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**PLAYWRIGHT AS SOCIAL CRITIC: A STUDY OF BADAL SIRCAR'S BHOMA**


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**Abstract:** Badal Sircar, Padmashri, is a renowned Bengali playwright whose plays have attracted wide attention for their striking originality. He is author of more than 50 plays. He was born in a middle class Bengali family. He took his degree in civil engineering in 1947. While he was a student of the Bengal Engineering College, he found himself drawn towards Leftist politics. As a student he started working with AISF. Later he became involved in the trade union movement which made him aware of the working middle class condition. However he was disappointed with the leadership. Sircar was suspended by the CPI. Disillusioned, he gradually took the theatre.

**Introduction:** Sircar knew that it was not human beings but society that needed to be reformed first. But he had no specific idea the way in which the struggle for a society could be carried on since he had already lost faith in the Left. In fact his five proscenium plays that were written from 1963 to 1970- EVAM INDRAJIT, BAKI ITHIHAS, TRINGSHA SATABDI, SARKAS AND SESH NEI exhibit Sircar's refusal to accept society as it is and his frantic search for the right path to follow.

Though he formed his own group SATABDI in 1967 and started writing, directing and producing for the proscenium theatre, Sircar was becoming more and more aware of the limitations of the conventional stage and he succeeded in evolving his own brand of theatre -Third Theatre.

Badal Sircar unlike the playwrights of the street corner plays never assume the role an agitator. On the contrary, he prefers to remain in the words of Lenin, "a propagandist who presents many ideas as an integral whole trying to provide a complete explanation of the contradictions found in society"<sup>{1}</sup> His play Bhoma (1976) is based on a real character. Bhoma, the protagonist of the play along with other ones cleared the forest in the Sundrbans to make it habitable but came to know later that the land belonged to someone else in the city. They braved tigers, crocodiles, and venomous snakes only to be forced to die of starvation.

The play Bhoma interweaves the story of bhoma with issues as diverse as the problems of ground water, the risk of nuclear tests and the metro railway project in Calcutta. In Bhoma Sircar has recorded his first hand experience of the conditions in rural Bengal together with the themes that have continued to haunt him for years. In writing this play Sircar has dual intentions: appeal to the conscience of the urban audience, creating in them awareness of the ongoing exploitation in the countryside, and attempt to make the rural audience realize their power.

Sircar talking about Bhoma has said, "Bhoma was written for people like us, aimed at our kind of

people, not meant to be performed in the villages. But when we took Bhoma to village audiences, they found a point of identification in the issues it touched- underground water, agriculture, their problems, land relations- and its departure from the gods and goddesses and kings and rulers of all earlier theatre"<sup>{2}</sup>

Being a playwright Sircar fought for the cause of suppressed and exploited. It shows his awareness and concern and commitment he has to change the society. He exposes every problem and nothing left untouched. He says that "we believe in the basic human rights of freedom, work, food, clothing, shelter, education, health issues, culture. We also believe in the inviolable human right of property which, as matters stand now, conceals out at one stroke all the rights of 80 percent of the human beings in our country. We believe in equality of man and woman, yet the family expects that the wife will take care of household chores and the children even if she is working for wages like her husband. We believe in the equality of all human beings, yet we get upset if the daughter wants to marry a man who belongs to different religion, caste or creed. These are contradictions we hardly even aware of"<sup>{3}</sup>.

In Bhoma Sircar questioned the cause of the sufferers. He used only six characters in this play. One can understand Sircar's social concerns when the character ONE says "no water, no fertilizer, no seeds, no land, no food, no cloths, no work, no water" this is the condition of common man in India almost 67 years have gone since India got independence but the fate of common man has not changed. The Britishers have exploited Indians but now the Indians are exploiting Indians. Being the offspring of communist party Sircar could think about the society in class differences. Sircar criticizes the urban class for exploiting the rural class. Common man has no identity in our society.

Sircar satirizes the political leaders's socialism i.e. equality in opportunity in saving black money in Swiss Bank. One leader invites all other leaders to go and save their money. People are suffering and

starving to death but they say that their moneys safe.  
 "Two: Bless me, it's the country that will become bankrupt, when should I? My money is in a bank in Switzerland.

One: Shall thou not be called a traitor by the nation?.

Two: Who dares call me that? I am a patriot and I will remain one?.

One : How?

Two: Microphone, News papers. Radio, Television: above everything else the I in man

Sircar sarcastically says that our politicians have achieved socialism not in providing food shelter and clothes to common man but in saving their money in Swiss bank

Sircar also satirized how the youth of India have been exploited by the political leaders to kill the youth themselves and to kill others. It is for their personal gains that politician use youth power in politics and they offer little and trivial things to youth

Five: Give me blood, I'll give you jobs'

One: who are you speaking to?

Five: The youth power of the nation. (shouts)  
 Give me blood, I'll give permits.

One: Will they come?

Five: .....They are coming.....like a tornado in youthful e cstasy.....

One: To give blood?

Five: Sure.

One: Their own blood?

Bhoma is an excellent play on the exploitation of villages by capitalist and industrialist and how they make the villagers destitutes. Sircar satirizes the rich urban class saying that villages should not take food in order to provide the rice for biryani for them. We can see that through the words of ONE.

ONE: 'How can you eat, Bhoma? If you eat rice we don't get our delicious biryanis. we've invented a queer picture. Bhoma..... we have bought up your blood with those pictures. Bhoma we have bought up rice and taken it away from your mouth.

So, it is very clear that they are living on the blood of Bhomas. He says If the Bhomas had rice, we would not have anything left to eat. Bhoma's blood, redblood, blossoms into white jasmines of rice on our plates- Twice every day.

Sircar says that " we are greatly impressed when a man lands on the moon. We marvel at man's ingenuity when a man made machine sends pictures from the very edge of the solar system yet we do not question man's stupidity in not being able to solve the problem of one human being dying of starvation every four seconds. We know about horrors and devastation of that war brings, many in this world have direct experience of it. Yet we got excited whenever the cry the war is raised and brand those

who ask questions as unpatriotic or traitors. We try nit think about these contradictions."{4}

The play Bhoma discusses the present condition of the world with highly technological development. Sircar is crying for the people of this world who suffered a lot because of atom Bomb. Man invented atom bomb to kill himself. All the experiments with atom Bombs that have been conducted on the earth have released enough radio activity to cause the birth of millions of deformed children. India has been recognized as one of atomic power nations with the launching of Aryabhata in 1974. Now the total stock pile of atom bombs in the world can destroy the whole world- four hundred times. We can understand the severity of the pain that people experiment.

"My heart has dried up. My heart is a piece of leather. Can you spare me a drop of water to moisten it?"{5} displays the disaster. And the atom bomb effect can be seen his words "Rise up all women that have conceived! Drown in atomic radio activity into your wombs! Give birth to disabled, deformed, atomic children!"{6}

One can understand where the world is going in the name of development of technology, it is only to destruction.

Sircar has also criticized the present Indian education system. He worries about brain drain. All the knowledge and Intelligence is being drained to foreign countries. Now a days the people are going, to USA, Canada, and Australia for settlement. They study in India but they don't use their knowledge and hardwork to develop India. They are going only for money making. Sircar expounded this in Bhoma very clearly through his characters.

Two: I've put my son in an English Medium school then in the Indian'Institute of technology,Karagpur.

Three: Educate him , educate him

Two: I'll sell my pots and pans, but He'll get his education.

Three: Yes. yes sell your pots and pans.

Four: Your country will also sell its pots and pans to educate him.

Six: Educate, he will depart in glory of America.

Two: I'll get his pictures printed in the newspapers.

Three: Your son will earn thousands of dollars in America.

Four: You will advertise in the newspapers for a bride for your son in America.

It is evident that today many educated people are using India for their education and then going abroad to making money. People wish to study English medium education because they will get job immediately, and they can so to America and they can demand dowry in marriage.

Sircar also criticized the double mindedness of

banking system in India. Bank can't give loan without security to poor people and cultivators who are providing food to the people of country. But they can give loans thousands of rupees without any security. Those who are rich will get loan and develop themselves and become richer. The poor remains the same. We see the biased banking system in words of characters Four and Five.

Five: You can't have it without security! Get shed back first, if everything else is satisfactory you can get up to ten thousand on it (Makes the of a phone ringing picks up an imaginary telephone) Hello...Yes sir how much?.....hundred and thirty thousand? OK., sir... (smiles) oh, that's only a formality, Sir

there is no question of securities..... yes.....yes... ok.

Four Sir.....

Five Don't be childish. Can any bank give loans without securities.

Four: Sir, if we can't meet this order the factory will have to be closed.....

Five: And if we give you loan without any security the bank will have to be closed, what about that?

Sircar can be called "a bare foot playwright" as Arundathi Benerji has said With his down to earth themes and realistic treatment of his subject has made him one among the four pillars of Indian Endlish Drama along with Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani .

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