

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Ironical Representation of Working-Class People in BadalSircar's Procession”

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Article Received: 28/3/2022,

Article Accepted: 27/04/2022,

Published online: 28/04/2022,

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.4.28

Abstract

Badal Sircar is a well-renowned postmodern playwright who has published literary and theatrical texts with collage technique. He uses collage to touch on several economic and socio-political issues plaguing the society in India. In addition, he has generated awareness with Satabdi, his own theater company established in 1967. The term "third theater" was coined by him when he took inspiration from the leader of the street theater movement, Safdar Hashmi, and from the practitioners of Western theater as well. He has directed a lot of plays, and he is a performer and a popular playwright. He achieved a scholarship from the university as he belonged to a Bengali middle-class family. He visited a lot of foreign countries using that scholarship. He established his theater to voice the subalterns of the country. He used to run his theater and insist his artists use simple costumes because he was a humble personality. The present study focuses on the irony of working-class people in his play "Procession," which is open-ended in which Sircar has made the most of collage technique to connect his scenes to the streets of Calcutta in a coherent and sensible way and leave an impact on audience's mind. The study is aimed to explore the themes of corruption and violation of the working class portrayed in the play.

Keywords: Procession, working-class people, BadalSircar, Calcutta, theater, third theater, western theater

RESEARCH ARTICLE

1. Introduction

BadalSircar is a well-recognized post-colonial Bengali playwright. He is reputed for his literary intellect and versatility. He has written over 50 plays and a novel. He has established his drama theater for his plays. It is well regarded as a "third theater ."He was a civil engineer and amateur artist. He connected with rural India when he was engaged in his profession. He was deeply affected by the desperate predicament of poor farmers and peasants. He resigned to spend all of his time in theater to spread awareness about injustice in society and find the right solution.

His play "Procession" is very intricate and unique. He doesn't seem to form a well-defined plot, storyline, or characters. The play's theme is significant, and it is open-ended with constant representation. He used the collage technique to link or connect variegated scenes in the streets of Calcutta through different episodes in a sensible way. He is truly an innovative writer who attempts to impact the mind of his audience.

1.1 Background

According to Sircar, the audience might wonder what will happen next by writing a play with a specific storyline. He believes that a writer cannot make the audience analyze the issues shown before them and think critically. This way, he used the collage technique to promote rational thinking among the audience. Sircar doesn't like to enact his play in the traditional proscenium theater. He always took a stand for "Street Theater," which can be known as "Third Theater ."The "Third Theater" was created as a kind of reaction against Britishers' forestage theater. It is possible to analyze and study the play "Procession" from two perceptions.

The first point of view is the theme, and the other is a technique that is used and adopted by the playwright. He touches on socio-political issues like violation and exploitation of common people (on the basis of class, civilization, and western influence), exploitation of working people by the ruling class, corruption, and practice of capitalist ideology. Sircar focuses on the disappearance of "Khoka," a young man. He stood up for his basic rights, and he was treated as an accused by the police. Sircar focuses strongly on the capitalism issue, which is the major cause behind all the socio-political issues in the modern world.

There is a predominant image of the procession in the play, which is called "Michael." The play is based on the backdrop of Calcutta, the city of Procession. This image has been used from both negative and positive perspectives. He has written the play and strung scenes together written by him and the scenes he had seen personally on the streets, tea shops, offices, and coffee shops in Calcutta. The old man in the play discusses several processions in Calcutta, and the characters are yet to be well defined. He portrays common people with social issues and violations and exploitation to them and their rebellion and resistance against the same.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

1.2 Literature Reviews

Badal Sircar (1925-2011) was among the most influential dramatists in the 21st century. The majority of his plays are based on his birthplace, Calcutta. He has shown the turbulent space of the 1960-70s in Calcutta. He used the existing city instead of a fictional one. Calcutta (now Kolkata) is one of India's largest and most important cities. Economically, the city is well-developed. But most of its citizens suffer from overcrowding and poverty (Shanthi, 2017).

Badal Sircar made great contributions to the people's theater in the post-independent era. Influenced by the western "Poor Theater" by Jerzy Grotowski, the "Environmental Theater" by Richard Schechner, and "The Living Theater" by Judith Malina and Julian Beck, Badal Sircar has established "Third Theater." It is a departure from the "First Theater," or the proscenium, uber-chic Theater, and "Second Theater," or the folk theater. Much in the manner of Safdar Hashmi, Habib Tanvir and Utpal Dutt, Badal Sircar's "Third Theater" had started developing an alternative way of theater in Indian drama with its open-air, audience-based, real performances. Mukherjee (2016) studied Sircar's "Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas (1976)" or "Indian History Made Easy" and related the "Third Theater" concept with its performative text.

Sircar wanted to get away from both the traditional folk styles in India before colonization and British genres. The "Third Theater" solution provided by Sircar was incorporated in "Beyond the Land of Hattamala (Hattamalar Operey)" in 1977. This slogan was popularized in "Critique of Gotha Program" in 1875 by Karl Marx. Mukerjee (2018) focuses on dramatic principles that every individual should play their role in society and take from the society according to their needs. The Marxist philosophy believes in resistance against capitalism in a society where everyone's needs cannot be satisfied.

The ecological imbalance has been causing a lot of trouble in the postmodern era. Humans have posed a lot of threats to the cultural, social, environmental, and moral balance. The environmental issues are not all about nature but also about social, mental, political, and cultural issues. Literature is a glimpse of society and it consists of society with its completeness. Badal Sircar has exposed ecological issues as an influential street playwright in one of his smartest plays, "Bhoma." He has depicted the environmental issues universally and their effect on the human psyche. This study is more than just about environmental effects on the real world, but also on the inner mind of mankind. Sharma (2015) sheds light on environmental issues and conducts an ecocritical study of the drama.

Mukherjee (2019) focuses on the "Third Theater" script, "Procession (Michhil, 1974)," which subjectivized the ordinary man who is lost in the mystifying turbulences of post-colonial ecstasy and de-humanizing anonymity of cities. He makes subversive use of incessant processions and their visual metaphor on several public issues in political societies. His play deconstructs this euphoria as it marks a nuanced change from mass panic to soul-searching.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deshmukh (2015) highlights a new theater trend brought by Badal Sircar with fruitful and bold trials on Bengali theater. The author also shows how Sircar has revolutionized the theater as per the new taste of the audience and the Bengali stage. His "Nukkad Natak" opens new ways of experiments by removing the barriers between folk theater and the urban proscenium stage. It is quite interesting to see how his theater of protest came out. The author has explored some characteristics of "Street Plays" or Nukkad Natak of Badal Sircar and how he left the stage for street performance.

The "Third Theater" was mainly brought to increase the exposure of theater to the common public and avoid extra operation costs. BadalSircar's theater group, Shatabdi, found that "Third Theater" was neither infested by old and materialistic morals of folk theater nor restricted by any immobile and expensive stuff of traditional proscenium theater. One can easily see the success of "Third Theater" with active involvement and communication of the audience. BadalSircar has written "Bhoma" and "Procession," especially to perform under "Third Theater". "Likhitkar (2020) discusses the unique approaches of "Third Theater" in "Bhoma" and "Procession," which make him an avant-garde dramatist.

The audience plays a very important role in dramatic performance. Badal Sircar is a legendary experimentalist who has brought a new theatrical form to develop live communication between the audience and performers and ensure their involvement in the performance. He named this concept "Third Theater" to enact his self-composed dramas and plays in open space. The performers can make direct contact, and ask questions to the audience as part of acting. Sometimes, performers sit among the audience on the ground while acting, and they appear in the arena from the audience sometimes. The actors bring the audience and move around the stage at the end of the performance to involve the audience in the climax (Chakraborty, 2011).

1.3 Research Gap

There are several interesting things to know about "Procession." Badal Sircar got the idea to produce the play even before writing it. He said, "It is one of the very few plays where I had the idea of the product even before I began writing it, particularly the procession idea." (Sircar, 1983). On April 13, 1974, the play was initially performed in Ramchandrapur village by his own theater group "Satabdi," which has also performed "Bhoma". "The procession was a huge success and hit like Bhoma. The play was so popular across the world that it was translated into several languages. It was also performed in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Rajasthan. This article is going to fill the knowledge gap about the play "Procession" and the way working-class people are shown.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To analyze and study the themes and techniques adopted by BadalSircar with special emphasis on "Procession."

RESEARCH ARTICLE

2. Research Methodology

To fulfill the above research objective, this study is based on secondary data, which has been collected from various research articles, publications, and journals on BadalSircar's "Procession" to understand the themes and techniques he has adopted.

3. Analysis of Study

One can analyze the play "Procession" and study the same with two perceptions, i.e., based on themes and techniques used by BadalSircar. He focuses on socio-political matters like a violation, exploitation of the poor, corruption, class difference, the influence of western civilization and culture, and exploitation of working people by the ruling class. He focuses on the disappearance of "Khoka," a young man, due to brutal violence by police as he was accused of fighting for fundamental human rights. Sircar focuses strongly on capitalism, which is the primary cause behind modern society's socio-political problems.

There is a predominant image of the procession in the play, and it refers to "Michhil" in Bengali. The space is set in the backdrop of Calcutta, and Sircar has chosen it purposely as it is the city of the procession. Sircar has used this impression both in negative and positive ways. He wrote the play and strung the scenes together written by him that he had seen in coffee shops, streets, offices, and tea shops in Calcutta. The characters are not developed well in the play. But the character of an older man voices several processions in Calcutta, including revolution, salvation, military formation, food relief, refugees, protesting, mourning, stars, and festive occasions (Sircar, 1983). The ordinary people represent the problems in society they face and violation and exploitation of them and their rebellion and resistance over it.

Themes and Techniques of "Procession"

Sircar has made the most of irony in his play. He was not aimed to showcase the issue of oppression and suppression of common people directly in the post-colonial period. Instead, he gives an ironic representation of them. The masters have exploited and violated working-class people very much. Sircar ridicules the cunning and cheap mentality of the modern ruling class man. It is clear from the following dialogue of the play –

“O Master, we can’t bear it any longer.

THE MASTER. Take this. This is for you.

CHORUS. What’s it, Master?

THE MASTER. The elixir that will bring you oblivion.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE MASTER *leaves the bottle with them. They snatch it from one another to have a sip...OLD MAN.Sura.Somarasa.Liquor.Daru.The best medicine.The way to lose oneself. Lose yourself, lose yourself. Just get lost, stop searching.*" (24)

It also represents "alcoholism ."Modern men are cunning enough to make common and exploited people dull by getting them addicted to liquor and other substances so that they can never get ahead. Religion, mass media, fine arts, drugs, unnatural ideas, and education are some of the tools to make people mindless in society and the family (Babu, 1997).

It is true that we achieved freedom from the colonial rule of Britishers in 1947, but we didn't get full freedom even in the 1980s. The ruinous aftereffects and colonial influence were still haunting the victimized common people. Sircar attempted to showcase all the analyzed aspects ahead of the people in an ironic and indirect way. Sircar has made the class difference evident between the working class and the ruling class in the capitalist society with several scenes (Ganesan, 2019).

“THE MASTER: What is the greatest enemy of civilization?

CHORUS: Communism.

THE MASTER: Who upholds, preserves, and protects civilization?

CHORUS: You, Master!

THE MASTER: Rest assured, my children, I "ll keep you civilized. Communism is the religion of the animals. Keep in mind that you are not animals; you are men.

CHORUS: But Master, we're "re-dying.

THE MASTER: There "s heaven for you after you die and heavenly happiness. Animals have no heaven. I bless you, you" d die like men, not animals." (23-4)

Instead of blaming anyone directly, Sircar attempts to mock and ridicule the materialistic master class in an ironic, subtle way. He has criticized both the middle class and the ruling class. He has criticized the middle class for indirectly provoking this exploitation. The play is an attempt to reveal the collaborationist role of middle-class Bengali people during the British empire (Dass, 1990). The capitalist master class believes that Communism or Marxism is a monster for them. They are highly money-minded and materialistic, and there is no limit to their greed for money. It has further elevated their inhuman behavior and selfishness toward the working-class.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The ruling class always looks down on the subalterns and consider the labor class as machines to use them at maximum potential to milk profits as much as they can and give them too cheap wages in return. The masters believe in hierarchy in social structure and that equal wealth distribution is the vilest part of communism. It is evident that partiality and inequality are important elements of western civilization and its influence is too strong in the minds of modern and post-colonial men in society. Inequality cannot be separated from civilization, which is destroyed by egalitarianism. Hence, the Master teaches people that communism is the biggest evil for civilization (Babu, 1997).

4. Results

It is evident that there is a lack of character development in the play. But Sircar shows Master as “upper class people” who tricks middle-class people and divides the marginalized groups in the name of religion. Sircar gave up his profession as an engineer to voice against anti-social elements with his literature. The Naxalite movement was about to end in the 1970s when the play “Procession” was written as a lot of young people were killed in public and in a mysterious way. The corrupt police officers haven’t answered the question of common people about the sudden disappearance of youth. It has wreaked havoc in Sircar’s mind. So, he decided to write the play with different events in Calcutta.

According to him, a lot of young men like Khoka disappeared suddenly and there was no answer for the common public. Sircar observed that capitalism is to be blamed for the division of people as lower and upper class and exploitation of lower class. There is no equal treatment of people in society in capitalism. Reisman (1998) defined “Capitalism” as a social system which is established on sole ownership of the mode of production. It is noticed by the chase of materialistic self-centeredness under freedom. It is further defined by accumulating and saving capital, money, and exchange for profit and financial self-interest, exploitation of the price system, economic growth, freedom of economic competition, and harmony of materialistic self-interests of everyone involved in it (1096).

Under capitalism, there is no equal distribution of power and wealth among all classes. The power and wealth is completely held by the ruling class and rich and under-privileged and less-privileged are devoid of basic needs too. They are also murdered and sentenced to jail for taking stand for their rights. Sircar is a strong believer of communism due to all these issues related to social inequality because he believes that communism can help and uplift the underprivileged and ban capitalism.

Sircar also focuses on colonialism apart from exploitation of the poor and downtrodden. The British Raj has corrupted the minds of native and innocent people and promoted black

RESEARCH ARTICLE

marketing and practice of corruption. The colonizers developed the capitalist system in which the rich get even richer and the poor get poorer. It helped the privileged to think of their selfish motives and needs, rather than the needs of underprivileged and unfortunate people. The fulfillment of their own self-interests is the sole cause for the promotion of corruption and black marketing.

In black marketing, the capitalists, masters, landlords, and rich people sell materials, services, and goods for the highest prices to the common people in an illegal manner and common people have no other option to buy those goods for more than their worth. They also trick innocent people to glorify Black Marketing as they praise Lord Krishna who was born as a human to eradicate the evil forces in the world. The Indian freedom struggle was important in the post-colonial period as an anti-colonial movement.

Some patriots and freedom fighters fought against the British Raj and a lot of non-violent, violent, and anti-colonial struggles took place to achieve independence. Anti-colonialism refers to the moment when a lot of oppression forces were articulated against the colonialism prevalent in economic, political, and cultural institutions as a resistance. It focuses on the need to recover local control and cast-off colonial power (Ashcroft et al, 2013). The British had no other choice but to give freedom to India after several years of struggle in 1947. But they were cruelly cunning as they sowed the roots of division of India in the name of religion. Their “divide and rule” strategy was so effective that it worked for so many years after they have gone. These colonizers had led to a lot of bloodshed, communal riots, and discrimination on the basis of color, race, and religion. The partition of India which caused bloodshed and riots is one of the biggest examples.

The play has a scene which depicts the struggle between the British forces and patriots, which is full of action –

“ONE. Free-ee-ee-dom!

TWO. Non-violence!

THREE. Non-coopera-a-a-ation.

FOUR. Satyagraha-a-a-a.

FIVE. The spinning whee-ee-eel!

ONE. Let Hindus and Muslims unite.

TWO. Quit India.

THREE. Do or Die.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

FOUR. Karengiyamareng (Do or die).

Five. British Imperialism, leave India!” (Sircar, 1983)

The climax of the play features the union of young Khokha who is dead and old Khokha who is alive. The chorus calls people to sing the Procession of Dreams. The play finishes with a hope that a true procession will pave the path to a peaceful home.

5. Conclusion

Sircar considers communism important in the capitalist society for the equal wealth distribution and welfare for everyone, especially the subalterns and working class. Ironically, Sircar mocks the materialistic, money-centric, and self-centered upper class who are influenced by western world. The colonizers have imposed technological advances in the colonial era. Sircar has shown the way the country is immensely harmed by colonial rule and how people were affected by capitalism even after so many years of independence with his play “Procession”. He dramatizes the cunning and sharp strategies that Britishers played to control the economic and political system of India. He has shown the pathetic and miserable condition of the colonized. He spreads awareness about the current colonial practices prevalent even in independent India that arise due to self-centered colonizers.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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