Beyond the Curtain: Unmasking Elite Indifference and Urging Social Change in Badal Sircar's Plays

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Abstract

Badal Sircar remains one of the most influential figures in modern Indian theatre, renowned for his commitment to social critique and theatrical innovation. This paper examines Sircar's sustained engagement with issues of middle-class complacency, social inequality, and ethical responsibility through a close reading of three significant plays: Bhoma, Basi Khabar (Stale News), and Baki Itihas (That Other History). The study explores how Sircar exposes the indifference of the urban middle class towards the suffering of marginalized communities and challenges dominant narratives of development, history, and social progress. Through fragmented dialogues, alternative historiography, and the principles of Third Theatre, Sircar creates a dramatic space that questions bourgeois morality and encourages critical self-reflection. The paper further examines the playwright's rejection of passive audience reception and his endeavour to transform theatre into a powerful medium for cultivating social awareness, critical consciousness, and collective action. By foregrounding the experiences of subaltern groups and interrogating structures of power, Sircar constructs a counter-discourse that urges audiences to confront their social responsibilities. The study argues that Sircar's theatre transcends aesthetic experimentation and functions as a powerful instrument of social

change, making his dramatic vision highly relevant in contemporary discussions of inequality, exclusion, and civic engagement.

Keywords: Badal Sircar, Third Theatre, Indian Drama, Middle-Class Consciousness, Social Change, Subalternity, Historiography, Political Theatre.

Challenging the *Status Quo* of the Middle-Class Bourgeois

As we trace the trajectory of Badal Sircar's theatre, we can discern a pattern of steadily growing politicization of his plays and a deepening concern with questions that can be seen as moral, ethical, or political. It is indeed challenging to find a typical style running through all the plays of Badal Sircar, but the setting of educated middle-class life in Calcutta might define the standard basis in most of his plays. This milieu serves as a backdrop against which Sircar explores and critiques the attitudes, behaviours, and inherent contradictions of the middle class. It is within this familiar setting that Sircar's characters grapple with complex issues, making his critique both accessible and relatable to his audience. Sircar started rigorous questioning of the *status quo* of the middle-class bourgeois with *Ebong Indrajit (Evam Indrajit, translated by Girish Karnad in 1989, originally published in 1974)*. In this work, Sircar probes into the existential angst and disillusionment of the urban-educated youth. The play marks the beginning of his exploration into the themes of alienation, identity, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world. It challenges the comfortable complacency of the middle class, urging introspection and self-examination. Following *Ebong Indrajit,* Sircar's plays increasingly rejected middle-class complacency and self-interest. His narratives began to challenge the comfort zones of the middle class, exposing their guilt and responsibility in maintaining societal inequalities. This phase of his work is characterized by a conscious effort to unmask the self-serving nature of the middle class and highlight their role in perpetuating social stagnation. As Sircar's theatre evolved, his plays moved beyond mere critique to advocate for action. This shift is evident in his later works, where the characters often grapple

with the need for change and the imperative to take action against societal injustices. Sircar's theatre became a call to arms, urging both his characters and audiences to confront and challenge the prevailing social order. The deepening concern with ethical and moral questions in Sircar's plays reflects his own ideological evolution. He becomes increasingly critical of the superficial morality of the middle class, exposing their reluctance to engage in meaningful action. Instead of mere hand-wringing or intellectual debates, Sircar's later plays call for tangible action. This evolution in his work mirrors his own journey from being a playwright who simply depicted reality to one who sought to transform it through his art. Sircar dismantles the facade of middle-class respectability, exposing the underlying self-interest and moral failings. He depicts a journey from awareness to action, suggesting that true ethical living requires more than a passive acknowledgement of societal problems. It demands active participation in creating change, challenging the audience to move beyond their comfort zones and take responsibility for the world around them.

Unmasking Urban Apathy: Badal Sircar's Dramatic Critique of Middle-Class Hypocrisy

Three among many of Sircar's plays, *Bhoma* (translated by Badal Sircar and Kalyani Ghose in 1983, originally published in 1974), *Baki Itihas* (*That Other History*, self-translation, originally published in 1974) and *Basi Khabar* (*Stale News*, translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay in 1983, originally published in 1972) predominantly highlight the hypocrisy of the urban middle class that exploits resources and underprivileged sections of society. These plays serve as a mirror reflecting the insidious nature of urban complacency and self-interest. Instead of exaggerating the threats of the exploiters and the callousness of the political leaders, Badal Sircar focuses on the callousness of the middle class and their capacity to watch the sufferings of the people without doing anything about it. This deliberate focus shifts the narrative from a simplistic us-versus-them dynamic to a more introspective examination of societal structures and individual responsibilities.

Sircar is repelled by the pedantic philosophical approach of Marxism that emphasizes theoretical precision and doctrinal accuracy, theoretically overseeing practical relevance or evolving social subtleties. He radically separates his ideals from the jargons of Marxist theory, choosing instead to germinate hope and foster awareness within the more accessible and emotionally resonant ambit of his plays. He radically separates his ideals from those jargons and germinates hope within the ambit of his plays. Sircar challenged the clichéd forms of protest and found a unique idiom of expression that does justice to the continuous bothering of conscience.

The intriguing interplay of discrete and fragmented dialogues in the plays mentioned above traces the narrative of the urban middle class that undermines the severe concerns and the voice of a marginal, poverty-stricken country. In all these three plays, we see an extremely insensitive and indifferent response of the urban community while responding to the concerns of the 'other'. Sircar bridges the gap between high-brow intellectual discourse and the lived experiences of ordinary people, making his theatre a space for genuine reflection and potential change. His portrayal of this dynamic was not just innovative but deeply humane, pushing the audience to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and their society. Through his plays, Sircar exposes the superficial moral posturing of the urban middle class, revealing a deeper malaise of inaction and ethical disconnect. His works compel the audience to confront the uncomfortable reality that true change requires more than just awareness—it demands active engagement and a willingness to disrupt the status quo. In essence, Sircar's theatre becomes a powerful tool for social critique and moral awakening, challenging the audience to rethink their roles and responsibilities in the larger societal framework.

Disparity and Dissent: The Urban-Rural Divide in *Bhoma*

The play *Bhoma* delves into the growing divide between urban and rural areas. This division manifests as differences in economic opportunities, access to resources, education, and overall living conditions. The play also addresses issues like uncaring government,

bureaucratic hurdles, red-tapeism, mass culture, and corporate monopolies leading to the eventual extinction of marginalised people. The exploitative urban elites enjoy a parasitic relationship at the expense of rural labourers. The urban man's obsession with Calcutta as a city and the growing unrest among people with low incomes, reminiscent of the famine days of the 1940s in Bengal, are observed in this play. The playwright's use of newspaper reports adds flesh and blood to the inhuman, ruthless nature and self-centred attitude of the stronger sections towards the weaker sections of society. The character Bhoma happens to be a representative of all those who are subject to oppression and exploitation to the core, especially those living in the rural belt. At the end of the play, the playwright advocates for an uprising of the oppressed people through armed struggle, reminiscent of the Naxalite movement in the late 1960s and 70s. The flawed and twisted knowledge of the metropolitan people about the ground zero reality of rural India is not a personal construct of an individual but consciously constructed by the state machinery and disseminated through organised media, like television, print, literature, radio, textbooks, etc. On the other side, the city-based middle-class individuals are primarily caught in their paradox of development and only grumble against the non-availability of insufficient amenities and infrastructure: the sneers of traffic, the absence of a public stadium, the hazards of overcrowded public transportation systems, waterlogging in roads and so on. In this context, Chris Banfield points out that "Plays such as Bhoma have been created, which confront rural and urban audiences alike with the vast difference between the lives of impoverished villagers and well-heeled city dwellers" (Banfield, 1996, 131). Referring to the insensitivity of the urban population, the anonymous characters in the play, therefore, collectively respond: "the blood of man…is cold." (Sircar,1983, 105)

In the play *Bhoma*, the character ONE's[1] voice for the basic needs of rural India is consistently interrupted and countered by the urban class's interests. This dialectical conflict can be seen as a fundamental conflict concerning the idea of 'development' endorsed by the state. For ages, rural demands relating to irrigation, bank funding in farming, etc., have been tactfully kept aside by the paradigm of city-centric development. Medha Patkar reacts strongly to this exclusionary discourse of development: "The tribals, peasants and other poor are, in the process, deprived of their resources in the name of development, which are then harnessed in the so-called interest of the nation. But since no plan to make them partners in the attained 'benefits' or even to compensate their loss are formulated or executed, they are finally left marginalised" (Patkar, 2007, 7-8). The following interplay of dialogues substantiates how the narratives of rural subalterns are outplayed and overshadowed by the dominant voices in the society:

ONE: …the same plot of land yields four times as much if there is water—that's only three million rupees.

TWO: The Second Hooghly Bridge—only 600 million rupees.

THREE: Digging in Calcutta for better streets and better sewers—only 2,000 million rupees spent so far.

FOUR: The Metro rail will cost only 3,000 million rupees.

[1] In Badal Sircar's plays, characters are often denoted simply by numbers, such as ONE, TWO, THREE, etc. This deliberate choice is much significant, as it suggests that the characters are not individuals with unique identities. Instead, they are anonymous figures, reduced to mere numbers. In the densely populated demography of the South Asian countries, the marginalized are often seen as mere prototypes; their individual losses or sufferings are not taken into consideration. They are perceived merely as part of a larger population, representing a particular class, electoral group, religion, ethnic, or linguistic group. This approach underscores the collective nature of their plight, highlighting how their personal struggles are subsumed within broader societal issues.

ONE: Only three million! I've calculated it. Only three million for the Simulpur anchal we are not begging. We want it on loan, at the usual bank rate, at 14 per cent interest. It's going to yield gold, the farm labourer will have work all the year round, will get higher wages. . .

FIVE: Ladies and gentlemen, it's here a last, the pride of India, the atom bomb. Going cheap, dirt cheap—atom bomb, the pride of India. Here you are ladies and gentlemen, the Aryabhata, India's own artificial satellite, another feather in India's cap, buy it cheap, the bargain of a lifetime, going cheap, cheap!

. . .

ONE: Three million rupees, only three million rupees—on loan. (Throughout his speech the others have paid no heed to what he has been saying. Now they break into a frensied dance and shove One off his balance with their swaying hips. One falls down, and is encircled by a wild vulgar crowd, singing and dancing, the singing growing louder. One groans.) We need water. Give us water. We need fertilisers. Give us fertilisers. We need land. Give us land. We need water. Give us water. (Sircar, 1983, 69)

By juxtaposing several contesting versions of history, Sircar renders the theatrical space a site of dialogue; thus, his theatre is transformed into a more negotiable art form. Arguments raised in the play's discourse are based not only on the content of the recorded history but also on the techniques in which events are recorded in history (historiography). In *Bhoma*, presenting the contrasting versions, he disrupts the illusion of authenticity by diffusing the margins between fact and fiction. Sircar, in his plays, depicts that facts are actually a result of a particular perception and thus seem to be fiction from another perspective. Instantaneously placing different perspectives of reality, Sircar depicts the limitations of a factual representation of any set of events and thus rejects history's claim to authenticity. Through this technique, he ascertains that dramatic presentation can come closer to offering a more wholesome understanding. *Bhoma* reminds us that knowledge is obtained not only from textbooks or

recognized sources but also from life. However, professional historians may doubt these sources at times. Sircar recorded the discrete events of daily life on his own and involved the entire team in the writing process. It is, therefore, not only the content but the making process itself which also justifies the recognition of Sircar's theatre as 'People's Theatre' in the book *On Theatre*:

"Bhoma is a composition of many detached scenes that were written over a three-year period. Whenever I reacted strongly to fact or a phenomenon I came across—in reality, in the newspapers, in a book, in a discussion—something emerged in the shape of a scene in a play. . . When I wrote those scenes, I had no idea that I was creating a play— it was more like writing a diary. When we were searching for a new play sometime in early 1975, these scenes were read out to the group members. It was decided that every-body would henceforth write down the facts or phenomena he or she reacts to together with the reactions. Such a notebook was called 'book of feelings'. The group began to deal with the scenes I wrote and with the contributions they made, the play Bhoma gradually emerged. (Sircar, 2009, 117-118)"

The compound and subjective responses to the recorded facts reject the authority-endorsed monolithic history from diary entries. The play *Bhoma* is a subjective response to a marginal reality that has existed for a long, but the interplay of short and restless dialogues disturbs that accepted reality and unearths a terrible history of age-old exploitation. Bhoma's story primarily germinated from Sircar's diary account of a real-life headmaster of Rangabelia Village School. The headmaster had met Bhoma, a 72-year-old woodcutter who had lost an eye and got wounded severely while struggling with a tiger and livelihood in the forests of Sunderban. The playwright exposes a wide range of historical and socio-political issues underlining deprivation and helplessness; together, they construct an alternative history of thousand Bhomas.

Sircar's search for Bhoma in the real world is transformed into theatrical terms through the urban man's (represented by ONE in the play) search for Bhoma within the play world. This character, called ONE, has not seen Bhoma but has only heard of him and wants to share his observations and knowledge with others who do not know. Sircar's search for the real somehow finds a theatrical representation in the play. From the cityscape, the character represented as ONE is searching for Bhoma but never gets to see him. However, the urge to know him and share the knowledge keeps the character ONE moving:

ONE: I want to speak. I want to speak to those who don't know yet.

THREE: What do you want to speak about?

ONE: About many things. About Bhoma.

THREE: Who's Bhoma?

ONE: I don't fully know who he is. I've never seen him. . . I've only heard of him.

FOUR: Only heard of him?

. . .

THE OTHERS (accusingly): But didn't you say you know?

ONE: Yes, I've come to know that Bhoma exists. Earlier, I didn't even know that.

THE OTHERS: Shut up. Don't talk rot. (Sircar, 2009, 60)

This search for Bhoma leads to a critical review of the history of human evolution through the survival of the fittest theory. In the course of the dialogic process, it is said that human beings are basically warm-blooded in scientific terms but have now turned cold-blooded –indicative of their intense indifference to the sufferings around them. They have restricted themselves to a self-centred world that hardly allows emotional bonding with the 'other'. On a sarcastic note, it is argued that if human beings had continued to be warm-blooded, they would have faced the same fate as the dinosaurs.

ONE: The blood of man is also cold.

THREE: The blood of man is warm.

ONE: It was. Before. Now it's cold. Theory of Evolution. Darwin. Had man's blood not grown cold, he wouldn't have survived

THREE: What would he have done then?

ONE: Die. Become extinct, like the dinosaurs. (Sircar, 2009, 60)

The state-defined 'development' and every little desire of urban individuals to secure a better and more comfortable life/lifestyle overshadow the common goal of the Bhomas in a capital-driven society. Bhoma is, therefore, invisible in the light of urbanization. The history of human 'civilization' has always witnessed the eviction and muting of the subalterns in the so-called development process. The character ONE is silenced by OTHERS when he enquires about Bhoma and confirms his existence, though not visible. This suppression of voice in the theatrical space symbolizes the privileged class's attitude towards the 'other' in society. The power structure strongly dislikes non-familiar language or a language it does not understand. The new language of protest or question is thus subverted not only by straight-away counter-arguments but ridiculed or laughed at to undermine the gravity. Laughter is often used as a popular strategic tool to ignore the troublemakers of society. Trolling in social media today can thus be seen as a 'legacy' of that strategic tradition.

On the other hand, Sircar's strategy is to identify the left-out figures in a society whose existence does not bother the rest of the world or is being mocked. The social space denied to these superfluous people is being imaginatively recreated on stage by the playwright, and thus a counter-narrative is constructed against the establishment. Character ONE in *Bhoma,* as a prototype of a historiographer, seeks to record an alternate history and disrupt the story that people generally listen to. As Sircar's plays often dismantle the conventional sequential structure, there is no continuity.

Bhoma's story literally figures out the faceless, anonymous individuals who find no place in the mainstream versions of history. Notably, ONE's understanding of history gets embedded with Sircar's views on historiography at one point:

ONE: Listen! Listen! I'm going to tell you a story now. (*While the story goes on, they continue humming and dancing to their own rhythm*.) A small village in the district of 24 Parganas, West Bengal holds approximately 250 families in of which 60 families have each less than an acre of land, 90 families have no land at all. They work on other people's lands as hired labourers. They get four rupees a day as wages. Each of these labourers has five, six, 10 dependants. At four rupees a day you can't afford to buy rice; wheat, yes, but not enough for chapatis. If you make a porridge of it with water and salt it goes a long way and fills you up. If you can't get wheat flour, there's cornflour, if you can't even get hold of that, you starve. You can't always get a four rupees a day job, may be almost for 100 days or 125 days a year. Nowadays thanks to tubewells and pumps to draw out groundwater for irrigation you get some spring-crop, wheat, Ravi paddy—so there's some work even in April and May, but then there's no electricity. If it's a diesel pump, diesel is expensive and you don't get it always. You don't get fertilizers. The price of fertilizers has doubled. Urea used to be one rupee fifteen paise per kg at the controlled rate, now it's one rupee ninety-five per kg. (Sircar, 2009, 67-68)

Theatrical Subversion in *Stale News*: Rewriting History and Awakening Rebellion

Although *Stale News* is based on the revolt of the Santhal tribe, which took place a long way back, it goes beyond time and place because the social conditions have not changed fundamentally even today. In the context of cultural decadence, degradation and nihilism, Sircar attempts to awaken the people and dream of and die to emerge with a new and better society. The play is full of violence, massacre and sensationalism. But it ends on an optimistic note because the young man, who remains indifferent to the sensational items in a newspaper, is transformed into a rebel who revolts against the capitalist society. While *Bhoma* critiques

history and historiography by juxtaposing subaltern experience with middle-class bourgeois ideology, *Stale News* attempts to re-write the history of the nation by contesting the statist discourse and its energetic rhetoric. Theatrical representation of such history offers a possibility for subversive cultural politics that questions oppressive power structures and provides liberating alternatives. Re-visioning history can bring to the fore the suppressed stories of revolt and voices of dissent, which can offer the oppressed and helpless people an impetus to "dream of and die for the creation of a new and better society", as observed by Sircar in "Voyages in Theatre" (Sircar, 2009, 126).

New Historicist critics hold that literary texts are not homogenous products but rather an intriguing web of multiple discourses reflecting varied interests, instincts, ethos, approaches, etc. While traditional criticism tends to find a single meaning in the text, the New Historicists celebrate the episteme of culture, acknowledging the multiple perspectives that typify the historical reality rooted in the text. With the advent of literary theory, literary texts identify the role of non-literary texts in constructing the socio-political realities entrenched in academic work. In *Stale News*, Badal Sircar provides his audience with varied discourses and perceptions that define historical facts. Through the intense interplay of dialogues, the playwright presents the mini/ micro-narratives, effectively surfacing the roots, strategies, and the end of the Santhal revolt besides the authoritative official version of the same. The Dead Man's body in the play seems to be a prop for depicting the array of discourses as his right hand refers to the glory of the Santhal rebellion and the utter violence organized against them by the British Raj. Character ONE also serves the same purpose to some extent by juxtaposing the different multitudes of history to bring about the spirit of the Santhal revolt, which, for Sircar, is a classic example of a revolution seeking a social change – a premise of Sircarian poetics. ONE is neither allowed to know about the mass killings of the Santhal revolt nor allowed to see The Dead Man. The Chorus forms a column hiding ONE. ONE's attempt to explore the hidden facts of the Santhal

uprising is repeatedly interrupted by TWO, THREE, FOUR, FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, and EIGHT. They seek to defocus ONE's attempt by chanting names of significant figures and heroes archived by official historians and newspapers in their interpretations of the past and the present:

TWO: Hei-i- Hoop

They march, forming a single row. ONE stands behind them. The Dead Man moves towards them.

TWO: Hoop! (They kneel, aim their guns.) Hoops! (They shoot. The Dead Man stops.) Hoop! Hoop! Hoop! Hoop! (Five rounds of shots. The dead Man moves towards them.)

TWO: Hei Hoop!

They march up to the Dead Man and surround him on three sides. The Dead Man rises, walks out of the ring. One makes an effort to see him but seems unable to do so. All the rest run in a particular manner, speaking their lines.

TWO: Sri Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Sai Baba, Maharisi Mahesh Yogi...

. . .

EIGHT. Raj Kapoor, Sharmila Tagore, Uttam Kumar, Hema Malini Rekha. . .

(Sircar, 1983, 120-21)

However, the Dead Man produces a faint ray of hope. In the words of Chris Banfield, the Dead Man "'speaks' (in silence) to a future generation, a post-colonial, urban generation, bearing witness to the past" (Banfield, 1996, 133).

Interrogating Bourgeois Morality in *That Other History*

Baki Itihas (That Other History) is Sircar's second major problem play after *Ebong Indrajit*. Basanti, a story writer and Sharadindu, a lecturer in Bengali literature, form a typical couple representing the educated middle class in Calcutta. They live in a well-furnished flat in an apartment in Calcutta. The play opens with a minor discord over an unpaid electricity bill.

The suicide of a person they remember faintly sets them on a pastime-story-writing. Initially, they considered spending Sunday on an outing to the Botanical Garden or Diamond Harbour, or perhaps making a social call. However, they ultimately chose to spend their time writing stories that speculate on the reasons behind suicide. The two stories are theatrically presented in the same manner with slight variation. However, the irony is in the way the death of a man provides matters for light-hearted literary conversation with the inevitable suggestion of a common bourgeois tendency towards self-centricity that looks back with utter indifference to the world outside. Frantz Fanon's observation from his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth* may be referenced here: "Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well: (Fanon, 1963, 41).

The last Act is a confrontation between Sharadindu and the dead Seetanath. Seetanath hands Sharadindu an album of pictures scrapped from newspapers - a contrast to Sharadindu's own collection of newspaper clippings (news and editorials) - and Sharadindu discovers a whole history of oppression and torture and cruelty- from the myths to history, from the German concentration camps to Hiroshima and Vietnam – 'the rest of history.' Sharadindu replies, 'History is not this.' Seetanath mocks, 'What is history? A history of passing examinations? The comfort in the company of a lively, bright and enthusiastic wife?' Seetanath asks Sharadindu about the rest of history?" Sharadindu cries out, "But what can I do about it?' Seetanath's tone is now different, cold and quiet:

No. You can't do anything. I couldn't do anything. Nobody can do anything. Oppressions, killings, riots, wars all these will continue, men will commit these yet man has nothing to do. The man who is satisfied with two meals a day will pierce another man with a bayonet. The scientists who cannot bear the pain of an animal will create a weapon to kill a million people. They are all men. Like you. Like me. They have all tried to live on one or another meaning they have given to life. (Sircar, 2010, 55)

Structurally, *That Other History* achieves a peculiar tension that reaches the spectator or reader very sharply. Besides being a rebel, Sircar takes a humanitarian stance through his plays. In this play, he prescribes love, compassion and respect for humans to redeem the world from evil. Sircar singles out the middle-class man and accuses him of being guilty on the count of man's inhumanity. With a dream of establishing an egalitarian society at the core, Sircarian theatre repeatedly points out the insensitivity, complacency, and indifference of a section of the community. His theatre voluntarily takes up the mammoth task of awakening society from a dreadful slumber that relentlessly endorses "armchair activism" to maintain the status quo.

Breaking Boundaries: A Quest for Direct Communication with the Intended Class

Sircar realized that the bondage of the stage, the management of light and sound system, and the shifting of curtains are all burdens to the real theatrical sensibilities as he believed that theatre is not meant for the 'illusion of reality' but the realization of reality in its nakedness (*Michhilye Badal Sircar,* 17-18, 2015). Sircar, thus, revolutionized the structure of theatre including paraphernalia, presentation, structure, dialogue, costume, light, sound management and all dramatic stereotypes to make theatre a real 'people's theatre'. The 'everydayness' along with 'borderlessness' and the 'intimacy' with the audience make his theatre a more negotiable form of communication. It seems more and more that Sircar moved consciously towards a theatrical dimension that seeks independence from all existing and known forms as a way of conveying meaning or significance that steers clear of the tried and therefore clichéd art and performance.

Badal Sircar attempts to find an authentic mode of theatrical communication that does not depend on the continental sources and practices, or its native post-independent adaptations. He advocates an alternative mode of communication that issues out of his untiring engagement with the "complex social structure of this complex world" - a living material for his mould-breaking experimentations - to change or transcend the constricted structures of conventional,

consumerist and capital-driven living. It would be wrong if we only judge the success or failure of his mission through his theatrical movement. Instead, we must try to find in him a rare capacity for finding a unique idiom of expression that does justice to the continuous gnawing of conscience. As the modern technological set-up increasingly perpetuates social inequities in new garbs, as people take on evolving masks for carrying on their fears as well as vested interests, Sircar's plays turn out to be more and more relevant. He keeps on revealing them with characteristic humour or sarcasm bordering on absurdity. Most importantly, he seriously calls for a timely social change based on honest dramatic practices, and for this, he does his bit with all the available instruments of drama at his creative disposal. It is here perhaps that we find Sircar's greatest efficacy. Badal Sircar's "Third Theatre" encourages the middle class to introspect and recognize the need for social change, fostering a sense of shared experience and community involvement. By addressing their fears and vested interests through relatable narratives, Sircar's theatre can inspire the middle class to engage in honest dialogues and actions towards a more equitable society. Sircar's plays become a powerful tool for conveying messages of social change to the middle class, urging them to transcend the constricted structures of conventional living and embrace a more authentic, community-driven existence. His innovative approach not only entertains but also educates and mobilizes the middle class towards a collective effort for social transformation. Sircar's emancipation from the paraphernalia of traditional theatre was not a choice but a compulsion for him. He resorted to the street to produce contents that could not be made within the proscenium arch. Therefore, it was not the medium that Sircar celebrated through his plays but the dream of an egalitarian society.

The most significant contribution of Sircar to Indian theatre is his "Third Theatre"[2]. He used it as a tool of social change, not simply as an expression of his innovative techniques. A holistic study of the emergence and evolution of Sircar's 'Third Theatre' suggests that he used theatre to expose the plight of the subaltern people amid a capital-driven society. Subhendu Sarkar in the "Introduction" to *Two Plays: Indian History Made Easy/ Life of Bagala by Badal Sircar"* states: "Badal Sircar is the pioneer of an alternative theatre movement in India that continues to work without government and commercial aid, without advertising in the newspapers and, above all, without falling into the trap of the money economy. It thrives with the active support of its own audience and never compromises on its objective: to make people aware of their responsibilities in fighting an unjust system". (Sarkar, 2010, xxxvii)

The social reality leading to the philosophical dilemma of human survival distinguishes the theatrical art of Badal Sircar. To be precise, deep political commitment and theatrical experimentation with a delicate blending of sublimity and seriousness form the focal point of Badal Sircar's theatre. With his active and unique participation, Sircar represented Bengali theatre at the national level among intellectual giants like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Habib Tanveer, etc. In this view, Badal Sircar turned out to be the face of Bengali theatre after Bijon Bhattacharyya, Sambhu Mitra and Utpal Dutta on a pan-India basis. Sircar's significance lies not only in the popularity of his Third Theatre but also in setting a new narrative of Bengali drama.

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[2] Sircar as a dramatist, was not contented with the two age-old traditions of theatre - folk theatre and urban theatre. He analysed the pros and cons of these two traditions and, by exploiting them, formed his concept of theatre, which became famous as the Third Theatre. He considered folk theatre the first theatre because it was indigenous. The proscenium theatre, on the other hand, with all its mechanisms, has been defined as the 'second' theatre. The second theatre also evolved through the imitation of Western models. Scanning the various aspects of these two extremes, he crafted his narrative through Third Theatre, the theatre of synthesis having the following characteristics: i. Inexpensive ii. Portable iii. Flexible.

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