CHAPTER - V

PRESS AND FACTS
Scandal in Fairyland is a close adaptation of a story written by Premendra Mitra for children. It is a short play written in 1974 under the title Roopkathar Kelenkari and staged on 18 January, 1975 at 'Curzon Park', Calcutta by Satabdi. Sircar says that he had never written a play specifically for children because he considers it a difficult task. Though the play resembles a fairytale written for children, it is a satiric comedy written to bring awareness among the people of Calcutta about the media.

Press plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy. It is a backbone of democracy in India. Press makes us aware of various social, political, and economical activities happening around the world. It is like a mirror, which shows us the bare truth and the harsh realities of life. Gandhiji said "A free press should be neither an ally nor adversary... but a constructive critic." According to Sircar, press plays a vital role in the reconstruction and regeneration of a nation by highlighting and pin-pointing the social, economic and moral evils in the society. But sometimes it also starts propaganda against the economic evils like smuggling, black-marketing, corruption, and bribery.
In the play, Sircar seriously criticizes the press which misleads the people for the personal benefits of a few. The play begins with a paperboy who runs calling on the roads of Fairyland to sell his newspapers. He speaks in a beautiful American accent. But his messy appearance makes him look like a caricature of a Chicago gangster.

PAPERBOY : Daily Fairy Green Extra! Prince Thunderbolt again! Sensational news! Daily Fairy Green! (41) *

Four characters named One, Two, Three, and Four appear on the stage to buy his paper and later stand aside reading it. Their way of reading the paper creates a flimsy picture in the minds of audience. They read about the latest victory achieved by the Prince Thunderbolt.

ONE : End of the Nightmare.
TWO : Copperland Free of Terror.
THREE : Prince Thunderbolt’s Seventh Success.
FOUR : Special correspondent of The Daily Fairy Green.
ONE : Goldlandis.
TWO : Silver State.
THREE : Pearl Kingdom.
| FOUR | : Diamond Isle. |
| ONE | : Emeraldia. |
| TWO | : Land of Gems. |
| THREE | : One after the other, the terrible doom – |
| FOUR | : threatening these six kingdoms – |
| ONE | : In the form of six terrible man-eating ogres – |
| TWO | : has been averted – |
| THREE | : by the brave Prince Thunderbolt – |

They read that the Prince Thunderbolt was in a battle last night with an ogre. He killed a marauding ogre and freed Copperland from the clutches of an evil fate. Up to then Prince had killed six ogres and last night he killed the seventh one. He cut ogre’s body into pieces and scattered over the seven seas at the ends of the earth. Then throwing aside the paper they at last disperse for their routine works.

The scene changes to the next day where the paperboy again runs calling on the roads of Fairyland to sell his new bundle of newspapers. Again the four characters appear on the stage in the form of chorus to buy his paper and later stand aside reading it. This time
they read that the slayer of seven ogres, Prince Thunderbolt has again accepted half a kingdom from the king of Copperland instead of asking the hand of the princess of Copperland in marriage. They further admire the newspaper and the Prince for his decision.

ONE : but considering the courage the Prince has displayed,

TWO : and the evil fate from which he has freed Copperland,

THREE : the value is small indeed.

FOUR : The voice of the people of Fairyland, the Daily Fairy Green –

ONE : congratulates Prince Thunderbolt on his decision,

TWO : worthy of a brave and true knight.

... 

CHORUS : Glory to Prince Thunderbolt. Long live Prince Thunderbolt! (43-44)

Paperboy then enters the scene and before getting into his regular business of selling newspapers, he talks to the audience witnessing the play. He says that to give the flavour of a real fairytale, the writer had used such fancy language in the paper. He reveals that
like the audience sitting in front of the stage he too doesn't understood what the characters are reading about. But he has to call out all that stuff like special edition and hot news otherwise they leave the place without buying his papers. He then describes the audience how a fairytale ends in a happy note by considering the burning news of the Fairyland as an example.

PAPERBOY: .... From time to time these ogres, giants, dragons, what have you – well, these monsters, they come wandering into Fairyland and they say they want a plump’n juicy human to eat everyday or else they’ll gobble up the whole kingdom. So then, you see, the King proclaims – that whoever kills the beast and saves the country will get half the kingdom and the hand of the princess in marriage.... And then comes the real hero – the prince who does it. And that’s it, folks – the ogre’s done for, the kingdom rejoices, and there’s a wedding in the palace. Music, fireworks, feasts, banquets, happy
Paperboy then asks the audience that up to what extent it is believable that their hero, Prince Thunderbolt has been killing ogres for a whole year but has not married a single princess. He reveals to the audience that to attract the readers; the Daily Fairy Green newspaper at last printed a sizzling editorial in which it projected Prince Thunderbolt as a saviour of Fairyland who takes the sacred vow to save Fairyland and sacrifices connubial bliss for the love of Fairyland. He concludes saying that he is the only one who sells the papers of Daily Fairy Green at a commission.

Paperboy then runs calling on the roads of Fairyland to sell his fresh bundle of newspapers. Paperboy tells the audience that he is now selling papers in the kingdom of Ironia. Again the four characters appear on the stage in the form of chorus to buy his paper and later stand aside reading it. This time they read that an ogre again has appeared in their kingdom and predict that Prince Thunderbolt will come and save Ironia. The scene immediately changes to the king’s palace of Ironia where the king and his minister are eagerly waiting for the Prince Thunderbolt who is on the mission of killing the ogre.
KING : Minister, the ogre gave us seven days' grace – is that over?

MINISTER : (wearily) Today is the seventh day, Your Majesty. And this makes it the seventeenth time I have breathed it into your royal ears, Sire.

KING : Oh yes, right, Um – er – is Prince Thunderbolt here?

MINISTER : Yes, Sire, Prince Thunderbolt is here and has gone on his brave quest to slay the ogre. Has your Majesty already forgotten? I told you this morning.

KING : Oh yes, you told me, did you not? Yes, yes, well – uh what do you think, Minister? Do you think we’ll – er succeed?

MINISTER : The whole country certainly hopes so, Sire. Have you not heard their cheers, Your Majesty? My eardrums are ready to burst. (46)

Later, their discussion turns towards the treasury of the kingdom. Minister says that if the Prince Thunderbolt returns with victory, he will ask half of the kingdom of Ironia. But King assures that once the
Prince Thunderbolt sets his eyes on Princess Rose, he shows his will towards marrying her rather than asking half of the kingdom. A messenger then enters the scene with the news of Prince Thunderbolt’s victory.

MESSENGER : Glory to His Majesty, King Ironheart!

KING : What news do you bear, Messenger?

MESSENGER : Sire, I was waiting at the foot of the mountain.

KING : Yes, yes, what happened?

MESSENGER : Prince Thunderbolt is climbing down the mountain, in his hand a bloody sword! (48)

King admires the Messenger for carrying him the good news about Prince Thunderbolt’s victory. King takes off his gold necklace to give it to the messenger, but quick as a flash, Minister clutches the necklace and stops him. The scene ends with King’s order to the guards to blow trumpets to cheer the Prince Thunderbolt.

MINISTER : What are you doing, Sire? If you give away half your kingdom, this necklace will double in price. Then,
when you give away the gold it will
treble in value. (48)

Paperboy then runs in calling on the roads of Fairyland to sell
his fresh bundle of newspapers once again. Again the four characters
appear on the stage in the form of chorus to buy his paper and later
stand aside reading it. This time while reading the paper they receive a
great shock when they come to know that Prince Thunderbolt has
broken the vow of bachelorhood at the first sight of Princess Rose and
accepted the hand of Princess in marriage. They further read that he
has rejected the gold and the wedding is fixed after eight days. They
then drop their papers and disperse for their routine works cheering
Thunderbolt and Rose. Paperboy then enters the scene and reads out
the paper for the audience and scolds the Prince Thunderbolt who for
his personal comfort and happiness keeps aside the safety of nation and
state. He further scolds the readers of the Daily Fairy Green.

PAPERBOY : .... They just read the headlines
and went off, dancing in joy.
Nobody cared to turn to the editorial. That's what education
and culture have come to in this country. I may make living selling
newspapers, but before I take to the streets, I must read the editorial....
Stupid fools! Instead of reading this,
the idiots run amok like women the
moment they hear of wedding. Go
on, dunderheads, line up along his
route with conch shells! (49)

The scene changes where the Paperboy again runs in calling on
the roads of Ironia to sell his new bundle of newspapers. Again the
four characters appear on the stage in the form of chorus to buy his
paper and later stand aside reading it. This time after reading the paper
they come to know the various postulations that rose against the Prince
Thunderbolt by the people of Ironia.

ONE : One hears that Prince Thunderbolt
has killed many an ogre in different
countries in Fairyland.

TWO : But has anyone ever seen a single
one of these dead ogres?

ONE : Can one really believe in the so-
called brave deeds of this Prince ...

(50)

The King and the Minister enter the scene discussing the charge that is
recently made against the Prince Thunderbolt by the people of Ironia.
Minister tells the King that he too doesn’t know why the people of
Ironia are against the Prince. He further reveals the King that the
people of Ironia are demanding the Prince Thunderbolt to show them the dead body of the ogre that he slaughtered in the kingdom of Ironia as they have a doubt on Thunderbolt's bravery. He concludes saying that the citizens of Ironia are suspecting whether the Prince Thunderbolt really assassinated the seven ogres or not. King then in anger accuses Daily Fairy Green for the severe disorder in Ironia.

**CHORUS**

: Give us proof!

Give us proof!

We want to see the ogre's corpse!

The ogre's corpse!

The ogre's corpse!

Let Prince Thunderbolt prove

The killing of the ogre!

We want proof, Thunderbolt!

We want proof, Thunderbolt! (51-52)

When Prince Thunderbolt comes to know about the will of the citizens of Ironia, he approaches King and asks him to conduct a test in the presence of the citizens. When Minister consoles Prince Thunderbolt saying not to consider the worthless slogans of the people, he asserts
that he has to prove himself otherwise he can’t walk the streets of Ironia with such scar on his forehead.

THUNDERBOLT : Your Majesty, I demand a trial.

MINISTER : A trial?

KING : Not an explanation?

THUNDERBOLT : What did you say, your Majesty?

MINISTER : Oh nothing! What trial, Your Highness?

THUNDERBOLT : My trial. I’ve heard charges of fraud about my slaying the ogres. I want justice. I want a trial in court.

MINISTER : Oh nonsense, your Highness. Why pay any heed to all that? If you haven’t slain the ogre then who has? But –

THUNDERBOLT : Precisely. I want a trial because of that ‘but’. Please arrange for a trial – a public trial before all the citizens of Ironia. (53-54)

The scene then changes to King’s court. Chorus, in the form of citizens enter the royal court and take their places. Minister starts the court describing the charge that is made against the Prince Thunderbolt
and asks him to give them the explanation in response. Before going to start his explanation, Thunderbolt conveys the court that the charge is not entirely untrue. Then he says that he wants to produce two witnesses who may make matters clear. He first calls an ogre as his first witness in the court. After seeing an ogre in the court, people become panicky for some time. Ogre reveals to the court that he is an illiterate ogre and some crooked men brought him to Fairyland. He then cries and urges the king to forgive him for coming and creating a trouble to Ironia. He further describes his desolate life to the court.

OGRE : .... There's no one as unfortunate as I in my family, Your Honour. I should have been slain by a brave prince's sword, like my dad and granddad before me. No, I had to be too smart and listen to crooked advice. Just because I was greedy I've got to suffer all the pains of old age. What came over me I don't ...

When Minister asks the Ogre about the person who gave him a crooked advice, he exclaims saying that he doesn't know his name but he can identify him smelling wherever he is. He looks around the court sniffing and then points out to a man who is feeling uneasy in the
court. Very soon Prince Thunderbolt clamps his hold on the wrist of the man and introduces him as the owner and the editor of the Daily Fairy Green and his second witness to the court. When Minister asks the man about the news that daily appears in his newspaper, he replies that not he but his clerk writes the matter for the press as he pays him a good salary. He further introduces himself to the Minister and describes the purpose of coming to Fairyland.

MINISTER : Your name?

THE MAN : Midas Speculatorotti.

MINISTER : Speculatorotti? That's not a Fairytale name. How did you come to Fairyland?

THE MAN : Why? Is there any ban on our coming into the fairytale? We're all over the world making the business deals. I make films too. All those religious stories - jazz them up, cut and paste them, and make them into box office hits. I make so many things - ask me what I don't make! Parties, revolutions, plays, temples - you name it, I make and unmake them! Why shouldn't I come to Fairyland? (56)
When Minister scolds Midas saying that he has no right to use his criminal mind on the people of Ironia, he defends himself and explains to the court why he has done so. Midas gives a long description which makes the audience understand the deformity he created in the Fairyland. He further says that the Prince Thunderbolt is a stupid.

MIDAS : What d’you think would’ve happened to that stupid ogre if I hadn’t helped? Finished, that’s what. Kaput! Killed by some fancy prince’s sword. He wouldn’t be coming here to the royal court dressed to kill. And that Prince Thunderbolt – what would’ve happened to him? He’d have been swallowed whole by some ogre who had a craving for princess and tried to make ends meet. And now? Think how he must be enjoying his huge estate – seven halves make three and a half kingdoms! And all that gold? How d’you think he’s got such power and wealth? Who gave him the idea of making a deal with that ogre? Yours truly, Midas
Speculatorotti. And what did Midas take in return? Only a thirty-five per cent commission. And today, through his own foolishness, he loses a fine business. One sight of the princess, and he's moonstruck.... So what do I have to do? I have to pan him in the Fairy Green, or else do you think there'd be a trial like this? (56-57)

After hearing the whole explanation, King passes a sentence of exile to Midas. But without feeling it as a punishment Midas happily accepts it saying that he is glad to leave that place as according to him Ironia is not a suitable place to continue his business deals anymore. When Thunderbolt asks him about his next journey, he replies that this time he wants to go to Bengal as there is a lot of black-marketing. And it is a suitable place to him in which he can survive easily for some more time. Before dismissing the court, King orders the Minister to relieve the Prince Thunderbolt from the charge that was made against him by the citizens of Ironia.

MINISTER : Your Majesty, whether Prince Thunderbolt has slain ogres or not, he has saved each of Fairyland kingdoms from being troubled by
ogres. That we have to admit, Sire.

(57)

The play ends with Paperboy who confesses to the audience that as the Midas closed his Daily Fairy Green, he is now selling the government newspaper. But not having the burning news in it, people are not showing interest to buy a paper from him. So he decides to leave Ironia and flee to Bengal as he recently came to know that Midas started a new newspaper agency there.

PAPERBOY : Ironia News! Ironia News — Yes sir, the Daily Fairy Green has folded up. I swear this rotten government paper doesn’t sell at all. Drat! I’d better go along to Bengal too. I betcha Midas has brought out a nice, juicy, quick-selling paper there already! (58)

The impact of media is really noteworthy. Excessive coverage or hype of sensitive news has led to communal riots at times. The illiterates are more prone to provocations than the literates. Constant repetition of the news, especially sensational news creates insensitivity among the public. Through his play Sircar beautifully portrays a clear cut picture of press which influences the minds of the masses to extend their business. Sircar presents Midas Speculatorotti, the protagonist as
an image of press media who for his personal comfort deforms the citizens of Fairyland by providing them false news daily. But throughout the play Paperboy’s effort is noticeable. He plays the key role of a stage-manager in the play and criticizes the public who don’t pay interest in reading the editorial column. In short, Paperboy in the play continually tries to enlighten the public who are living in a false atmosphere created by Midas. K Ayyapa Panikar remarks, “In Scandal in Fairyland, for instance, the newspaper boy is like a sutradhara, linking the scenes, marking the transition between them and commenting on the fairy tale of the play.” As the action unfolds, audience discovers complex interacting processes behind-the-scenes. The play however, ends happily in a true fairytale fashion.
REFERENCES

*. Badal Sircar, *Scandal in Fairyland* (Calcutta: Seagull Publications, 1992). All further references are from this text parenthetically numbered.
