

Post Colonial Issues in the Plays of Badal Sarkar with Special Reference to Procession.

Govind Vishwkarma

&

Dr. Rishi Pal Singh

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Jiwaji University, Gwalior

²Professor of English, Govt. S. L. (P. G) College Morar, Gwalior

Abstract: Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonisation on formerly colonised states and peoples. The term has been used largely after the Second World War by thinkers and designates the post-independence period of any colonised nation. In late 1970s, literary thinkers started to focus the attention not only on the cultural and political effects but also economic and philosophical effects of colonisation on the affected countries. There are various thinkers who gave different definitions regarding the term post-colonialism. Badal Sircar's writing style and theatre working are significant from the point of view of post-colonialism because of two reasons. Firstly, it was a reaction against the British style proscenium stage and secondly, he wrote as a medium of making people aware of the destructive effects of colonial rule on colonized nations. With these two aims Sircar developed his theatre form more relevant to highlight the effects of colonisation. Sircar was not contented with limiting his theatre to indoor performances. With the help of theatre, he felt that he could not fulfil his aim which was making common people aware of the injustices and exploitation. The aim cannot be fulfilled because of the poverty of common masses and hence the inapproachability of theatre to the people. The main aim of this paper is to highlight the issues like sufferings and injustices faced by the people with colonisation.

Key words: Post-colonialism, Exploitation, Suffering, Capitalist, Injustices

Introduction Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonisation on formerly colonised states and peoples. The term has been used largely after the Second World War by thinkers and designates the post-independence period of any colonised nation. In late 1970s, literary thinkers started to focus the attention not only on the cultural and political effects but also economic and philosophical effects of colonisation on the affected

countries. According to Jane Hiddleston, “Colonialism should be conceived as the conquest and subsequent control of another country, and it evolves both the subjugation of that country’s native peoples and the administration of its government, economy and produce”. Thus, the social, cultural, political and capitalist control on one nation by another can be considered as colonialism. In the view of some thinkers and historians, the process of colonisation started with the conquest of Christopher Columbus in 1492 when he started to invade different countries. Elleke Boehmer in his book *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* states, “Colonialism involves the consolidation of imperial power, and is manifested in the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands, often by force”.

Colonies of occupation are the places where though the native population has remained in the majority but is controlled by a greedy foreign power. Nigeria and India have faced such a situation. In this way, colonialism is defined as the invasion and control of other people’s lands and properties. Ania Loomba, said, “The process of ‘forming a community’ in the new land . . .” and adds that this “. . . necessarily meant un-forming or re-forming the communities that existed there already, and involved a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions”.

Thus, Post-colonialism as a term “. . . first became popular in North American university campuses, and in particular in literary departments . . .” as an academic subject and soon drew the attention of Western and other academic institutions, critics and scholars (Hiddleston 1). Post-colonialism has been defined differently by different critics. Discussing some definitions here will help in the proper understanding of the term. According to Jane Hiddleston, “The term “post-colonialism” can generally be understood as the multiple political, economic, cultural and philosophical responses to colonialism from its inauguration to the present day, and is some-what broad and sprawling in scope” (1). Thus, post-colonialism is a reaction against colonial rule and its economic, cultural and political policies.

Badal Sircar came to the theatre scene, when British style Proscenium stage was in vogue. This stagecraft was brought by the British when they established their economic monopoly in India. This Proscenium stage was used for the entertainment of both the colonisers as well as the colonised Bhadrakok – the native upper class people. Badal Sircar, an apparent first-generation Bengali dramatist of postcolonial theatre of India, was born on 15 July, 1925. The starting of his dramatic career can be traced back to the early fifties. It was the

time when India was celebrating her newly acquired independence as well as recovering from the unfair control and policies of the British. The plays of the time were pragmatic and full of a social realization. Subject matters such as the problems of textile workers, slum life, mental conflict, disturbance, disappointment and the resulting anger of the newly emerged middle-class were dealt by the playwrights of the time. Sircar was not a full-time playwright and stage director during the initial years of his contact with theatre. Before this, he was a civil engineer by profession but while working with Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation and the Comprehensive Area Development, he decided to quit from his work in order to devote his entire time to theatre work.

Badal Sircar's is famous for introducing the 'Third Theatre' and its techniques are significant from the point of view of post-colonialism. It was established as a medium of making people aware of the harsh effects of colonial rule. With this aims he developed this theatre form. This theatre has three chief characteristics. The first characteristic is the flexibility, portability and inexpensiveness of this theatre. To achieve flexibility and portability, Sircar decided to perform both in Anganmancha or intimate or indoor theatre and in Muktamancha or open-air production. He started practicing his Third Theatre techniques with intimate theatre and later he brought it to the open air. Sircar named his intimate theatre Anganmancha or space theatre. In this connection he opines:

My belief in Anganmancha (Arena theatre) did not come overnight. The thinking started abroad in 1958 when I first saw theatre-in-the-round. Then seeing more, by reading books, by performing in theatre, by writing plays a few ideas concerning the actors and the audience grew stronger and stronger. (qtd. in Sarkar xvi)

One of the most striking aims of Sircar's post-coloniality is his response and anger against colonial rule and the English language which is clearly visible in his writings in Bengali. In spite of being born and brought up in an educated middle class family with a Christian lineage, Sircar decided to write in his mother-tongue. He has written in Bengali, plays like *Ebong Indrajit* (1963), *Michhil* (1974), *Bhoma* (1976), *Sukhapathya Bharter Itihas* (1976), *Hattamalar Uparey* (1977), and *Basi Khabar* (1979) etc. which later on, have been translated into English by others. Although his education gave him both confidence and fluent command over the English language, his view is that for him the English language is an entirely inappropriate language for theatre. He was very much influenced by the views of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Indrajit, *That Other History*, and *There is No End* are the chief plays which Sircar wrote for the proscenium stage. These plays are about the prevalent attitudes, imprecise feelings and undefined frustrations causing distress to the educated urban middle-class. These plays expose the day-to-day struggle for survival, the meaninglessness of existence, and the decline of human values and emotions. These are the effects of colonialism that shook the foundation of the Indian civilisation and left people confused. These plays were written in the early phase of his career when the British style proscenium theatre form was in fashion and Sircar did not identify the power of theatre fully, the way he did later. In due course, he came to understand that theatre can bring about radical changes in society if it could reach the common people. So, he decided and invented his own theatre form which emphasises audience involvement and is also flexible and portable. This helps it to reach the common masses. Sircar's Third Theatre plays show his anger against the exploitation of the subaltern groups by the privileged groups and urban control over rural economy. His ". . . transition from depicting the alienation of the middle classes to writing about the lives of workers and peasants is arguably a Marxist progression" (Mitra 70). Sircar was full of resentment against the partition of society into the rich and the poor on the one hand and into the urban and the rural on the other which was the result of capitalist economic system and industrialisation introduced in India by the British colonisers. He opposed capitalism and firmly believed in Karl Marx's theory of communism which appreciates the virtue of labour in society. The ideas of praising the virtue of labour and equal access to resources were adopted in his play *Beyond the Land of Hattamala*. Sircar says that:

. . . he wanted to remind those party members who have forgotten, and helped others to forget, the basic principle of communism. The idea was first formulated by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) and later advanced by Lenin in *State and Revolution* (1917) in relation to his discussion of the higher phase of Communist society. (Sarkar xxviii-xxix)

He expresses and condemns, through his plays the capitalist system, the division of society into class, the exploitation of the poor and the unequal access to wealth and resources and supports classless society, equal access to resources, and even distribution of wealth and profit. The plays of Sircar helped a lot in creating consciousness in society not only among the deprived and subaltern groups but also among the privileged classes and encouraged them not to exploit the poor. Veena Noble Dass while appreciating Sircar's Third Theatre plays and his contribution to theatre comments, "These plays of Sircar have placed him on a pedestal

higher than other contemporary playwrights of Indian drama. His time of entry into Indian drama was very appropriate” (68-9). Sircar’s advent to the theatre scene was most appropriate because at that time both the Indian society as well as Indian theatre were suffering from lacunae which Sircar filled with his Third Theatre.

The aim of the Postcolonial theorists and writers are identifying the economic, political and cultural effects of colonial rule. The objectives of postcolonial criticism are wide ranging which include re-evaluating the history of colonialism from the viewpoint of the colonised and defining the economic, political and cultural impacts of colonialism on both the colonised people as well as the colonising power. In this background, Sircar deals with multiple themes in a single play and does not follow any story line. Most of his plays highlight the disastrous effects of the capitalist system on the Indian economy such as corruption, black marketing, exploitation of subaltern and labour class and increasing greed for money among the bourgeois class which gives birth to selfishness and destroys the environment and community. The catastrophic results of colonialism and capitalist system implemented by the British coloniser filled Sircar with hatred and compelled him to reject capitalism. He is a staunch believer of Marxist thoughts which criticise capitalism and promote communism. His plays *Procession*, *Bhoma*, *Indian History Made Easy* and *Stale News* largely centre on the harmful impacts of colonial rule on contemporary society and deal with the depressed condition of the subaltern groups, their rebellion against colonial exploitation and the damage caused by their civilisation and technological advancements.

Sarkar’s play *Procession* concerns with the postcolonial elements at two levels; firstly, from the point of view of themes and secondly, from the view of techniques. At the thematic level, the play will be dealt, among other things, with the problem of the disappearance of young men who are victims of police atrocities during the Naxalite movement. They are victimised for standing up for their rights. Such a young man is Khoka in this play. The plays also deals with the corruption, socio-political violence, the adverse effects of technology and the kind of civilisation and culture brought by the colonist, class struggle, use of ideology by the ruling class to exploit the working class which is a characteristic of the capitalist economy and with several other problems of contemporary society.

Badal Sircar believed that the depressed condition of the common masses was the result of the capitalism practiced by the British. This capitalism created a huge hollow between the upper class and the working class. It also led to an rough distribution of wealth in society. At one juncture in the play *Procession*,

the Beggar-woman's incessant cry for bread proves that there is poverty, hunger and unequal distribution of wealth in the country: "A piece of stale bread please, moth-e-e-e-er. O mother-O moth-e-e-er" (Procession 22).

With the themes of exploitation and protestation, Sircar raises another ruinous effect of colonialism; corruption and black marketing. The development of capitalism endorsed individualism and everybody especially the privileged people started to think of their private interests. The freedom struggle of India and the partition of the country play a major role in this play entitled Procession. India's struggle for freedom was an anti-colonial movement and hence is significant from the point of view of postcolonial studies. Though all the people of India were under the hegemonic control of the British government, most of them realised that foreign rule was harmful for the country. Some patriots revolted against this colonial rule and started violent and non-violent anticolonial struggles against "the British dogs" (Procession 19). The independence movement of India was a revolt which was taken up unitedly by different ethnic, cultural, religious and racial groups which believed in rejecting the colonial power and in re-establishing local control. In spite of the efforts made by some Indian leaders, the divide and rule strategy followed by the British colonisers resulted in confrontation, communal riots, and eventually the partition of the country after independence. This division of the country into India and Pakistan by the British led to riots and bloodshed.

Badal Sircar is true in his belief that the capitalist economy is the biggest enemy of the common people, irrespective of colonisation or independence. Until and unless this destructive economic system is uprooted and communism is implemented in society, people will continue to suffer and be exploited by the privileged class. The plays which have been presented by Sircar in the form of various processions exposes how colonial rule has harmed the common man immensely and how in spite of gaining independence common man is still in the clutches of capitalists who continue to exploit the masses. It also expresses Sircar's anger against this situation. In the play *Procession*, Sircar not only generates awareness but also creates the hope that a day will come when there will be equality in society and no one will exploit the other.

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