CHAPTER - VII

WORKERS' PARADISE
*Beyond the Land of Hattamala* is slightly a close adaptation of a story taken from the novel, *Hattamalar Deshey* written by Premendra Mitra and Leela Majumdar. It is originally written in 1977 under the title *Hattamalar Oparey* and staged on 22 July, 1977 at the Theosophical Society Hall, Calcutta by Satabdi. The play is serialized in the children's magazine, *Sandesh*, edited by Nalini Das and Satyajit Ray. Ms. Majumdar acknowledges in a note in the fifth volume of her *Collected Works* that the story of the play with its title, spirit, and the main characters had been conceived by Premendra Mitra himself. According to Sircar, though the play is somewhat absurd, it goes to the limits of imagination and idealism. In an interview with Samik Bandyopadhyay, he recalls that he had read only a few of the *Sandesh* installments and that had been enough to spark him off. As G. J. V. Prasad remarks,

If there is anything that can be seen as common to Sircar's plays, or even as one of his major intents, it is to bring his audiences to confront the truths of their lives, to explore the value of human lives and social relationships in a world that is hostile and is constantly fashioned to confound the individual.
As the play begins, two poker thieves named Kenaram and Becharam of Hatua village are fleeing in terror of being caught in the night. Four villagers named One, Two, Three, and Four enter the scene and discuss the possible ways of their escape.

**ONE** : Which way did they go?

**TWO** : They came this way.

**THREE** : Are you sure?

**FOUR** : I think they went that way.

**ONE** : No, no, this way.

**TWO** : Don’t be silly. I saw them go that way. (3) *

Not finding a safe place to hide themselves from the sights of the four villagers, Kena shows Becha the river which is in close proximity. Kena explains Becha his plan of escape through river. But Becha shrieks if they do so definitely they will not survive. Kena then convinces him saying as they unable to fight against the present circumstances. There is no any other possible way left to escape other than jumping into the river. Finally they both jump into the river.

**BECHA** : Which way now, Dada?

**KENA** : That way.
BECHA : But there's only the river that way.
KENA : So we'll jump into the river.
BECHA : Are you mad? We'll drown.
KENA : There's no way out. We won't fight the current. Just go wherever it takes us.
BECHA : But ...
KENA : Save your breath and stop nattering. Run now. (4)

After finding Kena and Becha struggling in the river, the four villagers initially appreciate them for their courageous attempt and then show their sympathy towards them. They later start chanting 'Hari Bol Hari,' the usual chant that accompanies a corpse being taken for cremation and go away. As Kena and Becha keep swallowing the river water for a long time, they at last sink to the ground and finally lie down as they are at the bottom of the river. When they both open their eyes they find themselves on an unknown land. After wandering for a while on the land they see that smoke is ascending towards the sky at a distance. Becha tells Kena that the smoke must be either from a chimney or a rice mill of a village. But Kena doesn't accept it and puts forward his prediction.
KENA : Silly ass. As if you only have chimney’s on a rice mill.

BECHA : You think that’s a town?

KENA : Course. A railway station at least. Good. Now we’ll go to the town. Be city slickers. There’s no profit in these blasted villages. (7)

After travelling a certain distance they come across a lovely big garden where Becha is startled to see a huge tree with a large trunk. Kena tells Becha the name of the tree and affirms him saying that he had seen hundreds of such trees in past.

BECHA : I don’t think these are our parts, Dada. I can’t recognize a thing. See that tree, I’ve never seen a tree like that.

KENA : Oh that’s a whatchamacallit tree – what’s it’s name now? I’ve seen hundreds. (8)

After walking a few steps, Becha feels uneasy to walk and tells Kena that he can’t walk anymore as he is very tired and thirsty. Kena then makes fun of him saying, “You drank gallons of that river water, and you’re still thirsty?” (8) Both of them sit for a while under a tree. Suddenly Becha hears a noise behind the group of trees and finds
someone getting closure to them. When Becha is afraid of being caught, Kena consoles him saying that they are the new comers to that land no one can know them who they are and from where they have come from. Meanwhile, Four plays the role of a man and comes to them. When Kena asks Four for water to drink, Four suggests that it is better to drink sweet water of coconut rather than water.

FOUR : Tap water you can get only in town. There’s a little problem here with good water. But if you go ahead a bit, there’ll be green coconuts.

BECHA : Green coconuts?

FOUR : Yes, very sweet too. Go ahead.

KENA : I’m looking for water and he shows me green coconuts!

BECHA : By gad! And not even a brass farthing to our names. (8)

Following the advice of Four, both Kena and Becha proceed again. After walking a few steps they find an old woman sitting under a tree with a bunch of coconuts. Five plays the role of old woman now. When Five offers the coconuts to Kena and Becha, Kena in his anxiety asks her the cost of each coconut. But Five answers Kena that it is free
of cost. Before Kena says something, Five cuts a coconut and hands it over to him. She gives a coconut to Becha too. Getting angry Kena again asks the old woman the cost they have to pay for the two coconuts. But Five gives a strange reply saying that she does not know what money is. But Kena thinks that the old woman is making fun of him and decides to bluff her.

KENA : Never mind. Why should I bargain with you? Becha, give me my wallet.

BECHA : (rattled) Wallet? What wallet?

KENA : My wallet. The one I left on the shelf. Idiot! (Winking).

BECHA : On the shelf! (Understanding at last) Oh! I left it at home.

KENA : (mocking) Left it at home. Now what? We’ve drunk the water.

BECHA : What’ll we do? (9)

Not having the enough money to pay for the two coconuts, Kena assures the old woman that they are again coming that way the next day and they will pay back her amount then. And they start their journey again. After some time they reach the town. Seeing the luxury of the town, Becha assumes that they are in Calcutta. But Kena clears
saying that they are not in Calcutta as it is not possible to anyone to reach the city in such a short time. He further convinces Becha saying that definitely they are not in Calcutta as there are no cops in the streets.

BECHA : God! What huge houses, gardens, fountains, tarred roads! It’s all spanking new. Where are we, Dada, Calcutta?

KENA : Ass! You think it’s so easy to get a Calcutta? From our village Hatua to the sub-divisional headquarters, then to the district headquarters, and then to Calcutta....

BECHA : But this is such a big town.

KENA : Calcutta’s much bigger. Besides, there are trams in Calcutta. Have you seen any trams here?

... 

If this is Calcutta, then where are the policemen? Don’t you know there’s a cop at each street crossing in Calcutta?

BECHA : That’s true. But even if it’s not Calcutta, do you mean to say
there's not one policeman in such a large town?

KENA : They're all 'sniffers' I think, going around in plain clothes. I guess they're all high class thieves here, and that's why there are only sniffers in the police. (10)

Later, as part of their journey they come across two men who are coming along that that way. To get it clear whether they are in Calcutta or not, Kena asks the two men about the address of the police station. But they reply that they never heard such name in their town. When Kena asks them about the dungeon, they misunderstood as 'Luncheon' and show him the way to a restaurant. While Kena and Becha start murmuring they leave for their work. The odd response from them makes Kena angry. He then shouts on their back saying, "My god! We've come to a country of idiots!" (11)

Becha then tells Kena that he is very hungry as he ate only some stale rice last night and they have been on the run since then. Following the direction shown by the two men both Kena and Becha reach the place which looks like a restaurant. They then start conversing about the delicious food items.
BECHA : Mmm! Dada! Have you ever smelt such rice?

KENA : Basmati.

BECHA : How do you know? Have you ever eaten basmati?

KENA : No, but I've smelt it.

BECHA : Lentils with fish heads, and what looks like jackfruit curry.

KENA : Could be green banana curry. Have seen the dishes? They're all stainless steel. I bet you each one is worth twenty five rupees at least.

BECHA : Yummy – Rohu fish curry! How much do you think a meal like this will cost? (11-12)

They at last sit down on the chair and order the man who is serving to the people. One plays the role of a server in the restaurant. Meanwhile, Becha observes two people leaving the place without paying the bill for what they have eaten. He misunderstands them as thieves who not having the money to pay the bill jumping off the situation smartly. But Kena clears Becha saying that they are not the thieves but may be the regular customers of that restaurant who will pay the bill at the end of every month. Kena then calls One and enquires him about the owner of
the restaurant. But One replies that there is no any specific owner for the restaurant as it belongs to everyone who comes and eats there. Kena tells One that as his appearance looks like a high class businessman, he misunderstood him as the owner of that restaurant. When One asks Kena with keen interest about their presence, Kena reveals that they have just arrived to that land.

ONE : .... Have you just come to these parts?

KENA : Yes, we've just arrived.

ONE : Fine. Join us. There are still, a few places. Give me your names, please. I'll write them down in the ledger.

KENA : Yes, yes, write them down. We'll pay you at the end of he month.

ONE : Pay? Pay what?

KENA : Whatever it costs. Write our names down – Becharam and Kenaram. OK, see you in the evening. (14)

Leaving the restaurant they enter the garden to take rest. Collecting the events they experienced since morning, Becha comes to the conclusion that all the people of that unknown land are fools. When Becha asks
Kena how the people of that land are making money for their livelihood, Kena orders Becha to stop thinking unnecessary matters and sleep calmly as they have to wake up at midnight.

**BECHA** : Midnight? They said it closes at ten.

**KENA** : Grow up! What'll I do there if it’s not closed?

**BECHA** : You mean you’re going to rob the place?

**KENA** : Have you got your poker? Or left it in the river?

**BECHA** : No, I’ve got it. (15)

They both slept well that night and next day they woke up late in the morning. They then started walking on the roads of the town as the part of their sightseeing. After exploring the town for a while they stop at a fruit stall. Not finding the vendor at the fruit stall, Becha attempts to pinch a bunch of bananas. But Kena warns Becha showing the man who is supervising the fruit stall. When Becha drops his idea of stealing the fruits, Kena scolds him calling him a coward. As soon as Kena lifts a bunch of bananas, the man who is supervising the fruit stall comes to him. Now One plays the role of the supervisor. One then
offers Kena and Becha to take some fruits of their choice. He further informs them that the fruits are brought from southern orchard. When Kena tells One that they require a dozen bananas as they both are very hungry, One hands over them a bunch of bananas. One further gives a jackfruit to Kena and requests him to deliver it at the clinic which is located at the end of the road. After arriving at the doctor's clinic Kena's changes his opinion. He decides to disobey the request of One.

BECHA : Here's the clinic. Aren't you going to deliver the jackfruit?

KENA : *(pulling him away)* You ass. You've come to a land of idiots and become one yourself. Such a lovely ripe jackfruit. Is it likely I'll give it away free? What do you think I am? Come on. (17)

Later, Kena exposes his plan to Becha. He says that he is going to steal the stainless steel dishes from the restaurant that night. The scene changes to the restaurant where Kena and Becha are eagerly waiting for the moment. The moment when they find no one at the restaurant, both Kena and Becha take out pokers from their waistbands and start making a hole in the wall. During the process, Kena observes the brickwork of the wall is very weak and tells Becha that their pokers
are going through the wall as in butter. To motivate themselves they start singing a song but quite out of tune.

KENA & BECHA : (singing) Say thee name of Rama, brother,

Make the poker fly, brother.

Make the hole in the wall
And enter one and all.

Take all the swag you would
And scram while the going’s good.

(18)

During their process Kena orders Becha to put an eye on the surroundings. Following the order given by Kena, Becha leaves the work and approaches the front door of the restaurant. But freezes for a while when he sees the door is open. He peeps around the door and then scampers to the back. He alerts Kena saying that the door of the restaurant is wide open but he found no one there. Very soon a doubt rises in the mind of Kena.

BECHA : I waited for sometime but no one was around. Even peeped around the door. All quiet. No one.

KENA : Have they sprung a trap for us?

BECHA : They might have. You said the policemen here are all sniffer.

KENA : Come on, let's go and see. Careful now. (18)

As soon as they both start creeping slowly, Two enters the scene. He sees the hole and wonders for a moment. He then starts appreciating both Kena and Becha for their brilliant work. But Two's strange behaviour of admiring the wrong deed put Kena and Becha into confusion.

TWO : Wow, how did you make such a perfect hole in a brick wall? With only that thin stick there? Bravo, what skill! But what sort of a game is this, friends? Making holes in walls at night? Do tell me what you are doing. (19)

Very soon Three and Four enter the scene. When Three too starts appreciating the work of Kena and Becha, Kena feels that they are making fun of them. Losing his temper, he at last shouts on them
saying, “OK, laugh. Just because you’ve caught us red-handed once, you can laugh at us.” (20) When Three asks them about their identity, Kena replies in a harsh tone introducing themselves as thieves. After hearing the response of Kena, Two expects that they both are coming from the land of Hattamala.

TWO : Oh, now I get it, you must be coming from Hattamala.

BECHA : Hattamala? Where’s that?

TWO : How do we know? But we’ve heard that everything is topsy turvy there.

FOUR : Ye-e-s. I remember hearing stories from my grandmother. (20)

In India, generally grandmother tells a fairytale to her grandchildren in order to put them to sleep. And for this she always selects a fantasy land to tell the story. Here Sircar selects Hattamala, a common fairyland found in the stories of grandmothers who reside in Bengal. According to Four, two thieves are the common characters in the stories of Hattamala who always been caught at the end of the story. Meanwhile, One enters the scene. Three and Four then introduce Kena and Becha to One as the people of Hattamala and the purpose they came for. When One asks Kena and Becha that what they are
going to do with those stainless steel dishes after stealing them, Kena replies that they planned to sell them in the market for money. After hearing the purpose, One laughs at him and tells that they cannot sell them in the market as no one will buy these dishes as the people of that land do not know what the selling and buying is. He further tells him that they even do not know what money is.

Calling all the past experiences from the day they entered the town, Kena asks One to clear his doubts disturbing him. One then promises Kena to clear every doubt he has. As Kena starts asking his doubts one by one, Three and Four also join in the middle to clear his doubts.

KENA : Don't people pay for their food?

ONE : Pay?

FOUR : I think all these words were in Grandma's stories.

KENA : Don't people give anything for the food they eat? They just go away after their meals?

ONE : What else should they do? They just come here to eat.

THREE : What should they give?
KENA : Then how do you manage?

ONE : Manage what?

BECHA : How do you live? Eat? Fill your stomachs?

ONE : Oh. I eat here.

KENA : And your family? Your wife and children?

ONE : The children eat at school. My wife works at the library in Shiulitala, so she eats there. At night we all come here to eat.

BECHA : Don’t you have to pay any money anywhere?

ONE : Money?

FOUR : Oh, I think they’re talking about those ornaments – round, flat discs – made of silver, I think.

THREE : I think there are even some made of paper, with pictures on them. (23-24)

Though Kena gets all the answers for his questions, still some confusion remains in his mind. He then starts behaving in a strange manner. After witnessing Kena’s odd behaviour, Two thinks that Kena
is suffering from some mental illness and orders Three to call a doctor as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Two and Four catch hold of Kena around the waist. After sometime a doctor enters the scene and starts enquiring the problem. Two explains the situation introducing Kena and Becha as the people of Hattamala.

DOCTOR : What’s the matter? What’s this rumpus in the middle of the night?

TWO : Oh Doctor, sir, this is that Hattamala man we told you about.

DOCTOR : Hey, let go of that poor chap. He’ll get hurt. Why, you’re almost choking him.

FOUR : Doctor, if we let him go he’ll hit us with that thing he has in his hand.

DOCTOR : No, no. He won’t hit you. Let him go. Come on. Leave him now. There, let me have that, my friend, please. Won’t you let me have it? Please! (34)

Examining the condition of Kena, Doctor comforts One saying that he has completely understood the patient’s condition and he definitely cures it in a very short time. Doctor then asks Becha to teach him the skill of making holes in the wall. He further motivates Becha
praising it as a wonderful skill and says that the people of his land are unaware of such a great art. Before Becha starts to say something, Kena interrupts him describing the process of making hole into the wall with the help of a poker to Doctor.

KENA : Nothing else. If you know how to use it, you can cut through a mountain.

DOCTOR : I suppose it takes a long time to learn to use it?

... 

KENA : Well, if you’re really keen, you can learn the basics in a few days.

No, you’ve got to hold it like this. Ah, like this, yes. Now turn it this way a bit – now that way. Now like this. Yes, there you are. This is what you have to do for a brick wall. For a mud wall it’s a different technique.

DOCTOR : Wait. Let me learn this first. I don’t think I’m doing very well, am I?

KENA : You’ll get it. It takes patience. Mustn’t let it slip like that. Speed is very important in this sort of a job.
Make each blow a true one. Hit straight. (35-36)

When Kena asks Doctor, "...does everyone really get everything free around here?" (37), Doctor replies that they are not getting anything free, in fact they all work to the best of their abilities and the result they achieve is shared by them equally. Becha interrupts Doctor saying that they didn’t work at anything from the day they entered the town but they got everything free. Doctor then advices Becha to forget the past and begin a new life from the next day. When Kena explains that they don’t know any other work except making a hole using their pokers, Doctor relieves him saying that they can even make use of it for doing good things.

**DOCTOR** : Well, that’s no small skill. It’s not easy to work it well. Your assistant’s taken four years to learn. I don’t think I’ll learn, not even in ten years.

**BECHA** : But what good can you do with a poker?

**DOCTOR** : Someone who’s learnt one skill won’t take long to learn another. (37)
Doctor then informs Kena and Becha that a builder is coming next morning to repair the hole and if they find any interest in it they can learn masonry from him. Doctor further advices that if they feel any difficulty in it, then wait for a couple of days and decide what to do. But Becha suddenly gets up and explores that living like a parasite for a couple of days is a terrible thing to them. He then decides that from the next day onwards he should engage himself in gardening by digging little holes for the plantation of flower plants. When Doctor asks Kena about his job, Kena says that he prefers to be a builder as he ruined so many walls and made so many holes. The play ends with a song by Chorus which leaves a message to the society in the form of oath.

CHORUS :  (singing) Whatever we need in this world, whatever,

We can make it all if we work together.

We’ll work our best indeed,

And take whatever we need,

We’ll share everything we have together.
Come, let's share everything we have together.

Whatever we need in this world, whatever,

We'll make it all if we work together.

Why go on shopping rampages?

Why do we slave for mere wages?

We'll share what we have together.

Come, let's share everything together. (38)

*Beyond the land of Hattamala* asks certain fundamental questions that shape our real and meaningful existence. Through this play, Sircar exposes politics of the society to its bones. It has a significant message to both adults and children. It is much easier to start right and keep right, than to start wrong, and then endeavour to get right. Through his two characters, Kena and Becha, Sircar exposes the problem that prevails in the society and at the same time shows the solution to it. After several experiences in the land of fantasy, Kena and Becha leave their profession of stealing and decide to work hard on their own to earn their daily bread. Doctor plays a prominent role at the end of the play. Like Lord Krishna of *Mahabharata*, he shows
them the path of dharma. He doesn’t want Kena and Becha to be dependent on the resources of others but in turn encourages them to work within their own limitations.
REFERENCES

*. Badal Sircar, *Beyond the Land of Hattamala* (Calcutta: Seagull Publications, 1992). All further references are from this text parenthetically numbered.