my mother to death and I'm not even sure she was guilty of the crime."

It is action or intention, dialogue or some comment by other character that precipitates or intensifies the conflict and thus throws light on other characters and develops the plot.

Girish Karnard's language is appropriate and effective. With great command over English and rich vocabulary, he manages writing dialogues, which are flexible and precise, and changes them according to the nuances of his plot and characters. For instance consider, the opening scenes where *Tughlaq's* language is highly poetic and imaginative as it communicates his idealism:

"Let's laugh and cry together and then let's pray. Let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with – ours now ! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come! I am waiting to embrace you all."

Karnard's characters use language that suits their status and temperament. The cheat, Aziz, uses matter of fact and even crude language. The language becomes symbolic and other items and events like chess, prayer and python become symbols in the play. The chess suggests the quality in *Tughlaq's* nature. Being a skillful chess player, he uses his political opponents as pawns on the chessboard of politics. Prayer is the leitmotif of the play and the python suggests *Tughlaq's* inhumanity and barbarity. There are many mythical references which are meant to add an epic like quality to his plays or make them amusingly ironical. There are certain references from Sanskrit drama but in *Hayavadana* and *Tughlaq* the references are mostly from Persian and Greek. In the case of *Tughlaq* they hold a special appeal because *Tughlaq* was a scholar. Besides a number of the Indian habits and beliefs are also reflected in Karnard's plays. Aziz the scoundrel in *Tughlaq* is appointed a state officer for tampering with the law and cozening the crown. Such scandalous persons are very much active in the contemporary political scenario. It shows Karnard's perception of Indian reality. Not only that, it also confirms that A.K. Ramanujan's observation on the Indian characteristic of inconsistency and hypocrisy is largely true.

In Karnard's plays the conflict between the ancient and the modern, karma and individual freedom, old and young, religion and science, high caste and low caste and many other dichotomies is evident through out the plays. The conflict, interestingly, provides plenty of opportunities for Karnard to reveal his sense of humour as well as his response to the stratified society of India for as in *Tughlaq*.

All the plays of Karnard have clearly recognizable Indian settings. To illustrate, *Tale-Danda* is set in the city of Kalyan, the capital city of King Bijjala's kingdom in Karnataka. *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*, by their very thematic nature, are bound to move to distant places from Delhi to Daulatabad, and from Dharmapura to the forest respectively. Significantly, the places of origin are left behind in both these dramas. Of course, there are references to many other places like Ujjain, Karnataka, Banaras, Rameshwar, Tirupati, Gandhara and Chitrapur.

Among other characteristic features of drama like plot, character dialogue and language there are two important factors which give Karnard a unique status as one of the greatest Indian playwright: (a) his view or vision of life and (b) his exemplary Indian imagination which has its exclusive feature that can be broadly associated with subject matter, dramatic form, setting, myths and legends, literary allusions, philosophy of karma and rebirth, other social stratifications and practices and language. His plays confirm that Karnard's approach is eclectic and synthetic as he has imbibed a lot from the Western tradition of drama as well. An attempt to trace out the influence of the World Drama on him one finds the infusion from the double plot of William Shakespeare, the comic genius of Moliere, the social problems of Henrik Ibsen, the dramatic lyricism of Anton Chekhov, the naturalism of John Strindburg, the symbolic expressionism of Eugene O'Neill, the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht, the religious quest of T.S. Eliot, the mythical and historical reinterpretations of Jean Anouilh and many more. These qualities of the Indian and the global traditions of drama enabled him to portray the contemporary psycho-religious, socio-political and literary and cultural turmoil authentically and admirably.

***Tughlaq* as a Historical Play**

Karnard's play *Tughlaq* deals with the life and turbulent reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq who ruled India for about twenty-six years from November-December 1324 to 1351. For the sake of dramatic precision Karnard spans only five years from 1327 to 1332. The action of the play begins in the year 1327, and proceeds on the road from Delhi to Daultabad and lastly in and around the fort in Daultabad. However, there is some confusion among the historians about the date of his accession but on the basis of extant records it may be said that Tughlaq's accession took place in Zil Hij 724/November-December 1324 and his coronation forty days later, i.e., in A.H. 725/ January 1325. He died on 21 Muharrum 752/20 March 1351.

Girish Karnard is deeply indebted to the contemporary historians like Zia-ud-Din Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, Al-Marshi's *The Maslik-al-absar*, Ibn-I-Bututah's *Travels* and Badoni's *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi*. Karnard follows the traditional sources which present Tughlaq as who combines in him the opposites – a dreamer and a man of action, extremely benevolent and unpredictably cruel, devout and godless. Tughlaq, both in histories as well as in Karnard's play is a profound scholar, idealist and visionary. He stands for administrative reforms, for the policy of Hindu Muslim amity and friendship and due recognition of merit irrespective of caste and creed. He is a keen administrator who reorganizes administrative machinery and taxation structure for the establishment of an egalitarian society in which all of his subject would enjoy fundamental human rights and justice, equal opportunities and freedom of faith or religion. This departure from the holy tenets enrages the orthodox people and they oppose and condemn him. Thinking of him as a non-believer in Islam simply because he abolishes jiziya tax and treats Hindus and Muslims with equal respect. This aspect is dramatized in the opening scene of the play through the Old Man who represented the orthodox Muslim and the Young man who stood for Sultan's point of view. The opening lines make this conflict absolutely clear:

Old Man: God, what's this country coming to!

Young Man: What are you worried about, grandfather? The country's in perfectly safe hands – safer than any you've seen before.

The Old Man accuses the Sultan and calls him "a thing." He feels that he has been insulting Islam despite the fact that Sultan made five times prayers a day compulsory as no earlier Sultan had done. Karnard's account of the behaviour

of Tughlaq in this respect corroborates with that of Ibn-I-Bututah who has mentioned categorically that Sultan constantly urged people about observing the obligatory prayers. The opinion of Ibn-i-Batutah is quoted in *A Comprehensive History of India* that “His standing orders were to the effect that prayer must be recited to congregation and severe punishment was meted out to defaulters.” However, he extended his patronage to men of learning and piety even to non-Muslims. Karnard closely follows history in showing Tughlaq’s liberal and rational religious views, humanism and idealism being a celebrated scholar. He tells Imam-ud-Din who warns him against his liberal attitudes in religion and politics:

“I still remember the days when I read the Greeks – Sukarat who took poison so that he could give the world the drink of gods, Aflatoon who condemned poets and wrote incomparably beautiful poetry himself – and I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sang to them. And my kingdom too is what I am – torn into pieces by visions whose validity I can’t deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha.”

Tughlaq’s rational philosophy, which grew out of his wide learning, was an anathema to the orthodox.

Karnard follows history in presenting that Tughlaq was a shrewd politician and was guilty of fratricide and patricide. He killed his father at the prayer time. Karnard uses prayer as a leitmotiv with a rare dramatic effect being a skilful dramatist though it was not employed thus in history. In the “Introduction” of the play Anantha Murty writes:

“Although the theme of the play is from history - there are many such plays in Kannada – Karnard’s treatment of the theme is not historical. Take, for instance, the use Karnard makes of the leitmotiv of the play, ‘prayer’ in the scene where the Muslim chieftains along with Sheik Shams-ud-din, a pacifist priest, conspire for the murder Tughlaq while at prayer. The use of prayer for the murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer which is most dear to Tughlaq, is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. The whole episode is ironic.”

Karnard’s Tughlaq is not repentant over the murder of his father and brother but according to history he attempted to atone for the crime and immediately after his coronation and succession to the throne he saw to it that his father’s name was inscribed on coins as Ishwari Prasad mentions in his book *A History of Quraunah Turks in India*.

Karnard adroitly employs historical evidence about Tughlaq’s decision to shift the capital from Delhi to Daultabad. Historical evidences prove that Tughlaq took the radical decision inadvertently for changing the capital for effective administration and control of the South. The Amirs and Sayyids were against the Sultan and by transferring the capital to Daultabad, the Hindu dominated town, he wanted to weaken their strength. The reasons, which Karnard’s Tughlaq gives for this decision to shift the capital, are based on historical grounds. He explains in the first scene the reasons to the crowd:

“My ministers and I took this decision after careful thought and decision. My empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daultabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom. I invite you all to accompany me to Daultabad. This is only an invitation and an order.”

The historians of the contemporary times have discovered that the plan of building an empire with Daultabad as its capital was implemented in stages keeping in mind the convenience of the people. Even Barani, who was dead against the Sultan, writes “he made liberal gifts to the people both at the time of the departure for, and on their arrival at Daultabad.” Girish Karnard, who presents his act of transferring the capital as an act of personal whim, ignores the fact of generosity. He describes as a mass exodus and in this aspect he follows the contemporary historians who focus on Sultan’s inhumanity

and callous attitude. Ibn-I-Batutah narrates an event, which is quoted in *A Comprehensive History of India*, that one night Tughlaq went up to the roof of his place and looked around. When neither a lamp nor even smoke or light came within his sight, he remarked: “Now my heart is pleased and my soul is at rest.” Karnard’s Tughlaq is also such a ruthless and vindictive person. In the sixth scene of the play he tells Najib:

“Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I can see that now. They’ll only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.”

This sort of forced exodus caused immense sufferings, destitution and starvation on men, women and children. Whatever relief measures were provided by Tughlaq, they were misused and even misappropriated by the corrupt officers like Aziz in the play. In scene eight the Old Man talks to the Young Man about it thus:

“The merciful Sultan had made perfect arrangements. But do you know, you can love a city like a woman? My old father had lived in Delhi all his life. He died of a broken heart. Then my son Ismail. He was six year old – would have been ten now! The fine dust that hung in the air, fine as silk, it covered him like a silken shroud. After him, his mother.”

Modern historians have tried to prove that the Daultabad scheme was implemented in stages keeping in mind the convenience of the people. At the distance of every two miles along the road from Delhi to Daultabad, the Sultan got constructed halting station and developed the entire uninhabited area into a habitation. First of all the aristocracy – Sultan’s mother, Amirs, Maliks, Ulema etc.— shifted to Daultabad. Then all the Sayyids, Sheikhs and Ulemas were summoned from Delhi. The Sultan was so considerate that before shifting the people of Delhi he had purchased houses for them. Facilities of travel and conveyance were provided for the migrants. Even Barani, who was opposed to Tughlaq’s reforms, wrote that the Sultan “made liberal gifts to the people both at the time of their departure for, and on their arrival at Daultabad.” Briefly, the Sultan planned the capital carefully and skillfully. Girish Karnard does not highlight the generosity of the Sultan and presents his act of transferring the capital from Delhi to Daultabad as the whim of the tyrant. The contemporary historian’s emphasis on mass exodus, which Karnard also presents in the play, is not correct. The general Hindu public remained unaffected by this plan. When Karnard presents in scene seven a Hindu woman pleading to Aziz “Please let me go, sir.... My child ... please have mercy on it.... only for a day, sir...”, it is a contradiction of history. The historians like Barani and Isami magnified the limited exodus of the upper classes from Delhi into a mass exodus. It is significant to state that when Ibn-i-Batutah reached Delhi in 1334, he found it full of scholars, literati and mystics and no after effects of the exodus were visible. The Sultan also permitted the people to return to Delhi in 1335-37.

However, it is a historical fact that no other event brought so much of unpopularity and infamy to the Sultan as the forced exodus which provoked strong reactions and the behaviour of Sultan’s corrupt officers like Aziz and Aazam in *Tughlaq* who misappropriated the relief measures. Hence, Girish Karnard does not deviate from history so far as the untold miseries and sufferings of the people due to exodus are described. The Sultan lost the confidence of the people though the change of the capital strengthened the feeling of national integration about which Karnard is absolutely silent because he has a different purpose in mind, that is to describe the political situation of the India of the Nehru regime and secondly to project Tughlaq as a cruel but weak character. Contrary to what Karnard projects A.K.Nizami writes:

“In its remote consequences the Deccan experiment of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq was a remarkable success. The barriers which had separated the North from the South broke down, and though the extension of administrative powers of Delhi Sultanate into Deccan did not prove successful, the extension of its cultural institutions did in fact succeed.”

Karnard ignores the achievements of Tughlaq altogether. It is pertinent to note that Karnard has taken only partial and even one sided view of the history of Tughlaq’s reign and depends mainly on the historical sources of Barani and that group of historians who were biased to the Sultan.

There were numerous rebellions during Tughlaq's time which made him ruthless and he inflicted "draconian punishment" on his subject as Nizami mentions in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. 5 which he edited along with Mohammad Habib:

"The Sultan began to punish both the guilty and the innocent on very suspicion in the hope that bloodshed on a large scale would terrorize his officers and make them obedient; on the other hand, his officers, knowing his military weakness, preferred rebellion to punishment without trial."

Actually in an atmosphere of perpetual distrust and rebellion Tughlaq became suspicious and vindictive but there are evidences with the historians like Dr. Ishwari Prasad who says in the book quoted above that

"We have sufficient data to prove that Muhammad was no monster who took delight in shedding blood for its own sake and those who stigmatize him as a callous tyrant forget the age in which he lived and the circumstances in which he was placed."

Tughlaq himself called the historian Barani and described to him the condition of his kingdom in these pathetic words: "My kingdom is diseased and no treatment cures it." Similarly in Karnard's play also Tughlaq says to Barani:

"What should I do Barani? What would you prescribe for this honeycomb of diseases? I have tried everything. But what cures one disease just worsens another..... It isn't as easy as leaving the patient in the wilderness because there's no cure for his disease.... Don't you see that the only way I could abdicate is by killing myself?... But what can you do when every moment you expect a beak to dig into you and tear a muscle out? What can you do? Barani, what vengeance is driving these shapes after me?"

Girish Karnard greatly alters the historical facts of the rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk perhaps to expose the weaknesses of Tughlaq and to show that he was the worst kind of daredevil. He sends Sheikh Imam-ud-Din as his official envoy with the message of peace to Ain-ul-Mulk. The Sheikh resembles the Sultan. Dressed up in the ceremonial clothes the Sheikh marched toward Ain-ul-Mulk's army. The elephant on which the Sheikh was riding halted about a hundred yard away from the enemy and the Sheikh stood up on it to say something when a trumpeter on the Sultan's side sounded charge. The Sheikh was wounded and succumbed to his injuries. Thus, Sheikh Imam-ud-Din, who had led a rebellion against Tughlaq in Danpur was murdered. Ain-ul-Mulk was pardoned and the governorship of Avad was restored to him. And later on he was transferred to Deccan. Thus, it is obvious that Karnard deviates from the history in the depiction of the rebellion of Aim-ul-Mulk in order to prove that the Sultan was a vindictive and revengeful, intriguing and treacherous man. Karnard differs from history as regards the murder of Shihab-ud-Din is concerned.

Tughlaq introduced token currency probably in 1330. Silver coin, known as *tanks*, was in vogue in his reign. He issued the bronze coin in place of the silver coin and demanded its acceptance as a token coin equivalent to silver *tanka*. It invited different reactions from the historians. Some say that it was meant to face the bankruptcy caused by the Sultan's boundless generosity and munificence. In sixth scene Tughlaq announces his plan to introduce copper currency in his empire along with silver *dinars* and also conveys his acquaintance with its prevalence in China. The Sultan's experiment failed miserably. He is also sore about the proliferation of counterfeit coins and says in the play in scene eight:

"Only one industry flourishes in my kingdom, only one – and that's of making counterfeit copper coins. Every Hindu home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me to close my eyes;"

Karnard takes up this issue of the token currency only to emphasize the Sultan's failure and makes no comment on his farsightedness and on the unimaginative and non-co-operative approach of his officers as well as his subjects.

Tughlaq's policy of taxation, which deviated from canon law, offended the orthodox Muslims. Karnard follows Barani and other historians who opposed Sultan's rationalized tax-structure and enlightened measures and does not appreciate his moves. Karnard refers to famine and plague that ravaged India during Sultan's reign but he does not sympathise with Tughlaq who faced a number of natural and man-made calamities. Karnard has portrayed Najib as an important character whose influence on the Sultan is great. He is presented as the Sultan's evil genius and is later on murdered

by the machinations of his stepmother. In history Najib is not such an important character. The episode of Aziz and Aazam is also included with the view to creating humour, irony, paradoxes and parallels and highlighting the failure of Tughlaq's administration. There is enough of evidence to prove that Karnard departs from history when it suits him as per the needs of his dramatic art. He takes only partial and one-sided view of his character and administration. He has drawn the plot of Tughlaq from Barani and other orthodox historical sources and lacks the just and impartial treatment of historical theme. M.K.Naik comments in his book, *A History of Indian English Literature*:

“Tughlaq is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India. Karnard projects the curious, contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan, who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and godless. His two close associates – Barani the scholarly historian and Najib, the politician seem to represent the two opposite selves of Tughlaq, while Aziz, the willy time server appears to represent all those who took advantage of Sultan's visionary schemes and fooled him. Karnard himself has suggested that he found “Tughlaq's history contemporaryHowever, Tughlaq fails to emerge as tragedy, chiefly because the dramatist seems to deny himself the artist's privilege to present an integrated vision of a character full of conflicting tendencies.”

However, Karnard skillfully brings out the dramatic potentialities in history and has ingeniously imposed on them the disciplines of art.

A Note of Existentialism in Tughlaq

The term existentialism means ‘pertaining to existence’; or in logic, ‘predicating existence’. Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship, or lack of one, with God. This philosophical label is applied to several differing schools of thought. It is generally agreed that existentialism derives from the thinking of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and specially in his books *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844) and *Sickness Unto Death* (1848). He restated and elaborated his belief that man may find freedom from tensions and discontent and therefore may find peace of mind and spiritual serenity through God and in God. Kierkegaard became the pioneer of modern Christian existentialism.

An important feature of atheistic existentialism is the argument that existence precedes essence which is the reverse of many traditional forms of philosophy, for it is held that man fashions his own existence and only exists by so doing, and in that process, and by the choice of what he does or does not do, gives essence to that existence. Jean Paul Sartre is the hierophant of modern existentialism. In his vision man is born into a kind of void, a mud. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, acquiescent existence in a ‘semi-conscious’ state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. If he comes out of his passive situation and would become increasingly aware of himself, he would have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer moral anguish and despair. The energy deriving from this awareness would enable him to ‘drag himself out of the mud’, and begin to exist. By exercising the power of choice he can give meaning to existence and the universe. Thus, in brief, the human being is obliged to make himself what he is, and has to be what he is. Like Sartre, Martin Heidegger believes that man is alone in this godless world. “Man has no reality, if he unthinkingly follows social law or convention.” Suffering, anguish and despair in his loneliness, he may nevertheless, become what he wishes by the exercise of his free will. Both the groups of existentialists, however, hold certain elements in common: the concern with man's being, the feeling that reason is insufficient to understand the mysteries or the universe, the awareness that anguish is a universal phenomenon, and the idea that morality has validity only when there is positive participation.

Existentialism has influenced all genres of literature of the twentieth century world over. It is a philosophy based on the concrete experiences of life and puts stress on the dignity of man. Existential writers like Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Kafka and other celebrities have projected human existence and existential concerns from a special angle of vision. The authors are, it appears, in search of new meanings and are in the quest of self-discovery in man's life; they display the hard realities of life and experience in their works. Their aim is to raise the self-consciousness of man and encourage him to live a genuinely meaningful life.

It is generally believed that poetry and fiction offer a better scope for subjective consciousness and internalization of

experience and confessional mode while drama is expected to present more objective and externalized conflict between the individual protagonist and a hostile, indifferent society, or a meaningless universe. However the continental drama especially the plays of Sartre and Camus reveal that existentialist situations can be effectively depicted in drama as the urgent predicament of man's being in the world, along with an individual's "crucial and terrible freedom of choice."

Girish Karnard's plays are imbued with existential thought and deal with freedom of choice, alienation, despair, anguish and absurdity, which characterize all schools of existentialism. Karnard's first play *Yayati*, which has not been rendered into English, is a self-consciously existentialist drama on the theme of responsibility. *Tughlaq* too is an existentialist play, which deals with philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of the whole kingdom, which a dreamer like him controls. His alienation from traditional religion arises primarily from the fact that he is an existentialist in his religious beliefs, which come into conflict with the orthodox and fundamental faith. In *Hayavadana*, Karnard deals with the problem of human identity and human relationship.

Girish Karnard has made a remarkable contribution to Indian English drama by inculcating existential thought into his plays which expounds a definite attitude of looking at life and human conditions and indirectly suggests a way out to overcome them.

An existentialist like the Romantics evaluates experiences in terms of intensity and is search of some sort of certitude. Tughlaq, a visionary and idealist, faces an existential predicament – a situation of confrontation with orthodox and fanatic Muslims who are bent upon opposing him at every step. He tries his level best to put his ideals into practice and fully realizes his duties to the kingdom and his subjects both Hindus and Muslims. He makes an independent choice to convert India into an egalitarian society based on secularism and mutual amity of these communities. Like a true existential he sees to it that justice works in his kingdom and convinces the crowd in scene first around him that it would be all possible without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light up our path Towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace - not just peace but more purposeful life.

His intention is to guarantee freedom of choice to his countrymen. In other words, he tries to promote the understanding of human situation amidst the dearth and disparities and wants them to rise above the sufferings and insecurities. He is restless because he feels his primary responsibility is to awaken his countrymen to feel the truth. He identifies himself with their sufferings and spends sleepless nights. He tells his step-mother in scene two:

"I pray to the Almighty to save me from sleep. All day long I have to worry about tomorrow but it's only when the night falls that I can step beyond all that. I look at the Pleiades and I think of Ibn-ul-Mottazz who thought it was an ostrich egg and Dur-rumma who thought it was a swallow. And then I go back to their poetry and sink myself in their words. Then again I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: 'Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries Let's be light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come I am waiting to embrace you all!'... I wish I could believe in recurring births like the Hindu but I have only one life, one body, and my hopes, my people, my God are all fighting for it."

Karnard's Tughlaq finds himself in the tight existential condition and makes a difficult choice. Otherwise too choosing is to commit oneself to one's decision. Tughlaq is convinced about the authenticity of his choice and refuses to relent to the tough opposition from the narrow-minded citizens who question his integrity. He frankly admits how other philosophical thoughts of the Greeks especially of Sukrat and Aflatoon also have shaped his personality when he talks to Imam-ud-Din in scene three:

"I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sang to them. And my kingdom too is what I am – torn to pieces by visions whose validity I can't deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha."

Tughlaq emphasizes the personal reality of his existence. He comes nearer to the thought of Fernando Molino as expressed in his book *Existentialism as Philosophy* that basic structures of human existence call "individuals to an awareness of their existence in its essential freedom." For Tughlaq idealism is not merely an abstract thought but a

way of life, “a philosophy capable of being lived” to borrow the expression of P. Roubizek from *Existentialism For and Against*. Tughlaq takes authentic steps towards such an existence where he can truly find a self-definition.

In her article “Introducing Existentialism” which is included in *Existentialism in American Literature* Margaret Chatterjee highlights another characteristics of Existentialism, that is, the indefinable nature of man who remains a bundle of contradictions despite the freedom of choice. She observes that various schools of existentialist thought have emphasized the need for “the quest for meaning in a world which has become opaque to human understanding and intransigent to human effort, especially, meliorist effort to transform it.” Tughlaq always faces such situations, which are demanding and complicated where even his idealism and policies are resisted and challenged. Such responses make him rash and reckless. He adopts the tricks of masking himself and behaves treacherously, he recurses to stratagems and manages to kill Sheikh Imam-ud-Din, Shihab-ud-Din, and millions of innocent people He becomes pretentious, poses to be religious and acts in totally irreligious and even inhuman manner. According to Ratan Singh Tughlaq is “an honest scoundrel.” In order to achieve his ideals and execute his policies Tughlaq deliberately chooses to indulge in patricide and fratricide. He takes an inadvertent decision to change the capital from Daultabad, murders his opponents and uses religion as a political game. Tughlaq’s willful acts are the worst example of the freedom of choice that a man can avail himself of as every choice he makes creates crisis, such situations which are totally absurd and drag him down in the “mud.” All these acts are the result of “bad faith” and cause self-deception, sense of guilt, anguish, despair and dread. In utter despair he says:

“God, God in Heaven, please help me. Please don’t let go my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don’t know how much of it is mine and how much of others I started in Your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of You. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud?”

Teetering on “the brink of madness, he comes to grief. It appears that in *Tughlaq* Karnard focuses on the existential problem that is the problem not of contemplation but of action. Man should choose, decide and act accordingly. It will not only solve the riddle of existence but would also create perfect climate for the moral growth.

The comic pair Aziz and Aazam are in the beginning totally desperate, alienated individuals but they form what the critics call an “alternative society.” Aziz is a dhobi and Aazam is a common pick pocket but once they develop an understanding the former assumes the role of a leader and the latter acts as a detached philosopher. These two derelicts are shown by Karnard estranged from society and alienated from themselves. Aziz, who is an opportunist, misappropriates Tughlaq’s plans to suit his own interests and assumes several disguises, kills people and commits all sorts of crimes and in the end succeeds. Aziz’s deliberate acts of choices are existentialist decision and despite being immoral through and through bring him success. He lives in the present and tries to gain power despite the absurdity of the act and situation. He tells Aazam who is sick of the existential absurdities and wants to live a honourable life:

“Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world– politics! My dear fellow, that’s where our future is – politics! It’s a beautiful world - wealth, success, position, power – and yet it is full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head.... It’s a fantastic world.”

Aziz manages to kill Aazam when he makes up his mind to get rid of his company. In complicated existential game/ situation both Tughlaq and Aazam fail while Aziz succeeds.

As it happens in much of existentialist literature, Karnard’s *Tughlaq* deals with problem of discovering the truth. Tughlaq tries his best to realize the truth of human existence, truth emerges out of human action and experience but he fails miserably. Life remains as unpredictable and meaningless for Tughlaq as it ever is. The only message, which the play leaves behind, is that man should try to cultivate understanding and natural emotion of compassion for one another if he wishes to have a life and world worth living. It may then offer an opportunity of ideal existential condition and may reduce the existential absurdity to a great extent.

Plot-Structure and Use of Other Literary Techniques in *Tughlaq*

Drama is “literature that walks” as Marjorie Boulton states and it is the plot of the play, which is the source of all the action, development of its characters, and dialogues. Its language imaginatively carries the meaning of all the sights, sounds and action of the play and makes a demand on the visual imagination of the reader or the viewer.

Plot does not happen by accident; it is an essential framework of incidents, simple or complex happenings and events. Plot is not the theme; it is an artistic organization of the events and incidents upon which the drama is constructed. The plot of Girish Karnard's famous play *Tughlaq* grows out the paradoxical events of the protagonist and his opponents. In the "Introduction" of the play Prof. Anantha Murthy says:

"Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealist; yet in the pursuit of the ideals, they perpetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real; the divine aspiration and the deft intrigues."

The plot is woven by the conflict between opposites right from the beginning. In the first scene the old people who are the staunch followers of Islam think that their country is unsafe in the hands of the liberal ruler who deviates from the holy Koran. The young crowd admires him for his rational and modern outlook. One of the young men says, "The country's in perfectly safe hands... safer than you've seen before" because he wishes to be 'human' first. Tughlaq treats both Hindus and Muslims equally and sympathetically. He plans to shift his capital from Delhi to Daultabad in order to strength Hindu-Muslim unity. The opposites keep playing the central role in constructing the plot. It is sheer irony that Aziz, disguised as Brahmin Vishnu Prasad, exploits Tughlaq's policy of Hindu-Muslim unity. It is also ironical that Sultan punishes all those who oppose his scheme of shifting the capital. Both Hindus and Muslims unite to hatch a conspiracy to kill him at Prayer time. Ratan Singh is the first to initiate the idea but when the rebellion is crushed the Hindu soldiers protect the Sultan. The Hindus whom the Sultan supported disagree with his policy of introducing token currency but misuse it and make counterfeit coins. The Sultan's move to shift the capital was meant to help the Hindus but it is a great paradox that it causes disaster to both Hindus and Muslims. They suffer poverty and death. The idealism and realism are two poles on which the plot of the play is erected. It crumbles like a pack of cards once his idealism dashes against the hard rock of reality. Notorious murderers and cheats like Aziz attain success and prosperity and the virtuous suffer. The idealist like Tughlaq turns a murderer and becomes lonely and frustrated. He finds himself on the "brink of madness, whom "the madness of God eludes."

Another powerful opposites that cling to the plot of the play are between religion and politics. Tughlaq punishes even the learned religious leaders for hob-knobbing with politics but ironically he himself stoops down to petty political tricks to get better of his political opponents. Sheikh Imam-ud-Din warns him: "Religion! Politics take heed Sultan, one day these verbal distinctions will rip you into two." Thus, Karnard skillfully employs opposites to build the structure of the plot.

In the play both Tughlaq and his political rivals misuse religion to fulfill their political ends. Both corrupt religion. In other words, Karnard employs opposites to develop the plot structure and these opposites carry the implicit irony of human existence. In *Tughlaq* the irony finds its most eloquent expression through the contradiction in the character of Tughlaq in whom the idealism and the intriguing nature built the duality of his character. The surprises are knitted together in the plot of the play, which Karnard explains through the symbol of the chess – a game traditionally known for the element of surprise and suspense. The play maintains till its end the suspense about Aziz who ironically gets rewarded for his misdeeds.

The play has a great symbolic significance as Karnard himself stated that he felt "in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction (of failures) – the twenty year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel." From this point of view the critics have called it to be "a political allegory." There are many important symbols, for example, the symbol of chess where he has "solved the most famous problems" as he himself says or the prayer symbol which is used as leitmotiv for the central theme of the play. The word 'prayer' is used so often in various ways and even in ironic manner. Likewise, the python symbol in scene Eight is indicative of Tughlaq's utter cruelty and inhumanity. When the Old Man and the Young Man talk about a passage in the Fort in Daultabad, the former says:

"Yes, it's a long passage, a big passage, coiled like an enormous hollow python inside the belly of the fort. And we shall be far, far happier when that python breaks out and swallows everything in sight – everyman, woman, child, and beast."

Thus symbols in the play are highly suggestive and ironical and contribute significantly to the main theme of the play which portrays the paradoxical situations in human nature and existence.

Even the opening sentences of the play make an artistic use of the verbal irony as does the speech of Tughlaq when

he elaborates publicly his ideals and administrative reforms. Tughlaq's diplomatic moves are marked by ironical implications as in the following lines:

"You can't deny that this war will mean a slaughter of Muslims at the hands of fellow Muslims. Isn't that enough for the great Sheikh Ima-ud-Din."

It is the incongruous situations, which are basically created by the Sultan's complicated personality, that constitute the dramatic irony in the play. For illustration take the lines of Aziz who calls himself to be the Sultan's close disciple:

"It's hardly flattering you, Your Majesty, to say I am your disciple. But I have watched Your Majesty try to explain your ideas and acts to the people. And I have seen with regret how few have understood them."

The plot of the play reaches its climax in scene seven when the capital has to be shifted to Daultabad. There has been mass exodus. This unfortunate decision of Sultan makes him unpopular and precipitates his downfall. Those who oppose his decision are killed even on suspicion. His kingdom is stricken with rebellions. His policy of introducing token currency badly fails. He is frustrated. His idealism gradually vanishes. Najib, who acts as his evil genius, gets killed by his stepmother and she in turn is sentenced to death. This is the turning point in the play because without Najib he is all-alone and none understands him. As the plot develops the kingdom gradually sinks into utter chaos.

The plot of the play is an artistic whole in which the events and intrigues are linked together by the predominance of Tughlaq's character. Karnard uses flashback technique to give glimpses of youthful idealism and has shown remarkable skill in weaving the comic story of Aziz and the tragic tale of Tughlaq's life. Girish Karnard does not follow the pattern of observing three dramatic unities of time place and action but by building a tempo and sustained intensity he creates the unity of effect. In other words all the episodes contribute to the unity of impression.

Tughlaq is unique in the use of humour, irony and satire. They are meant to provide comic relief and at the same time create a sense of horror and farce. Tughlaq's humour is sinister and of sardonic quality and is devoid of geniality, frankness and humanity. When he plays a sinister joke with his mother stating, "Look at the past Sultans of Delhi. They couldn't bear the weight of their crown," she knowing fully well about his parricide and fratricide grimly says: "Nothing – I can't bear to see you joking about murder." It is in the last scene that Tughlaq loses his grim and sardonic humour and he is trapped in net of Aziz's words.

Aziz and Aazam are the comic pair and they provide comic relief after the scenes of tension. Aziz, who is *dobhi* by caste but is disguised as a Brahmin, has a very fertile imagination and in this sense could be compared with the Sultan himself. He has unflinching sense of humour, which results from the success of his tricks and cunningness. He employs them to exploit the Sultan. Aziz delights in his perversions and has no humanity. In other words, his humour grows out of the enormity of crime. He rejoices and dances after killing Ghiasuddin Abbasid. Aziz takes out his clothes and puts them on in order to disguise himself as Ghiasuddin and then sings, claps his hands and laughs. Aziz is a black humourist, for instance, consider the following dialogue with the Sultan:

"We had to shift the corpses of all the rebels executed by the State and hang them up for exhibition. Such famous kings, warriors and leaders of men passed through our hands then! Beautiful and strong bodies and bodies eaten-up by corruption – all, all were stuffed with straw and went to the top of the poles."

When the Sultan calls him "a *dobhi*, masquerading as a saint?" Aziz replies:

*"What if I am a *dobhi*, Your Majesty? When it comes to washing away filth no saint is a match for a *dobhi*."*

His comment is pungent and sarcastic. There is a fun and irony when the Sultan promotes him to be an army officer instead of punishing him. Thus, *Tughlaq* is known for grim and sardonic humour as well as contrast and irony which weave the texture of his play.

Character of Tughlaq

Girish Karnard has presented the titular hero of the play, Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, with a great psychological depth and dexterity. It is interesting to note that other characters dramatize various aspects of his complex personality and at the same time they also exist as individuals in their own right. The whole play revolves around him and he seems to be the unifying factor for the play. For example consider the character of Barani, the scholarly historian and Najib, the

shrewd politician. These two characters form the two opposite selves of the Sultan. Aziz, who is the notorious cheat, represents the imaginative, shrewd, intelligent and pragmatic side of his personality.

Tughlaq's character is paradoxical as he is at once an idealist and dreamer and a man of cruel and base mentality and quick action. These traits make him an enigma and at the same time a tragic character whose paradoxical nature troubles him as well as others. Tughlaq ruled for twenty-six years. During these decades he conceived various projects for the welfare of his people. These plans are rightly proposed but badly executed and "disastrously abandoned." He was superb in formulating new plans but he lacked the psychological understanding of his subjects – something which is absolutely necessary for a successful ruler. His failures made him doubt his own people and they suspected his motives and designs. The result was a gulf between him and his people and it filled the atmosphere with bitterness and hostility on both the sides. Tughlaq was now treated as an "ill starred idealist" and condemned as a bloodthirsty tyrant.

Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq was a scholar and had deep academic interests but he was leading the life of a soldier and man of action, who spent more time on the battlefield. In the opening scene of the play Tughlaq is portrayed as an idealist and visionary, a rationalist and a forward-looking emperor. In his first address to the crowd he says:

"My beloved people, you have heard the judgement of the Kazi and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life."

Tughlaq's endeavour is to establish an egalitarian society in which justice would prevail. He seems to be an enlightened person who is seeking the support and co-operation of the people to execute his new plans to reform the society while they are given to orthodoxy and bigotry. The Sultan is tolerant of the Hindus and this invites further bitterness from the Muslim community. Tughlaq remains a visionary and an idealist despite such opposition. It causes him a lot of tension and frustration. Talking to his step-mother he says:

"I pray to Almighty to save me from sleep. All day long I have to worry about tomorrow but it's only when the night falls that I can step beyond all that."

When he is at the height of frustration, the Young Man in scene Eight reminds him of his visionary youth. Tughlaq talks to him:

"Nineteen. Nice age! An age when you think you can clasp the whole world in your palm like a rare diamond. I was twenty-one when I came to Daultabad first, and built this fort. I supervised the placing of every brick in it and I said to myself, one day I shall build my own history like this, brick by brick."

Tughlaq is active and ambitious; he is visionary and imaginative. He is philosophical in his conversation and even poetic. Consider, for example the following dialogue which he continues with the Young Man:

"One night I was standing on the ramparts of the old fort here. There was a torch near me flapping its wild wings and scattering golden feathers on everything in sight. There was a half-built gate nearby trying to contain the sky within its cleft. Suddenly something happened – as though some one had cast a spell. The torch, the gate, the fort and the sky – all melted and merged and flowed in my blood stream with the darkness of the night. The moments shed its symbols, its questions and answers, and stood naked and then calm where the stars throbbed in my veins. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke, was the sky. Suddenly a sentry called from far" 'Attention! Attention!' And to that challenge the half-burnt torch and the half-built gate fell apart."

In the face of the confusions and sufferings, it is his symbolic fall which is beautifully dramatized by him here.

Tughlaq is a man of profound learning. He knows astrology and has read the Greek thinkers like Socrates, Aristotle and others. He is deeply influenced by them in his philosophy of life. It is of a great disadvantage to him as a ruler because the orthodox Muslims criticize him for it and even oppose him. He asks Imam-ud-Din:

"I still remember the days when I read the Greeks... I can still feel the thrill with which I found the new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran... You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unifying my people by denying the

visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha.”

The Sultan is a highly learned person and the scholar of his time and is a great lover of poetry.

Tughlaq is totally unconventional in his approach to the problems of life or state and does not believe in the stereotyped solutions. His unusually original bent of mind makes the public issues still more complicated and far-fetched. He is a farsighted politician who wishes to achieve political and administrative unity for India. According to him the North and South should join hands and all religious and cultural barriers should be liquidated. With this view in mind he shifts the capital to Daultabad. His aim is to strengthen Hindu-Muslim amity. He becomes extremely unpopular because his decision brings untold sufferings to the people. Similarly, his decision to release token currency fails miserably as instead of boosting the economy it shatters it completely. It encourages corruption in form of minting counterfeit coins. Here it is pertinent to note that his subjects, who are given to intellectual lethargy, can not appreciate his forward looking quality of thought and thus do not extend any co-operation. He believes that the criteria for giving any office to a person should be the talent and not other considerations of cast and creed. For doing so he invites only ill-will and hatred and is called “Mad Tughlaq.”

Girish Karnard’s presentation of Tughlaq’s character is more inclined towards showing his weaknesses and terrible irregularities which prove that he was a great hypocrite and tyrant of the worst kind. It is due to two important factors: (a) Karnard follows the historical records given Barani and others – the orthodox historians – who were biased to the Sultan and (b) His purpose of writing this play to exhibit the political mood of disillusionment which prevailed in sixties in India and this governed his choice of highlighting the negative aspects of his personality.

However, Tughlaq invites the worst kind of opposition because of the religious leaders of Islam who feel that he is “a disgrace to Islam.” Though he makes the Muslims pray five times a day and then in a fit of utter frustration he prohibits prayer in his Empire to restart it when Caliph Abbasid comes to India. On the surface level he may seem erratic, but a careful analysis shows that he was a seriously religious and philosophical individual. It is out of sheer irritation that he behaves in such an unpredictable manner. He knows well that if religion turns out to be only a ritual, it loses its substance; and agnosticism and atheism are also not an answer to human problems and needs. He ultimately takes a rationalistic stand to deeply probe into the religious situations. To the religious people this rational approach is the sore cause of agitation because they take it to be a denial of religious sentiment. For instance, take Barani’s view who believes that the Sultan has lost faith in a “revealed word.” Another historian Ibn-i-Battutah gives entirely different picture of the Sultan as one who insisted that people should offer obligatory prayers and adopted humble titles while Dr. Ishwari Prasad gives a balanced assessment of Tughlaq’s religious nature – something we do not find in Karnard’s *Tughlaq*.

Girish Karnard delineates Tughlaq as both generous and cruel-hearted monarch. On the one hand some people like Aziz, who is disguised as Brahmin Vishnu Prasad, enjoy his bounty liberally and on the other there are people like Sheikh Imam-ud-Din who get killed ruthlessly and unscrupulously. Ratansingh talking to Shihab-ud-Din says:

“I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.”

The Sultan is revengeful, vindictive inhuman and callous, for example, take his following order which he gives to Najib in response to the conspiracy headed by Shihab-ud-Din:

“Najib, see that every man involved in this is caught and beheaded. Stuff their bodies with straw and hang them up in the palace-yard. Let them hang there for a week. No send them round my kingdom. Let every one of my subjects see them. Let everyone see what....”

In the face of opposition from the priests and courtiers when he plans to shift the capital from Delhi to Daultabad, Tughlaq issues such a mindless and inconsiderate order:

“Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daultabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I can see that now. They’ll only stand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.”

Thus, Tughlaq kills his subjects high or low for “the smallest offence” and hangs “them on suspicion.” When thousands of people die of hunger in the scorching heat of the sun enroute to Daultabad, Tughlaq is not moved with pity or remorse. The road is littered with dead bodies; the Old Man gives a very painful and pathetic account of the “strange

and frightening passage” in Daultabad Fort in scene Eight. However, it is pertinent to remember that his cruelty in the play arises from his anguish.

Some events in the play give an impression that he was a habitual killer and was utterly devoid of compassion. It may or may not be so in history as the opinions of the historians differ but the play shows that he was an awfully distracted and wild individual at times. Karnard’s Tughlaq is conscious of the fact that people think of him as mad and foolish. He ironically tells Barani : “I am an incompetent fool” and then confesses to him:

“I am teetering on the brink of madness, Barani, but madness of God still eludes me, (shouting) And why should I deserve that madness? I have condemned my mother to death and I’m not even sure she was guilty of the crime....”

Tughlaq’s madness is the result of his frustrations due to the failures of his plans and vision. He cultivates the feeling of loneliness, and self-remorse, In the beginning he was known to be a very successful political strategist but as the time passes he is proved the most unwise and ineffective king. A serious analysis of the play shows that a want of well-planned action to curb the lawlessness, his trust in the hypocrites who pretended to be loyal to him made him a poor judge of human beings. The opportunists and cheats like Aziz could reap the benefits in his kingdom and deceived him when the chance occurred. He lost the support of the Muslims due to his liberal response to Hindus but even they betrayed him, for instance, by making counterfeit coins. Nature too was unkind to him. Famine and plague devastate his kingdom. His policy of high taxation, which was meant to relieve famine stricken people of Doab, was severely criticized.

“You can’t take a step without paying some tax or another. There’s even a tax on gambling. Who are we to live? You can’t even cheat without having to pay tax for it.”

From the opening scene, Tughlaq is seen as a man estranged from his society, primarily because he is a man ahead of his age. He is not understood by the society around him because his ideas and ideals are far above the comprehension of his contemporaries. However he is not alienated from the human existence and craves for being “understood” earnestly and he says to Barani “All your life you wait for someone who understands you. And then – you meet him – punishment for waiting too much.” This sort of realization is not of a mad man but of a tragic character who is misunderstood through and through, whose every effort to do good yield the opposite results, who is betrayed by fate, chance and his own people, and whom even “sleep avoided” for “five years.” His words at the end of the play are pathetic but dignified. He grows in his stature though rather late. He says to Barani:

“If justice was as simple as you think or logic as beautiful as I had hoped, life would have been so much clearer. I have been chasing these words now for five years and now I don’t know if I am pursuing a mirage or a fleeting a shadow. Anyway what do all these subtle distinctions matter in the blinding madness of the day? Sweep your logic away into a corner, Barani, all I need now is myself and my madness – madness to prance in the field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence. But I am not alone, Barani. Thank Heaven! For once I am not alone. I have a Companion to share my madness now – the Omnipotent God!”

Tughlaq for once wins over his personal weaknesses and his peculiar circumstances where nothing seems to be working favourably. He has his own tragic flaws and his own vigour. He emerges as an alienated man who was an emperor to rule the empire for twenty-seven years. He wanted to rule a Utopia but ended up ruling a “kitchen of death’ as “a lord of skins.” It is the contrast between man’s expectation and the harsh reality of existence is indeed the experience of futility and meaninglessness of life that makes him a tragic and self-estranged human being. In this sense it can be stated that the “Sultan is victim-turned sinner.”

Assignments

Note: Attempt the following questions.

1. Discuss briefly the development of Indian English Drama.
2. Write an essay on Girish Karnard as a playwright with especial reference to *Tughlaq*.
3. Write a note on *Tughlaq* as an existential play.
4. “Tughlaq is essentially a historical play.” Discuss.
5. Discuss the use of paradox and irony in *Tughlaq*. Illustrate your answer.

6. Give an account of Tughlaq's character.
7. What is the part played by religion and politics in *Tughlaq*?
8. What role does Aziz play in *Tughlaq*?
9. What is the immediate relevance of *Tughlaq* to contemporary Indian political scenario?
10. Discuss the qualities of Karnard's language illustrating your answer from *Tughlaq*.

Note: Answer the following questions in about two hundred words.

1. Discuss any two important symbols as used in *Tughlaq*.
2. What do you understand by the term "opposites" in Tughlaq's character?
3. Discuss the element of humour in *Tughlaq*.
4. What is the significance of 'prayer' in the play *Tughlaq*?
5. Who is Barani?
6. What do you know about the character of Tughlaq's step-mother?
7. What are the important plays of Girish Karnard?
8. Write a note on the comic element in *Tughlaq*.
9. What is the role of Najib in *Tughlaq*?
10. Discuss any two examples of Karnard's use of history in *Tughlaq*.

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THE DUMB DANCER

Asif Currimbhoy

Unit-VIII

Asif Currimbhoy: The Dumb Dancer

Marjorie Boulton has made a very perceptive remark in her book, *The Anatomy of Drama*:

A true play is three dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended and the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions which occur literally and physically on the stage. Though in fact plays are often read in silence, if we are to study drama at all intelligently we must keep this in mind.

Thus, it is pertinent to note that drama is a composite art and it requires for its success various accessories such as stage, actors and audience yet it is “a cultural activity... in fact drama is almost as natural to human beings as breathing.” Indian theatre was occupied with plays written in regional languages to which the audiences responded spontaneously. It was easy for the actors also to play those roles in their own mother tongue. Early Indian English writers could not enjoy this prerogative. Hence the growth of Indian drama in English suffered. English language was not intelligible to the masses and the playwrights also found it difficult to narrate the situations or write dialogues in crisp and natural manner in English that was not the language of their emotional make up. Commenting on the paucity of Indian drama in English, the great scholar K.R.S. Iyenger opens the chapter on Drama in his famous book *Indian Writing in English* thus:

“‘Indo- Anglican Drama’: isn’t it like talking about ‘snakes in Iceland’? Not quite, – but the problem is there, for while poetry, novels and non-fiction prose can be read in the silence of one’s own study, Drama can come to life only in the theatre. Lately, however, a change in the climate is perceptible.”

About the scarcity of the dramatic literature Muralidas Melwani remarked in his article “Indian Drama Today” which appeared in *Quest* No 64, Jan-March 1970 that

“As against every play performed or published, three novels, or six collections of poetry (including anthologies) are published.” In other words, Indian English drama lags behind poetry and fiction both in quantity and quality.”

(a) Indian English Drama in Pre-Independence India

The Indian dramatists writing in English have not fully ransacked the rich fund of material from the ancient lore, myth, legend and history but despite these limitations and hindrances Indian drama in English had made a beginning in the early nineteenth century. It made a humble beginning with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerji’s *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* in 1831. M.K. Naik confirms in *A History of Indian English Literature* that Indian English drama dates with the publication of this play from 1831. Elaborating the theme of the play that is the “inconsistencies and the blackness of the influential members of the Hindoo community,” Banerji claims that it is a social play which presents the conflict between orthodoxy and the new ideas ushered in by the western education. It remained a solitary dramatic effort in India and the first play to present the East-West encounter. From the point of view of technique it is somewhat crude presentation of the conflict in the mind of the playwright. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet, translated three of his own Bangali plays into English: *Ratnavali* (1858) – a version of Harsha’s well-known Sanskrit play, *Sermista; is this Called Civilization?* (1871) and *Nation Builders*, which was published posthumously in 1922. Ramkinoo Dutt’s *Manipura Tragedy* (1893) was another play to join the history of Indian drama written in the nineteenth century. It is self-evident that Indian English drama could not secure a firm foothold and build tradition of its own about which M.K.Naik says:

“Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English drama in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, grew sporadically as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing.”

Among these three great dramatists, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the first chronologically speaking. He is a prolific artist and his creativity is inexhaustible. In Indian drama Tagore is known for the English transcreations as he translated some of his Bengali plays into English; they appeared in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1936). He often made extensive changes while subjecting the texts of original plays to rigorous condensation. Tagore's transcreations form a class apart and should not be compared with the plays translated by other writers. Tagore's plays deal with the mystery of human existence and complexity of human emotions like love, faith and even religion and death. The plays make an attempt to solve the actual conflict in human situation. He focuses on one problem or another only to point out that, problem being a reflective of life, no clear-cut solution can ever be given. Tagore's plays are divided into two major groups: First, plays based on a set system of thought and are theme-oriented called thesis plays like *Sanyasi* or *The Aescetic*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Chitra*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Natir Puja* and *Red Oleanders*, and secondly psychological plays which carry the substance through the symbols. Even the characters become symbolic. For example, take the play like *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devyani*, *The Mother's Prayer*, *Karna and Kunti* to name a few. Therefore, these plays are to be experienced and interpreted more in the theatre of one's own mind than in the theatre of the brick and mortar. Tagore being charged with the spirit of new humanism, challenged most of the secluded centres of thoughts and actions misleading the conduct of the practitioners in general. For instance, consider his play *Sanyasi*, which is the English version of Tagore's Bengali play *Prakitir Parisodh* (which means Nature's Revenge). The play propounds the thesis about the celebration of life through love, which liberates human beings and enlarges their vision. Tagore never advocates the philosophy of a renunciation of life. He accepts life as it is and enjoys the manifold beauties of life and nature enthusiastically. According to him a participation in the humble activities of daily life is essential for God-realization. In the play *Sanyasi*, the hero failed to realize the truth that God's pervades everywhere. He feels that he has attained the infinite by ignoring this world altogether but when he goes back to the world singing the victory over the forces of nature he is humiliated and disillusioned in the end. *The Cycle of Spring* is based on the idea that change is the law of nature. Therefore, all the changes are to be joyously accepted. If *Chitra* presents an illuminating vision of true love, *Sacrifice*, *Malini* and *Natir Puja* expose the problem of religious fanaticism. Even *Sacrifice* once again questions the religious bigotry of the orthodox Hindus and propagates his own humanistic concept of sacrifice in the play. Tagore's views on sacrifice challenge the traditional idea of human sacrifice to propitiate gods and goddesses. In *Red Oleanders* Tagore glorifies human love and human values. The theme of the play *Mukta-Dhara* is self-evident that the free flow of the human values is a natural behaviour and to hinder it in any way is to invite self-destruction. Tagore's psychological plays reveal his deep understanding of the feminine mind. These plays present a remarkable range of women characters of different age group and position and insight into the feminine mind. For instance, take Queen Sumitra, Devyani, Kunti and the Mother who have been drawn with rare skill and psychological insight in the plays entitled *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer*. Tagore's characters are used as his mouthpiece to present his ideological stance. They do not evolve or grow drastically different from what they initially were but they present the inner conflict of the head and heart. The principal characters tend to be symbolic and even attain allegorical significance in the thesis plays and archetypal in the psychological dramas where they attain a certain universality. Even though they do not have a free and complete development but they have a rich psychological and spiritual delineation.

Tagore imbibes in his art the best of the dramatic tradition of the West and the East that reveals itself in three important aspects of the theatre: (a) the stagecraft: Being an actor, director, producer and playwright himself he fully realized the needs and limitations of the dramatic art and took a keen interest in all accessories including the costume and the stage settings which are mostly non-realistic, romantic and remote to suit the romantic and legendary themes. (b) the dialogue: Tagore's dialogue is spontaneous and lyrical and they express the typical Indian ethos and culture. They carry the religious, moral and philosophical controversies. At times the dialogue is charged with the moral and social note. The sincerity of expression and intensity of feeling mingled with keen artistic quality save the dialogue from being monotonous. (c) the language: Tagore uses for his plays either the poetic prose or blank verse. The medium suits the emotional intensity and spiritual zeal. The language does have a didactic air which is, perhaps, its purpose as the plays are deeply rooted in the Indian ethos in its themes and characters and are "eminently expressive

of his deepest convictions in creative terms” to use the words of M.K.Naik from his valuable book, *A History of Indian English Literature*.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) wrote five complete and six incomplete verse plays between 1891 and 1916. He wrote them directly in English imitating the blank verse drama of the Elizabethans. Of these the earliest two fragments written, when he was a student in London, are: *The Witch of Ilni: A Dream of the Woodlands* (1891) and *Achab and Esar* (n.d.) To his Baroda period (1893-1906) belong the plays *The Viziers of Bassora – A Dramatic Romance*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Rodogune* and three fragments: *The Maid in the Mill: Love Shuffles the Cards*, *The House of Brute* and *The Birth of Sin* (which appeared as a poetic dialogue in *Collected Poems and Plays*, 1942). *Prince of Edur* (a revised version of the *Prince of Mathura*) was written in 1907 while *Eric: A Dramatic Romance* and *Vasavadutta* were written between 1912 and 1916. With the exception of *Perseus the Deliverer*, the rest of the complete plays were published between 1957 and 1960, *Perseus the Deliverer* was first serialized in *Bande Mataram*, Calcutta in 1907. Finally it was included in the *Collected Poems and Plays* (1942) All the eleven plays have now appeared in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library Edition, Volume 6 and 7 – *Collected Plays and Short Stories: Part I and II* (1971)

Sri Aurobindo’s plays are noticeable for their variety of period and locale, ranging from ancient Greek times to medieval India and covering diverse lands and cultures including Iraq, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. However, all the full-length plays are in blank verse and carry a stamp of a typical Elizabethan cast. In spite of the variety of settings, themes and characters, they “are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, – though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones.”

Sri Aurobindo’s fascination for the Elizabethan drama can be seen even in the early fragments – the *Witch of Ilni* and *Achab and Esar*. *The Viziers of Bassora*, based on a story from *The Arabian Nights* shows how a pair of young lovers is reunited after a series of trials, through the benevolence of Haroun Al Rasheed, Caliph of Bagdad. The contrast between the ‘good’ Vazier and ‘bad’ is the mainspring of the action. Similarly *Perseus the Deliverer* is “a romantic story of human temperament and life-impulses on the Elizabethan model” to use the words of the author himself. It vividly presents the conflict between the old and the new. The message of the play is that “the new must prevail – else chaos will come again” to use the words of K.R.S. Iyenger. *Perseus* too is located in Syria, but here the centre of attraction is not the hero, but Andromeda the heroine. *Rodogune* is Sri Aurobindo’s only tragedy that is based on a love-triangle and is perhaps the most derivative of all Sri Aurobindo’s dramatic creations. *Vasavadutta* is a variation on the story in the *Kathasagaritasagara*.

Sri Aurobindo’s dramatic art has been crippled by profuse Elizabethan influences and in his plays he does not reveal the same originality both in thought and craftsmanship as in his poetry. They lack dramatic quality in language and dialogue. His characters “seem to think, speak and act less like authentic Indians than like Elizabethan personages in Indian garb” to use the words of M.K.Naik. As Prof. Iyenger rightly stated, “Sri Aurobindo was a prophet and a recluse, and he stood apart in unique solitariness, and anyhow his five plays were but a small fraction of his phenomenal literary output.” However, Sri Aurobindo’s plays have an appeal for the scholars and not for the common men. They display a great exuberance of thought and dialogue but they “they can not fully meet the demand of the stage and are at best closet dramas” to use S. Krishna Bhatt’s words from *Indian English Drama: A Critical Study*.

Both as a poet and playwright, H.N. Chattopadhyaya (1898—?) has always been noted for his fecundity and versatility. He has a number of plays and playlets to his credit. He began his career as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918), a light fantasy in prose and verse. *His Poems and Plays* (1927) contain seven verse plays on the lives of Indian saints: Pundalik, Saku bai, Jayadeva, Chokha, Mela, Eknath, Raidas and Tukaram; they are marked by a poetic quality as their language is remarkable for its sublimity. They are called hagiological plays and are less effective dramatically than his plays of social protest. His *Siddharta: Man of Peace* (1956), a play in eight acts on the life of Lord Buddha, is a good play but by no means a successful one.

H.N. Chattopadhyaya’s *Five Plays* (1929) are in prose and are strongly coloured by his socialist leanings. *The*

Window, The Parrot, The Sentry's Lantern, The Coffin and *The Evening Lamp*. They contain some of his characteristic features like his social consciousness, flair for realism, and his terse prose style. *The Window* and *The Parrot* offer glimpses into the lives of the poor as the former deals with the slum life of the brave Textile Workers of Parel, Bombay, to whom the play is dedicated and ends with the protest against the proposal to tax Light. They rush out shouting: "Light, Light in the worker's home – for ever, the latter is dedicated "to all those whose mortality is not a parrot's cage." In *The Sentry's Lamp*, Chattopadhyaya probes into the consciousness of a bourgeois poet, a merchant and a worker, all the three awaiting the dawn when they are to be hanged. The poor worker says, "The Revolution will come. . .red like this dawn." The play is a symbolic expression of the hope of the dawn of a new era for the poor. *The Coffin* and *The Evening Lantern*. Although there is an uncomfortable alliance between symbolism and realism in the plays, they are too heavily coated with purpose. They have a tautness and intensity that is seldom found in Indian drama in English. They do manifest the 'new realism' of the early decades of the twentieth century. Besides, Chattopadhyaya wrote an allegorical satire on the evil of modern civilization entitled *The Sleeper Awakened* (n.d.). His play *The Saint: A Farce* (1946) is a satire on religious hypocrisy as in the play an opium-addict is mistaken for a holy sage. *Kannappan or the Hunter of Kalahasti* (1950) is a 'lyric play' on the theme of the right of a lowly hunter to enter a temple. M.K. Naik rightly points out that

"Chattopadhyaya's plays fail owing to both his inability to create living characters speaking in an individual voice and to work out his themes in a viable dramatic terms. Their best claim to remembrance is a few passages of rich romantic verse."

However, it is indeed difficult to deny the fact that he was a creative writer of "infinite possibilities" as Sri Aurobindo affirmed.

When compared to Bengal, the early history of Indian drama in English is much briefer. Though the first theatre in Bombay, the Bombay Amateur Theatre, was built in 1776, its dramatic activity was exclusively confined to performances by visiting European touring companies. With the rise of Marathi and Gujarati drama heralded by Annasaheb's epoch-making production of *Shakuntal* in Marathi in 1880, the vernacular stage soon posed a formidable challenge to English drama. Still, there are some examples of Indian English drama in Bombay during the nineteenth century such as C.S. Nazir's verse play *The First Parsi Baronet* (1866), D.M. Wadia's *The Indian Heroine* (1877) based on the events of 1857 and P.P.Meharjee's *Dolly Parsen* (1918).

Madras began later than Bombay in writing plays in English but soon surpassed it. In 1875 Madras Dramatic Society was founded and Oriental Drama Club followed it in 1882. Krishnamchary of Bellary founded the first South Indian dramatic society, The Sarasa Vinidini Sabha, in 1890. The dramatists of this period were V.V.Srinivasa Aiyangar (1871-1954), P.V.R.Raju, J. Virabhadra Rao, A. Srinivasacharya, Krishammacharya, S. Ranga Iyer, A.C.Krishnaswamy, R.S.Narayanaswami, J.S.R.Sarma, T.B.Krishnaswamy and K.S.Ramaswami Sastri.

A bilingual playwright, T.P. Kailasam (1884-1946), who wrote in English and Kannada, was acquainted with the rich tradition of Kannada theatre and the glorious cultural heritage of his country. He made an outstanding contribution to drama and used myth and history for dramatic purpose adroitly. His significant plays are: *The Burden, Fulfilment, The Purpose, Karma: the Brahmin's Curse, A Monologue* and *Keechaka*. His plays are based on Puranic themes, which are interpreted in the modern context. He is very successful in rendering Puranic characters and it appears that in them "there is a touch of iconoclasm but actually the idealism is deeper than iconoclasm," to use the words of Iyenger who further adds:

"Although Kailasam's total output is by no means impressive, these few plays are enough to establish his claim to be considered an original talent that tried, not unsuccessfully, to achieve superb self-expression through the medium of drama."

Among the writers of verse plays, a reference may be made to here to Dhan Gopal Mukherji's *Layla majnu* (1916), Bharti Sarabhai's *The Well of People* (1943) and *Two women*, a play in prose which is often charged with poetic feelings and packed with thought. She was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and her plays highlight the conflict and tension caused by East-West encounter. J.M.Lobo-Prabhu's plays are contained in *Collected Plays*. His play

like “Apes in the Parlour,” which is a biting skit on the sophisticated life, “The Family Cage,” that presents of a widowed sister in a joint family, and “Flags of the Heart” that is a sentimental piece based on love thwarted by caste and has a sentimental conclusion. As Iyenger points out, “Lobo-Prabhu’s energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise situations; but his characters are rarely alive, and his denouements are seldom wholly convincing.”

There is, then, S.Fyzee-Rahamin’s *Daughter of Ind* (1940), which is a story of an untouchable girl’s love for her master, an idealistic Englishman. The play has a power of its own as politics, satire, sentimentality, romance and imagination join hands. Above all, it is the character of the girl, Malti, “who was the candle that burnt itself to give light to other” which adds life to the theme of the play. Suryadutt’s *The Trial Celestial* (1940), Surendra Nath Ghose’s *Colours of a great City*; *Two Playlets – The Defaulters* and *Pippa Dances*, V.N.Bhushan’s *Samyukta* and *Mortal Coils*, Armando Menzes’s social comedy *Caste*, R.N.Narayan’s *The Watchman of the Lake*, K.R.S.Iyengar’s *Samti* and *Her Spouse or the Storm in a Tea Cup* and *The Battle of the Optionals* and D.K.Roy’s *Life of Chaitanya* are some of the milestones in the development of Indian English drama.

Indian English drama, despite its persistence and some monumental achievements, could not attain the same artistic quality that its poetry, prose and novel could share. Prof. Iyengar himself gives one of its main reasons when he stated:

“The paucity of good actable English dramas written by Indians is mainly attributable to the fact that the natural medium of conversation with us – excepting for the sophisticated who live in the cities and larger towns, in the Universities or in certain Government offices or business houses – is the mother tongue rather than English, and hence, unless the characters and situations are carefully chosen, it would be difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound convincing. Of course, there are certain perennial situations that transcend place, time and language.”

Only known Indian play written in English from North India during this period is *Death or Dishonour* by an anonymous author published in Dehra Dun in 1914. These are some of the playwrights who wrote during the Pre-Independence India. Their plays, though not very successful, have their own contribution in enlarging the frontiers of Indian English drama.

(b) Indian English Drama in Post-Independence India

Even in Post-Independence period drama, unlike poetry and fiction, has not registered very notable gains essentially being a composite art involving the playwright, the actor and the audience in a shared experience on the stage – something of which other literary forms are free. The Indian regional languages monopolized the theatre whereas Indian English as given the opportunity for occasional performance only. It is true that Post-Independence drama did benefit by growing interest abroad and a number of plays by dramatists like Asif Currimbhoy, Partap Sharma and Gurcharan Das were successfully staged in Europe and the United States of America. However, this did not lead to a regular school of Indian English drama at home. M.K.Naik makes a very candid though touching remark that

“This was mainly because the encouragement which drama received from several quarters immediately after Independence was monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages, while Indian English drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousin’s tables.”

Highlighting the problem of Indian English drama, Gurusharn says; “It is indeed laudable effort on the part of Theatre Group in Bombay and other agencies to stage the plays by some of the doyens of modern Indian English drama”. Actually, the first Five Year Plan after Independence encouraged the performing arts as an effective means of public enlightenment and National School of drama was established in Delhi where National Drama Festival was started and the Sangeet Natak Akademi was founded in 1954. *Enact*, a magazine solely devoted to drama, has been rendering a memorable service to the development of drama. Its editor, Rajinder Paul, is also a noted playwright whose contribution to the promotion of drama in English is great and lasting.

Though Tagore – Aurobindo – Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continues But with a difference, in the hands of Manger Sharon, G.V. Desani, Lachlan Deb and British Mandy. G.V.Desani’s *Hali* (1950) is much more complex and

singular piece of dramatic art, which has been highly admired both by European and Indian critics for its originality. It is an autobiographical play and Desani himself explains its genesis:

“I had a personal tragedy – a serious love affair. Hali is a monument to this affair and tragedy. It took me a very long time to write Hali. I planned it so carefully as to make people moved to tears and therefore reduced of the whole to the essentials without any padding whatsoever. I was then carrying a deep hurt in my heart and Hali was to be a gesture of loyalty to the love I bore a friend. After this tragedy I felt so helpless that I would have been killed by the sorrow but for some kind friends.”

The play, *Hali*, received due praise for its originality, its symbolism, its rich imagery and its sheer “apocalyptic quality.” K.R.S.Iyenger has made a very insightful observation about the play when he says:

“A short poetic play, Hali, is an attempt to project the story of a ‘passion’: in other words, Hali’s confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communication with Love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place.”

Another important verse play, *The lute of Krishna* (1950) is for the flight of imagination and the final message that “Utter dedication to the Lord is never in vein.”

Indian English drama of the post-independence era shows a rich diversity of genre like comedy, tragic-comedy, tragedy, farce, history plays and fantasy which makes drama a fruitful and thoughtfully cultivated field of creative activity. Asif Currimbhoy (1928), who is the most prolific playwright with a genuine feeling for drama and an outstanding sensitivity and sense for the theatrical value, has been able to establish himself as one of the greatest living Indo-English dramatist of our times. He has written more than thirty plays that are published in four volumes and the first among them being *The Tourist Mecca*. Variety and versatility both are the twin distinguishing marks of his plays. There can be no doubt regarding Currimbhoy’s fecundity as a dramatist. As he has written one act plays like *The Clock* and *The Refugee*, two-act plays like *Goa* and *Doldrummers*, three-act plays like *Inquilab* and four-act plays like *Sonar Bangla*. Currimbhoy has written plays on a wide variety of subjects such as history, current politics, socio-economic problems, the East-west encounter, Psychological problems, philosophical ideas, religious themes and art. He handles all the forms like comedy, farce, melodrama, fantasy, history, and tragedy, with ease as he has a flair for playwriting. Prof. Iyengar rightly comments, “He can contrive interesting situations, his dialogues are arresting, and he has a sense of atmosphere; and his plays are actable.”

Among the current themes the political issues greatly attract his attention. The major political events, which have special appeal for him, are partition and its aftermath in *The Captives* (1963), the liberation of Goa from Portuguese domination in *Goa* (1964), the coming of freedom to a tropical island in the Malaysian archipelago in *Monsoon* (1965), Indian freedom movement in *An Experiment in Truth* (1969), the Naxalite Movement in *Inquilab* (1970), the Bangladesh War in *The Refugee* (1971), and *Sonar Bangla* (1972), the Chinese invasion of Tibet in *Om Mani Padme Hum* (1972), the vicissitudes of Indo-China in *Angkor* (1973), the student agitation in Gujarat in *The Dissident M.L.A.* to name some of them. As M.K.Naik points out

“Most of these plays have a strong ‘documentary’ element about them and there is no attempt to understand and project in dramatic terms the ideological implications of the political conflicts dealt with. The dramatist appears to be primarily interested in the thrill of the exciting events rather than in the thought-process, which shaped them. The result is sheer reportage; and when Currimbhoy gives free rein to his imagination, the upshot is often crude and contrived symbolism....”

Commenting on Asif Currimbhoy’s contribution as a dramatist, C.Paul Verghese writes:

“Currimbhoy is a craftsman who can move from subject to subject, but develops no vision of his own... Currimbhoy seems to seek as escape from the conventional rules of dramatic composition such as the unfolding of the plot and denouement. Not only in the construction of his plots but also in the choice of the subject matter he shows this freedom.”

Like Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma (1940 –) is also a skilled craftsman. His play, *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) presents a picture of the Red-light area in Bombay is to be commended for its thematic boldness but is marred by the sensational superficialities. The play was performed on two continents abroad, but was banned in Bombay. Similarly, another play, *The Professor Has a War cry* (1970) also deals with theme of sex. The play is a mixture of melodrama and tragedy. Here a young man Virendra comes to know that he is an illegitimate child of a mother raped successively by a Muslim and an Englishman, after having been deserted by her lover, a Hindu professor, Gopal. Finally Virendra and Professor kill each other. However, there is a keen sense of situation and effective dialogues, noticeable local colour and pointed criticism of social hypocrisy.

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2003), who has made a distinctive and memorable contribution to poetry, has written five plays on his favourite theme – hollowness of the urban middle class, futility of social modes and the institution of marriage. *Three Plays* (1969) includes *Nalini*, a comedy in three acts, *Marriage Poems: A Tragi-Comedy*, and *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce*. *Nalini* is the only full-length play which has “the double personality of the artist” and two successful but immature business executives. *Marriage Poem* presents a middle class husband caught in the cross-fire of marital duty and love; and *The Sleepwalkers* is a diverting take-off on national preconceptions and prejudices. These plays provide a healthy social criticism through drama. Irony, wit and satire are skillfully used to expose the vanity of urban middle class. Ezekiel’s *Song of Deprivation* (1969), a short play, was published separately. Though he has a keen sense of the dramatic as his later poems also reveal, Ezekiel did not attempt at writing major drama.

Lakhan Deb has written three plays – *Tiger’s Claw*, *Vivekanand* and *Murder At The Prayer Meeting*. The first and the third are the historical plays. *Tiger’s Claw* is a verse play in three acts which dramatizes the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. *The Murder At the Prayer Meeting* deals with the murder of Mahatama Gandhi and reminds one of Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*. Deb skillfully employs blank verse but his rhymed verse is crude.

Gurucharan Das’s *Larins Sahib* (1970), a play in three acts, is a chronicle play that deals with the nineteenth century India, especially with Henry Lawrence of the Punjab and his three roles - viz, the enlightened empire-builder, the latter-day ‘Lion of the Punjab’ and the little cog in the wheels of the East India Company machine. What distinguishes this play from other Indian English plays is the successful use of Indian English. Das’s *Mira* (1971) vividly presents Mira’s selfless God-love with all the sophistication of contemporary theatre. It was successfully produced as a ballet in New York and as a play in Bombay. His play *Jakhoo Villa* deals with the theme of decadence in modern Hindu family in Simla.

Gieve Patel’s *Princes* is a study of the small Parsi community and deals with the conflict over the possession between two Parsi families of a child who becomes invalid and later on dies. The play is significant because it creates a situation that most Indians can identify with, that is the obsession with male children and also because it uses a language that characters can speak without straining our credulity. It shows that there is a possibility of using the English language of sub-cultures creatively and not merely for the comic purposes. His second play *Savaksa* appeared in 1982 and its extracts were published in *The Indian Express*, 28th Feb. the same year. The play is about the 60 years old Savaksa who wants to marry the 20 year old Perin, but her elder sister, Hutoxi, intervenes to prevent if possible this monstrous alliance. Once again, the play is about a Parsi family, and the spoken English has a nervous power, and the theme transcends the Gujarati or Parsi milieu.

Girish Karnad (1938), Kannada actor, director and playwright who wrote *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadan*. He himself translated *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) into English. *Tughlaq* is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq of the fourteen-century India. Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan and himself admitted that he found “Tughlaq’s contemporary”. Karnad deviated from history when it was the need of his artistic design. *Hayavadana* is a bold experiment in the use of folk motifs. It is based on the ancient *Kathasaritsagar* tale that Thomas Mann used for his novel *The Transposed Heads*. K.R.S.Iyenger rightly observes that

“In all his three plays – be the theme historical, mythical or legendry – Karnad’s approach is

'modern', and he deploys the conventions and motives of folk art like masks and curtains to project the world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements."

Karnard's plays are conspicuous for the skillful handling of the literary devices like irony and dialogue that has given him international praise as a playwright.

M.V. Rama Sharma's *Collected Plays* (1982), which is a collection of eleven plays on a variety of themes, deserves a special mention. His plays like *Youth and Crabbed Age*, *Like to Like* and this *Busy World* shows the influence of G.B. Shaw. *Shakuntala*, *Marpessa* and *Urvashi* are the plays based on the theme of love. *Towards Marriage* and *Carnival* are realistic and satirical plays and *The Mahatma* (1977) highlights the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi.

Santha Rama Rau brilliantly adopted E.M. Forster's famous novel *A Passage to India* to write a play. Among other plays of interest are: V.K. Gokak's *The Goddess Speaks* (1948); K. Nagarajan's *Chidambaram: Achronicle Play* (1955); Aarti Nagarwalla's *The Bait* (1969); M.D. Melwani's *Deep Roots* (1970) – a study of upper middle class alienation and hypocrisy; Dilip Hiro's *To Anchor A Cloud* (1972), and two one-act plays: *Apply, Apply, No Reply* (1977) and *A Clean Break* (1978); Prithvi Nandy's *Rites For Plebeian Statue*; P.S. Vasudev's *Lord Ravan of Lanka* (1974); Shiv. K. Kumar's *The Last Wedding Anniversary* (1975); K.A. Abbas and Pragji Dossa's *Barrister-At-Law: A Play about the Early Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1977); Manohar Malgonkar's historical play *Line of Mars* (1978); and Syed Amanuddin's *The Kind who Sold his Wife* (1978) which deals with the ancient legend of King Harishchandra.

Here are several other plays, which have appeared in periodicals like *Enact* and others. The *Enact* plays include Anil Saari's *Prefaces* (1969); K.S. Rangappa's *They Live Again* (1969); Dina Mehta's *The Myth-Makers* (1969); Mrinalini Sarabhai's *Vichar* (1970); Kamla Das's *A Mini-Trilogy* (1971); Madhu Rye's *I Am a Butterfly* (1974); Snehlata Reddy's *Sita* (1974) and B. Narayan's *The Onlookers* (1975) to name a few.

Plays long and short continue to be written, published and occasionally even produced. There are also a few plays, which are successfully produced but not yet published. Some playwrights like Krishna Gorowara have a great promise and his various plays have appeared in journals and magazines. He has an inborn talent for comedy, satire and irony and he exposes urban sophistication in the plays like *The Way up*, *Call it a Day*, *Refineries Unlimited*, and *Indo Anglicans in Anglia*. Lawrence Bantleman's *The Award* (1973); K.S. Duggal's *To Each a Window: Six Radio Plays* (1981); Louella Lobo Prabhu's *Broken Melody* (1981) and other plays; Masti Venkatesa Iyengar's *Kalidasa* deserve a special mention. Prof. Iyengar makes an apt remark:

"In the light of what has been detailed above, it may not be wide of the mark to say that Indian drama in English will have but a limited vogue, a minority appeal, and yet on that score it is not to be written off as being of no consequence whatsoever."

Not only that, Indian drama has attained a recognizable popularity and it has become a thoughtfully cultivated form of writing in the field Indian Writings in English. As Faubion Bowers rightly observes "it is certainly one of the best legacies the west left its colonies in the east." It has not only introduced Western playwrights to contemporary India, but has profoundly influenced the regional theatre, which imbibes in it the best of the Indian tradition as well as the Western tradition.

Asif Currimbhoy as a Man

Asif Currimbhoy is India's first authentic voice in the theatre. He has written the country's first plays of dissent. He presents life, as it is, not as something it should be – a trend that has prevailed in India's classical theatre. His art discredits "wonderbox of illusions, finds itself telling the truth while politicians lie and people look the other way" to use the expression of Faubion Bowers. Bombay-born non-practicing Muslim from baronetcy stock of the Khoja sect, followers of Aga Khan, has a devoted wife and three grown up, well-settled children. He retired early from a senior position in Burma-Shell Oil Co. to devote more time to writing. He believe in himself so fiercely that he could continue

"to work for so long alone in theatre to conform and yet to create, to obey society and yet destroy it with death-ray words, to write plays like bullets needing only the trigger of a national event and

even to live in this unappreciative world where fame is awarded others so cheaply and on such a flimsy basis.. . It will be generation before we can really take the measure of Currimbhoy's true worth."

as Faubion Bowers put it.

He has been writing plays for almost thirty years at the rate of two per year, and this fecundity in alliance with his feeling for variety and talent for versatility makes him the most prolific and the most successful of our dramatists. Farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy, history, fantasy: Currimbhoy handles them all with commendable ease. Drama for him is an appropriate means for the agonized expression of his social conscience.

In a conversation with Ruth L. Meserve & W.J. Meserve, Suraiya, his wife, said: "Asif is a karma yogi." It offers a genuine clue to the man and the dramatist, Asif Currimbhoy. There seems to be in him a compulsion toward life that explodes onto the stage of his imagination – sometimes quickly as his thirty plays over a relatively brief time verify, and sometimes fitfully and slowly. Meserves have aptly stated that

"As a man of tremendous energy, he must do things which bear out his destiny in the world of mind as well as the social and political worlds that surround him. And there is a business world in which he toils with considerable success yet seemingly finds only limited satisfaction for the goals he is driven to reach. He has something to say, something he must say: a message to deliver, a vision to fulfil; and he must work, speak, write and act. He is a "karma yogi," and like other thoughtful men he searches inwardly as well as outwardly for means to satisfy both the act and the art of his desires...."

Like "a karma yogi" action is a major key to his artistry. However, the action for him is not only physical rather it stretches to the vast limits of his imagination and includes the larger metaphysical world in which he is most interested. In other words, Asif Currimbhoy stretches his material beyond the confines of the particular to produce not a social document of one country's problems but an imaginative re-creation of egocentric man in conflict with the social and political systems he seemed destined. Meserves have made very perceptive remark about him when they concluded that

"Challenged to touch that essence of creativity, that latching to Currimbhoy's artistry, one discovers the complexities that are expected but also the substance of whole man, man as writer rather than simply the writer. This is particularly evident in the manner in which Currimbhoy visualizes his art. Man in action attracts his mind and eye – the spectacle of his situation..."

It makes the dramatic scene rather than a strictly liner plot his forte. The physical action of his plays supports his thought in a manner dexterously orchestrated with other dramatic elements of diction, music and spectacle.

In his plays thought dominates and governs the action and the control of the play is never meant to pass from his hands. It is pertinent to remember that in his plays "twin forces of dialogue and action fuse on the stage to entertain and instruct the audience" but it is always Currimbhoy the man who controls Asif Currimbhoy the artist in him. Meserves insightfully observe:

"Perhaps compassion is the force which unifies the drama of Asif Currimbhoy. Why does a man write plays? Why does he put himself artistically and – too frequently in Currimbhoy's case – to open him to rejection? Such a person must feel strongly that he has something to say; he must feel deeply. In a Currimbhoy play there is always a definite philosophical basis...."

On a total view, Currimbhoy's achievement in the field of drama is both impressive and distinctive and touched the hallmark of significant attainment.

Asif Currimbhoy as a Dramatist

Indo-English drama generally tends to be academic in tone drawing upon sundry literary sources. Even after the establishment of the National school of Drama and Sangeet Natak Academy and many other dramatic organizations, Indian drama has failed to pass the acid test of a living theatre in this country, but Asif Currimbhoy, a prolific writer

from Goa, has been able to establish himself as the greatest living Indo-English dramatist of our times. Beginning from 1959, his dramatic career spread over many decades, has many remarkable achievements. He has written more than thirty plays. Variety and versatility are twin obvious distinguishing marks of his plays. There are one-act plays like The Clock and The Refugee, two-act plays like Goa and Doldrummers, three-act plays like Inquilab and four-act plays like Sonar Bangla. Currimbhoy handles his subject matter with an easy assurance and his plays include farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy, history and fantasy etc. Commenting on the excellence of his plays K.R.S. Iyenger has rightly pointed out that

“The topicality of several of the plays, the opulence of scene, situation and character, the bold experimentation in technique, the resourceful and often splendid improvisation, the ample elbow room conceded to the producer and the mastery of dialogue are not qualities often found together in the work of the same playwright.”

It is indeed true that Currimbhoy has brought an exceptional talent and seriousness, lots of industry to the difficult craft of play writing in English though he is yet to achieve the appreciation, which he has earned. Faubion Bowers regards Asif Currimbhoy among very few Asians who have been able to promote the art of drama both at home and abroad. According to the critic Asif Currimbhoy, besides Rabindranath Tagore, has startled the world by his creative genius. Bowers states:

“Another exception is Asif Currimbhoy, I think, for he has now begun to emerge more and more clearly as a playwright of international stature.”

Asif Currimbhoy has written plays, which can be categorized as follows:

- (a) **The Romantic Plays:** In these plays he gets under the skin of the situations and characters thereby involving the emotions and feelings of the audience and making them think. This is exemplified in at least four of his plays – The Tourist Mecca (1959), The Doldrummers (1960), The Darjeeling Tea? (1971) and This Alien.... Native Land (1975). They are not romantic in the conventional sense of the term, but in them “there is a deliberate coalescing of reality and reverie, actuality and fevered imagination” as Prof. Iyenger put it. What distinguishes these plays is that most of their characters are aliens or Anglo-Indians. What binds these plays together is dexterous use of sex as technique. For example, take The Tourist Mecca, which is a “dramatic divertissement” on the “pilgrims” to the Taj. It is the story of two lovers who in the end passively accept the continuance of “life movement” in a separation. The play opens with a young bearded Sikh sitting alone on the lounge in one of the posh hotels in Agra. Four groups of tourists to Agra from different countries – France, UK, USA and USSR – enter the lounge. After a while Lady Toppin, an elderly woman tourist from the USA, comes to the hotel along with her daughter, Janet. Lady Toppin is captivated by Agra, a place of pilgrimage for her, from which she seems to learn something new every year. She shakes hands with Keshav, the tourist guide, and gathers from him a few details about her accommodation in the hotel. Then she calls on an American couple. Janet, her daughter, finds it convenient to talk to Keshav. She offers him tea and tells him that she “would personally sooner share confidences with stranger than with a friend,” thereby expressing her love for him. Keshav finds an opportunity to carry on his romance by telling her that he must have met her somewhere in the past. Janet tells him:

“You must have met my mother before evidently. There are bits and pieces about her that you remember, and subconsciously associate with me.”

Keshav lures her by saying: “Your logic is quite disarming. That’s yet another difference between you and your mother.” The young lady submits herself with delight to Keshav Singh and tells her mother that she wants to marry him. The mother wants to save her from the “trap” of Keshav and her arguments betray her inner sorrow and helplessness. She slaps her daughter viciously and tells her that Keshav is a gigolo and that cuff-inks that he wears had been given to him by her long ago. It makes Janet miserable. In her anxiety, Janet offers a bribe to the receptionist, asking him to bring Keshav to her room as early as possible. After a while, instead of Keshav, Kate, a middle aged woman, enters and tells her that Keshav has gone out and it is not possible for him to go

over there. Interestingly, she tells her about the business of Keshav as a gigolo. Janet is rather disheartened when she knows that Keshav is a professional lover. He fails to convince her of his genuine feelings of love for her. While parting Janet kisses him and slips her emerald ring onto his finger thereby suggesting that he has to remain as a professional lover only. Keshav continues to stare at the ring as the curtain closes.

Tempo makes a special contribution for a satisfactory understanding of the orchestration of the play. It quickens with the arrival of the four groups of the tourists from various countries. It slows down with the arrival of Lady Toppin and her daughter. It jolts to a sudden halt when Janet decides to opt for happiness instead of truth. She says:

“I shall come again for a holiday next year with Mother. It will give us the chance to think things over - more calmly.”

Thus, the tempo now uneven, now even, now quickening and now slowing, punctuates the rhythm of the play and enhances the dramatic effect.

Currimbhoy's character delineation in this play is interesting. Keshav is a mysterious character and invites some psychological explanation. His appearance and dress makes Janet wonder as to how could he be an ordinary travel agent. His silence and reserve sound deeper. We find some development in his character. In the beginning he is rather reserved and is found to be as a professional lover but with the arrival of Janet he becomes a sincere lover.

The play can be examined in terms of conflict which is essential to theatre. For instance, the conflict between Lady Toppin and her daughter – the former advising the latter to change her attitude towards Keshav and the latter denying it – appeals to the reader/audience intensely.

The Tourist Mecca is remembered for its vigorous and masculine dialogue also. Currimbhoy's handling of the element of irony in the play is effective for instance take American husband's observations about places or the tourists' comment about the Tajmahal which, according to them “is a dream in marble designed by Titans and finished by the jewellers.”

Currimbhoy employs certain theatrical devices to keep the play alive on the stage. In “Forward” to The Hungry Ones. J. Meserve and I. Meserve aptly observe that “Asif's forte is the dramatic scene which he presents with a fascinating variety of theatrical experiments.” he uses flash-back which makes the audience enter the subconscious desires, the rise and fall of sounds which produce the dramatic effects or the group recite in chorus which creates the total effect on the stage. Currimbhoy is not just interested in controlling the minds of the audience, but “he has something to say, something he must say, message to deliver, a vision to fulfill” to use the expression of Meserves. He lays bare the predicament in which modern young men and women fall a prey to the force of circumstances. These characteristics are illustrated further in the plays like The Doldrummers – a highly moving play that explores human relationships. This romantic play is built around four young Anglo-Indians – Tony, Rita, Joe and Liza – it is not devoid of a realistic flavour. The playwright attacks the modern youth and their purposelessness in life and ridicules them for the lack of courage and criticizes them for their inhuman treatment of women. The play is remarkable for the audio-visual effects created by the picturesque description of Juhu Beach itself.

Darjeeling Tea? is an outcome of Currimbhoy's tour in the tea gardens as well as his holiday visit to Darjeeling in the summer of 1970. it is a typical romantic comedy in which he successfully deals with the love between Mac, the tea planter, and the hill woman on the one hand, and between Bunty, a new recruit, and Didi, the illegitimate daughter of the Big Mac on the other. There is a lot of mirth, laughter and gaiety in the play but what Currimbhoy wants to point out is that there is a bitterness and cynicism behind the laughter essentially because of a change in values in society. The element of conflict between the levels of society claims critical attention in the play. Currimbhoy employs many Hindi phrases like “Han, Burra Sahib,” or “Han, Han Sethji. The language of the play sounds un-English but it does appeal to the feelings of the audience. The irony and satire permeate through out the play. The playwright exposes the drunkenness and the aping of the Brown Sahib and the lechery and lavishness of the expatriate planters. He uses a variety of theatrical techniques to direct the emotions he

wants the audience to feel. He also uses sex to make a point. Big Mac who indulges in womanizing has to reap the consequences for the sins he has committed. Currimbhoy dramatizes how man is a sensual being and also an object of compassion and at the same time exposes the lack of values among the British planters. He shows that there is a shift of values in the expatriate planters and that the Darjeeling Tea famous everywhere is not served in Darjeeling.

This Alien... Native Land deals with the predicament in which an Indian middle-class Jewish family is placed. The Jewish family comprises of Joseph, his wife, Rachel, his two sons, Jacob and David, and his daughter Sarah. Everyone in the family is in the doldrums. The play can be analyzed at the level of parallels and contrasts. The members of Joseph's family feel alien in their native land. Joseph contrasts India with Jerusalem:

“But not like here. Here it's dirty and filthy and ...and...ingrown...There it's the wide spaces...and a new life...”

The dialogue in the play is realistic, racy, simple, forceful and sometimes poetic. It is not an exaggeration to say that through dramatic poetry Currimbhoy has secured the depth and intensity of the play. Humour and irony are forcefully presented in the play, for instance, in Sarah's anxious inquiry about time to meet her lover. The play is important for its imbedded satire as well as for various theatrical devices like the sound effects and gestures that reveal the inner mind of the characters. Precisely, the play reveals how disintegration overtakes an Indian Jewish family.

To sum up, the romantic plays of Currimbhoy, with their dominant theme of love and sex, are infinitely theatrical and thoroughly enjoyable. The dramatist employs theatrical devices like the flashback, the pantomime, “the shadow screen” combined with effective visual and auditory images to keep the plays alive on the stage. Through his romantic plays he proves that he has something to say, a message to deliver about man's destructive indulgence in passions. He is especially anxious about the modern youth who easily falls a prey to the force of circumstances.

- (b) **The Political Plays:** Though Asif Currimbhoy is not an overtly political writer, he has taken considerable pains to present his thought by implication, indirection and innuendo rather than by direct statement. His plays Goa (1964), An Experiment with Truth (1969) and Om Mane Padme Hum! (1971), and more than a dozen other plays were written during the decades of sixties and seventies may be categorized as his Political plays. His themes are drawn from a wide variety of fields including history and politics. They deal with crucial political events that affected the body politic of India. Goa deals with the Indian take over of Goa in December 1961 and An Experiment with Truth is a reconstruction of the ministry and martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi. The Restaurant has the theme of the partition and its aftermath; Mansoon takes up the advent of freedom in an island in the Malasian archipelago; Om Mane Padame Hum is about the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959; Inquilab is based on the Naxalite movement and The Captives on the Sino-Indian conflict. The Refugee and Sonar Bangla deal with the Bagladesh war while The Dissident M.L.A. with the student agitation in Gujarat, which led to the dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly in 1976. Manubhai, a fictitious dissident M.L.A. is the main brain behind rumpus in the university. The problem of dissidence in politics, the pernicious influence of politics on academic life and political corruption are dealt with realistically.

The political plays of Currimbhoy give us not only an insight into the political world in which the historic events took place, but also reveal the unique stand taken by the playwright in assessing the worthlessness of these political events. These political plays of Currimbhoy reveal that he is fully aware of the social absurdities and particular events and conditions in the affairs of man which strike his imagination. He uses them in his plays in such a way that do not make his plays of low quality. The place of action can be anywhere, Calcutta, Bombay, Darjeeling or any other but the problem and conflict presented there are the problems of every man.

Believing that a man reveals himself in the social and political systems, he makes this socio-political world as the starting point. His bitter anguish at the bloodshed in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) finds expression in Sonar Bangla. Sumitra, the heroine of the play exclaims: “Is this what victory means? They.... They've become

beasts.” Currimbhoy feels that violence cannot be used to finish violence and war cannot bring happiness and consolation to life.

Currimbhoy’s play, *Inquilab*, is a direct response to the Naxalite revolt in West Bengal where the agrarian communities opted for violence. He explores in depth the Naxalite revolt, and is a non-partisan and honest account of the violent that overtook Calcutta in 1970. Currimbhoy deals with Naxalite movement showing how it aims at awakening socialism with all the aspects of socio-economic dimensions and anti-capitalistic trends among the people, which exploit the masses economically and socially. In this three act-play, Currimbhoy portrays the revolution in all its shades. Its causes, effects and aspirations are dramatized in a realistic manner. The setting of the play is a classroom in one of the colleges in Calcutta where many communist slogans are scrawled on the walls and a red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle is drawn. Datta, a distinguished Professor of law with a conservative outlook and “a British traditional approach,” is worried about the “dying city” affected by processions, strikes and violence and is equally perturbed by the “revisionist” students questioning the holy institutions of learning in general, and his lesson on the freedom of thought and expression in particular. He is influenced by Gandhi and is keen to explain to them that non-violence is an active philosophy. Amar, the son Prof. Dutta, makes a passionate appeal to his father:

“Look around, father, open your eyes: the poverty, the terrible poverty...We’re drowning under the Hooghly, silting up the doomed humanity... And you talk of education, father.”

The basic cause of the revolution is the unfair distribution of money and the widespread, large-scale unemployment. Through it Currimbhoy also exposes the appeasement policy of the Government. Amar tells Mr. Jain:

“You have enough land: Don’t go putting it in your brothers’, sisters, and dogs’ names: Don’t go on having captive labour through compulsion or reward: the land belongs to the tiller!”

Mr. Ahmed is totally committed to the revolutionary ideas and wants to put his Naxalite theory into practice. The students seem to have been tremendously influenced by him.

The society is divided into two sections, the rich and the poor. The landlords like Mr. Jain and Prof. Dutta represent the rich; the poor are represented by Shoumik and other villagers alongwith Ahmed. Naturally the students make strong protest when professor Dutta lectures to them by quoting a few articles from the Indian Constitution. They scream, shout and run helter-skelter, forming animated little groups. They burn books, ransack the shelves and try to break the statue of Sir Asutosh. As the prof. Dutta gets up to protect the statue, he is flung down by the Naxalite students. As he falls, he clasps Ahmed to his breast. Ahmed slowly dis entangles one arm holding a peasant’s sickle and with a jerk buries it deep into the professor’s back. We find

“An indescribable expression on the professor’s face before he falls lifeless. Still in Ahmed’s arms, the moist kiss drying on the cheek through which serpents a streak of red blood. Pitch black darkness and silence.”

After the holocaust, Amar realises that the Naxalite shortcut will not bring about “socialist revolution” and his father’s approach was right. He also realizes that the change should come through the will of the majority and through a free vote. He feels that the answer to the evil and hatred spread in the name of the revolution, which involves all like an epidemic, lies in generosity of understanding and radiant love of woman. He finds it in Suprea, the daughter of the slaughtered landlord, Mr. Jain.

The tempo in all its variations is an intrinsic element in the structure of the play; it affects the rhythm of the play and enhances its effect. About this play Currimbhoy wrote to Faubion Bowers:

“The play is a nightmare and redemption of today’s Calcutta. Amidst all the uncertainties, I am still trying for what is more precious to me: A Bengali language production in this heart of disturbed Calcutta. This is the only thing that will give own disturbed heart some peace.”

As a “dramatist of the public event” Currimbhoy shows in his famous play *The Refugee*, a human concern about the exodus of Bangladesh refugee in India in 1971. In this neatly structured play he dramatizes graphically

the liberation of Bangladesh from the tyranny of Pakistan. When the talks between Yahya Khan and Mujiburehman failed to reach any fruitful conclusion. The plot centres on Yassin, a young intellectual refugee from East Pakistan. He miraculously escaped the machine guns and is welcomed to the household of Sen Gupta who himself was a refugee 24 years earlier. He was also the childhood friend of Yassin's mother, Rukaiya. Sen Gupta looks back with nostalgia upon his hometown of Comilla in East Bengal. Despite a father of two children now, he cherishes sweet memories of Rukaiya, his young love.

Sen Gupta, who has become prosperous through hard work and diligent application, looks upon the refugees as a threat to his own home and community. Yassin remains unperturbed and does not even talk about his home. Sen Gupta's son Ashok joins Mukti Foj for "someone has to do the fighting." Inspired by Mita he searches his own conscience; even Ashok stirs him to action. He at last decides to work for the liberation of his country. However, things are not so easy for him. Everything seems a nightmare to Yassin as he loses distinction between reality and non-reality. In the end he takes away Ashok's Mukti Foj uniform and the rifle to join the Mukti Bahini to liberate his country from the clutches of West Pakistan. He is still unsure whether he is doing the right thing.

The play can be analyzed at the level of conflict in the minds of various characters, between idea and action – between conception and execution - which forms the central dialect of the play. The setting of the play is realistic and the dialogue gives an insight into the theme of the play and the playwright's power to handle it. Currimbhoy's language in this play is very effective and it adds much to the theatrical value of the play.

An Experiment with Truth is built on conflict which operates in the play from the beginning to the end. The conflict between the Indians and the Britishers, especially on the latter's monopoly on salt, the conflict between Gandhi and his wife over the possession and preservation of it for her progeny whereas Gandhi is interested in renunciation, the conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi where the former pleads for a separate electorate for minorities and the latter asking for a joint electorate and the inner conflict of Gandhi in his mind regarding his sexual abstinence has made the play very powerful. Through flashbacks, shadow cutouts and special effects Currimbhoy makes the play theatrically vital. Here the playwright gives scope for a "highly complex theatrical event in which the dramatist's twin forces of dialogue and action fuse on the stage to entertain and instruct an audience" to use the expression of Prof. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve.

Currimbhoy weaves the political event of the flight of the Dalai Lama from Tibet when China occupied it in the fifties and give a succinct account of the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet. The play dramatizes the conflict in the mind of the Dalai Lama. The play, Om Mane Padme Hum opens in the prayer room of the monastery in the Potala at Lhasa where Boy Rimpoche along with the red and yellow robed monks chant the Buddhist hymn "Om Mane Padme Hum." The three abbots of the great Monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden persuade the Dalai Lama to escape under the threat of an internal revolt against the Chinese occupation. But the Lama does not like the ideal of leaving Tibet. Even the Ministers ask the Lama to run away from Tibet because the Chinese military with superior weapons outnumbers the Tibetans. On the one hand, the Tibetans want to save the Dalai Lama, their "living Buddha" and on the other the Chinese wish to bring about a cultural revolution through a class conflict, and by breaking their strong religious ties and their absolute belief in the Dalai Lama. Actually, the Cultural Revolution is in operation. The Chinese soldiers force the monks to cultivate the lands. One of the soldiers says, "if they can kneel and pray, they can keel and plough."

An interesting feature of Om Mane Padme Hum is the masterly juxtaposition of opposites – Buddhism and Communism, the past and the present and violence and sufferance. The purpose of the Chinese invasion of Tibet is to transform Buddhism into Communism.

The chief merit of the play is, to quote Prof. Srinivasa Iyenger's words from his article, "The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy" that "a recent historical event is viewed in a much wider context, involving something more than the Lama's or Tibet's fortunes." This is made possible because Currimbhoy interweaves a public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity. The moral question Currimbhoy raises in the play is expressed at the end when the Dalai Lama escapes from the Chinese threat and

says: “In any human conflict, the ultimate interests of the combatants are the same: the interests they fight for are only ephemeral.” The temporal conflict between Tibet and China is thus elevated to a metaphysical level. Thus, these plays successfully dramatise those political events that have directly or indirectly shaped the destiny of India. They demonstrate Currimbhoy fine sense of the theatre and his skill that leads to artistic excellence.

- (c) **The Social Plays:** As a dramatist of the third world, Currimbhoy is naturally attracted towards social realism as a dramatic mode. Hence the topicality of many plays. Asif Currimbhoy explores the socio-realistic world to the fullest in his plays like Thorns on a Canvas (1962) which is a satire on art Academies and is an affirmation of the artist’s faith in man and man’s creative work; The Hungry Ones (1965) that seeks to dramatize the great reality of hunger and love; The Miracle Seed (1973) which is an eloquent affirmation of faith in the resurrection of life and The Dissident MLA (1974) that presents a sordid world of politics. These plays distinguish themselves by their unfailing social realism and satire.

Thorns on a Canvas is a reaction against the banning of his earlier play The Doldrummers and is a protest against all establishment-sponsored art. The play opens with a pantomime from an Academy of Art which is like “a bee-hive with neat and uniform rows of kiosks within which each artist performs his function” to use his own words. The Patron, who is a well-to-do man, introduces his daughter, Malti, to the Academy. Malti is excited and wonder-struck. The Father and daughter happen to meet Yakub, an untidy and unkempt man “with a rose in his hand upon which he gazes with quiet contemplation.” Beside this untidy young man is seated an obese and ugly woman Nafesa, blowing soap bubbles. The Patron throws coins into the air and the young man scurries for them. Malti looks back at the young man who bursts the floating bubbles with a thorn located on his rose stem. She moves towards him to take the rose and utters a sharp cry as the thorn pierces her finger. The rose falls and she looks frightened at the blood on her finger. The young man and the fat ugly lady look at each other and laugh. As the play progresses, Malti is disillusioned by with her father and his selfish motives encouraging her to paint. The Academy holds a successful exhibition of her paintings. She is drawn to Yakub and promises to meet him in room at dawn, but she is shocked to find Nafesa so close to him. For the first time she feels the pain of life, and learns the true art, the art of life. She discovers in Bukay (the inverted Yakub) the same change is taking place. Malti, as an agent for transforming others, begs Bukay to come with her to the vision of “a new line, a new colour.” The play ends with Bukay looking at Nafesa “wistfully, with a distant poignancy” for he knows that he must leave her.

Through parallels and contrasts the playwright produces in Thorns on a Canvas a singleness of effect, the effect being that an artist should express “his” own pain, his “his” unique essence of the world, “his” rapture and ecstasy. In this way, the play acquires universality of appeal. The playwright deliberately contrasts scene iii with scene iv, the former is the scene of exhibition which symbolizes “the vested interests behind the glittering façade” while the latter is the scene of slums “where Art speaks for itself” where the rose is a live rose not without thorns. The intention is to present art in its pure form, spontaneous, full of appeal to people from all walks of life.

Thorns on a Canvas is a purely symbolic play. The Patron is the epitome of patronage, glorifying in the act rather than the true artistic results. His daughter, Malti, symbolizes perfection without a soul. Nafesa symbolizes the ugly exterior holding “a simple beautiful spirit.” Yakub symbolizes the inevitable artist who is able to create because of his pain and fear. He must live in ugliness and indigence. Currimbhoy seems to suggest that a moving work of art may be created by a man who need not be willowing in the gutter, or the pinnacle of self-conscious aristocracy. So, Malti in her self-discovery turns to this symbol.

At the time of its production at Café La Mama of Ellen Stewart, the play gave rise to bitterness among both the Americans and Indians. They regarded it “as being prompted by ex-colonial resentment” as Girija Rao put it in he article “No Laurels for Asif at Home,” in *The Sunday Standard*, 23, June 1968.

Currimbhoy’s play The Hungry Ones presents a poignant cry of poverty and conscience. The play begins with the visit of the American beatnik poets – Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky – to Calcutta and presents with

greater penetration all manifestations of hunger in the riot-torn and the famine-stricken capital of Bengal. It shows how two Americans strive unsuccessfully to understand the mystery of India and leave the country in utter frustration. The play opens with two American beatniks – Sam and Al – lying and tumbling back to a normal posture after a few feats in the streets of Calcutta. Two Bengalis, a man and a woman, deposit a bag on the side wall, open it and wear tattered clothes. The man begins to perform “a monkey act.” The crowd diverts its attention from the Americans to the Indian juggler who slaps his bare stomach till it sounds like an empty drum. The two Americans pass through the hovels of Calcutta where they witness rows upon rows of maimed and deformed beggars, some moaning and some begging for alms. The beatniks also witness the scenes of riots, arson and violence in the streets of Calcutta. Ramesh, a Hindu who is in conflict with Razia’s brother, goes to a Guru who asks him to meditate so deep that none may disturb him. The dramatist wants to show that love is possible even in an environment of arson, loot and rapine.

Sam and Al are at a loss to understand how Razia, the beggar, was able to give alms to so many. They approach Razia and offer her food by telling her that they have learnt how to earn food. But, she simply asks them to save Ramesh from the enemies. Immediately, they run to the refugee camp in search of Ramesh and fling themselves at him but are frightened because they have not yet unraveled mystery of India. The play comes to a close as they leave for America, bidding farewell to Razia who is “broken, shattered” and who yearns for the love of her husband, Ramesh.

In this play also the technique of parallels and contrasts works through out the play. On the one hand the beatniks practise Yoga and meditation and on the other an India and his wife perform “the hungry act.” The strength of the hippie movement lies in the pretence of ignorance, the forte of the “Hindu religion” is in learning. The playwright contrasts the deformed body of ‘the Indian man’ with the beautiful body of the “Indian woman.” On the one hand is the atmosphere is of peace, harmony and love, on the other the atmosphere is of arson, loot and communal riots.

Besides, there is a comparison between the racial problem in the USA and Hindu-Muslim problem in India. The enterprising nature of Sam is contrasted with the passive nature of Ramesh. Through the technique of parallels and contrasts, Currimbhoy conveys the message how hunger and love are not overwhelmed by exigencies of circumstances.

Currimbhoy takes every care to give his characters a vocabulary and style appropriate to their nature and profession. If the language is highly simple when the students talk, it achieves the heights of poetic magnificence in passages when Sam narrates the acts of violence witnessed in the city.

To convey the deeper and inarticulate feelings of two Americans, Currimbhoy gives him action rather than speech. For Asif Currimbhoy, gesture is a precise and powerful expression, not a way of passing the “whole play over to the actor; it is a language which he tries to make precise” to borrow the expression of John Russell Brown which he used for Pinter.

Currimbhoy ridicules the college students for their unjust comparison of the beatnik with the Indian Saints, the women, “the limitless multitudes,” for leading utterly meaningless life and even “Swamijis” for exploiting the gullibility of people by asking them to meditate all the time. The play provokes the thoughtful laughter when the two Americans try to show that they have gained an understanding of and admission to the mystery of India.

With all its complexity The Hungry Ones presents a realistic picture of Calcutta of those days and is an actable play.

The Miracle Seed, a play rooted in modern India, presents an eternal challenge of endurance and survival. It is essentially a realistic play which presents the gruesome and degrading picture of the drought that battered Maharashtra in 1872 and it invariably reminds the reader of Bhabani Bhattacharaya’s delineation of the Bengal famine of 1943 in So Many Hungers. The play opens with a conversation between Ram and his wife Malti, a farmer family, in a village in Maharashtra. Ram grows restless because of the drought, which dried up all the wells in the village and left the cattles thinner and thinner. His wife, who is pregnant, is equally worried

about it. As a result, the whole family has to depend on “withered vegetables.” Ram feels that the government have the responsibility to feed the people and says:

“This is my land, and this is my government. I have rights. If this land does not grow food, they have to feed us.”

Malti’s twenty years old nephew, Laxman, arrives from Bombay. With his arrival the play takes a different turn. The dramatist juxtaposes the poverty of the rural life with the prosperity of city life. Laxman brings “the miracle seeds” that affected the green revolution in the Punjab. Ram is assured of “golden harvest” and prosperity and is very hopeful about them. Laxman gives Savitri, the stammering daughter of Ram, a pebble to rectify her vocal defect. He tells Malti how the government is building “dams and canals ... that will give us sufficient water all year through.” But Malti has her own doubts about the performance of the government. The sowing of “the miracle seeds” has gone waste as the rains have failed once again. The family of Ram verges on starvation and ram is pessimistic about the green revolution. Through Ram’s words, the playwright unravels the crux of the problem which wrecks the Indian farmer.

In utter desperation Ram “catches the plough and smashes it on the ground”; he goes to the idol, which Malti has garlanded and spits on it. When his family is preparing to leave for “the city refugee camps” Savitri brings an armful of “the finest hybrid stalks” from the small patch of land fed by Malti with water. This kindles hope in the family, which decides to stay back, and “wait for the next monsoon.” Laxman, however, leaves for the city promising to come back “for the next ... golden harvest.”

As a one-act play, The Miracle Seed deals with a single dominant dramatic situation— the cruel vagaries of nature resulting in a perpetual drought. Currimbhoy takes care to make it a tautly knit play with a beginning, a middle and an end. The arrival of Laxman with “sackful of surprises” from the city to Ram’s house promising “a golden harvest” forms the beginning of the play. The consecutive failure of two monsoons resulting in the shriveling and death of the “miracle seed” constitute the middle. Ram’s decision to leave the village for the city with his family, averted by the prospects of “a golden harvest” demonstrated in “Savitri’s vegetable patch,” makes for the end of the play. However, the ending of the play is not convincing. The pebble episode may appear to be a out of place as it does not contribute anything to the development of the plot of the play though at the end of the play it does bring some surprise when Savitri with a stalk of harvest in her arm speaks without stammering.

The Miracle Seed is endowed with satirical touches especially upon the false social standards of city life and the awfully bad performance of the Government about providing relief to the drought affected public. The play has a good deal of theatrical value; various kinds of auditory and visual images like the continuous breaking of rocks, growing in volume, the sound of riot and fire at the Government fair-price shop and the loud protests of the people raised against inflation, for example, widen the play’s meaning and reflect the poignant condition of the farmer in the fight for survival. The distinguishing feature of The Miracle Seed is the gradual emergence of hope through despair and doubt represented by three generations – the grandfather, Ram and then Savitri.

In The Dissident MLA Asif Currimbhoy transforms a topical event into a work of art. The play is about Manu, a dissident MLA of Gujarat, who makes use of students to get the assembly dissolved. The play opens with the conversation between Manu and his wife, Shanti, about their son Ramesh, a student leader who puts forth before his father some of the problems confronting students. There is a steep rise in the mess bill of the college hostel. The examinations are tough and irrelevant and on the top of that there is the problem of unemployment. Manu advises Ramesh and his friends to stage the gherao of the Vice-Chancellor and create disturbances in the State with the ulterior motive of getting the Assembly dissolved. The gullible students readily indulge in the gherao of the V.C. They even go to the extent of meeting the Home Minister and recommend “shave his head, paint his face black, and force him to ride on a mule” as it is phrases in the play.

The students campaign against black marketers and police, and set fire to buses and trains. Anarchy is let loose everywhere. Kantibhai, an old guard, goes on fast unto death for the dissolution of the Assembly and the

restoration of normalcy. Manu, the dissident MLA, meets Kantibhai, his mentor and persuades him out of going on fast. He is out and out for the dissolution of the Assembly. So he asks the MLAs to defect and help him in getting a no-confidence motion passed. With the agitation of students on the one hand and the defection of the MLAs on the other, the Governor is forced to dissolve the Assembly in order to restore normalcy. The student leader realizes that their agitation has not solved their problems and that there will not be any change in the corrupt Government.

The uniqueness about Currimbhoy's character portrayal is that he uses his characters to explain his point of view rather than create a play around developing characters. He toys with such surrealistic characters as Manu in *The Dissident MLA* who is a lecher, a schemer, a man of ambition, an undisguised "goonda" who believes that "it's always better to work ... behind the lines." He is a man of lascivious nature.

The special feature of this play is that Currimbhoy exploits the dramatic resources of gesture, posture and movement so unrelentingly and ingeniously as to make the accompanying words in many cases almost superfluous. His lechery is also revealed to us through his gestures. Currimbhoy links his gestures with dialogue so that they make more subtle impression. It is not drinking of whisky that matters but the way he drinks it. Here the gesture offers unspoken comment.

The characters in the play are easily recognizable. Kantibhai is no other than Morarji and his ridiculing idea of "conscience" reminds us of the words of Mrs. Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, who gave instructions to the party worker to go in accordance with their conscience. The streak of realism has given ample opportunity for the playwright to make his comments on the people around him especially on the politicians.

Currimbhoy directs his satire on the hypocrisy of the politicians, for example, consider Manu's comments about Kantibhai. He lashes out at the selfishness and avarice of the politicians. Blinded by their inordinate greed for power they plot the most inhuman deeds. He also ridicules the faith of the politicians in astrology. Currimbhoy satirises even the students and administrators. He has a dig at the appointment of Vice-Chancellors.

The theatrical devices that Currimbhoy employs in the play are the propitious use of the dual scenes in scene ii Act. 1 and the shock effect toward the ideas. Precisely, his social plays are the manifestation of a new deal for Indian drama in English with their intense social realism and poignant satire. They testify the fact that the theatre can be used as a medium of immediate social and moral commentary. They reveal the bitter truth and have provided enormous material to Indian theatre in English, which enabled it to shake it of its dreary note that had prevailed for so long.

- (d) **The Plays on Religion and Art:** The ancient epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* have always been the source of inspiration to the creative writers in India. Asif Currimbhoy also turns to them for new themes and techniques as he himself said in one of his interviews which appeared in *Commentary* Vol.1, No3, in Feb. 1976. He says:

"There is mystical element in the human being that always drew me to the spiritual factor in life; I was not attracted to any one particular religion; I was attracted by all. As a result I wrote separate plays on religion which are highly academic."

Naturally he has drawn some of his subjects from these great literary and religious sources. He also draws on the art of Kathakali and exploits the technique of psychoanalysis to break fresh ground in the Indian Drama in English. This has resulted in writing of plays on religious themes and art – "*OM*" (1961), and *The Dumb Dancer* (1961). While "*OM*" is a bold and visionary trilogy modeled after Greek tragedy, *The Dumb Dancer* is a dance play within a play combining the commercial theatre with the art-theatre.

OM is a bold, imaginatively conceived, philosophical play. It tries to dramatise certain historic attitudes in India to the problem of the quest of the 'self.' It presents man's search for God and outlines, in some of the most theatrically impressionable scenes, the different paths of salvation. Paul Verghese says in his book *Problems of the Indian Creative Writer*: "In this play Currimbhoy makes a bold attempt to represent dramatically the highly abstract and abstruse metaphysical concepts of Hinduism." Like the Greek tragedy the play is constructed with

Chorus and soliloquies. It is unique in that and offers scope for a total theatre with elements of “shadow play,” dance, pantomime and a dynamic sense of movement in stage technique as well as in its feeling for audience participation through a mystical union between spectator and the unfolding trilogy. As Rajagopalachari rightly Observes, “an aesthetic appreciation and deep understanding of the profound thoughts of the Hindu seers” are necessary to get at the meaning of the play.

The opening scene shows that an old man is sitting near the altar chimney and a young woman is cleaning the room. When the doors opens Svetaketu, a “pale and shaken “young man in his thirties staggers in and tells the young woman, who is his wife, how he saw a man lying dead across his path and how he began questioning himself about the event. The wife and the old man tell Svetaketu, who is haunted by the fear of death, that he should not entertain such ideas of death and that life has meaning because of one’s actions but he is not convinced by their arguments. He finds it difficult to recoup himself from the obsession of death. As the shadow of a man in robes approaches Svetaketu screams. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that the main thrust of Act I is on duty without expecting any fruits, while in Act II the emphasis is on “devotion to a personalized God for attaining salvation.” In Act III, Svetaketu is obsessed by his dream in which he sees a dead figure, which he and other carry on their shoulders. As the dead body grows heavier and heavier, he calls out for help but “prayers come out of his mouth.” The daughter asks him what exactly is wrong with him. He tells her that he wants to bathe his leg thereby suggesting the cleansing of his soul. He wonders why the dark man should repeat on devotional word “OM” over and over again. He takes pride in his knowledge of the *Vedas*. The stranger, who is unmindful of Svetaketu’s criticism, chants the single syllabled word “OM” continuously.

Next morning, Svetaketu finds his daughter running along with the stranger. He shouts and screams, wondering how the lame stranger can run. He thinks that it is the reward of his sacrilege. With a view to cleansing him of his sins, he decides to go to the waters. He moves deeper and deeper into the river reciting hymns from the *Vedas*, which do not help him. He cries out “OM” when the waters gag his mouth and drag him under.

In Act III, the same three actors take different roles – the old man as the “guru” (master) and a “sannyasi” (hermit), and the young man as the “sishya” (disciple) and the woman as a “girl servant.” The scene of the action is the forest school in the Himalayas. The “guru” discusses the paths of salvation by giving examples. They aspire to “moksa” (spiritual salvation), which they cannot attain for the simple reason that they have not shed their desires. They find that the girl who “completes the trilogy” attains what they failed to get. She tells them:

“I seek not to attain moksa, for to seek as you do is to desire, for yourself perhaps as a Guru, for another perhaps a Disciple.”

The play comes to a close with the words of Chorus:

“Lead me from the unreal to the Real! Lead me from darkness to Light! Lead me from death to immortality!”

All the previous sound effects reach a crescendo as the curtain falls. “OM” has the thematic unity. The development of Hinduism since the ancient times, the transformation of many gods and goddesses into “the world of one and one only,” the progression from action and sacrifice to knowledge and action are ably dealt with in Act I of the play. Devotion to a personalized god, which is a post – Vedic concept and an offshoot of the conflict between the Aryans and Dravidians, gains a prime of place in Act II. Knowledge and a realized experienced without any desire form the basis of Act III. Thus, each Act dwells upon the problem and the attainment of salvation thereby imparting the play a sense of unity.

Svetaketu, the protagonist of the play, is a character taken from the Chandogya Upanishad. He symbolizes the historical development of Hinduism. In Act I he is a representative of the Vedic period. He is presented here as both a warrior and a man of action keeping “the cosmic world in order.” In Act II Svetaketu symbolizes “devotion to a personalized god for attaining salvation.” Which is another aspect of Hinduism. In Act III he is a teacher symbolising “the path of salvation through knowledge.” Through the three phases of his life – a

soldier, a temple priest and a teacher – he symbolizes the three aspects of Hinduism, namely, action, devotion and knowledge.

The play “OM” runs like a Greek tragedy in which the playwright has created the proper atmosphere of gloom that suits the troubled mind. As in Greek tragedy, the Chorus plays an important role here interpreting, foretelling and philosophizing the action of the play. Asif Currimbhoy himself stated that

“The Chorus serves the “inner voice” and is a continuous link between this oldest faith in the world in its application to the problems of today and all times. The Chorus gives verbatim reproductions only. The play is on a different level altogether, but the duality should not be taken as literal.”

The dramatist makes the Chorus recite select passages from the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* including the *Gait* to suggest the revelations that follow the development of the character and thought. Besides, the recitation of the passage is in conformity with the movement of the play.

Thus the play is at once an exciting and profound living experience. Prof. Iyenger makes very insightful about comments about the play. He says:

“Currimbhoy draws freely upon Vedic and Upanishadic lore in his attempt to make the play panoramic sweep of India’s spiritual traditions while the technical virtuosity is superb, the play’s intention remains blurred in the total execution. Although the philosophy is not wholly consumed in the human drama, the play has its scintillatingly rich moments.”

By fusing the elements of pantomime, recitation, dance and song, Currimbhoy succeeds in creating powerful images. However, the characteristic feature of Currimbhoy’s art play *The Dumb Dancer* are discussed separately under the heading of its “Critical Appreciation.”

Rightly hailed as India’s first authentic voice in theatre, Currimbhoy has now emerged as a playwright of international stature. Deeply concerned with the dramatic values in his writings, his plays are first and foremost meant for the stage and he brilliantly succeeds in writing plays for the theatre. He contrives interesting situations, creates proper atmosphere, sustains coherent action, portrays realistic and animated characters, writes sinewy dialogues and above all experiments boldly and successfully with a variety of theatrical techniques.

Currimbhoy is a prolific playwright. As it has been rightly pointed out by Peter Nazarath in his article “Asif Currimbhoy: Dramatist of the public Event,” which appeared in *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol.4, No 4. (July 1976) that Currimbhoy

“interweaves the public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of decolonization”

He not only records the events like the invasion of Goa, the flight of Dalai Lama, the assassination of Mahatma, the famine in Maharashtra, the visit of the beatniks to India, the political situation in Gujarat and the Kathakali dance of Kerala, but also offers “commentaries, consciously or otherwise” on them.

As he himself confesses, his lays spring from his “emotional reaction” to what he sees around him:

“There is a sense of a trigger – I think the trigger was life itself, of what I saw around, of how I reacted to it, in other words an emotional reaction.”

Asif Currimbhoy **dramatic art** can be summed up thus that it gathers his material mostly from a distinctly Indian experience and weaves various threads into it from the myths, folklore as well as from the contemporary society. He has attempted almost every genre – comedy, tragedy, farce, melodrama, history and fantasy. His achievement as a dramatist is marked by his impressive contribution to Indian Drama in English and his plays are marked by the following qualities:

- a) They are invested with intense realism by making the setting, incident, character and dialogue contemporary with the times.

- b) They are not a literal-minded transcription of mere facts.
- c) The plays are genuinely a microcosm of Indian life with all its predilections, delusions, fantasies and capacity to live in the past.
- d) There is in his plays interplay between realism and fantasy, which gives them the unity and universality.
- e) By fusing the elements of pantomime, recitation, dance and song, Currimbhoy succeeds in creating powerful images at once visual and auditory which make the plays vitally theatrical.
- f) The plays have some very deftly used dramatic techniques like parallels and contrasts which present his themes and add to his artistry. Significantly, he uses sex not simply to exploit the emotions but to make a point in terms of a deeply moving human metaphor.
- g) In his plays irony is yet another device which Currimbhoy employs in his plays to express his evaluation of things.
- h) The plays reveal a vigorous use of colloquial idiom and imagery.
- i) The plays show that he works his satire into the character and the character into the plot ingeniously.

Though Currimbhoy's plays have message to convey, they are not merely vehicles for expressing his thoughts. They are works of art. Currimbhoy never forgets that he is more a dramatist than a moralist or a philosopher. His plays are meant for the stage and they demonstrate his fine sense of theatre. The dramatist's concepts and ideas are integrated with the central concern of exploring certain human situations. More than any other dramatist he brilliantly succeeds in projecting an "an image of the times." He seeks to expose his **vision of man** through his dramatic art. He sees man as essentially a creature of passion with potential for great nobility as well as terrible destruction. Currimbhoy's plays are a legitimate product of his abiding faith in the efficacy of love and compassion. In fact, his whole approach to the drama is conditioned by his vision of life that love and compassion alone matter and they serve as panacea to the ills of society. The philosophical basis can be recognized in the titles of his plays and in the kind of people he presents. In other words, his plays spring from his belief that in spite of endless arson and hopeless nuance, there is scope for values like love, peace and understanding.

If one tries to find out Currimbhoy's **limitations** despite his massive achievements as dramatist, one could say that his plays are **deficient in wit and humour**. Though Currimbhoy's plays are mostly comedies, there are a very few truly comic lines or comic characters worth the name. As the world of Currimbhoy is essentially serious which is concerned with the serious issues there is not much scope for the comic treatment of events and characters in Currimbhoy's canons.

Sometimes critics like Anniah Gowda and Krishna Bhatt have been critical, at times over-critical, of the dramatic art of Currimbhoy. They seemed to me more conscious of the limitations than the merits of Currimbhoy as a dramatist. They have passed, for instance, strictures on his **use of language**. In his article, "Indian Theatre in English: A Personal View" which appeared in *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol.5 No.1 (Jan 1977), Anniah Gowda is of the opinion that Asif Currimbhoy presents his themes "in very unauthentic language." Dr.A.K. Bhatt almost subscribes to this view when he says in his article "A Theatre of Journalism," *The Indian P.E.N.*, 40, No.12 (Dec. 1974) that

"Asif Currimbhoy seems to be totally unconcerned with the proprieties of language and that he does not seek dramatic consistency in his dialogue anywhere, nor does he care much for the dramatic effect of the speeches."

This sort of pungent criticism of Currimbhoy's use of language must be taken with a pinch of salt and should be dismissed only as their personal views. Prof. Iyenger makes very apt suggestion that the characters and the situations are so carefully in Currimbhoy that the problem is tackled successfully as the dramatist adapts the English language to reflect the idiom of the language of the characters.

Currimbhoy also endeavours to overcome the problem of language by experimenting freely with a variety of theatrical techniques like light, shadow, black-out, shadow play, chant, choral back-drops, pantomime, music,

rapid changes of time and place, and also by transforming the contemporary events with his imaginative reconstruction into perennial situations that transcend place, time and language. In other words, he has created a language for the Indian Theatre that enables the audience to identify themselves with it.

Despite the damaging criticism of Dr. A.K.Bhatt, which is biased and full of some sort of prejudice that makes him say that his plays “for the most part badly conceived and badly constructed,” none can deny that his plays have a **thematic unity** of their own by the way of exploring a single idea or a cluster of related ideas through a variety of characters and actions. Currimbhoy seeks the unity of idea by selecting only those incidents and characters that are germane to the projection and development of his themes. He is aware of the need for finding some means to suggest a singleness of purpose or effect in order to clarify and organize his creative effort. Currimbhoy’s plays may be the fine-wrought products of stage elements and techniques of the West, but they an emotional depth which is the essence pf Indian society. Besides, the theatrical vitality coupled with Currimbhoy’s commitment to the social and artistic can override his occasional lapses and missed targets. His plays offer admirable illustration of sophisticated artistry of contemporary Indian drama.

Asif Currimbhoy’s The Dumb Dancer: A Detailed Critical Appreciation of the Play

The Dumb Dancer is a powerful study of a Kathakali dancer “who so completely identifies himself with the character of Bhima that it leads him from one misapprehension to another, from one disaster to another” to use the words of Srinivas Iyenger. To understand and appreciate the play fully, it is essential to know briefly about the art of dance known as Kathakali:

“Kathakali is a vigorous, all encompassing form of dance of Kerala which originated from “Ramanattam,” the story of Sri Rama. After the recital of a few verses by various characters behind the curtain, the hero and the heroine appear on the stage and perform “Mangala.” After this begins the use of the gesture language, the exquisite dancing and acting to the accompaniment of the music of the singer. The story is usually taken from Hindu mythology. The verses set the story in motion and serve as connecting links of time and space.”

The Dumb Dancer is a dance play from the episode of “The Slaughter of Duryodhana” in the ancient epic of *Mahabharata*. The play moves through the labyrinth of the dancer’s confused mind as he hovers between reality and the world of myth. Currimbhoy successfully combines dance, music and action so as to make the play very effective on the stage.

The scene of action is the operation theatre of the mental asylum where “a dance sequence from Duryodhana’s slaughter is enacted.” The person who plays the role of Bhima has the name of Bhima in real life also. He believes that he killed Duryodhana and devoured his guts. He is now in the mental asylum under the care of Dr. Prema the superintendent of the asylum, “a comparatively young woman composed with a beautiful olive complexion and chiseled features.”

To make Bhima recollect that the guilt he bears is not his, Dr. Prema wishes him to go through the performance again, as close to reality as possible. With the help of Dr. Dilip, “a young doctor with the sober look,” she wants to give a shock therapy to Bhima by showing him real human entails after an autopsy.

Act 11 is a flashback, which takes us to the house of the Guru. It is a training centre where for twelve long years the disciple-actor imbibes the way of life of Kathakali dancing through the “organic discipline” of long hours of training.” Like other boys in the centre, Bhima is subjected to deep and varying moods, at times exhilarating and at other moments silent and morose. He is very ambitious to achieve perfection in his art. In “thundering accents” he recites a few verses from “the vow of Revenge” from the *Mahabharata* and performs the Kathakali dance. In a moment of elation, he asks if he will ever attain the greatness of Madhu at all. The teacher advises him to

“get back to work. There can be no greatness....without sacrifice. Speech interferes for you. Blindness does not for him. Practise being the dumb dancer.”

Immediately, he recedes into darkness, cuts his tongue and “emerges again into the flickering light, dancing with the shock of one about to collapse” and throws his severed tongue at the feet of his Guru. In his ambition to attain perfection in his art, he identifies himself completely with the epic character, Bhima.

The Act 111, shows Dr. Prema communicating with Bhima, the dumb dancer. In her “eerie study of abnormal psychology” she expresses her morbid interest in him:

“You’re warm, Bhima... but the blood in the body lying there won’t be warm... that’s the only defect.... You’d want it warm and flowing., wouldn’t you...yes, yes....”

Dr. Dilip wonders at her behaviour and realizes that she is drawn too much towards the dumb dancer. He says:

“You seem as much engrossed in your patients as they seem to be in their own malady. I’m not so sure that’s a good thing. It wears you down.... Makes you behave most unexpectedly.”

In her treatment of Bhima, Dr. Dilip, however, performs an autopsy before the interns and leaves the corpse at the disposal of Dr. Prema who puts on a mask of Duryodhana. Bhima is let into amphitheatre to see the human entails. In her search for a complete “identification” with Dr. Prema kills Shakuntala, her rival Dr. Prema tells Dr. Dilip, “There is no other way... no other way. The identification had to be complete. The ultimate experience.” The dialogue unravels the mystery of Shakuntala’s death thus:

Dilip: What do you mean! What do you mean!

Prema: To live through it again. I shared it with him, Dilip. He’s been caressing my hair with the blood... and dead men have no blood...

[She throws the scalpel from her hand in the corner near a heap. It falls with a clutter that diverts Dilip’s attention. He looks....to find Shakuntala body ...torn open from the stomach.]

Dilip: My God! Shakuntala!

Prema: but live people do. That was the only thing missing, until

Dilip: The scream. It was hers ...not yours. Where did you get the Scalpel from?

Prema: It was her fault. She was so willing to be sacrificed.... So that Bhima could be restored. But he could never harm her... so it became my duty.

Dilip: *[august]* You...killed her!

Prema: One of us had to die. And Bhima had already accepted me. You saw it yourself yesterday.

[Dilip takes Prema by the shoulders impellingly.]

Dilip: Prema! Prema! What are you saying!

[He slaps her violently.]

You are hysterical. You don’t know your.... state of mind. *[slaps her again]* Now! Come out of it. What’s the truth? What happened?

[The slap shocks the edge of sanity back to her momentarily.]

Prema: *[voice low, shaking, appealing, then far away again]* Who is sane, Dilip, and who is not? Remember, I tried, Dilip. Really tried. But it drew me closer instead of further.. The vertigo.... the vortex....I found myself slipping into the terrifying abyss of darkness.... slipping without being able to hold myself back. How much of the insane fantasy was true and how much was not. Sanity lay... as a fine dividing line. It seemed to move... and engulf me. No words can tell you what its discovery means because it lies beyond.... The point of no return.

No greater passion was there than this stalwart God. I lip-read his mind. It was gigantic. When I touched him, I felt the element of distraction grow within me. It... interfered with the ...rapport. I...I could never find myself, so tired ...so tired was I. The desperation grew. Identification. I searched for it. But the other image of myself lay in his world....not mine.

Shakuntala interfered. She kept returning.... Reminding. And all the time I was thinking of what was

missing... the blood that had to be warm and flowing... red as the blinding sun. Death merely can as the forth dimension.

Do you understand, Dilip? Distraction reaches higher than sanity. I could not find him or myself without it. Do you understand, Dilip, why I cannot return now.....

In her ecstasy of “identification,” she puts Bhima’s “arm around her, making her hand caress her hair.” Dilip obviously rejects this and asks her to come out of Bhima but in vain. She tells him: “No.... he can’t hear you any more ... and neither shall I. We can only hear each other.... Living in the same world. Listen! He calls out to me again. Listen.Listen.Hush. Let the whispers die.” The play ends with Dr. Prema’s triumph in her search for “identification” with Bhima.

The three –act **structure** of The Dumb Dancer has the tidiness and the well-defined contours of the well-made play. Act I is the middle of the action in which Dr. Prema takes the patient into her asylum with a view to proving his innocence. Act II is a flash-back where the identification of Bhima with the epic character Bhima, his ambition to achieve perfection in his art, his severing of the tongue and thus offering sacrifice to his Guru are effectively brought out. In Act III occur the autopsy conducted by Dr. Dilip, the exposure of Bhima to a real situation, the interest of Dr. Prema in him, and her engineering “with insane but clinical precision a gruesome tragedy” to use the expression of Prof. Iyenger. The Kathakali dance forms an organic unit of each Act and “it should be said to the credit of Asif Currimbhoy that he has made the Kathakali dance an integral part of the play” as Paul Verghese highlights in his book, Problems of the Indian Creative Writer.

The tempo of the play, which varies for the **dramatic effects**, now quickening and now slowing, adds to the thematic intensity of the play. Act I is almost a pantomime, which runs rapidly. The Dumb show of “The Slaughter of Duryodhana” and the clinical examination by the psychiatrist and Dr. Dilip quicken the tempo. In Act II, the practice of the Kathakali dance by the disciples and “the insane Fantasy of Bhima” slow down the tempo. In the beginning of Act III where Prema poses a number of problems before Guru and his daughter, the tempo slows. However, when Dr. Dilip conducts the autopsy the tempo quickens. Briefly, we find tempo quick in Act I, almost slow in Act II, and again quick in Act III. It appears that through these variations in the tempo, the dramatist tries to control the mind of the audience.

As a realist Currimbhoy’s **interest in character** caused him to probe into the complexities, tensions and frustrations of characters. He has succeeded in portraying his characters at the critical moments of their lives, not necessarily those of violent physical action as in melodrama, but of the inner crises that penetrate the social façade give insight into their desires, aspirations and even frustration. Currimbhoy does not limit himself to characters drawn from the rural society. His characters are drawn from an urban, sophisticated milieu as well as from the rural surroundings like Bhima from The Dumb Dancer. He strongly feels that conflict is the theatre and as such he takes the utmost care to present the outer and inner conflicts of various characters in his plays. Though his primary characters are generally men Currimbhoy’s **art of characterization** attains an especial quality once he comes to portray the women. He endows them with strength and power. It is women characters that dominate the action of the play. As J. Meserve and I Meserve rightly observe,

“In Asif’s best plays the power of his women characters dominates the action.... In retrospect one finds Asif Currimbhoy’s women characters, whether minor, or major, stronger and more memorable than his men.”

In The Dumb Dancer, Dr. Prema is not presented just as a psychiatrist but as a full-blooded human being who grows and develops in the play. Like a psychiatrist, she would like to make a close study of the abnormal state of mind of Bhima. But, she is drawn towards the patient more and more. Her fascination for the man grows so much that she defies him. She says: “he is a God. It is difficult to remain detached from a God.” In this light her jealousy of Shakuntala may claim some critical attention. When she comes to know that Shakuntala is partial to Bhima, she somehow wants to do away with her. She tells Dilip about it thus: “One of us had to die. And Bhima had already accepted me. You saw it for yourself yesterday.” In this sense it can be said that she successfully engineered a gruesome and tragic end of Shakuntala. There is hardly any growth and development in the character of Bhima

except that he has completely identified himself with the epic character Bhima and that he wants to excel Madhu. There is hardly anything innovative about him.

The Dumb Dancer is built on **conflict**. Once his Guru directs him that “You have to be.. a dumb dancer.... dumb dancer....” He grows restless and these words electrify the situation; he “contorts his body into an agonizing dumb dance” which expresses his mental agony. Dr. Prema is equally perturbed. Dr. Dilip comments on the tension in her mind: “The more she thinks in terms of exercising her psychiatric skills the more she grows restless, and the more she is drawn towards Bhima and she confesses to Dilip about “the element of his distraction grown within me. She is equally unhappy with the arrival of Shakuntala as her dialogue with Dilip reveals. Her inner struggle leads to the external conflict between the two women as both of them aspire to possess Bhima. They get entangled in a verbal scuffle.

Shakuntala: I want to see Bhima get well.

Prema: And if he should get well? What then?

Shakuntala: Why... Why, then, he could do what he pleases.

Prema: Leave here and go back to the village in Kerala?

Shakuntala: If he wishes.

Shakuntala: I want to see Bhima get well.

Prema: And what makes you think he wouldn't get well here? Everything... and more.

Shankutala: I didn't say he wouldn't.

Prema: No, you didn't. You'd be prepared to make any sacrifice, Wouldn't you?

Shakuntala: Yes.

Prema: Anything. Anything at all. Willing or unwilling.

Shakuntala: Yes.

Currimbhoy has shown a contrast between utterly innocent and selfless love of Shakuntala and possessive and self-centered love of Prema. In an attempt to draw Dr. Prema's attention, Dr. Dilip too becomes a victim of tension. He gets cross and tells her “I feel angry ... angry that you should think they deserve more of your attention ... than I.” He grows restless when he sees Prema in the arms of Bhima and asks her: “Get away from that beast. Get away from him! Bhima!” Thus, the play is saturated with conflict, which is the soul of drama in general and this play in particular.

The **dialogue** in Asif Currimbhoy's drama is a very effective medium to convey the message of the play. During the terrifying performance of “a dance sequence from Duryodhana's Slaughter,” Dr. Prema is found fidgeting with “the strands of black hair made of string” and expressing her concern about Bhima. At the end of scene i of Act1, her short remark that “Terror... is a taut string” reveals the hidden motives and tensions in her mind. In scene 2, of Act 1, the dialogue between Dr. Prema and Dr. Dilip about the performance is crisp, powerful and natural:

Dilip: It was gruesome...but fascinating.

Prema: You found it interesting

Dilip: Yes.

Prema: Very?

Dilip: Yes.

Prema: What was interesting?

Dilip: You.

Prema: [*surprised*]...Me?

Dilip: Yes, you were interesting.

Prema: Oh, don't joke now, Doctor.

Dilip: I'm not joking, Prema. You seem part of the play. The tension in you was unmistakable.

This is a remarkable dialogue that casually develops the plot that represents “the world of sane” and the world of

insanity that engulfs Prema as she crosses “the fine dividing line” between them. Moreover, Dr. Prema’s simple question whether that Kathakali performance is interesting at all, Dr. Dilip replies that Dr. Prema is really interesting. Here the play right manages to show an emotional link, which exists between them and presents the humour of trivial conversation forcefully.

The Dumb Dancer can be produced on the stage successfully. As J.Meserve and I Meserve put it in the “Foreword” to The Hungry Ones:

“Rather than always use language for the creation of images Currimbhoy thinks more in terms of scene and actions on stage which provide images to stimulate the minds, the ears and the eyes of his audience.”

Kathakali dance with the accompaniment of drums, cymbals, gongs and songs can easily hold the attention of the audience. Currimbhoy recalls its effect on the foreign audience when it was staged at the British Drama league Festival in one of his interviews conducted by V.S.Patil, which appeared in *Span*, Vol. XI, No.4 (1970) with the title “A Playwright Speaks”:

“The timing and the tone of the play were just right. Everything was bizarre to the point of fascination and the audiences were absolutely thrilled. I don’t think we will ever forget that experience.”

Currimbhoy gives elaborate **stage directions** as to ensure the success of the play on the stage. In some scene she even presents a challenge to the director. For example take the following directions meant for the director for presenting Dr. Prema’s feeling during the pantomime in the very opening of the play:

“Since she forms part of the audience and the centre of attraction has been the dance, it may be difficult to single out her reactions and the movement of the string around her fingers. Perhaps an extra light can be thrown in her direction, particularly the movements of her hands, to create this incidental interest. In any case, as the rest of the scene shows, she gets up soon to speak to the audience, and the continuity of her hand gestures is likely to recall the similar earlier movements.”

In Act 11, his suggestion is that the director should adapt the lengthy extracts from the *Mahabharata* to meet production requirements. If the director wants to give emphasis on choreography, he should think of a pure pantomime with a musical background. Thus, in The Dumb Dancer Currimbhoy “alights upon theatrically effective means and materials through which he registers his communication with his audience” as R.L.Nigam’s “Asif’s Plays” rev. of The Doldrummers, The Dancer and “OM”, *Enact*, Nos. 25-26, Jan-Feb. 1969.

The **element of suspense** makes the play genuinely interesting. In the play-opening scene one does not know why the pantomime is tried and why the psychiatrist is very anxious to make clinical assumptions about the dancer. No one knows why Dr. Prema wants Dr. Dilip to conduct a shock therapy. The audience is kept in suspense in Act 111 where the nurse tells Dr. Dilip that a scalpel is missing. After the conduct of autopsy, one hears a loud scream in darkness and Dr. Prema is found in the arms of Bhima. There is an expression of complete satiation and triumph in her wild eyes. Here again the audience has to wait in great suspense. After some time, Dr. Prema tells Dr. Dilip that she had to kill Shakuntala because “Bhima could never harm her” and because she stood as a snag in reaching Bhima. In the end, she goes to Bhima and he puts his arms around her. A faint echo “Draupadi”.... “Draupadi”.... is heard and we don’t know who has called out the name. Thus, the suspense engages the audience through out the play.

To sum up it is apt to say that The Dumb Dancer is a swiftly moving play of suspense, presenting a conflict between the world of sanity leading to insanity and the world of myth and make-believe. It is highly entertaining and superbly theatrical play that achieves a perfect synthesis of the art of Kathakali and drama. Though it focuses on a purely Indian world, it has a wider and universal appeal.

Currimbhoy is commonly known to be a playwright with a social purpose, as he has taken unusual themes from contemporary Indian society and woven them into plays of artistic excellence, but in this play as in “OM” he has demonstrated that he could successfully draw upon the Vedic and Upanishadic lore for his themes. It reveals the dramatist’s deep knowledge of the ancient Indian classical literature and spiritual traditions. While “OM” speaks of men search for God and for the divine Self, The Dumb Dancer lifts us out of our self-conscious selves into a world of cosmic proportion.

Assignments-I

Note: Attempt the following questions:

1. What are the salient qualities of Indian English Drama?
2. Write an essay on any two Indian dramatists in English.

3. Give an account of Currimbhoy's social plays. Illustrate your answer.
4. What are the main themes of Currimbhoy's political plays?
5. Discuss Currimbhoy's use of satire and irony. Illustrate your answer.
6. Give a critical account of Currimbhoy's "Romantic Plays."
7. Consider Asif Currimbhoy as a playwright.
8. Examine critically the major qualities of *The Dumb Dancer*.
9. Discuss the "impressive achievements of Currimbhoy as a dramatist" and point out his limitations as well. Give examples from the play prescribed in the course.
10. Write an essay on Currimbhoy's art of characterization with special reference to the characters in *The Dumb Dancer*.

Assignments-II

Note: Answer the following questions in about two hundred words.

1. Write a note on the use of language in *The Dumb Dancer*. Give only two illustrations.
2. Why is *The Dumb Dancer* called a dance play?
3. Write a note on the character of Bhima.
4. Justify the title of the play *The Dumb Dancer*.
5. Discuss the role of Dr. Prema in the play *The Dumb Dancer*.
6. What are the traditional values recommended in the play, *The Dumb Dancer*?
7. Write briefly on the note of suspense in *The Dumb Dancer*.
8. What are the dramatic techniques that Currimbhoy uses in *The Dumb Dancer*? Give only three examples.
9. Give any two examples of the limitations of Asif Currimbhoy as a playwright.
10. Briefly evaluate the characters of Shakunatala or Dr. Dilip.

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