

***BOOK REVIEW***  
***Rethinking Third Theatre***

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**Name of the book: Rethinking Third Theatre Editor: Kazi Abu Zumman Publisher: Research  
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*Rethinking Third Theatre* critically examines the movement of Third Theatre that was brought into being by the innovative impulses of Badal Sircar. The book tries to dissect the core of the Third Theatre and its current relevance, employing theoretical frameworks and researched data. Central to its discussion is an exploration of Sircar's dramaturgical philosophy, compositional techniques, socio-political contextualization, economic underpinnings, and the multifaceted nature of Third Theatre.

The editor Kazi Abu Zumman rightfully underscores the significance for such a book in times when Third Theatre accomplishes fifty years of its journey and the centennial of Badal Sircar. Kazi compliments Sircar's bold fusion of aesthetic refinement for having utilized the transformative force of drama for societal change.

Kazi further addresses the marginalization of Badal Sircar within India's postmodern dramatic landscape, postulating two reasons behind the phenomenon: first, he was not desiderated to be understood and, second, he had not been comprehended properly. The editor claims that while deliberate obfuscation from vested interests accounts for some of this marginalization, there persists a pervasive hesitance among Bengali intellectuals to engage profoundly with Sircar's ideological stances.

Kazi points out another crucial aspect, which is the political philosophy of Third Theatre. Sircar's "own unique form of ideological discourse", as Kazi describes it, stands apart from any one political regime. Here, Kazi emphasizes the need of a nuanced understanding of Marxist framework to fully grasp Sircar's political ethos, for interpreting his work devoid of this theoretical nodality shall utterly be an audacious and foolish attempt.

Furthermore, Kazi invites an understanding that shall not solely consider Third Theatre as merely a dramatic form but as a philosophical paradigm and a potent ideological stance. He is opposed to the dominant tendency to reduce Third theatre to the level of only to its formal attributes, advocating instead for its ethical and ideological imperatives.

Kazi attributes the reluctance to embrace Sircar's ideological precepts to a kind of cultural inertia, particularly within the Bengali intelligentsia. The editor reproaches the prevalent parochial attitude that is more tuned to the recognition of one's worth by the West than to the acknowledgment of indigenous potential, holding this as a barrier to the dissemination of Sircar's ideological insights.

However, Kazi finds a glimmer of hope in figures like Shamik Bandopadhyay. Additionally, the scholarly efforts of Professor Pabitra Sircar and Professor Darshan Chowdhury, who have undertaken the academic elucidation of Third Theatre, have facilitated the integration of Third Theatre into academic discourse, paving the way for its wider acceptance and recognition.

Third Theatre marked its experimental appearance as an alternative theatrical expression during the tumultuous 1970s by Sircar. This period saw the emergence of a new wave rooted in Sircar's philosophy, focusing on "form". Prabir Guha, a prominent voice on Third Theatre, introduced Alternative Living Theatre, seeking to establish his distinctive style.

Nevertheless, as Kazi keenly points out, one fundamental difference sets Sircar's Third Theatre apart from Guha's Sahajia Theatre; Third Theatre values content over form whereas Sahajia Theatre values form over content. This difference can also be seen in their dissemination strategies: Third Theatre emanates from a central locus to the periphery, whereas *Sahajia Theatre* operates in the reverse direction, from the periphery to the center. Regardless of their approach, the motive behind the stance is identical; both the Third and Sahajia aim to transform society through the medium of theatre, guided by their respective ideological credences. In addition, there is one more version expanded and evaluated from third theatre which is Goutam Sengupta's *Antranga Natya*, a more or less "form" or performance-based theatre.

The book contains nine key essays that have tried to analyse and critique the various aspects of Third Theatre, helping to constitute a coherent and discursive opinion regarding this movement.

Professor Sk Makbul Islam, in his seminal article titled "Tritiya Ebong Third: Natya Baigyanik Paryabekhan" ("*Tritiya and Third: A Theatrical Scientific Observation*") has

meticulously organized the assimilation of contemporary theatre science within the theoretical framework of artistic reflection. According to him, “It is through the dynamic interrelation of construction and reconstruction that Third Theatre has emerged.” Understanding “Third” entails understanding “society.” One must comprehend social theory, the “system” of society, and its “dynamism.” Professor Islam has adeptly structured the theatrical scientific explanation in this article. After the era of activist Badal Sankar, this is the first time that the theoretical foundation of Third Theatre has been systematically organized. Professor Islam remarks: “Badal Sircar crafted his own content, formulated his own form, and devised his own dialogue style. He tailored themes and forms specifically for the target audience, recognizing that a play is not solely constituted by its theme and form alone. To maintain the dynamism of theatrical production, effective management and organization were essential. Sircar implemented both internal and external workshops to keep the theatrical team’s work dynamic and efficient”. This article plays a significant role in unravelling the theoretical complexities of Third Theatre. It lays the groundwork for the conception of Third Theatre and post-Third Theatre ideologies.

In “AntarangaNatya” (“*Intimate Theatre*”) Gautam Sengupta, a playwright, director and actor, delves into the transition from Third Theatre to Intimate Theatre, highlighting the struggle. This article potentially offers an expanded understanding of Third Theatre, albeit while sharing the same philosophical ground, there have been significant differences in terms of approach. Another form of Bengali theatre, known as “AntarangaNatyaAndalan” (Intimate Theatre Movement), has also emerged. Sengupta proclaims: “In 1978, the playwright, actor, and director Badal Sircar first used the term “Alternative Theatre” in his book “The Third Theatre,” published in August of that year. This term later evolved into “Theatre of Synthesis”. Subsequently, in 1983, his book *Theatre Er Bhasa* (“The Language of Theatre”) elaborated further on ‘alternative theatre’. From these works, we learn that Sircar initiated his Third Theatre or Alternative Theatre on November 5, 1972, inside a room in Kolkata, stepping away from the conventional stage (proscenium) to start his Third Theatre or Alternative Theatre movement”.

Natyaguru Probir Guha investigates the Bengali theatre’s historical roots within *chaitanya* culture in his article titled “SahajiaSanskriti - Sahajia Theatre” (*Sahajia Culture-Sahajia Theatre*). He refers to *chaitanya* culture as SahajiaSanskriti. Within this *chaitanya* culture, he identifies the dormant seeds of Sahajia Theatre. He integrates the Sahajia Theatre movement into the context of non-Proskenium theatre in postmodern times. Comparing the theatrical philosophies of Third Theatre and Sahajia Theatre, he finds them closely related. Delving deeper into this aspect, it can be said that Sahajia

Theatre's style emphasizes "form", making the form more diverse and significant here. According to Prabir Guha: "In the 1970s, Third Theatre was a movement in Europe and Latin America. Instead of adhering to the traditional methods of acting, directing, or other theatrical technicalities, they approached drama with a serious intent, detached from the mainstream current. They broke away from the conventional circle and sought to chart a new course in theatre, aspiring to unveil a new horizon in this opposition. Thus, they termed the first theatre as Director's Theatre, the second as Corporate Theatre, and the third as Democratic Theatre. There would be no hierarchy there. Everyone would work together, participate in discussions, and make decisions".

Dr. Sanjay Ganguly, a renowned playwright and international director, writes about the desired goal of theatre for the audience from a theoretical perspective in his "Theatre Er Darshak" (*"The Spectatorship in Theatre"*). He believes that one of the paramount objectives of theatre is to intellectually stimulate the audience. He asserts, "Philosophical discourse is often incomprehensible to the general populace, but drama can easily bring it within reach of the people, hence, it is the fifth Veda." He further contends, "Theatre fosters the dissemination of ideas among people and constructs a pathway to transform reality through that cognitive process. Here, there is no coercion, no central authority, no regimentation; there exists the essence of collective learning, where actors and spectators are teaching and learning from each other. It creates a democratic arena".

In "Lokanatak O Third Thatre: ToulantikBichaar" (*"Folk Theatre and Third Theatre: A Comparative Analysis"*), Professor Apurba Dey explores the mutual relationship and contrast between Indian folk theatre and Third Theatre. The article is written in a comparative manner. Alongside examining the nature and characteristics of Indian folk theatre, he parallelly explicates the nature and characteristics of Indian Third Theatre. He highlights the condition of reciprocal reception between the two and identifies their limitations as well. Professor Dey writes: "Folk drama has not been as exclusive with proscenium theatre. However, it seems to have a frequent association with Third Theatre or alternative theatre. Third Theatre breaks out, releasing itself from the confines of conventional and proscenium stage restricted within four walls".

Zulfikar Zinna, a renowned Indian playwright and director, examines the theoretical foundation of 'alternative theatre' in his "Bikalpa Theatre Er TatyikBhitti O Tar Bikash" (*"Theoretical Basis of Alternative Theatre and Its Development"*). In this article, he identifies the historical characteristics of "economic sociology", "political economy" and globalization. He investigates how concepts such as GATT treaty, patenting intellect, laissez faire, political marketing, intangible property, and intellectual property have been instrumental, as he observes, in stimulating and constructing the

aesthetic aspects of alternative theatre. He traces the sources of these elements contributing to the emergence of alternative theatre. The author articulates the significance of socio-political perspectives behind the establishment of alternative theatre. This article is crucial for understanding the dynamism of alternative theatre. According to him: “We must remember that alternative theatre doesn’t solely stem from economic disparity; it also arises from political ideologies. Nowadays, people are familiar with intimate theatre, story theatre, rooftop theatre, floor theatre, garden theatre, studio theatre, and so on—all reflecting an experimental spatial representation. However, due to the lack of political stance and theoretical base, the architects of these spaces are struggling to get their desired outcomes. While alternative theatre emerged to challenge cultural norms, it has now become an attractive commodity in the cultural market itself”.

In his “Bikalpa Theatre: Biswabikha” (*Alternative Theatre: A Global Perspective*) theatre critic Dr.ParthapratimPanja presents an overview of the history of non-proscenium theatre discourse worldwide, and also elucidates the history of alternative theatre, examining and presenting it in a succinct and comprehensive manner.Dr.Panja comments: “The most powerful and popular form within alternative theatre is street play. Although ‘Pather Natok’ (street play) existed before, the literal meaning of street play as we understand it today was born in this era. The initiation of today’s street theatre can be traced back to 1917, during the first anniversary celebrations of the Great October Revolution in Moscow’s Red Square where Vsevolod Meyerhold acted in a street play manner for a rebellious poem, “Mystery-Bouffe” by the poet Mayakovsky. Subsequently, this form of art spread among workers in slums, factory gates, markets, and ports, gradually becoming an expression of democratic socialist consciousness, reflecting the daily lives of people through performance”.

Professor DaniKarmakar has explored the nature of Street Theatre and Third Theatre in his article “Pathanatak Er Swarup O Third Thatre” (*The Nature of Street Play and Third Theatre*). He has presented a comparative analysis of both forms of theatre, delineating the characteristics of street theatre and articulating the objectives and aims of Third Theatre in a systematic manner. He has critically evaluated the similarities and disparities between the two theatrical traditions in the Indian context. He attests that “Third Theatre is considered as one of the variants of street theatre. However, there is a distinction between street theatre and Third Theatre.” He further adds, “Badal Sircar brought theatre under the open sky”.

In “Tritiya Theatre Er GabeshanaPadhyati – EktiPrastabana” (“Research Methodology of Third Theatre: A Proposal”) Professor Sourav Gupta presents a preliminary framework for establishing

methodological validity in the research on Third Theatre. He contends that “The foundation of research lies in philosophy, ideals. The direction of Research is determined by the specific philosophy it adheres to. ‘Third Theatre’ embodies a unique philosophy; its philosophy lies in the essence of subject matter, script, and the vitality of presentation”

*Rethinking Third Theatre* serves as an invaluable resource for scholars, practitioners, and enthusiasts alike, offering a comprehensive exploration of Third Theatre’s past, present, and future. As the essays delve into the legacy of luminaries like Badal Sircar and their transformative contributions to the theatrical landscape, they also shed light on the challenges and triumphs encountered along the journey. Through the series of unique essays, the book navigates the intricate terrain of Third Theatre, unravelling its philosophical underpinnings, socio-political significance, and artistic innovations. From the theoretical musings of scholars to the practical experiences of practitioners, the diverse perspectives presented in the book enrich our understanding of Third Theatre in a more coherent way. While celebrating the achievements of Third Theatre over the past fifty years, the book also hints at avenues for future research, particularly in exploring the potential trajectory of “Post-Third Theatre.

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