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# Theatre and Socio-Cultural Aspects in the Novels of Badal Sircar

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## **Abstract**

*Badal Sircar, a pioneer of Indian theatre, is renowned for his innovative approach to drama, but his influence extends beyond the stage. This study delves into the socio-cultural dimensions embedded in Sircar's novels, exploring how his literary narratives mirror the societal fabric of their times. By analyzing his novels, this research seeks to uncover the profound interplay between theatre and socio-cultural aspects within his written works. The study begins by situating Sircar's novels within the broader context of Indian literature and theatre, outlining the historical and cultural forces that shaped his creative expressions. Furthermore, the research probes the impact of Sircar's socio-cultural critiques on readers and society. It investigates how his novels shed light on prevailing issues, prompting readers to reflect on the complexities of the human condition and the societal forces that shape it. The study also underscores the role of Sircar's novels in providing historical and cultural documentation, allowing readers to peer into the past while contemplating contemporary relevance. In conclusion, this study illuminates the intricate interplay between theatre and socio-cultural aspects in the novels of Badal Sircar. By analyzing the thematic depth, narrative techniques, and socio-cultural commentaries within his novels, it highlights the enduring significance of his literary contributions beyond the realm of theatre. Through this exploration, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersections between literature, theatre, and society, and their collective impact on cultural narratives.*

**Keywords— Theatre, Literature, Contemporary, Cultural, Narrative.**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Drama stands apart from other literary forms in large part because of its dependence on live performance. Only after a convincing stage performance can a play's success be evaluated, as the author learns from the audience's response whether or not his work is ideal or needs some tweaking. As a result, the biggest hindrance to the growth of Indian English play was the absence of theatrical performance.

Both original Indian theater and theater translated into English from India have come a long way in the last several decades. A number of plays originally written in regional languages are now being translated into

English. Now that a large number of these plays have been preserved, literary critics have the opportunity to assess Indian theater in its whole. The translations served to unite people from different cultural backgrounds from all over the world, north and south. The enormous popularity and success of regional play in India provides strong evidence for the establishment of a comprehensive national theatre.

Theatres in the four most significant languages—Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, and Kannad—were able to stay active and contribute to the post-independence period by having their works translated into English. With their bold experiments and innovative techniques, Badal

Sircar and Girish Karnad, the true representatives of these language theatres, have taken the Indian drama in a new direction, marking a stage of great achievement.

A careful examination of Indian theater's evolution through time demonstrates that the success of modern Indian theater can be traced back to the particular basis of Sanskrit play. By the twelfth century, the Sanskrit play had blossomed abundantly under the patronage of the Indian monarchs, who were great lovers and supporters of it, but it was destroyed by the Islamic invasion. Folk theater emerged as a result of the destruction of conventional Sanskrit theater. Thus, after six centuries, when British imperialism was established in India in the eighteenth century, the indigenous Indian theatrical traditions began to be influenced and neglected by Western dramatic theory. After India gained its independence, theatre artists set out to produce creative work unaffected by the western colonial theater tradition by reviving classical elements and going back to their origins. Because of this, a new theatrical movement emerged called the "Theatre of Roots," which aimed to create an original Indian theater for urban audiences by fusing elements of contemporary European theater with those of traditional Indian performance while maintaining a clear identity for itself.

An examination of the development of Indian drama across time suggests that modern writers are returning to the same Indian folk traditions that gave rise to Indian theater. Girish Karnad, a leading playwright of the roots movement, does this by drawing inspiration from classic stories in order to revitalize genuine Indian theater. Overall, it is correct to say that: on the one hand, modern Indian English theatre has, with the application of various modern theories and innovative tools, extended its focus from rural to urban India, and on the other hand, these plays, as a part of the 'Theatre of Roots' movement, are significant in their binding of the traditional forms of Indian theatre with the modern.

It is possible to trace the history of Indian theater by looking at its three major periods of development: the Sanskrit or Classical Theatre, the Folk or Traditional Theatre, and the Modern Indian Theatre. This three-way split is sometimes simplified as the Hindu, Muslim, and British eras, although it might also be thought of as the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern periods.

### **Tradition and Modernity in Indian Theatre**

In order to have a fruitful discussion on the topic of decolonization, it is necessary to first have a thorough understanding of the concept and ask pertinent questions such, (i) Why did decolonization occur? (ii)

Why did that have to happen? How did it happen (iii)? (iv) Why is it useful, exactly? (v) What type of environment was established for the development of Indian theater after decolonization? One must have a comprehensive understanding of British imperialism or colonialism.

All such concerns have persuasive answers that may be found by examining the overall structure of colonialism and discussing its many components, step by step. Therefore, the following measures may be taken to curb the occurrence of colonialism:

According to the most recent revision of the Oxford English Dictionary, "colonialism" is "an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak peoples by a large power." In the field of postcolonial studies, the term has taken on a very negative connotation, becoming shorthand for such evils as oppression, injustice, racism, and exploitation. What we now call "colonialism" was not only the political dominance of Asia, Africa, and South America by European powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is the setting and means through which non-European cultures and knowledge were obliterated, altered, or 'disciplined' by colonial authorities. Colonialism had profound effects on the original inhabitants, and it cannot be understood just in terms of the political and economic 'situation' that it created. Europeans learned about native civilizations via translations, commentaries, and academic research, then destroyed or adapted those societies' underlying belief systems.

By this definition, colonialism is clearly defined as an exploitative agency of a strong country working against a weak one in order to dominate the latter. The repressive, exploitative, racist, and fundamentally partial essence of colonialism is laid bare in the post-colonial writings. It's not simply the imposition of European political authority over a non-European country; it's also the destruction and adaptation of that country's culture. In the case of India, this is abundantly clear; the British colonists not only had Indian texts translated into English so they could read them and learn about the culture, but they also brought their own plays to the stage, establishing a theatrical tradition based on the British model. This demonstrates the colonizers' overarching strategy of first attempting to devalue the local culture before imposing the European one.

Imperialism is the justification of the rule of a European country over a non-European nation. To achieve this goal, imperialism portrayed the dominated countries or

nations in their own written products and in their own language as barbaric, backward, undeveloped, and in need of a master power that could civilize and liberate them.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mahamad Raihan H. Kheera. (2023) in Indian English Drama. While keeping firmly anchored in the cultural traditions of his own region, he had a great awareness of Western theatrical aesthetics and technique. Karnad thinks Indian English authors might benefit from drawing inspiration from India's great folk arts legacy. He opposed the time's prevalent trend of slavishly copying the works of Western authors. His singular contribution to this generational endeavor was to see myth, history, folklore, and contemporary urban life as four separate narrative themes from which to draw throughout his work. Karnad is a playwright whose work, like that of his colleagues "Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, UtpalDutt, Habib Tanvir, G.P. Deshpande, and Mahesh Elkunchwar, demonstrates a deliberate and self-conscious effort to create a new Indian theatre." This study intends to analyze Karnad's impact on the Indian English Theatre through the prism of India's rich folk cultures, which have persisted since the dawn of human civilization.

Vitullo, A. (2022), Teachers, especially those who specialize in the field of Language Arts, play a crucial role in helping teenagers make sense of the world through their own personal lenses. Adolescents nowadays are often confronted with the challenge of making sense of the effects of sociopolitical strife on their lives. Adolescents' experiences with displacement, a common result of sociopolitical strife, are becoming more central to their worldview. A viable strategy for educators to help teenagers at this pivotal moment is by creating places for them to address their ties to displacement through Young Adult (YA) novels. This article uses affect theory to analyse four young adult novels (Jamieson et al.'s *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020), Ruta Sepetys' *Between the Shades of Gray* (2011), Kira Kira Kadohata's *2006*, and Takei et al.'s *They Called Us Enemy* (2019)). This article aims to explore the ways in which relocation affects the protagonists and antagonists in young adult literature.

Author: Sravana D. (2020), Karnad is troubled by the contemporary man's existence, which he sees as too complicated and incomplete. The use of traditional stories highlights the absurdity of today's and conflicts. As a result of the influence of western ideologies and systems of knowledge that take a multifaceted approach

to human behavior, folk stories are being repurposed as vehicles for contemporary life. His view on the present is colored existentialism, reflective of a sea shift in how contemporary man thinks about the meaning of human existence and where it came from. The moral and spiritual principles that restrict human liberty are called into question, and man is therefore let loose from his metaphysical roots. Man is shown as a member of a social group comprised of other humans who can communicate and interact with him. Girish Karnad illustrates the application of contemporary thinking to classic stories. The notion of God and religion is only indicative of their helpless situation and neurotic thinking, and the violent and brutal behavior they engage in is a direct result of the Oedipus complex that seems to characterize all mother figures from existential detachment to fanaticism. Karnad's past is a reflection of the present in terms of politics, religion, and society.

Author: UdaysinhDodiya (2020), Renowned actor, film producer, and author GirishKarnad. He's published work in both Kannad and English. The greatest literary honor bestowed in India, the Jnanpith Award for Kannada, was also bestowed to him. Karnad is very perceptive when it comes to people. Karnad has used mythological, historical, and folk themes in his plays, yet they are also easily associated with modern life. The author of this article has examined these themes in depth by focusing on his own play, *Yayati*. Karnad borrowed the *Yayati* topic from the Mahabharata's *Adiparva*, but he gave it his own spin using his own style and skills.

SANJAY KUMAR (2017), This free ride is too hilarious for words, and it involves fish and a way to looking at how they interact with one another. Comedy of errors in *Garish*. The dramatic or tragic picnic is the bellhop of the language. This fated and ideally serious which bulldoze of thumb to the court audience in a play has an inexplicable quality. The local mom-and-pop five-and-dime is more aware of the disaster that is as fine going to show once and for all or has occurred than the characters who are frightened about it. The characters are as clueless as a chicken with its head chopped off, while the few viewers who put in the effort to learn about the past are rewarded with insights into a world the characters are blissfully unaware of. Covert irony refers to the author's reference to his or her first, impulsive response while writing a play, which results in these recommendations. It is a linguistic irony that emerges at intervals of what is rumored. It's ironic, yet the circumstance doesn't get enough credit for the understatement with which it occurs.

### III. THEATRE AND BADAL SIRCAR

In Sanskrit performances, the presence of the audience is emphasized. In the past, monologues, soliloquies, and asides were all ways for performers to speak directly to the audience. The Vidushaka, or Jester, is another key character in classical play who acts as a connection between the actors and the audience. Rasa is another important component of Indian traditional theater that Bharata contributed. Rasa, which literally means "taste," is used to describe a sensation of beauty. Happiness (humor), love, sorrow, wrath, fear, pride, awe, and aversion are only a few of the eight primary rasas that Bharata postulated. As the ninth and last fundamental rasa, 'peace' acts as a unifying force for the other eight. These nine bhavas and rasas are interconnected. Bhavas imply that performers should play out their feelings. Aristotle and Sage Bharata have been compared many times. The Western idea of tragedy is based on Aristotle's Poetics, a Greek text. Bharata's Natyashastra, the foundation of Indian theatrical theory, is grounded on Karma philosophy. Humans, according to this view, are not helpless victims of predetermined destinies, but rather active creators of their own destinies. His future is entirely up to him.

Playwrights have always played an important role in bringing people of different backgrounds and languages together, teaching them to be empathetic towards one another while also pointing out the flaws in their own behavior and the limitations of the human condition in the context of social relationships. Communication between dramatists and their audiences has always taken place on the stage, all the way back to the time of Plato and Aristotle. This is the most effective strategy for educating the public and shaping public opinion. The social, political, ethical, moral, and psychological spheres are all subject to its unwavering rule.

The most effective sort of performance art is one that motivates its audience to make positive changes. It's a reflection of how people behave and feel. Plays are always powerful as purges because of the way their messages are presented visually. Since the beginning of literature, plays have been used to raise awareness of pressing legal, social, and psychological issues. It has permeated every facet of society, amplifying existing practices with the aim of enhancing communication and well-being.

When it comes to Indian theater, the play is an old genre that serves as a boundary between the spiritual and the profane;

Theatre has always been one of the most powerful

media of sensitization and social communication in India. Communal violence and conflicts arising out of caste, religious, and gender identities have found a unique resonance and representation in post-Independence Indian theatre. Theatre reveals many salient aspects of urban violence by the staging or enactment of violence.

While looking at the contributors of theatre the name of Badal Sircar is included without any exception. It is observed that Badal Sircar contributed to the modern Indian drama and played roles as playwright, director, and actor to change the scenario contemporary theatre. No other theatre personality has had such a deep and pervasive influence on theatre practice and theory in post-independence India as Badal Sircar. 1

Back then, discrimination based on gender, caste, and religious affiliation was a major factor in disputes and riots. Before and after independence, proscenium plays were very influential. The proscenium let the audience to see the many phases of life on stage via the imaginary fourth wall. The audience was kept in the dark with the use of electricity so that the actors and conductors could provide a convincing presentation.

Sircar's approval of the proscenium stage inspired him to create the Third Theatre. Traditional theater simply could not afford the necessary performance resources, such as the fancy and useless theatrical infrastructure.

Badal Sircar, an avant-garde playwright and theatrical activist, strove for the betterment of humanity and, more specifically, Indian audiences. Nothing was lacking in his life that would have improved it. In those days, people had lives like to the frogs shown in the condemnation. His talent as an actor, combined with his genuine interest in and knowledge of the plight of ordinary people living under the constraints of conventional wisdom, propelled him into that world. He hoped they would break free from traditional household constraints and emerge from the prison of their culture. That is to say, he stressed the need of rejecting the Indian Ideal Vision of life established by its customs.

Badal sought to better people's lives and the world at large. He was a visionary writer of plays who had a realistic view on life. Instead of basing his theater on a utopian vision, he used the everyday experiences of the people as a foundation. He adhered to moral and ethical values, which he then applied to the foundations of Indian society. He regularly gave performances in rural Indian communities and led seminars to help the locals there develop their theatrical skills. He didn't set out to

become famous, and he never sought to keep anybody entertained in either urban or rural settings.

He traveled to outlying communities to carry out social service. Badal was not an idealist but a realistic playwright who required the participation of the people as both audience and actors. Because of this, Sirkar's Street Theatre evolved into a political and social movement.

#### IV. BADAL SIRCAR'S THIRD THEATRE

Movies will make you famous; Television will make you rich; But Theatre will make you good. -Terrance Man Badal Sircar, an avant-garde playwright, actor, and director, brings the lyrics of American actor, director, singer, composer, and dancer Terrance Man to life via his Third Theatre. Sircar thought that theatre was the ideal creative form to suit his social goal of raising awareness about people's problems and their abilities to effect social change. His goal was to get people thinking critically about their lives and their communities, so he came up with Third Theatre to do just that.

Badal Sircar, the theatrical activist, had his sights fixed on the greater good rather than on his own success. Through his theater and performances, he hopes to awaken those stuck in a hopeless routine. Sircar rejects the idealistic view of life and society, as well as the role of the writer as a visionary; instead, the playwright emphasizes the need of immediate action to effect change. His stage work was based not on a utopian ideal but on practical steps toward that goal.

The people's voices were heard and acted upon at the Third Theatre. Sircar performed extensively in rural areas of India and also taught seminars to help locals develop their own theatrical skills. Sircar brought the theater out to the countryside and small towns so that people there might have a more personal experience with it as both spectators and participants. This supports Sircar's argument that street theater is a kind of political activism. Badal Sircar gave up his successful engineering and urban planning job, his affluent support of the arts, the gilded spotlight of the professional stage, and his conformist accomplishments in order to serve the public. A social man who had devoted his life and works for the cause of the people, his theatrical prowess, his work, his zeal to free art from confining limitations, and his feeling of duty for the impoverished all attest to the fact that he is no ordinary playwright. Badal Sircar's passion for the stage extended much beyond the creation of his own works.

He has acted in and directed a number of comedies, some of which he has produced with his own company, Satabdi. Over time, he became more convinced that in order for the theater to fulfill its social function, it would have to abandon the traditions associated with the proscenium style of performance—particularly in Bengali theater.

This inspiration drove him to create plays for Angan Mancha's arena, in-the-round, and environmental theater formats. After visiting Poland in 1969, Sircar was exposed to Grotowski's Poor Theatre for the first time, which had a significant impact on the development of his Third Theatre. The works of Richard Schechner ('Environmental Theatre') and Julian Beck ('Living Theatre') had a significant impact on Sircar's conception of theater during his tour to the United States in 1972. The Theatre of Conscientization was developed using an accumulation of such insights. Badal Sircar argues that the terrible divide between urban and rural life is a defining element of India's current socioeconomic realities. According to him, the theatre is one of the areas where this duality is most apparent. That's why he developed Third Theatre, a hybrid form that bridges the gap between the two. So, Third Theatre is what happens when urban commercial theater and traditional folk theater collide. Badal Sircar has experience helping the impoverished and oppressed in rural and tribal communities, therefore he had a firsthand understanding of the hardships these people face.

So, he began collaborating with locals to create and write plays that highlighted their experiences and heightened their awareness of societal issues. Badal Sircar furthered his mission by establishing the Third Theatre with the help of a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship he received between 1971 and 1973. Sircar hopes that his Third Theatre will help people understand the stark realities of rural life, the nature of industrial and agricultural exploitation, and the metropolitan grip on the rural economy. His theater is always about raising awareness, whether of oneself or of the world around one. From everyone, according to his capacity, to everyone, according to his or her needs; this is his basic creed. The theatrical guy came up with the idea of Third theatre and went on to write and direct various plays, the first of which was Spartacus. In 1972, Sircar's ensemble Satabdi presented Spartacus for the first time in Surendranath Park. The audience's rapt attention during the performance and subsequent acceptance of the Third Theatre was a testament to the popularity of the venue.

The expected result demonstrated to Sircar that a dedicated and consistent theatergoer base was forming in Surendranath Park. The artists discovered a new level of immersion in their work. The triumph proved to Sircar that the unconventional Third Theatre could successfully replace the sappy, simplistic, and theatrical Jatra. Plays such as "Michhil" ("Procession"), "Rupkathar Kelenkari" ("Scandal in Fairyland"), "Bhoma," "Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas" ("Easy Indian History"), "Hattamalar Operey" ("Beyond the Land of Hattamala"), and "Basi Khabar" ("Stale News") were all created by Sircar and his crew for the Third Theatre.

## V. THIRD THEATRE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

There were defining features of Sircar's theatre that helped it flourish and effect societal change. One defining feature of Sircar's work is that it resurrected India's rich folk theater history. The concept of selling tickets was completely abandoned in 'Third Theatre. It moved away from the commercial "city theatre" or proscenium theatre, which had favored the employment of complex stage setups, lighting, sound devices, props, costuming, make-up, etc. The "effectiveness of Sircar's theater is due in large part to the sparseness of his staging, which forces the audience to focus on the actors' words." Bharucha (130). Sircar ignored everything except the play's mission. When movies first started to gain popularity, Sircar believed that theater shouldn't imitate the medium by creating an "illusion of reality" via staging and acting. He emphasizes a nuanced contrast between the two art forms, saying, "Theatre is a live show, cinema is not." Theater is different from film in that "in theatre, the performers have to be present when the communication takes place" and "theatre is a direct medium of expression." ... (Sircar 11).

His unconventional stage setting provided considerable opportunity for open dialogue between actors and audience members. In 'Third Theatre,' the human body was the primary means of expression. Sircar argues that although a play may go on without props, the presence of a human body, either onstage or in the audience, is essential to its success. Direct interaction between the show's actors and audience members was facilitated by their shared physical presence. Reality of the performer's body and voice, rather than the distraction that may be generated by lighting, scenery, costly costumes, make-up, etc., replaced the "illusion of reality" that occurred in proscenium theaters due to the employment of extensive stage equipment in "Third

Theatre." As Sircar argues, "Theatre is a human act, and hence all human Everyone engaged, whether onstage or in the audience, should feel completely at ease and unrestricted in their interactions with one another. According to (Sircar 49). Sircar believed it was crucial to forge a connection between actors onstage and audience members in the audience in order to effect positive social change, and that closing the gap between them physically would help achieve this goal. The show at Sircar's was completely gratis. He achieved this independence by stipulating that patrons need not pay any admission fee to enter his theater.

Sircar's 'Third Theatre' was funded entirely by audience contributions. Sircar was opposed to the idea of a theater that sold tickets and advertised in the press to bring in an audience. In addition, there was no regular schedule for shows. His performances took place in parks, marketplaces, slums, in front of universities and industries, and on open grounds, both in cities and the countryside. By doing so, Sircar eliminated the economic barrier to entry for theatergoers in both urban and rural areas. In addition, it didn't have any of the restrictions that plays in proscenium theater had. Chris Banfield concisely describes the liberated nature of Sircar's theater. As he puts it, "Sircar's theatre is 'free' in two senses: liberated from the constraints of Western theatre's naturalistic expectation, and literally free for its audiences, who are expected to pay only what they can afford." This is according to research (Brian and Banfield 131). It was also said by Rustom Bharucha: "Sircar knows that the poverty of his theater is its strength." The citation is Bharucha

Sircar added, "Free theater attracted us, not only because our people are poor and can ill-afford the price of admission, but also because we came to believe that in theater, both the actors and the viewers should have equal position.... Although the proceeds may not be intended for personal gain, when entry is required, the audience is cast in the position of consumers and the performers into that of vendors.... A human act cannot take place under these circumstances. According to (Sircar 49). His idea of "Third Theatre" made theatergoing accessible to those who would not be able to afford it otherwise and allowed them to create relationships with actors who delivered timely and relevant themes.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It is evident that Badal Sircar's plays provide a realistic image of India and the Indian people as they struggle to

eradicate colonial authority. Sircar began his acting career on a proscenium stage, which was inspired by the West, but he eventually became dissatisfied with it. Because he was dedicated to writing for the ordinary people and because he wanted to do everything, he could not save his culture and civilization from being completely destroyed by colonial invaders, he devised his theatrical method as an act of rebellion. Sircar did not begin writing until 1947, long after India's colonial British rulers had returned home. The spiritual bankruptcies of the intellectually active urban middle class, the exploitation and subjugation of the poor and powerless class, and the inability to establish our own economic, banking, and political systems are all things that his plays document. He said that the British had left an indelible impression on the psyche of the people as well as the political, cultural, and economic structures of the nation. All of his plays reflect his resentment of the government and the people who continue to support colonial slavery and do not seek its abolition.

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