

Manoj Mitra's *Sajano Bagan*: A Discussion on the aesthetics

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Sajano Bagan the beautifully arranged orchard by *Manoj Mitra* is one of his best plays. Being a superb playwright and director, he has portrayed *Banchharam* as a representative character of Indian peasant - labor class and being a brilliant actor himself he has given life to the struggle of a centenarian hopeless, helpless, have-not protagonist of the play. *Banchharam* may be considered as the most famous character of Bengali theater. The first show of *Sajano Bagan* was performed by the Kolkata based Bengali theater group *SUNDARAM* in the year 1976. From the very beginning Manoj Mitra has been continuously enthralling the audience with his acting skill till the year 2018. *SUNDARAM* alone has staged a thousand shows of the same play. This *Manoj Mitra's* play has been translated into many Indian languages and also in foreign languages. The play *Sajano Bagan* may be performed once in every day throughout the world with its own cultural fragrance.

The play represents the psychological thoughts of all the characters portrayed in it. The socio-cultural idea of the people is also reflected in the play. The playwright tried to visualize the real picture of the pre & post -colonial society so that the spectators can enjoy the aesthetical norms of the play and simultaneously will be aware of the social issues. In this short article, we are going to discuss the play, *Sajano Bagan* by *Manoj Mitra*. In order to conceptualize the play and make an attempt to find out the different aspects involved in it which determines the trend setting norms as sketched by the playwright.

This is about life and experience. According to Burner (1984:07) "a life lived is what actually happens. A life as experienced consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thought, and meanings known to the person whose life it is...a life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, and by the audience, and by the social context". Experience is a tool of discovery of human beings and their social mechanisms. It has been considered as a key concept of ethnographic discourses in order to theorize the process and product of life[s] and its cultural manifestations. The self-experiences manifest as source of knowledge and corpus of pedagogical thoughts. *Sajano Bagan* has a very

interesting story which has been canonized by the critics over the years. The main plot of the story portrays the life of a tenant and how he has been treated by the local landlord, named as *Nakadi*. The role of the tenant, *Bancharam*, a peasant who always tries to save his *Bagan* (orchard) from the land lord's conspiracy but the way the protagonist *Banchharam*, acts before the land lord every time makes the later believe that *Banchha* is going to die very soon and after his death, this orchard will be occupied by the land lord himself, however this does not happen like that instead of the tenant, the land lord dies.

As the plot unfolds, we find the main goal of the play, *Sajano Bagan* portrays the socio-economic status of the pre and post independent era of India. *Sajano Bagan*, the beautifully arranged orchard belongs to a tenant *Bancharam*' an old peasant of undivided Bengal. He is very much attached to his orchard. His dream, his soul, his life and his philosophy everything is dedicated to decorate the mother earth with the ornaments of herbs, shrubs, and plants and simultaneously, knowingly or unknowingly his efforts unite the labour-peasant class in making the powerful landlord/capitalist/tyrants ruling the society powerless. In those days the so-called petty land lords were exploiting the peasants in various ways. Under such circumstances, the playwright, *Manoj Mitra* has inserted the aesthetical properties such as *Navarasa* (nine Rasa) in the play *Sajano Bagan* which results into a brilliant theme along with wonderful characterization, dialogues and conflicts with an intention to throw the entertainment to the spectators and readers as well as to create awareness among the common people. In this play, farm land (*bhumi*) is symbolized as power and wealth for the landlord but the same piece of land is a symbol of existence for the poor. For *Banchharam* the sixteen bigha and some odd, piece of land is more precious than his life. The character *Bhanchharam* stands as a symbol of protest against dominance of landlords and also symbolizes as a protector of agriculture land against industrialisation. He does not care being abandoned by his grandson *Gupi*. He is also neither afraid of the landlord, *Nakadi* nor afraid of the ghost of *Nakadi's* father *Chhakadi*. He is asked to leave the haunted orchard by so called well-wishers, because both, the ghost *Chhakadi* and his son *Nakadi* along with his troop, planned to usurp the orchard after the death of *Banchharam*, so the landlord's troop tries to kill *Banchha* by applying their own killing methods but *Banchharam* tactically manages the scene by replying: *ki bol li bagan take chhededebo? Sara janmoraktajalkarebanalam aaj kebhuterbhayechhededebo?*. Means, What did you say? I should leave this orchard? I have spent my whole life here offering my blood, sweat and toil to this orchard and today only

because of a ghost, I should leave it? This shows the attachment of a peasant to his land- the mother earth.

Above all Bharatas, the writers of *NATYASHASTRA* believed in teachings of *Upanishadas*. So they had given importance on *SADHANA* or discipline. According to them in a play all participants should learn to use the language and vocabulary, sound and modulation of voice (*Vachika*), body, face movement (*Aangika*), attires, make up and decorations used (*Aahaarjya*) and senses of mind and intelligence (*Saatvik*). To them the performance of play was not a mere tool for entertainment rather it was similar to *YAJNA* having moral and ethical purposes to achieve. "It will conduce moral duty (*Dharma*) wealth economic well-being (*artha*) , refine sensibilities (*Kaama*) and lead to liberation (*Moksha*)" (Vatsyayan1996:57).

In the play *Sajano Bagan* both the artists and spectator find help in achieving these four goals. The theme creates awareness about one's moral duty towards the helpless, poor, senior citizen, peasant and many more. It makes us understand the importance of mother earth, which is a guarantee of economic growth. The play depicts the story of landless labourers who are compelled to tolerate harassment and other negative factors while working in factories. They are exploited by the capitalists. Neither they are paid properly nor offered proper residence or health facilities. In frustration they become addicted to drugs and alcohol. These habits not only bring poverty for them but also ruin their lives and health. Whereas on the other hand a poor with a piece of land get back his efforts in the form of crops, fruits and other eatables, which are essentials of everyday life. Sadly even after 74 years of independence the situation has not changed. In this pandemic lock down we have experienced it. The people with agricultural profession win over the economic crisis raised due to lock-down. *Gupi*, the grandson of *Banchharam* became estranged towards agriculture. He wanted to earn money by opening a barber or tailoring shop. He even wanted to sell the orchard because he was not interested to work in mud and soil. After he was driven away from home he went to town to have a job of labourer in any factory/industry. But when he realized the status of laborers there, he returned to his grandfather and to the orchard. Thus the play *Sajano Bagan* brings *ARTHA* to its spectator. Of course it refines the sensibilities of its audience. The Play sensitizes all by bringing the issues of peasants and labour class. Those have-nots had small dreams and desire to be fulfilled. Though they were silent in front of

their tyrants but their hearts and souls never remained silent. Those drops of tear gave them strength to fight against the exploiters. Exploitation and injustice should be stopped otherwise the revolution shall begin once again in the way It happened with *Banchharam* of Sajanobagan. He was rescued by the British officer from the clutches of the landlord *Chhakadi*. But in post independent India situation worsened. In this Democratic country although there were laws for protection of peasants and labour class, but there was no awareness among them. The literate people having ill minds and motives were cheating innocent illiterates. So *Nakadi*, the son of *Chhakadi* tried to entrap *Banchharam* with his sweet words and knowledge of Law. When *Banchharam* didn't find any way to escape from his clutches, he played the tit for tat game with him. It was a kind of revolution with the wit of a poor peasant who had no strength of men or money. To fight back with his tricks was *Banchharam's* survival strategy. In this battle the powerful landlord became gradually powerless and at the end met to his fate. The playwright has depicted esthetically how lonely *Banchharam* was trapped by *Nakadi* and *Moktar*.

Nakadi- x xaajtheke e sampattir sab bhaaraaminilaam.
Tomaarrakshanhaabekshanhbharanhposhanh sab aamaar. Aare, baaperpaaperpraayashchitt o karbanaa?

From today on wards I take the responsibility of this property. I shall also take your responsibility as well. After all I need to perform the act of atonement for all the sins my father had committed.

(*krutangyatayaBanchchaaNakadirpaajadiyekaande*) *Banchha* feels obliged and hold the legs of *Nakadi*.

Shonopraticamaasepayalaataarikhedukhaanaakarebadopaattidebo....

Jatadinjibitaaachhomaasemaasedushokaresamaanediyejaabo.

(Listen, every month I shall give you two hundred rupees till you alive.

Moktar- *Ba.... Ba.... Ba.... Ba....*

Wah... Wah... Wah....

Nakadi- *aamaarsudhuekatakandishan ! Tumi gata hale eibhitaamaatibaagaan-taagaan sab aamaarhaateasbe....*

But I have one condition. When you die, the entire property along with the orchard will be mine.

(Banchharamaantakeothe. Teerbendhaaharinhermatodrutabegeharedhuktejaay.)

Banchharam is startled. He tries to escape into his hut, his movements as fast as an injured deer.

Moktar- *chaachaa.... chaachaa*

Uncle... Uncle...

(Moktar giyebaanchharaamkedhare).

Moktar steps in and holds back *Banchharam*.

Nakadi- *shono, shono, tomaarjeebaddashaayaaami e dike fire o taakaabonaa. Kintutumichokhbunjale....*

Listen, as long as you live, I shall not even think of the property but once you close your eyes.....

(Banchchaprabalbegeghaadnaadte thaake.se raajinaye).

Banchha vigorously shakes his head with disapproval.

Moktar- *donosubidhechacha, tomaardonosubidhejaddinbencheaachhotomaarsampattitomar I rail ,aabaarmaasoharaa o pele! Gaachher o khele, talaar o kudule. Chalochacha... koteniyajaai, ektaachuktipattarhayajaak...*

Uncle, you get dual benefits, as long as you are alive the property remains with you and at the same time you will be receiving two hundred rupees per month, now let me take you to the court for an agreement...

With refined sensitivity the actors and spectator both simultaneously tastes the different Rasas in a play. *vibhavanubhav -vyabhichari- samyogadrasanisipattih*. So the sensible mind and soul help them to attain the difficult goal of *Rasa nishpatti*. Truly it is said *Rasobaihsah* Rasa is the God. Rasa is the path to eternal life. To get the Rasa means to get the God, get the moksha. Monoj Mitra did the magic with his powerful wordings and composition. When innocent *Banchha* was cheated by the landlord with his sweet poisonous words, the *karunha rasa* made the audience bleed with pity. It went to the climax when the dying old man began to believe that jiggery-pokery and agreed for the agreement.

Moktar- *(Nrushansachhalanaay) Ha... Ha... Ha... keeshareer...*

(With a deceitful villainous expression) Ha.. Ha... Ha... What a body

Nakadi-*keeswasty*...

What a health

Banchchaa- *Naa..Naaa*...

No.... No....

Moktar-*keekhaanchaa*..

What a frame...

Banchchaa- *Naagoaarnaa*...

No.. No....

Nakadi- *han... han... ki hadaa*.

Yes... Yes... The bones.

Moktar- *ki paanjhaa*...

What a grip....

(*oderbharasaay budo Banchcharjeernhabuk dule uthebenchethaakaaraashaay*).

The old Banchha's frail chest shivers with a hope of life.

Banchchaa-*Baanchbo*.... *Aamibaanchbo*....

Yes... I shall live, I shall live again.

Moktar- *haan.... Haan.... Bahukaalbaanchbe, armaasmaasaneekistikhaabe.shaalaa. dashakhaanaashaalertaakaaghare base tule neba.*

Yes.. you will live long and take the monthly payments regularly. You shameless enough to buy ten shawls with this money and go on enjoying your life in this hut.

Banchchaa- (*duchokhchakchakkare*) *aami? Aar o baanchbo?*

(His eyes twinkles) *me? Shall I live more?*

Nakadi- *Baancho- Baancho. Aami to diteichaaibenchethekejatopaaro tule naao. Haa... Haa...*

Yes...live long... I want to give you maximum. Take as much as you can take from me. Ha .. Ha... Ha....

(Moktar aarhaansichaapte pare naa. Oi mumurshubudorbaanchaarbadaichchhe. Moktar ektu dure saregiye pet chepehasatethaake. Nakadi o much ghuriyehaase. SudhuBanchchaarambishvaaseabishwaase bid bidkare.)

Moktar can not conceal his smile. That dying old man wants to live. Moktar moves away and burst in laugh. Nakadi also turns his face and smiles. Only Banchharam murmurs hovering between his beliefs and disbeliefs...)

Banchchaa- Baanchbo... Aamibaanchbo....

Yes I will live... I shall live. (p-11 Sajano Bagan)

The enthusiasm of writers need to be controlled because the article is getting lengthy but it seems as if a lot yet to be said. So taking the risk of few more words we wish to bring another beautiful piece of the last scene, that brings the people on stage and under stage nearer to moksha, to God. When the dark night come to an end and a new sun rises it brings new hope with a bundle of joy in the form of great-grandson of *Banchha*, he decided to live for the new born baby, for the birds in his garden, for the humming bees, for the mango flowers that were spread over the earth like little pearls and for the white sapling flowers in the pond. He announced with a thundering voice “I cannot die.” At the same time he rejects the pity paid by the land-lord in the form of two hundred rupees. His self-pity was turned to self-regard. He declared *chirotaa kaal aami khete khiechi aaj base base ekta amadaa baaduder mato tomaar rakt chuse chuse uthe daandaate bhaalo laagenaa*. (The whole life, I have toiled hard for my living and now I don't like to take money like a dead sucking bat by just sitting and doing nothing)

The working class again wins over the capitalist class. The defeat of the Land lord is narrated by the playwright in a mesmerizing wording:

Bhorer aalo gaachhpaalaar faank diye ese padechhe Banchha Kaapaalir mukhe. Lolcharma bruddher mukhkhaaniuddbhaasita. Odikeuthune (aangan) madaar khaatiaaye suyeeachhe Nakadi Datta kemarbhaangaaChhakadi Datta futiyekaandatekaandate sei khaater kaachhe aabirbhuta halo. Haate sei maalaataa khaate baslo nijer haate maalaataa Nakadir gaalaay padiyedila.

(The early morning sun rays permeate the trees and their foilages and falls on *BanchhaKapali's* wrinkled face, making it more exposed. On the other side *Nakadi Dutta* is lying on death bed with a broken hip. *Chhakadi Dutta* appears near by death bed sobbing, holding a garland. Sits on the bed and puts the garland around the neck of *Nakadi*.)

Satyamev Jayate, the part of shloka from *Manduka Upanishad* is again proved in *SajanoBagan*. The truth alone triumphs and this faith brings moksha to the people connected to *ManojMitra'sSajanoBagan*.

In concluding remarks, we would like to state that *Manoj Mitra'sSajano Bagan* is one of the popular plays because of its aesthetical value. This play demonstrates the social and psychological features of characters through the aesthetical norms. The dialogue of characters is found natural. That is why the play *Sajano Bagan* became very famous and popular.

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