



## Exploring Innovative Performance In Badal Sircar's Bhoma And Procession

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### ABSTRACT

Sircar is a prominent Indian Bengali writer in post-independence Indian theatre who recognized the limitations of both folk and proscenium theatres in addressing contemporary social issues. He developed a Third Theatre movement style that emphasized direct communication between performers and audiences, his plays are performed in unconventional spaces. This approach not only dismantled the barriers present in traditional theatre but fostered a sense of community and shared experience among participants. His "Third Theatre" movement was grounded in a desire to democratize theatre, breaking away from traditional production methods, performance, and engagement with the audience. The present research article explores how Badal Sircar's plays *Bhoma* and *Procession* have an innovative performance and how they reflect his theatrical through working-class people and his audience. His innovative performance represents a revolutionary approach to Indian theatre that challenged conventional performance forms and made theatre accessible to the masses. It also emerges between the social and political turbulence of the 1960s and 70s. Sircar's Third Theatre is a transformative approach to performance that seeks to bridge the gap between traditional folk theatre and the proscenium stage, creating a unique platform for social commentary and community engagement. Sircar's innovations inspire artists who seek to use performance as a tool for social change and cultural identity. It serves as a vital art transformation power, shaping societal equality. It grapples with social, political, and economic discrimination and challenges experienced by middle-class people. Sircar's plays *Bhoma* and *Procession* explore the innovations in performance that characterize this groundbreaking theatrical form, which gains a deeper appreciation for Sircar's legacy and the ongoing significance of his plays in the ever-evolving landscape of Indian theatre. *Bhoma* is a powerful commentary on exploitation, poverty, and systemic neglect, inspired by the life of a rural farmer, *Bhoma*, who symbolizes society's oppressed and marginalized sections. The play does not follow a conventional plot structure but instead unfolds as a collage of scenes, monologues, and dialogues that depict the struggles of *Bhoma* and other villagers. *Procession* reflects the disillusionment of urban India, capturing the chaotic and dehumanizing effects of corruption, alienation, and societal decay. The play presents a fragmented view of urban life, highlighting the struggles of ordinary people caught in a corrupt and indifferent socio-political system.

**Keywords:** Community, Cultural identity, Folk theatre, Indian theatre, Third theatre.

### Introduction:

Badal Sircar was born on 15 July 1925 in West Bengal, India. He was a unique figure in Indian theatre, and his innovative contribution has reshaped the landscape of performance art in India. He initially trained as a Civil

Engineer, and his journey into theatre began as an actor before he transitioned into directing and playwriting. His European experiences, exposure to avant-garde movements, and the concept of Poor Theatre articulated by Jerzy Grotowski profoundly influenced his artistic vision. It culminated in the development of his unique theatrical form known as "Third Theatre". It is characterized by its rejection of the traditional proscenium stage, emphasizing direct engagement between performers and audiences. He sought to create a form of theatre that was not only accessible but also resonant with the socio-political realities of contemporary India. Sircar integrates elements of folk theatre with modern performance techniques and has crafted a hybrid theatrical experience that prioritizes human connection over-elaborate set designs and props. This approach allows performances to occur in various unconventional spaces, making theatre a communal and participatory experience.

Sircar's plays address pressing social issues, including class struggle, political oppression, and the plight of marginalized communities. His notable plays *Procession* and *Bhoma* exemplify his commitment to using theatre as a vehicle for social change. Through the Third Theatre, Sircar aimed to awaken social consciousness and inspire collective action among audiences, challenging them to reflect on their societal roles. Sircar advocated a stripped-down aesthetic that shifted the focus from elaborate sets and costumes to the performers' bodies and emotional expressions. In Third Theatre, the absence of a proscenium arch fosters a more intimate connection between the actors and the audience, breaking down barriers that typically separate the two. Its performances often occur in unconventional spaces, community halls, and open fields, allowing for greater audience participation and engagement. Sircar's commitment to audience involvement is another critical innovation of Third Theatre. This approach encourages audiences to engage with the themes and narratives presented, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. Sircar's works are deeply rooted in the socio-political landscape of India. Sircar's play *Procession* explores the struggles of the working class, highlighting their aspirations and challenges in a rapidly changing society. Similarly, his other play, *Bhoma*, delves into the complexities of identity and belonging, reflecting the tensions between tradition and modernity. Sircar sought to awaken social consciousness and inspire collective action among audiences. He believed that theatre could serve as a catalyst for change, prompting individuals to reflect on their societal roles and encouraging them to challenge injustices.

### Objectives of the Study:

The objective of the study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Badal Sircar's innovative approach in Third Theatre, highlighting its innovations in performance and its significance as a medium for social change. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To understand how these concepts redefine performance, we examine the foundational principles of Badal Sircar's Third Theatre approach, including its departure from traditional proscenium theatre and integration of folk theatre elements.
- To explore the innovative performance techniques employed in Third Theatre, which include minimalistic staging, physical acting, and audience participation, and assess their impact on the overall theatrical experience.
- To investigate how Third Theatre encourages active audience engagement and participation, transforming spectators into participants and fostering a sense of community and shared experience.
- To analyze Sircar's vision of rural and urban theatre traditions, particularly the modern performance styles, to create a unique theatrical language that addresses contemporary social issues.
- To investigate the thematic content of Sircar's plays within the Third Theatre framework, focusing on how they address pressing social issues such as class struggle, political oppression, and the experiences of marginalized communities.
- To assess how performing in unconventional spaces, such as streets and community areas, contributes to the accessibility and relevance of Third Theatre, making it more relatable to diverse audiences.
- To explore the significance of the minimalist aesthetic in Third Theatre, focusing on how the lack of elaborate sets and props shifts the emphasis to the performers' physicality and emotional expression.
- To reflect on the lasting impact of Sircar's innovations in performance on Indian theatre and its relevance in contemporary artistic practices, considering how Third Theatre has inspired subsequent generations of theatre artists.
- To explore the theoretical frameworks that underpin Third Theatre, including its connections to global theatre movements and its implications for understanding the role of theatre in social change and cultural identity.

### Scope of the Study:

The scope of the study aims to present the innovations in performance within Badal Sircar's Third Theatre. It emphasizes the unique characteristics that distinguish it from traditional forms of theatre. It includes an examination of the minimalist aesthetic, audience participation, and the use of unconventional performance spaces that facilitate direct communication between performers and spectators. The study will also analyze the innovative performances of Sircar's plays *Bhoma* and *Procession* and highlight how they reflect contemporary social issues and contribute to social awareness and change. It aims to investigate the synthesis of folk and urban theatrical elements in Third Theatre and assess its impact on the evolution of Indian theatre. Sircar's

innovations reflect within the broader context of cultural and political discourse in post-independence India; the study seeks to understand the lasting legacy of Third Theatre and its relevance to contemporary performance practices.

### Review of Literature:

Rustom Bharucha (1983), in his book *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, explores the performative and minimalist aspects of Sircar's theatre. Bharucha highlights Sircar's innovative use of minimal props, costumes, and sets, which forced audiences to engage more actively with the performance. Bharucha's analysis underscores Sircar's desire to democratize theatre by making it more accessible and participatory. He argues that this minimalist approach reduced production costs and transformed the theatre experience into a more intimate and dynamic interaction between performers and audiences.

Priyanka Likhitkar (2020), in her article "The Evolution of Badal Sircar's Theatre: From Proscenium to Third Theatre," discusses the distinct approaches in Sircar's plays *Procession* and *Bhoma*, emphasizing how Third Theatre integrates the qualities of indigenous folk theatre and conventional proscenium theatre. This paper highlights Sircar's journey from actor to playwright and his efforts to make theatre accessible to the common people, illustrating the success of Third Theatre through active audience participation and communication in his performances.

Kundu, M. (2019), in his review of "Badal Sircar's Third Theatre," argues that Sircar's ideological claims for his innovative theatrical form were compelling, but they did not fully translate into his actual practice as a theatre worker. Though innovative in theory, Kundu contends that Sircar's Third Theatre fell short in its real-world execution and performance.

Saini, A. (2013), in her article "Demystifying Theatre: Badal Sircar," highlights Sircar's Third Theatre, which aimed to open up theatre to people irrespective of class, gender, and language, making it more inclusive. Saini examines the transformative impact of Badal Sircar on Indian theatre, particularly through his innovative concept of "Third Theatre." The article highlights several key aspects of Sircar's work and philosophy, emphasizing his contributions to making theatre more accessible and socially relevant.

Katyal, A. (2015), in his book "*Badal Sircar: Towards A Theatre of Conscience*" examines how Sircar's belief that theatre should be accessible to all led him to create the innovative Third Theatre form. *Towards A Theatre of Conscience* serves as a crucial resource for understanding the evolution of modern Indian theatre through the lens of one of its most significant practitioners. It offers a comprehensive analysis of Sircar's innovative approaches and his unwavering commitment to using theatre as a vehicle for social change, making it an essential read for scholars interested in contemporary performance studies and Indian cultural history.

### Discussion and Findings:

Sircar's plays *Procession* and *Bhoma* portray an innovative performance, and these are traces of how his Third Theatre concept directly reached his audience and how his characters exemplify the social evils of socio-economic and political disparity. His theatre troupes collaborated in devising performances that reflected the socio-political realities of the common people. The actors are non-professional performers and were integral to the creation of the narrative, and their participation blurred the lines between performer and audience, making the theatrical experience more immersive and interactive. Through his characters, Sircar emphasized minimalism in performance, using everyday spaces such as parks, streets, and community halls instead of conventional auditoriums. This spatial innovation removed the physical barriers between the performers and the audience and challenged the elitist structure of theatre by making it more inclusive and accessible to people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Badal Sircar's Third Theatre represents a significant innovative approach in the realm of performance, characterized by its minimalist aesthetic, participatory approach, and commitment to addressing pressing social issues. Sircar is redefining the relationship between performers and audiences, and he created a theatrical form that was accessible, engaging, and deeply resonant with the socio-political realities of contemporary India. The main innovations introduced by Third Theatre include the use of minimalistic staging and props, which shift the focus from elaborate set designs to the physicality and expressiveness of the performers. This method aligns with the principles of Poor Theatre as articulated by Jerzy Grotowski, which prioritizes the actor's body as the primary vehicle for storytelling. Sircar's emphasis on audience participation further distinguishes Third Theatre, inviting spectators to engage actively with the performance rather than remaining passive observers. Through *Procession*, Sircar addressed pressing socio-political issues, including government oppression and the struggles of the working class. His commitment to egalitarianism and social consciousness is evident in the thematic depth and emotional resonance of his work. Sircar synthesizes elements from both folk and urban theatrical traditions; he created a unique theatrical language that resonates with diverse audiences, bridging the gap between rural and urban communities. The lasting impact of Third Theatre is evident in its influence on subsequent generations of theatre practitioners in India. It is revealed through the dialogue between Khoka and the Old man:

Khoka: "What Procession? [...] I've seen many processions. They never show you the way. It's always the same road, the same..."

Old Man: "The Procession to show us a way. The way home."

Khoka (tired): "I've seen many processions. They never show you the way. It's always the same road, the same... (Procession 52)

The above statement highlight Khoka's disillusionment with the lack of real change brought about by societal processions and movements. He sees them as repetitive and futile, stuck in the same patterns. In contrast, the Old Man maintains hope that the Procession can show a new path, a way back home to a better society. Their contrasting perspectives reflect the play's themes of searching for meaning and a just future amidst the repetitive cycles of oppression.

Sircar felt that the theatre practiced on the Indian stages was not a naturally developed product of traditional Indian drama. Therefore, he developed the Third Theatre, which was based on Indian tradition. He considered folk theatre and rural theatre as the first theatre, urban theatre as the second theatre, and his innovation as the 'Third Theatre'. Folk theatres have their attractiveness, but Sircar feels that because of the story of god – goddess, king-queen of folk plays, people conceive the perception of destiny. On the other hand, proscenium theatre does not follow the customs of traditional folk drama. Proscenium theatre has its own limitations (boundaries). Sircar said in this respect that, though in a proscenium theatre, it is possible to speak about the changes in society and development, the existence of the subalterns is being deprived here. There is no scope for involving the class of people who can change. On the urban-centered Proscenium stages, the plays of group theatres reflect the idea of establishing a developing society or the struggle for a healthy culture. In middle-class townships, its influence on the audience is much less. On the other hand, though the group theatres reveal the struggle of developing societies in front of these urban people, they are not in a position to do anything to change the society. For these reasons, Sircar decided to break the limitations of Proscenium theatre and contemporary folk drama and attempted to involve the working class in the whole performance. By taking theatre closer to the audience and making the common people spectators, he tried to establish progressive reasoning, a speech free from exploitation.

Sircar's plays are characterized by their use of non-realistic forms, such as the "street play" or "traditional Bengali folk theatre," as well as their focus on political and social issues. The play was groundbreaking in its use of non-realistic forms, including a chorus that commented on the action and its depiction of the lives of ordinary people. In addition to his playwright work, Sircar was a theatre director and teacher, and he founded the theatre group Shatabdi in 1976. The group was committed to creating a new kind of theatre rooted in ordinary people's experiences and addressing their concerns and aspirations. Sircar's works profoundly impacted the development of the third theatre movement in India and beyond. His commitment to creating theatre that was accessible and relevant to all people, as well as his use of non-realistic forms and his focus on political and social issues, helped to inspire a new generation of theatre artists who sought to create a theatre that was truly democratic and inclusive. The chapter draws attention to some of the contemporary playwrights of the era in different languages and their similarities with the plays of Badal Sircar. Some historical evidence of the performance of theatre is highlighted, such as the work of Kalidas. Examples have been presented of modern Indian plays like the *Nil Darpan* in Bengali, which depicted some of the horrendous attitudes of the British towards the people of the coast. At the same time, Sircar's plays are also deeply rooted in progressive perspectives of the Indian socio-cultural environment. He was a staunch critic of the caste system and other oppressive structures in society, and his plays often highlight the plight of marginalized and oppressed communities.

In *Bhoma*, for instance, Sircar presents the story of a Dalit man who is subjected to caste-based discrimination and exploitation. The play exposes the systemic injustice that Dalits were facing in Indian society, and the writer called for the dismantling of the caste system. Similarly, Sircar presents a scathing critique of the capitalist system and its exploitation of labour. The play portrayed the struggles of a group of workers who were fighting for their rights against a ruthless capitalist. Through the character's struggles, Sircar highlighted the importance of collective action and solidarity in the fight against oppression. Sircar's plays are also deeply committed to the idea of social change. He believed that theatre could motivate people and inspire them to take action against injustice. His plays often end with a call to action, urging the audience to join the struggle for social justice. In *Bhoma*, for example, the character *Bhoma* delivers a powerful monologue at the end of the play, urging the audience to rise up against the caste system and fight for a more just society. Similarly, in other plays, the workers' struggle is presented as a call to action for the audience to join the larger struggle against capitalism. The exploration of Badal Sircar's Third Theatre reveals several key innovations in performance that have significantly impacted Indian theatre. Sircar discusses how *Bhoma's* innovations and new methods of action were presented effectively. In the play, Sircar's characters are portrayed as the colour of blood:

**ONE:** Go! Go away! Go and look for your love! I am looking for *Bhoma*, let me look for him! One starts walking in mime. Two, Four, and Six get up and walk in the same manner in the opposite direction as if they were three friends.

**SIX:** Hey, what the hell are these people blabbering about? Who is *Bhoma*?

**FOUR:** Who knows? It could be some village idiot, it seems from the name.

**TWO:** Look mates, hey, walk fast, we'll be late for the movie.

**FOUR:** Plenty of time! They'll be running ads for soaps for 10 minutes at least!

**SIX:** Aw, shut up! That's the thing—you can get a peep at the real stuff. ~ Lovely dames.

**THREE:** (to One) Where are you going?

**ONE:** To Sealdah station. From there to Port Canning. From Canning to the Sundarbans on a motor launch.

**THREE:** Sundarbans? Is Bhoma then in the Sundarbans?

**ONE:** Who knows? He may be there. Perhaps he is there, yet not there.

**THREE:** What does that mean?

**ONE:** I'll tell you when I come back. I don't know yet.

**FIVE:** Sir. (*Bhoma* 95)

These lines highlight the stark contrast between the urban characters who dismiss *Bhoma* as irrelevant and the one character who recognizes the importance of searching for him. Sircar uses this juxtaposition to expose the societal disconnect between urban and rural populations, where the struggles of the marginalized are often overlooked or misunderstood by those in positions of relative privilege. The dialogue serves as a powerful commentary on the need for greater empathy, understanding, and action towards addressing the inequities faced by rural communities. Sircar's most notable innovation in Third Theatre is his audience participation. He sought to create an "intimate" theatre where the audience is not merely a passive observer but an active participant in the performance. The approach is exemplified in plays like *Bhoma*, where the staging occurs close to the audience, allowing for direct interaction and engagement. The success of this method is evident in the enthusiastic responses from audiences, who often become part of the narrative, thus fostering a sense of community and shared experience.

### Conclusion:

Badal Sircar's innovative performance in his Third Theatre is significant, and its innovation in the realm of performance is characterized by its minimalist aesthetic, participatory approach, and commitment to addressing pressing social issues. In *Bhoma*, Sircar employed minimal props and improvised dialogues to involve the audience further in the performance, breaking away from the traditional proscenium stage. The play was performed in parks, street corners, and remote villages, with the audience sitting around the actors. *Procession* illustrates Sircar's use of the chorus to create a vivifying effect. The characters in the play are not types but representative and symbolic, with the actors fluidly taking on roles and then merging back into the group. This research article concentrates on the concept of Third Theatre and its innovative performance along with its literary as well as theatrical nuances and Badal Sircar's contribution to the world of Third Theatre. The main objective of street theatre is to create a close relationship with those marginalized in the developing society of the post-colonial era. The third theatre's literary and stage presentation changes the audience's minds and positively influences the people that inequality in all respects is not justified and a humanitarian approach is a must for amicable coexistence on this earth. The theatre portrays the difference between urban and rural life and exposes the widening gap between haves and have-nots in the Indian socio-cultural context. Badal Sircar never supports these societal inequalities, and he uses his writing to demolish these inequalities through the theatre. It gives a positive message to this society that society should give equal rights to all classes of people. This research work is completely based on an analysis of all the purposes of this theatre-making. Badal Sircar brought revolutionary changes with the help of his street theatre to almost all walks of life.

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