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## Ethics of Survival in Asif Currimbhoy's *The Hungry Ones*

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### Abstract

Asif Currimbhoy's position with the New India Confirmation Organization in Paris afforded him the opportunity to explore French culture and lifestyle. He has contrasted the lifestyles of those in Paris with those in India. The milieu of pre-Autonomy, post-Freedom and the partition of India have significantly influenced him. The scholar have been profoundly disheartened upon discovering that their degrees will not facilitate employment opportunities. Consequently, they have frequently exhibited violent behavior. A substantial amount of information has been utilized in the composition of Currimbhoy's plays.

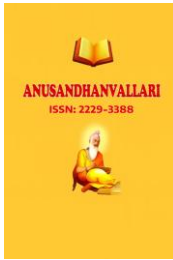
**Keywords:** Hunger, riots, impoverished, famine, exploitation, racism.

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### Introduction

Currimbhoy's *The Hungry Ones* endeavors to depict the authentic conditions of living in Calcutta during the 1960s. This play was released in 1965 and chronicles the journey of beatnik poets Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky. Between 1960 and 1970, Allen Ginsberg and his partner Peter Orlovsky travelled to Calcutta. The city and its circumstances significantly influenced both individuals. Upon the arrival of American beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky in Calcutta recently, they have generated much excitement. They put on soiled khaki shorts and unkempt beards while traversing the bustling downtown streets, attracting college students irresistibly. Simultaneously, the outcry of a deprived generation has emanated from the slums and coffeehouses of Calcutta. The impact on Americans remains ambiguous; yet, a distinct sense of affinity with the beatnik poets is evident.

The majority of Asif Currimbhoy's plays employ the realism in them. Each play contains an element of fact that connects it to a significant event or incident from history or contemporary times. He concentrates on the impact of social issues on individuals' lives. The issues pertain to politics, religion, society, human existence and interpersonal relationships, among other factors. He discusses a specific societal occurrence and presents it in a realistic manner. He examines the impact of political events on individuals' lives and composes plays that depict this in an artistic and authentic manner. As a social critic, Currimbhoy addresses significant societal issues rather than expressing personal opinions. He allows the observer to formulate their own perspective on the particular topic. He extracts topics from



contemporary Indian society and transforms them into a dramatic narrative. A.Selvam and M.P.Ganesan point out: “Asif Currimbhoy has exhibited his various facets of writing through various kinds of plays like social plays, religious plays, historical plays, political plays” (19).

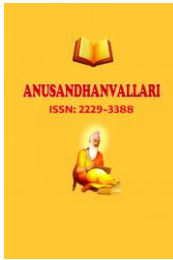
The play address two forms of poverty: geographic poverty and seasonal poverty. Poverty differs among societies. It persists in society due to insufficient financial resources, economic assets, food or secure housing. They lack sufficient education, nutrition and secure housing. Poverty occurs when an individual is unable to satisfy their fundamental needs for survival. The strategy aims at identifying the impoverished and implementing assistance programs should consider and completely eradicate poverty. Assisting the hungry is fundamentally rooted in aiding the impoverished. Regrettably, the activities predominantly concentrate on providing sustenance or facilitating the cultivation and distribution of food. They do not address the fundamental issues that cause hunger. These technical measures utilize resources and energy to assist individuals experiencing hunger. Consequently, poverty and dependency remain prevalent issues globally. Since India’s independence, poverty has persisted as a prevalent issue and a significant concern. Many individuals believe that the world experiences a food crisis, while some contend that unforeseen disasters exacerbate the situation.

## Discussion

Currimbhoy’s *The Hungry Ones* significantly illustrates societal issues in his oeuvre. He believes that writing mirrors society. As a social critic, he adeptly illustrates the current state of the globe. Individuals believe that an artist reflects cultural facts and that literature serves as a mirror of social processes. Each of his works pertains to real life in some manner, frequently through a significant event or incident that has occurred recently. In this setting, he has witnessed the grim spectacle of Calcutta in West Bengal, where numerous individuals relocated due to the monsoon failures of the 1970s. This dire circumstance compels him to compose the play entitled *The Hungry Ones*.

The significant events of the 1960s influenced Currimbhoy. The partition of India upon its independence has inflicted suffering throughout the nation, particularly in Punjab and Bengal. The upheaval in the nation and the prevailing living conditions have significantly influenced Currimbhoy. Asif gets numerous opportunities to explore various regions of the world in detail. This indicates that Currimbhoy meticulously observes individuals, particularly their manner of speech. All these factors have influenced his writing. He commenced writing in his late twenties. Certain events or circumstances that Currimbhoy experiences significantly impact his theatrical works. Currimbhoy’s plays unequivocally demonstrate his commitment to depict his observations of the surrounding world. He possesses distinctive concepts regarding playwriting. He composes plays having a social purpose. He demonstrates this by stating that he composes plays imbued with significance. His writing possesses a social purpose, as it is directed towards others in a manner that holds significance for them. He is a writer with a social objective, although he is not a propagandist.

Currimbhoy’s plays address significant themes such as exploitation, societal governance, communal coexistence, cultural practices, racism, poverty, the calamity of natural disasters and the conflict between individuals and society. A primary topic is the adversity faced by impoverished individuals residing in both rural and urban locales, where natural calamities induce hunger and malnutrition. He is a diligent playwright with firm convictions regarding the craft of drama. His fascination with his observations and responses has directed him towards the realm of theatre. Currimbhoy demonstrates his concern for the human condition. The human condition is to manifest in every environment that imposes stress on individuals. Despite the uniqueness of each location, individuals consistently respond in a uniform manner.



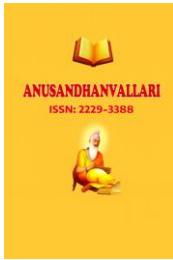
The play consists of a single act; however, it encompasses twelve scenes that transition rapidly from one to another. Asif Currimbhoy is indifferent to the chronological sequence of events. The drama features four principal characters: Allen Ginsberg (Al), Peter Orlosky (Sam), a Bengali woman (Razia) and a Bengali man (Ramesh). Additionally, there are three minor characters: a rickshaw driver, disciples, beggars and several others, including students and a guru. The drama is set in the early 1970s.

The two Americans traverse the slums of Calcutta at a leisurely pace, searching for the Indians who feigned hunger earlier. They seek to uncover what the Indians conceal. They see numerous beggars with mutilated bodies and absent limbs along the pathways. Some want financial assistance, some express their discomfort softly, some endure their difficulties with patience and some await help with anticipation. The rickshaw driver implores the two Americans to show compassion towards the beggars. He implores for compassion for the afflicted, which has instilled in him a desire to both live and perish. According to Condon et al. (2013), individuals who engage in mindfulness and compassion meditation are five times more inclined to assist someone in distress.

The curtain rises as two American poets traverse the streets of Calcutta, inciting a commotion. The play illustrates the pervasive impact of hunger on all aspects of life in Bengal's capital, which is torn apart by riots and famine. They traverse the bustling urban thoroughfares in stained khaki shorts and unkempt beards. The white individual performs a headstand in yoga, while the black individual kneels on the floor in prayer towards Mecca. Simultaneously, they perceive the lamentations of famished individuals in Calcutta's slums and cafés. The readers may certainly identify with the American beatnik poets. The playwright illustrates the sorrowful plight of impoverished persons who struggle to purchase two meals daily. The Bengali man and woman perform the monkey act. The crowd has lost interest due to the monotony of repetitive experiences. The two Americans exchange a meaningful glance before gradually rising and approaching the two Indians. The two Americans are highly intrigued by the performance of the Indians. The initial individual offers the man a banana, although he stealthily passes by without accepting it. The second American offers money to the Indian man performing the monkey act, but the man fails to see it. The portrayal of the monkey act or the hungry act evokes sympathy for the impoverished.

The man is currently prone, seeming as though he possesses neither arms nor legs. He contorts his body forward, agonizingly advancing, scraping the sidewalk with his flesh and lacerating himself on jagged stones till blood stains the soiled fabric. He continuously strikes his exposed brown abdomen and his eyes appear vacant. The sound of his empty stomach resembles that of a hollow drum, compelling him to persist endlessly (THO 26).

Currimbhoy discusses the dire circumstances faced by the impoverished, emphasizing their struggle to secure sustenance merely twice daily. Poverty is a socio-economic issue that arises when individuals within a society are unable to fulfil their basic needs. Basic human necessities include food, clothes, housing, education and other essential need. Humanity experiences misery and distress when it does not attain a subsistence level of vital needs. A thorough understanding of human poverty includes the lack of choices and opportunities for a sustainable life in social contexts. Poverty undeniably exists in rural regions of India. The primary causes of poverty are insufficient financial resources and the inability to purchase goods. The insufficiency of well-paying employment opportunities and inadequate infrastructure adversely affects both the quality of life and the ability to secure employment. Subsequently, the two Americans converse regarding the individual who decline their proposal during the monkey performance. Subsequently, they regard the woman with an arrogant demeanor and pronounce allure. They approach her by offering a banana, but she declines by placing her hands together in gratitude. They attempt to capture her attention by assigning her numerous tasks. The man accepts "urchin child" who gives him some of his own food: "He stretches his hand out, slapping his belly, eyes now beseeching...the child is moved to pity, takes out some of his own food



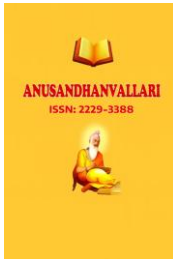
(possibly from mouth) and puts it in the mouth of the man, who at last closes his eyes, stops hitting his belly, lies inanimately, only his mouth chewing slowly on the food, the life coming and going out of him" (THO 28).

This event demonstrates how assisting those in need may transform the lives of underprivileged individuals. The toddler providing sustenance to beggars conveys a message regarding the capacity of youth to assist the poor. Kindness is a commendable trait that is somewhat rare in contemporary society. Individuals are preoccupied with fulfilling their own needs and desires. Individuals in society frequently fail to exhibit kindness towards one another. Exhibiting kindness entails demonstrating benevolence towards others. This attribute is a rare endowment possessed by only a select few individuals. They are enthusiastic about assisting those in their proximity. Providing emotional support, financial assistance and enhancing their confidence are all methods to accomplish this. The afflicted receives substantial assistance through kind words and deeds. Individuals ought to exhibit kindness towards those in need of assistance and this behavior should be promoted. Berryman Mere states: "A magnanimous heart, benevolent words, and a life dedicated to service and compassion are what rejuvenate humanity" (80).

Exhibiting kindness towards others does not need fulfilling all their needs. However, it is evident that everyone requires assistance and endeavors to provide it. The world would significantly improve if individuals treat one another with kindness. The Bengali man's anguish illustrates how poverty compels individuals to endure both physical and psychological distress for survival. The two Americans had ceased their antics upon noticing the woman gazing at her partner. The man rises and cautiously approaches the woman, his chest still rising and falling from exertion and fervour. She admits him and assists in removing his garments, her fingers gliding over the bloodstains. Americans understand the transformative impact of hunger on individuals' lives. The scenario, conversely, depicts the genuine affection between a husband and wife and illustrates the husband's commitment to providing for his family. She is completely isolated due to her husband's circumstances and his continued existence. The two Americans attempt to participate in the Indians' game. Because of this, both the Indian man and woman join the game. The playwright maintains the anonymity of the Bengali man and woman to generate suspense. The affection between Razia and Ramesh exemplifies the harmonious coexistence of individuals from diverse races and religions. Currimbhoy's narrative depicting a man and lady behaving like monkeys in Calcutta illustrates the fraternal bond between Hindus and Muslims. The most commendable aspect of Indian culture is the enduring links of love and faith that prevail across many groups. The profound affection between Razia and Ramesh exemplifies this well.

The love between Razia and Ramesh symbolises an enduring aspiration for peace among the society. The beatniks' exploration fails to provide a definitive representation of Indian culture and civilisation. The script consistently refers to them as strangers. An American inspects the Indians' bag and retrieves the drum, which he twirls playfully. The Indian man immediately turns and seizes it from the American. He repositions the drum into the bag. This renders the game somewhat less seamless. The Americans are pleased to befriend the Indian man and woman for the first time, although they do not reciprocate. The Americans will engage in many activities, whereas the Indians will persist in their routine. The play illustrates the true experience of starvation in Calcutta. The Americans currently attempt to ascertain the reasons behind the Indians' hunger. Currimbhoy states, "unusual in the ordinary, the beatniks and the famished" (THO 30). The playwright illustrates that understanding the meaning and importance of hunger is crucial: "... so you wish to join us, outsider, a hungry one ...? then learn: outsider, learn ... HUNGER!" (THO 30).

In the second scene, the Americans engage in conversation with college students in Calcutta. Sam advises Al against consuming alcohol or smoking due to the presence of numerous pupils traversing the campus pathway. The pupils greet the two Americans. They communicate with the Americans, informing them about the situation in the city, where numerous individuals endure hunger. During the famine, millions perished from starvation. Individuals



should be aware that natural disasters such as floods, droughts, earthquakes and similar events can induce starvation. Famine poses a significant hazard to human survival. Famine results in several fatalities due to induced hunger and illness. Occasionally, governmental policies precipitate famine. Starvation typically results in numerous illnesses. Individuals residing in impoverished regions seldom possess adequate sustenance. Students' testimonies illustrate the difficulties individuals faced during the famine. The students' look persists.

1 ST BOY: ... not to mention the Bengal famine when millions died....

GIRL: ...When mothers committed infanticide....

2 ND BOY: .... not since Bengal was torn into two...

3 RD BOY: ... Muslim and Hindu.

4 TH BOY: (softly) .....and millions died again.

1 st BOY: ... in this great city of Calcutta....

2 ND BOY: .... once known for its British Regetta ...

3 RD BOY: ... the cultural heritage of Tagore...

4 TH BOY: ... always to the fore ....

GIRL: (softly).... and millions died again (THO 31).

The performance also demonstrates that the government fail to implement appropriate measures for resolution. The dramatist seeks to emphasize the public's failure to understand the issue and their reluctance to inform the authorities. The youth are unable to unite and initiate a robust movement about this issue. The playwright emphasizes the dire conditions in West Bengal during the 1970s. The portrayal of the students illustrates the dire circumstances within the state. Students seek to revolutionize the entire state due to the prevalence of hunger-related fatalities. They initiate a campaign to inform the President and Secretary about the dire conditions faced by the populace. They believe that Al and Sam will assist them. The movement proceeds without disruption, aiming to reveal the government's negligence. Certain students wish to compose a manifesto for this movement, while others do not. However, they desire the movement to elevate the issue to the attention of the President and the Secretary. They discuss several strategies to rectify the situation and initiate the movement. They believe the movement will be highly successful. The students continue to converse.

3RD BOY: (promptly) Let us commence our tasks now. A manifesto is required.

SECOND BOY: Why? I am a boy: Every action is deliberate. The fourth boy stated that there will be no manifesto for this movement.

SECOND BOY: Indeed, the strength of this movement derives from its indefinability...

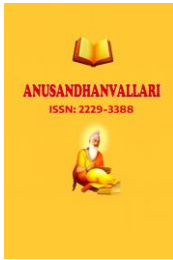
3RD BOY: That is feigning ignorance...

4TH BOY: The objective of this movement is to demonstrate that individuals lack awareness of their actions...

1 st BOY: This movement lacks purpose...

4TH BOY: Indeed, are there not millions who perish from starvation?

GIRL: Perhaps we ought to inform the President regarding this matter... (THO 32–33).



Currimbhoy emphasizes the importance of representation in resolving issues rather than resorting to violence and protest. Individuals lie on the pavement resembling decaying corpses infested with flies amidst dire starvation. Several dogs consume an individual's flesh and skeletal remains. The audience must recognize that fatalities due to starvation render the entire city an undesirable place to inhabit. The author asserts that effective leadership is essential for the movement to progress in any circumstance. Al assists the students in achieving their objectives by demonstrating the correct manner of movement in connection to their actions. "The bug" represents the manner in which a limited group of individuals or authority exert control over the working-class populace. The powerful are indifferent to the suffering of the populace, necessitating resistance against the government. Al effectively assists the kids in advocating for the subject in a seamless manner. In the play, Al portrays the role of the counsellor for the students' movement. Al is a mentor who consistently provides valuable guidance on leading the movement. Al's counsel facilitates the advancement of the majority of the students. He performs the main role in orchestrating the students' movement in the play. Al's proposal progresses: "One day, an insect inflicted a bite on me. He was large and rotund and had drained all of my blood. I trampled him and obliterated him. He erupted into a container of crimson blood. I exclaimed internally, "Oh my God, that is my blood!" (THO 34).

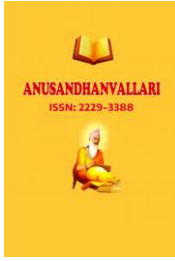
The motivation of Americans towards Indian kids conveys a message regarding how a coordinated movement might address societal issues. They illustrate that "the bug" within the prevailing power exploits individuals, parasitically deriving sustenance from them. The issue resolves when individuals recognise their subjugation and begin to question and resist. Some students wish to illustrate to the president and secretary the extent of hunger among individuals using violent means, while others dissent. The play illustrates how the unfortunate condition of individuals can lead to negative thinking during times of pain. Individuals exhibit such behaviour. Al and Sam assist the children in navigating their challenges by recounting their personal experiences. Their discourse on courage aids in addressing their issues.

The work explores the connection between the American yogic beatnik and the meditative yogi of India. Ramesh observes the two disciples reciting passages from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Each disciple discusses the central theme of the two principal epics. The Ramayana narrates how Rama fulfils his father's vow with the assistance of his devoted wife and loyal brother. On one hand, he must contend with the elements and both virtuous and malevolent individuals. The Mahabharata advises against allowing emotions to interfere on the battlefield. The disciples discuss the epics and the practice of meditation. Ramesh approaches his guru and seeks permission to leave immediately. The guru instructs Ramesh to peruse the epics to discover the essence of life. He argues that meditation is the most effective method for discovering one's spirit.

*The Hungry Ones* provides a striking portrayal of Calcutta's streets, where beggars traverse like phantoms among riots and conflagrations. Two Americans traverse the streets and impoverished areas of Calcutta. They visit the refugee camp, where illness, infirmity and despair are prevalent, illustrating the dire conditions of individuals within contemporary Indian society. The subsequent scenes are all rapid, facilitating swift action. Currimbhoy effectively generates visual and auditory imagery that stimulates contemplation and engages the senses. The performance illustrates the students' fascination with beatniks, street-dwelling immigrants in Calcutta, riots and a Guru reciting songs from Indian epics.

## Conclusion

This drama illustrates that Currimbhoy aims to depict the unresolved grief and suffering of individuals. Currimbhoy thinks that theatre constitutes the paramount kind of entertainment since it facilitates individuals'



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comprehension of theatrical art and their role within it. *The Hungry Ones* offers a profound examination of society issues, illustrating how the evolving economy transforms individuals into primal beings, compelling them to engage in unnatural behaviors for financial gain. Individuals may compromise their integrity for a modest amount of sustenance, although this is permissible.

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