

SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN PROCESSION BY BADAL SIRCAR

Ms.B.Charanya

Ph.D. Scholar, English – Part Time

Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India



Badal Sircar is a reputed Bengali post colonial playwright. He is very well known for his versatility and literary genius. He has written more than fifty plays and also has written a novel. Badal Sircar has created his own dramatic theatre to enact his plays. It is called as the Third Theatre. Badal Sircar is a civil engineer by profession and he is an amateur artist who used to create theatre. While he is busy with his profession, he happened to come in close contact with the rural India. The desperate plight of the poor peasants and farmers has created a big impact on him and he resigned his job so that he could spend his full time in theatre to make the people aware of the injustices in the society and to find suitable solution to it.

Procession is a unique and intricate play by Sircar. In this play Sircar doesn't seem to create well defined characters, plot or story line. The play is open-ended and the theme of the play is made significant through repeated representation of it. Sircar has made use of a collage technique through which he has connected or linked variegated scenes and different episodes that he has happened to see in the streets of Calcutta in a meaningful and coherent manner. Sircar is an innovative writer who always aims at creating an impact on the audience mind through his direction of the play.

Sircar feels that the usual way of writing a play with one particular story line will make the audience to think what is up next in the story? He means to say that a writer may not be able to make the spectators think critically and analyse the problem presented before them. So the technique of collage will make the audience think rationally. Sircar does not favour the usual proscenium theatre to enact his play. He always stands by the 'Street Theatre' which can also be called as Sircar's 'Third Theatre'. Sircar created the Third Theatre as a form of reaction against the proscenium stage theatre created by the British during their rule.

The play *Procession* can be analysed and studied in two points of views. One is on the basis of themes and the other is on the basis of techniques adopted and used by Sircar. Sircar analyses the socio-political issues like corruption, exploitation and violation of common people, based on class, influence of western culture and civilization, and the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class and the practice of ideology formed by it. Sircar deals with an issue of the disappearance of a young man named Khoka because of the brutal atrocities of the police is handling him as an accused just because of standing up obtaining for his basic fundamental rights. Sircar strongly focuses on the capitalism which is the root cause of all other socio-political issues in the contemporary society.

In the play, the image of procession is predominant and it means "Michhil" in Bengali. The setting of the play is in Calcutta. Sircar has chosen Calcutta because it is a city of procession. Sircar has employed this image both in positive and negative perspectives. Sircar has written the play not as a whole. He strung the scenes together which was written in parts by him as he had seen it in Calcutta streets, coffee houses, tea shops and in offices. In the play, the characters are not well defined and an old man

character in the play talks about the various processions that use to take place in Calcutta. "Michhils for food and clothes, Michhils for salvation, Michhils for the revolution, Michhils in military formation, Michhils for refugees, Michhils for flood relief, Michhils mourning, Michhils protesting, Michhils festive, Michhils with stars" (*Sircar, Procession* 8). The common people present the problems they face in the society and the exploitation and violation done to them and their resistance and rebellion against it.

Sircar has made a rich and abundant use of irony in the play. He does not want to show case the problems of suppression and oppression of the common people in the post colonial period directly. Rather he represents it in an ironical manner. Working class people are much exploited and violated by their masters. Sircar ridicules the cheap and cunning mentality of the modern man who belongs to the ruling class. It is evident from one of the conversations in 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.

THE MASTER *leaves the bottle with them. They snatch at 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 is also an example of alcoholism. The modern men of the ruling class are clever enough to make the exploited common people mindless by adulterating with liquor and illicit drinks so that they can be on the safer side always. Manchi S. Babu is also of the same view. "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" (101).

In the play, Master is a character who proclaims that communism is the worst enemy of the civilization. It is the religion of animals. Sircar believes that it is communism which could bring equal distribution of wealth among the people in the society. It is a boon to the downtrodden people in the society whereas the upper class people feel that communism is their only enemy because it spoils the existing hierarchy of social structure which is a greater advantage to them. The upper class people's opposition against communism is evident from.

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 dying.

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

As it is already said that there is no well defined characters, Sircar represents the group of upper class people through Master. He fools the working class people and the downtrodden is the name of religion. Though Sircar is an engineer, he gives up his profession in order to raise his voice against the antisocial elements through his writing of plays. When the *Procession* was written in 1970's, the

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Naxalite movement was at its climax in Bengal, because many young people were murdered by the police in public and as well as in a secretive manner. The common people who question the sudden disappearance of young men are not at all answered properly by the indifferent police officers at any cost. It has created a severe impact on Sircar's psyche which has induced him to make the play with variegated scenes that take place in Calcutta. Sircar views that there are many men like Khoka who disappeared all on a sudden for which the common people couldn't find any solution. Having analysed all these, Sircar comes to a point that capitalism is highly responsible for the division of people as upper and the lower class and the exploitation of the latter.

Under the capitalism, there is no equality in the treatment of people in the society. Capitalism can be defined as

. . . a social system based on private ownership of the means of production. It is characterized by the pursuit of material self-interest under freedom . . . capitalism is further characterized by saving and capital accumulation, exchange and money, financial self-interest and the profit motive, the freedom of economic competition and economic inequality, the price system, economic progress, and a harmony of the material self-interests of all the individuals who participate in it. (*Reismen* 19)

There is no equal division of wealth and power among the people of all classes. The wealth and power is wholly possessed by the rich and ruling class and the less privileged and under privileged people are devoid of even their basic needs and they are accused and even murdered for standing up for their rights. All this social inequality and the related issues have made Sircar strongly believe in communism which can lend its hand to uplift the downtrodden and ban the capitalism.

Along with the theme of exploitation, Sircar also concentrates on the effects of colonialism. During the British rule, they paved the way for black marketing and corrupted the minds of the innocent native people and thereby cultivate the practice of corruption. The capitalist system created by the colonizers served the privileged to develop more and more and to think of their own selfish needs and interests and not of the unfortunate and underprivileged people. Their own self interests and its fulfillment is the sole reason for the promotion of Black marketing and corruption.

Black marketing is the sale of goods, materials and services in an illegal manner by the rich people, landlords and the capitalists or the masters. In this illegal marketing, the common people are forced to buy the goods for the highest rate from what they worth. The capitalists also make innocent common men to sing the glory of Black marketing as they sing the glory of Lord Krishna who was born as an ordinary human being in the world to destruct the evil forces and evil men in the play.

Indian freedom struggle movement is an anti-colonial movement and it is important in the post colonial study. Some freedom fighters and patriots revolted against the British rule and had conducted many anti colonial, violent and non-violent struggles in order to obtain independence. Anti colonialism can be defined as, ". . . the point at which the various forms of opposition become articulated as a resistance to the operations of colonialism in political, economic and cultural institutions. It emphasizes the need to reject colonial power and restore local control" (*Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin* 14). In 1947, after many years of struggle, British accepted to give freedom with an agreement of dividing India on the basis of religion as Hindu and Muslim. The divide and rule strategy of the British colonizers had led to many communal riots, bloodshed, discrimination based on race, colour and religion etc. eventually it led to the partition of India after independence which again resulted in riots and bloodshed.

In the play, there is a scene where some patriots struggle with British forces and the scene is about the fight between the two. So the scene is full of action. It is evident form,

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.
FOUR. *Karengē iya marengē* (Do or die).
Five. British Imperialism, leave India! (*Sircar, Procession 19*)

The play ends with the union of the old alive Khoka and the young dead Khoka with the chorus that invites the audience to sing the procession of dreams. The play ends with a hopeful note that a real procession will show a way to the real peaceful home. Thus, Sircar has exposed how the colonial rule harmed the country immensely and how the people have got clasped in the clutches of the capitalism even after independence through his intricate play *Procession*.

References

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