



IMPACT OF AMBEDKARISM ON INDIAN REALITY IN THE SELECT PLAYS OF BADAL SIRCAR

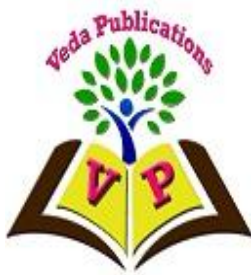
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ABSTRACT



Badal Sircar is the greatest postcolonial and postmodern writer of the twenty-first century. He belongs to a Bengali middle class. He is a non-Dalit writer who is much influenced by the writings of Ambedkar. Today, his rise as a prominent playwright in 1960s is seen as the coming of age of Modern Indian playwriting in Bengali, just as Vijay Tendulkar did it in Marathi, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, and Girish Karnad in Kannada. Badal Sircar plays are significant not only from the point of view of socio cultural, political, mythological perspectives of life but they also register a marked contribution in the process of decolonization of Indian theatre. Sircar has picturesquely presented the portrayal of a realistic picture of his contemporary society in his plays.

Keywords: *Ambedkar, Exploitation, Nationalism, Religion, Caste.*



Sircar's in his introduction to the Two Plays: *Indian History Made Easy* and the *Life of Bagala* says that he is a country breed and he does not aware of the rural exploitation. It is contrasting to his sayings that his middle class protagonist does not aware of the rural exploitation. Sircar himself finds this contradiction of authenticity. Rustom Bharucha says:

"My own experience as a spectator of this 'identification process' has been somewhat disturbing. It seems to me that the more an actor from the city attempts to give an authentic performance of a villager, the more distant he seems from the realities of rural life. The more accomplished his mastery of rural dialects, the more destitute his appearance, the more tattered his costume, the more remote he seems from the life of the oppressed peasant. The distance between a *bhadralok* actor and the oppression of the villagers he attempts to depict is often an embarrassment." (13)

Yet, despite the perceptual difference, he says that the middle class has a positive role in fighting against the Establishment. Sircar's introduction to the Two plays: *Indian History Made Easy* and the *Life of Bagala*. He points out the contrasting of his middle class heroes':

That Sircar thinks unlike the ideologue of a party is apparent in his choice of quite a few protagonists who come from the middle class having little or no connection with workers and peasants. Coming from a Bengali middle-class family and spending most of his time in the cities, Sircar prefers to write plays based on his experiences, depicting the world he knows best. Besides, the middle-class can also plays a positive role in fighting against the Establishment. They may take the opportunity of their comparatively advantageous position (for example, they can avail themselves of higher education which is a far cry for most workers and peasants in a country like India) and urge others of their class to struggle for a better world. It should not be forgotten that most of the playwrights of agitational street-corner plays are from the middle-class as well. (xxxiii)

The perceptual difference is everywhere in literature. In the play *Procession*, Sircar wants the people to remember the great law giver Manu and the revolutionary Sri Chaitanya, Nehru and Gandhiji. But he refused to mention the legendary revolutionist Ambedkar. He wants to remember the reader to know the greatness of our Indian constitution but not the Ambedkar's the maker of Indian Constitution. One could find Gandhian nationalism in Sircar himself and his plays. Like Sircar, the Subaltern Studies also highlight and follows Gandhian nationalism. The Subaltern Studies come under the serious discussion of Gandhian nationalism.

THE MASTER. Remember our national heritage. Remember the numberless martyr in our struggle for freedom. Remember the revolutionary heroes of our fiery days. Remember—India is the country of Manu, Parashar, Kalidas, Bhababhuti, Sita, Savitri, Sri Chaitanya and Gandhiji. Remember the invincible strength of the principle of Non-violence. Remember that it is our responsibility to give spiritual leadership to the world. Remember the greatness of democracy in India. Remember the fundamental rights of the constitution. Remember – the Green Revolution, the Nationalized Banks, Family Planning, Dollar aid, the nuclear blast, MISA arrests. (31-2)

Sircar does not include the name "Ambedkar" but he simply created awareness among the masses "Remember the fundamental rights of constitution" (31-2). Here one could think what is the necessary of including Sita and Savitri in the list of Gandhi and Manu? Sita and Savitri are considered as the greatest *pathivirathas* (pure devotees to their husbands). He says that non-violence is the invisible strength and he wants his people to remember it. He again insists the Gandhian nationalism. Finally after discussing the Indian state affairs, he wants the masses to remember the schemes and revolution. Such schemes and revolutions are Green Revolution, the Nationalized Banks, Family Planning, Dollar aid, the nuclear blast and MISA arrests. Rustom Barucha's *Rehearsals of Revolution* says Sircar moves away from the religious themes. He says:

Other changes have greatly affected the development of Jatra over time. In the nineteenth century a gradual secularization of the plays' themes took place, moving away from the religious stories of Krishna, Rama, Siva and Kali to historical and romantic stories. Improvised prose dialogue began to supplement the music and songs. (115)

Apart from the Sircar's criticism of religious themes, his actors and theatre are criticized. Rustom Bharucha's *Rehearsals of Revolution*. Sircar says:

Originally female characters would have been played by male actors, though women have routinely performed in *jatra* troupes for many years now. In fact Jatra was to become criticized for its over-salacious emphasis on erotic encounters, songs and dances. (116)

Bharucha says that Sircar is more humanist than a Marxist. Sircar follows communist ideology. Despite his attack on the bourgeois values and innate selfishness of his spectators, Sircar never fails to appeal to their humanity... he urges them to feel more compassion for the underprivileged, who have been denied the basic necessities of life. In this respect Sircar represents a kind of radical humanism one associates with William Blake, who believed that no revolution was possible in the social and political structure until men were prepared to break 'the mind forged manacles' which governed their lives. (45)

Though, Sircar is a Marxist and humanist, one could analyse the non-Dalit perceptual difference. In the play *Procession*, his perceptual difference is vivid in nature. Sircar says that love is blind and if someone loves somebody, one does not care about the class/caste. Here, one could trace Sircar's, non-Dalit perceptual difference. "A Brahmin boy marrying a low-caste sadgope girl? That's why they say: When it's love, one doesn't care whether it's this low-caste or that! (43). Wikipedia report says that Sadgope is a word comes from the Sanskrit language. The prefix 'Sad' meaning 'good' and the suffix 'gope' means a 'Milkman'. Sircar's satire on the inter-caste marriage is vivid which Ambedkar insist deeply in nature.

It is evident that Sircar followed Gandhian nationalism. Scholars of the Dalit literature and

Subaltern Studies critique on Sircar works. He not only followed Gandhian principles but also practiced religion in all his plays. "The whole world's turning atheist. It was our country alone that had some religion but even that's going out" (43). It is evident that he is interested in spirituality. He often quotes all religion names like "Hare Krishna", Lord Jaganath and Goddess mother Kali, the terrible Hindu goddess.

Like Subaltern studies, Sircar also caught between the webs of Gandhian nationalism. Moreover Sircar says that strength of the religion lies in the hands of God. He says:

THE MASTER. The strength of tradition In the devotion of God....in the contentment of patriotism ... in the non-violence and peace... in social responsibility.... In pragmatism... in the context of the constitution... in pragmatism... in the context of the constitution.... in the preparation for planning... in the ways put down by law... in the foundations of class harmony... in polices of tolerance... (46).

Apart from the religion and pragmatism in Sircar, it is Gandhian nationalism that gains more. This could be seen in Arundhati Roy's introduction to the *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition with the Doctor and the Saint*. She says that Gandhi considers the problem of untouchables as the problem of Dalits but not as the problem of Indian culture and tradition. Tamlaras's *Nandan Kathai* and "Chandra's Death": A Question of Representation. She says:

The significance and context of this study is the question of representation. Who can represent who? The question of representation gains its attention both in political and in literature. Ambedkar represented Depressed Class People in the Round Table Conference and opposed Gandhi's representation of Indians as a whole including the untouchables. Ambedkar's representation of Dalits seems to be an authentic representation and Gandhi representation seems to be inauthentic. Ambedkar's representation is subjective and Gandhi's representation is objective in nature. Gandhi considers the problem of untouchables as the problem of Dalits and not as a problem of Indian culture and Hinduism. (5)



She says that Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition With the Doctor and the Saint*. She questions the fact that who can represent who? Whether a Dalit could represent Dalit suffering well or a non-Dalit could represent the problems of Dalits authentically. She says that there is perceptual difference between the Dalit and Non-Dalit writer representation of Dalits. Like Arundhati Roy, Sircar is caught between the non-Dalit perceptual differences.

The play *stale news* written in 1983 and the play list out the death census rate of Harijans. Sircar says: "THREE. In the first nine months of 1978, 3,019 cases of atrocities on the Harijans. One hundred and seventy-five Harijans killed, 129 Harijans women raped, 289 cases of arson".....(160)

Sircar not only discusses the death rate of Harijans, in *Stale News* he also discusses the myth of nationalism and regionalism. He quotes the saying of Swami Vivekananda, Iswar Chandra Sekar and Bakim Chandra Chatterjee. One could analyse in theoretical representation of Santhal revolt, what is the necessary of including the saying of Swami Vivekananda and others. After the theoretical representation of the *Stale News*, the third play the *Life of Bagala* discusses the trauma of educated youth's in an urban middle class family.

Tamilarasi's "The Trauma of Educated Youth's in the *Life of Bagala*" says that Bagala in his life suffers a lot in the hands of his uncle and aunt. Moreover he is like a bonded slave in their house. Bagala's is an unemployed guy, doing all sorts household works. The crisis comes when his uncle and aunt brings her a bride for him with a dowry of fifty-thousand rupees. Bagala's psyche changes when his aunt and uncle force him to agree for the marriage. He seems to be uncanny in nature. The best illustration is that he tears his wedding dhoti and says his aunt that rat gnaws the clothes. His mental tension is best illustration: "He heard the Wild movement, sound, and with it the chanting of 'bastard'. The cry of a jackal is heard") (71). He also heard the frightening voice and barking dogs. He says:

BAGALA. (startled, in a frightened voice) God! What's that? Is it a jackal? I'm done for! What if it chases me? (suddenly straightens

up) Bastard jackal! (Cry of jackal. Startles, then raises his voice) Bastard jackal! Cry of the jackal at a distance) Running away. It won't chanting bastard is more powerful than chanting Rama. (Barking of dog. BAGALA again startles. Then gathers himself.) Bastard dog! (Again barking) But it's hydrophobia if it bites! Its too horrific! (jackal cries, dog barks) so many jackals and dog—what's on the other side? Crematorium? It must be. Suddenly stops) Crematorium? What does it mean? Pyre. Death body. Death—Death. Dea-th. (71)

Sircar not only illustrated his mental dilemma but also he brings an image of Jackal which is considers as the bad omen. Sircar picturizes Bagala as courage less guy and makes his life fulfills through the hands of old man and Nila, a genie.

The fourth play *Evam Indrajit* says that he is a born a revolutionary hero but Sircar projects him as a timid and courageless person. Even though Sircar, got angry towards the anti- social evils, he could not do anything. But he depicts his anger and frustration towards Mansi, his cousin lover, later he feels that marring Mansi is a taboo. Though he gets frustration and pours all his anger towards Mansi, he do nothing and he simply blames the institution's norms and of our Indian society.

His own inability to write a good play is evident via Indrajit attempts to write a play. Indrajit struggles hard to write a play and tears all his plays. Sircar's character Auntie often disturbs Indrajit to have food on time. Here Auntie insists the role of Aristotle's unity of time, and action.

The fourth play *Bhoma* represents the sufferings of all the depressed peasants. In the beginning of the play, a city man searches for Bhoma. Throughout the play there is a constant search for Bhoma. A city man constantly searches Bhoma and they keep on asking who Bhoma is? And have you seen Bhoma? It is a well known fact that city man has his own perception difference towards peasants and workers. Anjum Katyal's *Badal Sircar: Towards a Theatre Conscience* says:

In the collection of loose and detached scenes dealing with subjects as diverse as the problem of ground water, the hazards of nuclear texts, the criminal Metro Rail project



of Calcutta, dollar aid and so on, the connecting link is a city man in search of Bhoma, the only person who is capable of clearing the jungle of poison trees that our society has become, to make it habitable. (153)

Sircar himself says to the performer one should represent the exploitation of rural exploitation authentically. He asks the performers to represent the problem of subalterns' authentically. But he himself caught between the representation problems. It questions the necessity of a city man who searches for Bhoma and to clear all the anti-social evils in the society? The answer is a city breed could not authentically represent the trauma of subalterns'. So the city man wants Bhoma to represent the exploitation of Bhoma in Sundarbans authentically. Anjum Katyal's *Towards the Theatre Conscience* also discusses his awareness of the perceptual difference. Katyal says:

It seems to me that the more an actor from the city attempts to give an authentic performance of a villager, the more distant he seems from the realistic of rural life. The more accomplished his mastery of rural dialects, the more destitute his appearance, the more tattered his costume, the more remote he seems from the life of the oppressed peasant. The distance between a *bhadralok* actor and the oppressed of the villagers he attempts to depict is often an embarrassment. (155)

Sircar wrote and acted his plays before the centenary celebration of Ambedkar. Katyal says that he is aware of the perceptual difference. He says that the Satabdi members are both middle class and *bhadralok*. They both are aware of the perceptual difference and they are successful in it. They both are successful in portraying the oppressed peasants (subalterns).

Bhoma represent the trauma of subalterns' till his last spirit. In a struggle to weed all the anti-social elements, he lost his spirit yet he boost up all the energy to save the life of subalterns. The spirit within him is tireless and it has an eternal beauty. The eternal struggle within him is a true beauty. He has uncontrolled anger towards the society's anti-

social elements. Anjum Katyal's *Towards A Theatre of Conscience* quotes Rustom Bharucha's sayings:

Anger is the driving force of Bhoma—a relentless, though rigorously controlled anger directed against the well-fed, easy-going bourgeoisie of Calcutta. It this anger that makes the play more than a lament for Bhoma himself as an individual or for the thousands of Bhomas who continue to survive from day to day in Bengal. (154)

The fifth *Procession* is a play depicts the Calcutta's (city) procession and the disappearance of an anonymous character Khoka in the time of procession. Sircar through *Procession* points out the variety of procession that is taking place in Calcutta. Sircar calls the Calcutta as a "city of processions". Sircar himself calls the play as a collage of everyday life in Calcutta. In the play, Sircar uses the variety of *Procession*. Such *Processions* are: the black marketing, hiring of prices and different religious procession and its communal classes.

ONE. This country needs military dictatorship. They should all be trashed into order.

TWO. In the park, pair of young boys and girls sitting close. What's the country come to?

THREE. Strikes and gheraos all the time. No wonder prices soar.

FOUR. At the temple yesterday I heard Sri Vishnu Maharaj's sermon. Oh, sublime.... (49)

Though Sircar has some perceptual difference he succeeds in portraying the realities of Indian reality. It is vivid that he is aware of the perceptual difference.

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