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## The Importance of Bengali Theater In the English Literature

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### ABSTRACT

In the field of theatre, this dichotomy is very pronounced. The city theatre has practically been imported from the West and even today the architecture of proscenium stage and auditorium, lighting system, the set design, story and characterization in plays remain the same. On the other hand, the folk theatre has retained most of its indigenous characteristics and thrived in most cases because of its tremendous vitality and popularity. Sircar feels that this alienation has given rise to a harmful phenomenon. His visit to USA and Czechoslovakia influenced him with the theatre activity going on there. Actually, his group Satabdi was the first ever group which recognized the validity of a poor theatre. Grotowsky's concept of the need to renounce all outward techniques and concentrate on analyzing the closeness of the living organism struck a synonymous chord in Sircar's imagination.

**Keywords :** Pronounced, proscenium, auditorium, indigenous, alienation, phenomenon.

### RESEARCH PAPER

Sircar experimented with themes, archetype and stereotypes instead of plot and characters. He was exposed to the works of Schechner, Julian Beck, Judith Malina, Andre Gregory and others. He went on to make his theatre increasingly subtle and at times incomprehensible. He also adapted the special, environmental seating of audience as propounded by Schechner. The "Satabdi" together with "Angan Manch" as they described the small room theatres and the Gram Parikramas i.e. Walks undertaken by the choir groups performing and singing in various villages has taken theatre to every nook and corner of Bengal. By evolving flexible, portable and inexpensive theatre, they have acquired freedom. The shows of Sircar go even without funds, not doing business, never needs a critic and no stardom artist for performance. **He loves the medium, constantly thinks about it. His play Evam Indrajeet has been acclaimed in India and translated in many languages. However, earlier his comedies Ram Sham Jadu, Boro Pishima, Abu Hasan, Solution X and Shanibar were his experiments, which opened him to Calcutta crowd, the understood the everyday speech.**<sup>1</sup> The journey of Sircar can be distinguished in two different parts, his work in proscenium and in free theatre. His plays that deal with the proscenium arch are discussed with the absurdist approach.

When Sircar was asked in an interview whether he considered Evam Indrajeet as a political satire or existential play, he assured that he never considered the play a political satire and he did not know the existential philosophy. Evam Indrajeet is clearly existential, like Beckett's Waiting for Godot, it makes clear that our existence is a pointless particle of dust. Sircar always insisted that this play was a private

piece of writing, not meant for stage. The play makes the point that nothing worth mentioning ever happens. The same kind of feeling we can witness in a typical absurd play either of Ionesco's *Amedee* or *How to get rid of it* or Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Evam Indrajeet is a tale of a playwright who struggles painfully in vain to write a play. He furiously tears up his manuscripts; his inspiration appears as a woman whom he calls Manasi. The playwright is unable to write a play because as an honest artist and conscious one he finds that life is chaotic and fragmentary to cohere into a dramatic world and became mechanical without any meaning. His agony is of the artist who is aware of the sterility and horror of life, like Eliot's *'The Waste Land*, which offers hopeless life. Evam Indrajeet starts with such protagonist and the keynote is struck in the beginning that he has no meet with despair only. The name given to the protagonist is also interesting "writer. He is in search of a play to and unable to write for simple reason that he has nothing Write.

**In There No End the protagonist of the play Sumanta, a Bengali young intellectual like Indrajeet, faces the same problem. Sumanta is more progressive than Indrajeet. He is not baffled but achieved what he wants. He gets success when he chooses his own path to become a poet."**<sup>2</sup> A problem of common person, which is universal that he cannot decide what he wants in one stroke, tries here and there and then achieves success with some faults and flaws in his life, it happens with Sumanta in the play. It is a courtroom style performance. The trial in the play finally proves that every human being is a culprit. All human beings have Drought about this crisis and all of them suffer in one way or another. He points out the collective collective responsibility of all men and women. Therefore, they can resolve it collectively.

Sumanta :There is no accused. I am the accused you  
You... all of you are accused  
The Man We are all the accused.  
The Jury (Together) late are all the accused (Sircar, 17)

Another proscenium arch play is *That's Other History*, which deals with the power struggle at the family level. The play is in three acts. In the first act, Vasanti tells her story while in second act Sharad her husband narrates his story. **The third act is the reverie of Sharad. Sircar takes a different approach in the proscenium, to discuss one story in three ways. Each act can be treated as separate one act play. This psychological play of Sircar throws light on the existence of demon, the persecutor in the personality of everybody and the havoc that it has caused throughout human history."**<sup>3</sup> Sircar shows in the play how everybody has in his mind the demon that is responsible for violence destruction and wars, the other side of history. This play as Steiner points out: "Every Rescuer-Victim transaction will eventually result in a Persecutor-Victim transaction." [Steiner, 48] This political deformity is well explained in the play.

All these plays discussed earlier deal with the proscenium but Sircar's major work is in his trial theatre. According to him, the first theatre is our own folk, second is the colonial theatre adopted from West and the Third Theatre is neither folk nor Western, it is the theatre that deals the problem of today's society. His group 'Satabdi' uses to perform the plays rather improvises a story from Bengali Literature. 'Satabdi' performs on Saturday afternoons in Curzon Park, a park at the heart of the city. Satabdi needs wide range of plays for the park and *Scandal in Fairyland* is written for that purpose in 1974. This play is a close adaptation of children story written by Premnanda Mitra. Sircar told Samik Bandopadhyay in a interview in July 1991:

have never written a play specifically for  
children because it is so hard to write for  
children....whatever is thematically valuable  
in my play came from this story.

Sircar's *Scandal in Fairyland* elucidates the crucial roles of the press in molding the public opinion though it is a funny tale for children. **The role of press is also an improvisation to amalgamate the tale of Prince who beheads ogre and saves the kingdom of Gold, Diamond, Pearl etc. and finally marries to a Princess; the press can play important role in developing public opinion has taken place successfully in the play.**"<sup>4</sup> Actually, Mitra's Story point out the Prince is virtually created by the press, an ogre is made to compromise, and vanishing game is monitored the press. This play easily lends to the children theatre but Sircar himself says, "If I had written it for children, I could not have used the idiom of the popular press so extensively Sircar, viii]

Sircar's *Stale News*, *Procession* and *Bhooma* are the plays of Shatabdi, which was performed for the 'Third theatre'. These plays can be performed in a hall without any sets or technical assistance. The characters can become the set and other props in the play. The theatre depended on the performer's body and the spectator's imagination. An important means of participation was by urging the audience to concentrate intently on the actions of play most of which were done in highly imaginative mimes. Direct eye contact with the audience was also encouraged in order to heighten participation. As for the themes of the street theatre or free theatre is on socio-political issues. Contemporary issues make the play successful. The structure of all these plays is not difficult to improvise with the current issues like communalism, terrorism, police brutality, dowry system and caste inequalities, industrial and agricultural exploitation. A major part of the theatre is inspired by leftist ideologies but Sircar's play and ideas as summarized by Gowri Ramnarayan, Sircar's plays began to exemplify the needs of society but Marxists denounced him as a utopian dreamer. [Ramnarayan, 75) These three plays are the result of the collective work of Sircar and other members of Satabdi team.

**They have collected various news items of the exploitation and oppression and made a collage that portrays man. The plays have neither characters nor a story because 'A character may be too limiting in its individuality, a story may be too specific to suit his subject [Sircar, vil as Sircar puts it. It has neither characters nor a plot. Six actors, dressed identically, mime various operations in the play.'**"<sup>5</sup>

His *Stale News* exemplifies how people are made confused and mindless by education, press and mass media. Sircar also conveys through his play that the social inequality, oppression and exploitation have not changed even a little until today. For this, he narrates the Santhal Revolt that took place more than a century ago when the British were ruling India. In addition, he juxtaposes the gross atrocities of oppression and exploitation of colonial India and those of post-colonial India.

The process of making people mindless, in the family and the society, is successfully effected through religion, fine arts, mass media, education, unnatural ideals and drugs. This is shown in Sircar's *Procession*, which elucidates how mentality is affected and how it is persecuted through the process of social status. The play has neither a plot nor any characters in the conventional sense. It is rather a collage of various episodes taken from the flux of human life. The underlying unity behind this heterogeneous collection is the theme of being lost in civilization. The characters are not types but representative and symbolic.

Sircar's *Bhooma* depicts the impact of lovelessness on our society. Sircar, in the preface, writes about the evolution of the play:

But Bhoma's story is not there in this play.

Seeing, feeling and learning about our surroundings shock us, hurt us, anger us these have come out in disjointed, dramatic pictures. Bhoma's picture was then part of those pieces. But when those pictures were strung together into a play then somehow it was Bhoma's image which started to become the link and at the end the play could not be called anything but Bhooma.

Bhooma becomes a powerful symbol as the play progresses. He is not just a poor peasant. Bhooma is the jungle. Bhooma is the cornfield. Bhooma is the village. He also symbolizes love, compassion and humanity. The oppression of Bhooma has caused all the problems and the freedom of Bhooma solves all the problems. Sircar believes in the credo, 'From everybody according to his ability, to everybody according to his needs.' He shows how such an egalitarian society, obviates all oppression and exploitation. Bhooma emphasizes the need of love and compassion to better our society. The Bengali Theatre has become rich with the contribution of Sircar and his innovative performances. The themes are not only related to the Bengali world but the fact of Indian life is exposed through it. This is one of the reasons that Sircar is one of the milestones of modern Indian Theatre. The world of Bengali Theatre with their innovations tried to develop the world of drama and the contribution of Sircar made this world golden one.

## References

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