



## Societal Images in Asif Currimbhoy's 'The Hungry Ones'

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## ABSTRACT

*Asif Currimbhoy is one of the great playwrights in Indian English literature. He is a diligent dramatist with his own definite views on the art of drama. His interest in what he sees around and how he reacts to it has brought him to the province of drama. The present play "The Hungry Ones" reveals a real image of society in Calcutta during 1960s.*

*The play "The Hungry Ones" deals with different social issues and problems dominant in the contemporary times. Asif Currimbhoy's narrative techniques are different from other playwrights. Most of his plays represent social realism. The present play reveals the image of poverty in Calcutta during 1960s.*

**KEYWORDS :** Hungry, poverty, dominant, contemporary times, image of poverty etc

## Introduction

Asif Currimbhoy is a dramatist who presents his plays with a social purpose. He not only seeks to present men and things as he sees but also projects his own point of view. 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 work of the same playwright" (246). It is indeed true that Currimbhoy has brought an extraordinary skill 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.

The Plays of AsifCurrimbhoy throws light on the sensing conflicts everywhere. The conflict is sometimes internal like physical, mental, and emotional because of human relations that we maintain in society at the same time, conflict in theatre among the characters, situations, scenes and surprisingly among the audience. He invents human predicament through social, moral, religious and political concerns in his plays. AsifCurrimbhoy's plays are focused on human predicament which surprises him so much that he shares the pain and agony of humanity through the characters of his plays. The shameful human condition is uppermost in his mind. His imagination is built on the experience of life. There is a perfect creation of thought and feeling in his plays. All his plays deal with social, political, moral and religious issues with despair, sentiment and social criticism. He also adds gentle comic laughter with a cynical and ironic purpose...

**The Hungry Ones** is one of Currimbhoy's social plays which aim at depicting the real picture of the city of Calcutta during the 1960s.. This play was published in 1965. The two Americans continue their struggle to understand the mystery of India. In their journey, they come across the dreadful sight of poor natives. Asif presents the atmosphere of despair, miserable and wretchedness. He makes use of visual image and gives the description. The play begins with two American poets namely Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky visiting Calcutta city during 196s. Both of the poets were highly influenced by the city and its condition. In their observation, people are struggling to get food even one time in a day. It reflects the real image of the society in Calcutta during 1960s. Asif Currimbhoy projects the situation through monkey act performed by two Indians. The description of the monkey act or the hungry act arouses the feeling of pity and sympathy for the poor class: The man now lies prostrate, as though without arms and legs, writhing has body forward, inching forward painfully, his flesh picking up the filth of the pavement, cutting itself on sharp stones till blood shows on dirty cloth, all the time slapping

his bare brown stomach, his eyes hollow, till the sound of his empty stomach sounds very much like the empty drum, that drives him on and on. (1965:26) It is highly influenced by American beatnik poets. In the beginning of the play, they observed two Bengalis (Bengali man and woman) are giving entertainment with two monkeys to pedestrians and the public. Here the Bengali woman begins to twirl the drum slowly with regulated tapping and the man begins a monkey act. The monkey takes out his cap, drags himself on the pavement like a deformed hungry beggar, slapping his stomach, inviting pity, revulsion, charity. The scene accurately presents the poverty of the Calcutta people. The scene seems like an entertainment to the public at the same time it presents the real image of hunger in Calcutta. For getting food, one time in a day, people are struggling a lot. Monkey acts rightly depicts the deformed hungry beggars in Calcutta.

Asif Currimbhoy exactly focuses the situation through monkey characters. Currimbhoy does not simply presents the picture of society in regard to a major event but he also throws light on the causes of its occurrence. He has criticized the society on several angles. There are several wrong concepts in the society which has been accepted by people and has become one of the set norms. For example the exploitation of poor or labour community is continued from generation to generation and thus it has been set as an established order of society. As the hungry act in the first scene is in itself an example of the extent of poverty and misery. The scene ends with the voices of the two Indians speaking: "...so you want to become one of us, stranger, a hungry one...? Then learn, stranger, learn...HUNGER." ( 1965: 38) This dialogue clearly expresses the condition of the poor who are victims of natural disaster i.e. famine in Bengal.

The two Americans offer money and things to the Bengali man who crawls by without taking them. It reflects Indians attitude and maintaining a sort of reserve though they are in unpleasant situation. The two American hear the sound of the Bengali woman's voice or perhaps the joint voice of the Indian man and woman, in resonance, they practically experience the image of poverty in Calcutta. "so you want to become one of us stranger, a hungry one....? Then learn: stranger, learn..... HUNGER.(Pg. 30). Bengali man and woman attract the American poets. Human has his own weakness by this, the two Americans are attracted by the beauty of Bengali woman. They also have sexual yearning towards her so they search for her. It reveals how the people fulfill their deplorable desire in the miserable condition also. This is a sort of image in the society.

The American poets are inclined while interacting with the Rickshaw man who has given complete confidence towards their searching i.e. Indian man and woman. In their searching, they search along foot

paths, rows upon rows of maimed beggars, some begging for alms, some moaning softly, some bearing softly, some waiting. They start at the beginning of the row, lighting matches to see the faces of each individual beggar that blazes out shockingly in disease and deformity. This description clearly reveals the level of hungry in Calcutta more-over the same is very much influenced by American beatnik poets. They too suffered a lot to see the position of people. While approaching the last man in the row, Rickshaw man interrupts them and says something about the last man who suffers with personal failures. This hunger for life, this hunger for death. It appears in the play. .... "Don't touch him, Sahibs. He's gone through it all. Leave him alone. I have seen him alone. He's suffered all the misery possible. Every disease and deformity and despair. Pain till it numbs. It numbs. It was ....a personal failure. It formed his reserve."(pg-38). It reflects the physical and mental agony of a few people. In their continuous searching, they find the woman. They try to touch her when the Rickshaw man interrupts them. He also explains every thing about her. Basically she is innocent and has woman's weakness. Finally, the situation changes the minds of American poets from evil to noble.

### Conclusion:

AsifCurrimbhoy as a social critic throws ample light on the serious issues related to the society. He has taken different themes from contemporary Indian society and presented them in the realistic manner. The play exhibits the image of poverty, starvation and famine. He depicts the life and tension of the poor and the middle class people in addition to present the evils of lust and trading in the flesh of the poor and ruthlessness in the contemporary society. Asif Currimbhoy provides the reality of life and it is this realism that affords a special impact to the social background to his dramas. AsifCurrimbhoy also believes psychological theories that are in connection with human nature and attitude. Each of his plays represents different types of human nature and conflict which reflects in the society. Ultimately, most of his plays depict social realism.

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