

## **Reimagining Indian Theatre Through Badal Sircar's Third Theatre**

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### **ABSTRACT**

By introducing the groundbreaking idea of Third Theatre, Badal Sircar was instrumental in revolutionizing contemporary Indian theatre. By placing an emphasis on social interaction, direct audience involvement, and minimum stage setups, his theatrical technique questioned traditional proscenium theatre. Sircar created a people-oriented play that tackled existential issues, social injustice, class awareness, and contemporary life's challenges by combining elements of Indian traditional theatre with contemporary experimental approaches. via his Third Theatre, especially Anpanman and Muktamancha, he brought the audience closer to the stage and fostered an environment conducive to social reflection via interaction. After India gained its freedom, his work helped to develop a new alternative theatrical culture.

**Keywords:** *Theatre, Audience, Social Theatre, Drama, Interculturalism, Sanskrit.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Translations of Indian plays have been innovative and risk-taking in terms of both content and technical skill. It has been successfully incorporating mythological, historical, and folkloric aspects for some time now. Plays produced in several Indian languages are gaining popularity throughout the country, prompting translations into English and other languages. Theatre experts from all over the globe, who speak a wide variety of languages, are becoming closer as a community via their collaborative effort on these translations. It would seem that India's regional theatres are making way for a "national theatre" that includes every kind of Indian theatre. The Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Kannada theatres have stood out the most during these turbulent years of rebirth and consolidation.

Regardless of whether they were written before or after independence, all of the plays that have been mentioned so far were originally written in English. Some of the plays that have been adapted for the English language originally appeared in regional languages before the authors chose to translate them. Since at least some of these works are transcreations rather than just translations, they may be considered part of the conversation even if they are not strictly speaking plays written in English. Rabindranath Tagore, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad are the most iconic personalities in Indian English drama in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada, respectively, and all over India.

The iconic Bengali theatrical personality Badal Sircar (15 July 1925 – 13 May 2011) inspired the "third theatre" (alternative or street theatre) that performed in rural areas rather than in traditional theatres. In the 1970s, India had a playwriting movement that included Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad (Kannada), Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi), and Mohan Rakesh (Hindi), all of whom contributed significantly to the field.

His innovations in street theatre, contemporary and experimental Bengali theatre, and Indian dramatization and stage directing were groundbreaking. He wrote plays anonymously for performances on the courtyard theatre (Anpanman), and he was engaged in both the proscenium and street theatrical scenes; he is still one of the most translated Indian playwrights. Rustom Bharucha claims that "The Theatre of Badal Sircar" is India's most politically neutral and noncommercial theatre.

His plays served as a reflection of society's endemic evils and its disintegrating social hierarchy in an attempt to bring them to light. Famously, he would often cast people everyday in his plays and sketches depending on his best judgement of their acting abilities. He depicts the existential position of modern man.

Using contemporary events and social themes, the renowned Bengali playwright Adal Sircar depicts the existential anxiety of the present society. The idea that our lives are meaningless and the accompanying philosophical anguish are central themes in many of his earlier works. This psychological anguish runs deep among the Bengali middle class, and from the start of his acting career, Sircar has been fixated by its collapse.

## **II. BADAL SIRCAR IN INDIAN THEATER**

The audience's presence is made very clear in Sanskrit theatre. Performers would often address the audience directly during solo performances, asides, and monologues. The Vishaka, or jester, is another important figure in classical theatre who brings the spectators into close proximity with the performers. Bharata also had a significant impact on Indian traditional theatre with his play Rasa. The common word "rasa" means "flavor" and is used to describe an aesthetic experience. Bharata argued for eight rasas: joy (humor), love, sadness, anger, pride, amazement, and repulsion. "Peace" is an attempt to bring harmony to the eight base rasas; it is the ninth holistic rasa. All nine of these rasas and bhavas are connected. Bhavas suggests that artists let their emotions show onstage.

Many have sought to find common ground between Aristotle and Sage Bharata. In Western dramatic theory, tragic theory has its origins in Aristotle's Poetics and is based on Greek notion. According to Bharata's Natyashastra, karma is the bedrock of Indian dramatic philosophy. In this perspective, man controls his own destiny rather than being a passive observer of it. The path his life takes is totally up to him.

Consequently, the idea that Indian dramatic art first acquired or mimicked Western dramatic elements, leading to a similarity between Indian and Western play, seems to be very false. We may be convinced that Indian theatre developed independently if we compared the structure and content of famous Indian plays like Kalidas and Bahasa to Greek tragedies.

A key difference between Western and Indian dramatic art is that Indian theatre does not include tragedy, which is the distinguishing quality of Greek tragedy:

Unlike most Greek tragedies, which sometimes have tragic elements, Sanskrit literature is devoid of tragedy altogether. The intricate rules of Sanskrit dramaturgy prevented the creation of any tragic plays in Sanskrit. It is completely illogical to assume that renowned artists like Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti would be unable to craft an emotionally gratifying tragedy. Shakuntala and Uttararamacharita have taken tremendous pains to avoid tragic events. Along with "Urubamba," which ends with Duryodhana's death, Bhasa's other compositions likewise lack a melancholy undercurrent. Duryodhana was rightfully punished for his sins, yet the audience did not feel grief at his death. This is also characteristic of Sanskrit drama.

In their respective Western and Indian perspectives on play, Aristotle and sage Bharata couldn't have been more unlike. The vast majority of Indian theatrical experts believe that Sanskrit theatre was the first. Sanskrit theatre has triumphed against adversity over the years by staying true to the classical principles outlined by Bharata in his Natyashastra. Bahasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka, Vishaka Datta, and Harsha are among the most renowned Sanskrit playwrights. Their plays are renowned for being lively, technically superb, and artistically rich. I therefore:

During the height of Hindu theatrical genius, which occurred between the second century B.C. and the ninth century A.D., there are a number of tragedies that are incredibly lyrical and painstakingly staged. A number of plays—including Bahasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Shudraka, and Shri Harsha—emerged during this heyday of Sanskrit theatre, and they all had structural differences from Greek theatre.

It was between 500 and 50 BC that Bahasa, the first known Sanskrit dramatist, lived. According to legend, he penned 35 plays, but of those, only 13 have found a home in print: In 1912, the first volume came released, edited by Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Ganpati Shastri. Shastri had discovered the invaluable Bahasa plays from the southern region of Travancore State via his extensive and meticulous investigation. On one of his many business trips in 1910 as the administrator in charge of the distribution of ancient Sanskrit literature, he made the shocking discovery—among palm leaves—of eleven manuscript dramas that had never been seen before.

### **III. THREATRE AND BADAL SIRCAR**

Badal Sircar is well-known as a leading character in modern Indian theatre. Several critics have attempted to bring him up for debate, despite his little involvement with Bangle Literature. His groundbreaking influence on modern Indian theatre is more important than his inconsequential personality. He was active in the Indian theatrical scene in the years after independence, serving in various capacities as director, actor, and arranger. Sixty plays have been tallied by him so far. His advocacy of ridiculous theatre in Indian literature began with the "Third Theatre" movement, which he founded. Sircar has dedicated his life's effort to promoting Indian creativity. His revolutionary concept is best shown by "Third Theatre," which has two separate kinds of stages. Both are Anga Mancha and Mukta Mancha. Anga Mancha portrays the audience and the artist as inseparable. There is always a warm welcome from the crowd, who sit in rows all around the auditorium. A Mukta

Mancha is a form of stage that doesn't cost anything and doesn't come with any kind of set design, costume, or makeup. The "Third Theatre," an acting-centric setting, places a premium on a performer's character, physical fitness, and line delivery. The music in the backdrop is also underutilized in Mukta Mancha. Nothing more, like theatre, lighting, stage, clothes, makeup, instrumental music, or illusions, is required for Mukta Mancha to achieve the audience's subconscious. Just by dissecting and studying Sircar's comedies and absurd plays can we expect to have a full comprehension of his theatrical works. This study's overarching goal is to illuminate Sircar's 'Third Theatre,' the plays that were staged there, the philoJoving ideology that inspired it, and the innovative methods it used.

Working within the traditional parameters of the theatre was something Sircar really felt limited by. In an effort to bring the spectators even more into the action, he embarked on a quest to find a new kind of dramatic expression. Sircar found it difficult to present his groundbreaking design in the more traditional Proscenium Theatre. He thought of using a new sort of stage for that purpose. The focus of his recent playwriting has been on the themes explored in this new design. "Third Theatre" is the name given to this new kind of stage. The "Third Theatre" staged plays written and performed by Sircar and his company Satabdi in 1967.

"Third Theatre" or alternative theatre is more than an idea if you believe Sircar. Beyond just a genre, "Third Theatre" encompasses a great deal. He wants to see an "Alternative Theatre" developer. Instead, than being a specific form of dramaturgy, "Third Theatre" is more of a philosophy, viewpoint, or movement in Sircar's opinion. The phrase "Third Theatre" may be interpreted according to Sircar's own meaning as this allusion will just cover his plays. Traditional Indian theatre, in Sircar's view, did not give rise to contemporary Indian stage acts. He based the "Third Theatre" on traditional Indian techniques because of this same reason. His own production came in at number three, after the urban theatre and the theatres of rural and folk societies.<sup>4</sup> Folk theatres provide amusement, but the stories told in folk plays about kings and queens, gods and goddesses, offer spectators a feeling of destiny, says Sircar. Contrarily, proscenium theatre does not adhere to traditional folk play methods. Only proscenium theatre may define its boundaries. While proscenium theatre does make it possible to talk about social and developmental changes, Sircar said that it takes the subalterns' own existence away from them. There is no way to improve the situation by involving the people with the authority to do so.

The influence of foreign theatrical traditions on Sircar's "Third Theatre" is plain to observe. While Sirkar was active with theatrical performance, he got the opportunity to travel to several nations and gain knowledge with their theatres. For example, Granovsky's Poor Theatre may be a mandatory performance for him. Toward a Poor Theatre was the name Granovsky chose for his theatre after his novel of the same name. The name Granovsky is well-known among Russians who work in the theatre sector. Granovsky believes that audiences and performers must be physically similar for a play to be a success, regardless of whether they look identical or not. Granovsky is largely responsible for the techniques and body language used in "Third Theatre" by Sircar. The Granovsky Theatre, in contrast to outdoor theatres, was enclosed. To him, nothing about the performance was more effective than the actors' bodily expressions in communicating the play's fundamental themes.

The technical components of a theatrical play, such lighting, make-up, and decorations, take a back seat to the emotional connection and expression. Berthold Brecht, another writer who aimed to muddy the waters between audience and performer, may provide Sircar with ideas. Through his innovative work on the proscenium stage, the use of stagecraft and costumes had been reduced. As a result, these considerations may inspire Sircar to be more assertive throughout his performances. When discussing the need to remove the fourth wall and the legitimacy of conventional realistic play, Roma Rola might be used as an example.

When it comes to contemporary Indian theatre, Badal Sircar possesses the most ground-breaking definition of "culture" and its significance. They 'perform' on several levels too. The concept that "culture" refers to "high art" or "artefacts that can be bartered" is not only stated by Sircar, but it is also made very clear that this is a luxury enjoyed by the well-off, as only they can afford it. This kind of "culture" is entirely irrelevant to a sizable segment of the world's population. But Sircar does it in the most innovative way conceivable, bringing their real culture to ordinary middle-class, lower-middle-class, and poor people. Through street performances. The art form and popular entertainment of the people, this is what I mean when I say "real" culture. It consists of gymnastics, songs, dances, speeches, and other popular entertainment forms that depend entirely on the voices, bodies, and dedication of the performers, instead of the usual proscenium theater's artificial paraphernalia.

However, the fact that Kathakali is ceremonial and enormous in scale does not imply that it is not authentic. The weight that various cultures give to two crucial facts about the world, however, varies greatly. Its power generation capabilities are one example. In Kathakali, the audience is seen as secondary to the act. The life and energy of the performance comes from the actors—their skill onstage, the years of training they put in, and their elaborate costumes, makeup, and headgear. The inclusion of drums, singing, and chanting is essential for this energy to fully express itself. In contrast, the audience is a vital source of energy for the actors in Sircar's kind of street theatre, and they often participate in performances themselves. It is an energy that replenishes the environment and the living things in it at the same time. Consequently, in this kind of performance, the spectator is not isolated from the theatrical heritage and ritual. They make it. The second important difference is derived from this one. Socially conscious and equitable, Sircar's theatre is critical. The reason it is so good at provoking thinking is because, rather than imposing its opinions on others, it takes cues from the lives of people around it. Kathakali, on the other hand, aims to dull the senses of its viewers. Its ceremonial usage aims to evoke a feeling of awe, mystique, and solitude. Asking, "Who is it folk for?" is necessary, regardless of the term "folk."

Therefore, the work of these theatre practitioners is more really "intercultural" in conceptual practice and effect than travelling Kathakali performances abroad or just "performing" Kathakali or any other form of dance, music or art. If we were to reduce culture to its creative expressions, we would be reducing it to a superficial reflection of a people's aesthetic ideals. Aesthetics always arises within larger social, political, economic, and historical settings; nevertheless, no single creative work can provide a full reflection of these factors. For this reason, "culture" is not something that can be so simply "done," as Rustom Bharucha astutely notes. Finally, understanding how contemporary Indian theatre artists fit within the complex web of interculturalism may be instructive. In the spirit of

interculturalism, every one of the performing arts professionals we've worked with has succeeded in breaking down barriers between different cultures. In contrast to the surface-level "lifting" of material elements or ritual forms from "other" cultures and "doing" or performing them, the process of "transcending" starts with living through and thinking through the markers of class, nationality (with all its arbitrary constructions), language, and ideology that differentiate cultures. Unfortunately, India's colonial history has made it even more difficult for Indians to overcome "difference"—even though they have been subjected to a certain form of "intercultural" experience.

Having said that, "interculturalism" is defined as a two-way street. In addition, the a priori clause is on full display in colonialism, which occurs whenever one culture approaches another with the intention of "taking." This means that the dominant culture has attained a state of wealth, power, and domination. A kind of "interculturalism" develops as a result of interactions between two cultures. Unfortunately, cultural conflicts and unequal interactions will persist as long as one culture views the other as a commodity with monetary worth and the other culture views the first as nothing more than a commodity. That is to say, the colonial history of our nation unavoidably shapes our present-day responses to cross-cultural speech and conduct. However, we can't deny that it has both positive and negative consequences.

The cultural practices of the Indian theatre practitioners I discussed before demonstrate this break and the ensuing process of self-identification. To call their work "intra-culturalism" would be a huge understatement; the term is misleading since it implies a homogeneity and uniqueness inside "national" institutions, which is plainly not the case (as the Indian example shows). They are reacting to Western capitalist culture and indigenous, residual colonial culture in India at the same time that they participate in popular, rural, and regional Indian culture. The latter is still alive and well among the Indian government, the urban bourgeoisie, and the groups that advocate for the "official" portrayal of Indian culture. Badal Sircar embodies a unique kind of interculturalism via his theatrical work and personal difficulties with class consciousness and colonial connections. The present iteration, on the other hand, is the product of Sircar's capacity to interact with "culture" at its most base, where it is most rooted in the past, in the many aspects of class awareness, as opposed to only the outward, ritualized manifestations of "tradition." Consequently, it transcends geographical, socioeconomic, and caste lines. Last but not least, I'd want to address the chance that someone would say that, because of epistemological limitations, my understanding of western interculturalism is irrelevant. My reaction is that I think it's important to highlight that one facet of interculturalist discourse is questioning accepted knowledge. Because of its centrality, we must discuss epistemology; we must acknowledge that it is a construction that acquires the status of "truth" only by application, and that even in this context, no truth can be considered conclusive. Make changes, tweaks, and reapply it as you want. Rest assured, it stems from a long line of precedent. Consequently, how can we overlook the fact that "interculturalism" is a kind of discourse that alludes to the intersections of many historical and cultural groups?

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Badal Sircar is among the three great contemporary writers – Karnad, Tendulkar and Rakesh. He delves deep into the problems of middle-class society. He uses contemporary situations to project the existential attitude of modern life. Popularly known as a 'barefoot playwright', he stands in the forefront of a new theatrical movement in India. He has created a genuine people's theatre known as

Third Theatre, supported and created by the people and not merely performed by people. Sircar's professional career as an urban planner, his training as a civil engineer, is mixed with his inner life as a playwright and its outward expression in his role as a theatre director and actor. His uncompromising attitude to social evil shows his link with his contemporaries. The distinctive qualities of his plays, which go by the name of 'Third Theatre', lie in their appeal to the mind of the audience. Here lies his success as a playwright. Sircar is one of the brightest stars in the constellation of Indian Drama. His plays prove that Post-Independence Drama has made a fresh ground both technically and thematically.

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