

EVAM INDRAJIT

By Badal Sircar

(PART – 1)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Indroduction

Badal Sircar (15 July 1925–13 May 2011), also known as Badal Sarkar, was an influential Indian dramatist and theatre director. He is mostly known for his anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement in the 1970s. He took theatre out of the proscenium and into public arena, when he founded his own theatre company, Shatabdi in 1976. He wrote more than fifty plays of which *Ebong Indrajit*, *Basi Khabar*, and *Saari Raat* are well known literary pieces. As a theorist and philosopher of Indian theatre, Sircar opened up the discourse to include concerns with democratic human interaction and a search for a more just and equitable society. As a mentor and teacher, he travelled widely across the country holding workshops which had a deep impact on hundreds of theatre workers, including some major directors.

Education

Sircar was initially schooled at the Scottish Church Collegiate School, Kolkata. After transferring from the Scottish Church College, he studied civil engineering at the Bengal Engineering College (now IEST), Shibpur, Howrah then affiliated with the University of Calcutta. In 1992, he finished his Master of Arts degree in comparative literature from the Jadavpur University in Kolkata.

Career

While Sircar was working as a town planner in India, England and Nigeria, he entered theatre as an actor, moved to direction, but soon started writing plays, starting with comedies. He experimented with theatrical environments such as stage, costumes and presentation and established a new genre of theatre called "Third Theatre". In Third Theatre approach, he created a direct communication with audience and emphasised on expressionist acting along with realism. He started his acting career in 1951, when he acted in his own play, *Bara Trishna*, performed by *Chakra*, a theatre group.

Eventually still employed in Nigeria, he wrote his landmark play *Ebong Indrajit* (And Indrajit) in 1963, which was first published and performed in 1965 and rewarded him instant fame. It captured "the loneliness of post-Independence urban youth with dismaying accuracy". It was followed by his plays *Baaki Itihaash* (Remaining History) (1965), *Pralap* (Delirium) (1966), *Tringsha Shatabdi* (Thirtieth Century) (1966), *Pagla Ghoda* (Mad Horse)

(1967), *Shesh Naai* (There's No End) (1969), all performed by Sombhu Mitra's Bohurupee group.

In 1967, Sircar formed the "Shatabdi" theatre group, and the first production he directed was *Ebang Indrajit* in 1967, a play about three people – Amal, Bimal, Kamal and a loner Indrajit. In the next five years of its existence the troupe performed several of his plays and had a deep impact on contemporary theatre, especially after 1969 when it started performing plays both indoors and outside amidst people, and evolved the *Angan Manch* (courtyard stage) and inspired by the direct communication techniques of *Jatra* rural theatre form, to eventually become his "Third Theatre", a protest against prevalent commercial theatre establishment. Often performed in "found" spaces rather than rented theatre halls, without elaborate lighting, costumes or make-up, where audience became participatory and was no longer a passive, it added a new realism to contemporary dramaturgy, retaining thematic sophistication of social committed theatre all the while, and thus started a new wave of experimental theatre in Indian theatre. In 1976, his group "Satabdi", started performing at Surendranath Park (then Curzon Park) Kolkata on weekends. These open-air and free performances led to his troupe travelling to nearby villages on other weekends, where it employed minimal props and improvised dialogues to involve audience further into the performance.

As a playwright Sircar rose to prominence in the 1970s and was one of the leading figures in the revival of street theatre in Bengal. He revolutionised Bengali theatre with his wrath-ridden, anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement.

His plays reflected the decayed hierarchical system, the atrocities that prevailed in the society, and were socially enlightening. He is a proponent of the "Third theatre" movement that stood ideologically against the state. Third theatre involved street plays, with actors being attired no differently than the audience. Also the formal bindings of the proscenium theatre was given up. Sarkar's "Bhoma" is an example of a third theatre play, set as always, in an urban background. Starting with *Sagina Mahato*, which marked his advent into arena stage, his subsequent plays, *Michhil* (Juloos), *Bhoma*, *Basi Khobor*, *Spartacus* based on Howard Fast's historical novel by the same name, were performed in parks, street corners and remote villages with the audience sitting all around.^{[10][14][15]}

Badal Sircar directed his last play in 2003. Though his movements were restricted after a road accident, yet many years later till 2011 he continued performing at play readings and writing new works like adapting William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, two stories by Graham Greene and a novel, *History of Love*.

Sircar was awarded the Padma Shri in 1972, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1968 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship, the highest honour in the performing arts by Govt. of India, in 1997.

Badal Sircar influenced a number of film directors, theatre directors as well as writers of his time. Some of their remarks are as follow;

- Film director Mira Nair in an interview mentioned, "For me, Kolkata was a formative city while growing up... I learned to play cricket in Kolkata, but more than anything, I learned to read Badal Sircar and watch plays written by him for street theatre."

- To Kannada director and playwright, Girish Karnad, Sircar’s play Ebong Indrajit taught him fluidity between scenes.”
- According to the theatre director-playwright Satyadev Dubey, “In every play I’ve written and in every situation created, Indrajit dominates.”
- To Actor-director Amol Palekar, “Badalda opened up new ways of expression.”

In 2013, a newly established cultural group, Maniktala Kolpokatha started their theatrical career paying homage to the great play writer, staging “Ballavpurer Roopkatha”. To the group, it is one of the plays that is not often staged in the Kolkata Theatre Circuit and has all the spices of love, laughter, and fear.

Sarkar is also the subject of two documentaries, one directed by filmmaker and critic, Amshan Kumar and another *A Face in the Procession* by Sudeb Sinha.