

## BOOK REVIEW

### Introspecting the *third* dimension of Indian Theatre

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**Two Plays: Badal Sircar (Translated in English by Subhendu Sarkar); Hard cover, PP:165, Price : Rs. 350, ISBN : 0-19-806549-3, Publisher: Oxford University Press**

“The basic tool of trade of the art of theatre is the human body. It is the presence of the body that ultimately distinguishes theatre from cinema” said Badal Sircar in his book *Third Theatre*. The truthfulness of the above lines has dramatically been brought down in this book *Two Plays*. This unique book is broadly divided into 4 parts with few pages of picture in between. The front cover is a hard cover and carries the name of the book, name of the writer and the name of the plays. The front cover also carries a picture scene from a famous play of Badal Sircar “Hattamalar Opare” and the back cover carries a picture of another famous story named, “Khat Mat Kring” by Badal Sircar.

The first part is the Introduction part consisting of 36 pages where Subhendu Sarkar describes about Badal Sircar’s various plays and his style of writing and had mentioned many events related to him. He has described how the Communists formed party in spite of so many repressive measures by the Imperialists. He emphasized the role of All India Student’s Federation (1936) and the Youth Cultural Institute (1940) in the formative years of Indian political theatre. The role of IPTA (Indian People’s Theatre Association) has been clearly mentioned in this book. This introductory part throws light on the use of open air stage. Unlike any

hall or proscenium it needs minimal props, lighting and costumes. Reference has been made of Utpal Dutt's personal experience of acting in "Chargesheet" (written by Umanath Bhattacharya), which was the first street corner play in Bengal. Utpal Dutt's other playwrights like Special Train (1962), Din Badaler Pola (1967), Mayna Tadanta and Kaalo Haat have also been mentioned. The next part of the introduction describes the early life of Badal Sircar and his journey from engineering to CPI leader and then finally to theatre, one of his childhood passion. A list of his comedy plays categorized as comedy plays include: Solution X (1969), Baropisima (1959), Sonibaar (1959), Ram Shyam Jadu (1961), Ballabhpurer Rupkatha (1963), Kabikahini (1964).

Among his proscenium plays Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas, Tingsa Satabdi, Sarkar and Sesh Nei, Evam Indrajit became the most famous one in which his characters are typical prototypes and caught in meaningless, self-centered and uneventful existence, they accept everything unquestioningly. The author has portrayed the whole character sketch of Evam Indrajit to show how Badal Sircar used his plays to present his ideas which are normally protagonist and has confused ending. Following the description of Evam Indrajit, the author has focused the idea behind the birth of "THIRD THEATRE", the brainchild of Badal Sircar. He also quoted some lines from ThirdTheatre, "*To the performers, the spectator constitutes an anonymous mass, a faceless crowd. To the spectators, the performers constitute a band of select skilled people – an instrument of entertainment*".

Subhendu Sarkar has critically analysed the plays of Badal Sircar and has also mentioned about Sircar's use of open air theatre i.e. Anganmancha which reduced the distance between the spectators and actor. He also mentioned the characteristics of Third Theatre i.e. flexible, portable and inexpensive. He sometimes attributed the Third Theatre as 'Free Theatre', 'Intimate Theatre' or

‘Alternate Theatre’. At the end of the introduction part, Subhendu Sarkar has quoted some lines from the plays to show his style and art of writing plays.

The next part of the book introduces its readers to the 1<sup>st</sup> play *Indian History Made Easy* (Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas) which was first performed on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1976 at Calcutta Theosophical Society Hall. This play is also a part of Third Theatre which is played in open arena with spectators on 3 sides of the acting arena. This is significant in forging a unique relationship between form and content using the form of classroom teaching and characters of Teachers and masters – with the teacher instructing and teaching students – the playwright covers more than three hundred years of British rule without developing a story. Badal Sircar has very intelligently used this type of setting so as to give vivid information about the Colonial period and the way how they used to exploit the Indians. Dialogues spoken by the characters are seldom lengthy, thus provides the play with dramatic pace besides helping the audience to concentrate on the action. An example of such dialogues:

TEACHER 1: You!

STUDENT 1&2: In.

TEACHER 2: You!

STUDENT 3: dus.

TEACHER 3: You!

STUDENT 5&6: tri.

TEACHER 1: You!

STUDENT 1&2: al.

TEACHER 2: You!

STUDENT 3&4: Re.

TEACHER 3: You!

STUDENT 5&6: vo.

TEACHER 1: You!

STUDENT 1&2: lu.

TEACHER 1: You!

STUDENT 3&4: tion.

MASTER: Now, all together.

STUDENTS: Industrial Revolution.

Teachers, Students and Master take up different roles making the entire period come alive before the audience. Here though the students are taught, it is the audience who learns about the mechanism of colonial exploitation. The events have been described in a chronological and geographical order which gives a clear picture of what he wanted to portray through his plays. Appropriate use of songs in between the dialogues adds some more interesting flavors to the play. The play ends with a scene where all the students lying in the floor and crying for food i.e. the condition when Britishers left India in a miserable position.

From page 51-55 there are some pictures of Sircar's famous plays like Evam Indrajit, Khat Mat Kring, Michil etc.

The next play "*Life of Bagala*" (Bagalacharitmanas) starts with Stage Managers calling and introducing the Hero of the play Bagalacharan Batabyal or Bagala. This play revolves round the life of this innocent boy who is orphan and stays with his maternal uncle and aunt. His name was his greatest problem of his life. His classmates and friends constantly keep nagging him and teasing because of his name. It was difficult for him to find any job because of his name, quietness and personality. Even his maternal uncle and aunt are so unjust towards him, and

wanted him to marry so that they could get a dowry of Rs.50,000. In this part it is somewhat relevant to real stories what happens with peoples having such type of insane names, personality and character. In the later part when Bagala runs out from his uncle's home fooling them and tries to attempt suicide lying in a railway track, entry of an old man is shown with a lighter in his hand and talking to someone invisible. Reading further the reader comes to know about Nila a magical creature that saved Bagala by pulling him from the tracks. This story shows how by supernatural intervention Bagala is able to recognize himself, gains self confidence and takes a stand against injustice. Sircar has given an interesting climax to the story where Bagala returned whatever he owned to his maternal, gave away magic, got a job and stayed with Nila together. The play reminds us that no change can be brought about by magic; it is only through human action and will that something worthwhile can be achieved. Through this play Sircar wanted to convey his audience that one needs to change his perception towards life to stay happy and successful, and for being successful an insane name or being an orphan is not a bar. But some irrelevant scenes have been shown in this play where Nila saves Bagala from the railway tracks,

The fourth and the last part of the book includes a conversation between Badal Sircar and the writer of this book Subhendu Sarkar where many questions regarding Open Air Theatre (Anganmancha) and Third Theatre has been asked and Badal Sircar has very beautifully answered and discussed about his personal experience. He also discussed about his workshops in and outside India, the techniques he used to adopt in his workshop and many more. At the end Badal Sircar has also mentioned that how h used to decide his characters in his plays keeping in mind the shortage of lady actresses in his group. He alluded that he was deeply impressed by Dr. R.P. Dutt's *India Today* and to make the history analytical

and understandable he exploited the form of classroom teaching in the play “Indian history made easy” i.e. (sukhpathya bharater itihaas). “I Dream of Jeannie” has been an inspiration for him to write “Life of Bagala” i.e. (Bagalacharitamans).

In the last page of the book a whole list of Sircar’s plays has been given in a chronological order, their venue of first play and the group to perform it first. This book is very beautifully compiled by Subhendu Sarkar and gave the whole idea of Badal Sircar’s writings in a nutshell in the introduction part of the book. This book is helpful for those who are researching about the concept of Third Theatre and Badal Sircar. Even the plays are interesting for students who are interested in history and loves reading comedy plays.

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