CHAPTER IX

ADULSCENCE AND ALIENATION
Life of Bagala is a message oriented play written for the youth of Kolkata. It is originally written and produced under the title Bagalacharitmanas in 1998. Be it the pang of a broken heart or failure in exams, modern youth find it difficult to cope with their problems. Unable to find solutions to their problems, youth below the age of thirty are committing suicides. Troy Johnson examines:

Alienation appears as an early symptom of fear and confusion, resulting from stress. This is often accompanied by dramatic changes in behavior patterns. Indian youth begin to visualize thoughts of powerlessness over his or her environment. Events seem insurmountable, and individuals feel alone. These feelings often overshadow all others and quickly lead to a feeling of hopelessness. ¹

According to Sircar, adolescence is filled with many changes and is a vulnerable time for youth. There are great changes in physical characteristics, changes in the way they think, changes in expectations placed on them, increasing responsibilities, and the move toward greater independence often lead to great emotional anxiety.
Depression is the leading cause of suicidal thinking in youth. When youth experience little or no control in the important events of their lives, they may see themselves negatively. This negative thinking makes it difficult for the youth to face the stresses in their lives, and combined with poor problem-solving skills this can lead to feelings of depression and hopelessness. To give a solution for this, Sircar created an imaginary character named Bagalacharan, simply Bagala and describes his life with the problems of youth.

The play begins with two stage managers who come on the stage from its two corners by making a gesture of blowing imaginary trumpets. They then stop blowing and request the hero to enter the scene. After realizing the hero’s absence, they at last go in to the audience in search of hero. Then a simple-looking ordinary man with a long face comes from the audience murmuring “impossible! Impossible! Living in this way…” (53) * After finding him, the two stage managers repeat the gesture of blowing imaginary trumpets once again. The sound irritates the hero and makes him cover his ears with his hands. Hero exclaims that the sound is making him lose control over his mind.

HERO : Seems I’m losing my mind. All of a sudden – close to my ears,
He then reveals his identity and shows his disinterest regarding his name and surname to the audience. He further accuses his parents for assigning such an odd name to him and feels pity of himself describing his childhood.

**HERO** : Bagalacharan! Parents calling their son by this name... What to say! Particularly if their surname's Batabyal!

**S. M. 1&2** : Bagalacharan Batabyal.

**BAGALA** : Bagalachar-an Bata-byal! Rather than hanging this name round its neck they should've tied a 10 kg stone and thrown the child into the Ganges!... My parents vanished in a bus accident when I was a child. Else I ... Else I ... Else what would’ve I done? What could have I done? Those giving me hell since childhood were always there, alive and kicking ... (54)
He continues portraying various instances of his past life where he was made fun of by others on his odd name. The scene initially changes to Bagala’s childhood showing him as a school boy where his fellow students tease him in many ways. They pull his hair, try to trip him up, and then at last poke jokes on him.

**BOYS** : Baga! Baga! Hey Baga, have you seen a Bog? Seen a Bog, Sri Bagala? Bagalssaran Batabyal! No. No. Ballbat! Ballbat Batball Ballbat Batball. O Bogu, are you hurt? How can we resist tripping up seeing such bog-like legs? Isn’t there a district in Bangladesh called Bagura? Is our Baguya’s house in Bagura? *(Sing)* Baga cries fallen in a trap! (54)

Next, Bagala portrays his college days where the event of teasing haunted him like a nightmare.

**STUDENT 1** : Which school are you from, dear?

**BAGALA** : I …

**STUDENT 2** : Your name is really Bagal? I mean – Bagalcharan?
STUDENT 3 : Your surname is really Bat ... I mean ... Batabyal?

STUDENT 4 : How do you spell it? B-a-t-a? Is't Bata?

STUDENT 1 : Shoes from Bata?

... 

STUDENT 1 : I suppose your sister's name's Bagalasri?

STUDENT 2 : Or Bagalasundari?

BAGALA : (weak voice) I don't have a sister. (56-57)

Stage Manager 2 enters the scene and tells the audience that after the death of Bagala's parents, Bagala was moved to live at his maternal uncle's house. Bagala interrupts him and describes to the audience the miserable life he lived at his uncle's house. From his childhood he lived with his uncle and aunt not as a member of their family but as one worse than a servant. He says that they never loved him. Instead they hated him considering him a burden in their family. He further reveals that he was greatly tortured by his aunt and uncle even for silly reasons. He describes how his aunt and uncle used to scold him every time when he fails to obey their order.
AUNT : Bagai! Didn’t I tell you to buy fish from the market after the scales have been taken off? Won’t you ever remember?

BAGALA : I did remember, aunt.

AUNT : Well. If you did, why didn’t you tell the fishmonger?

BAGALA : Told him, aunt. Nut he refused.... He said... taking off scales for fish weighing 250 grams...

AUNT : 250 grams! Shall I buy 1kg fish and feed you? How much money did your daddy leave behind?

... 

UNCLE : Bagala... Brought batteries for the torch?

BAGALA : Couldn’t get any at Sambhuda’s shop. That’s why ...

UNCLE : And there’s no shop in Kolkata except Sambhu’s! And the market’s far awa-y! It’s very painful to walk! Buy me a bicycle, uncle! Or do you want a scooter? Or a Maruti? (57-58)
Later, Stage Manager 1 enters the scene and tells the audience that by hook and crook their hero at last became a commerce graduate and started searching for a job. When Stage Manager 1 describes the bachelor life of his hero, Bagala interrupts him telling the audience that he received many interview call letters but he could not succeed in any of them. In a slow voice he reveals the reason for not getting a job. He says that his odd name is the root of all misfortunes and so he was thrown out by the interviewers every time he attended the interview.

INTERVIEWER 1 : Most unsmart.

INTERVIEWER 2 : Doesn't utter a single word. Got terrific result-s. A first-class honours degree Yet...

INTERVIEWER 1 : The name's Most unsmart too — Bagalacharan Batabyal. With that name and that personality, his relationship with the colleague-s ... Forget it. Got to call five more before lunch. (Raises voice) Next! (60)

Sircar successfully employs the two stage managers in the play who not only demonstrate the scene to audience but also add the comic flavour to the play. According to Maurice Wintemnitz, "This Sutradhara or stage-manager, according to our dramas, as also
according to the Natyasastra must be a highly cultured man. He should be capable of winning applause of the public not only in music and in the art of stage-technique, but should have command over language...."  

In the play, the two stage managers comment on the incidents of the play, help the plot move forward by linking different episodes, and directly address the audience. Their conversation sometimes makes the audience laugh at them.

S. M. 1 : Nonsense! He doesn't let us say anything! What kind of Stage Managers are we?

S. M. 2 : Then let him speak. We'll only blow the trumpet. (59)

Next, the scene immediately changes to the house of Bagala's uncle where his uncle and aunt are in a hurry to make arrangements. They tell Bagala to get ready as his prospective in-laws are coming home to see him. When Bagala expresses his disinterest towards marriage, they try to convince him in many ways saying that he is going to live a happy life as his father-in-law is a rich man. When Bagala exclaims that he doesn’t want to stay at his father-in-law's house after marriage, his aunt in a rage orders him to get ready by half-past seven and makes herself busy in arranging for the event.
HELPLESS  : Not a single word! Put on the
dhoti-kurta and be ready by half-
past seven. Or I'll raise hell. And
don't forget — the dhoti might be
your uncle's but the kurta — we
spent money for it! (62)

Helpless in the situation, Bagala at last decides to run away from the
house. At this moment the two stage managers enter and summarize
Bagala's miserable life at his maternal uncle's house. They say that
Bagala led the life of a servant without any wages in his uncle's house.
As a private tutor to his uncle's son, he toiled many a year. Next, they
talk about the mentality of Bagala. They say that Bagala doesn't have
enough courage to defy their order — even the order given by their son,
Master Mantu who is in class seven. They further predict Bagala's life
after his marriage.

S. M. 1  : Marrying an ugly, quarrelsome,
pampered, and the only daughter of
an executive officer of a business
house ...

S. M. 2  : If our hero stays as his father-in-
law's, he could be rewarded with a
job ...

S. M. 1  : And a dowry of fifty thousand ...
S. M. 2 : Which goes in the pocket – I mean
- in the hands of Uncle and Aunt.
(64)

Now Bagala’s life takes a great turn. Getting frustrated from the
tortures of his uncle and aunt, Bagala successfully escapes from the
house unaware of the fact that very soon this escape is going to bring a
great change in his life. In a great dilemma where to go, he at last
catches a crowded bus. After some time he gets off the bus at the
outskirts of the city. Then a long soliloquy follows where Bagala
describes his present condition.

BAGALA : Who knows how many kilometer-s
I’ve run! Spent 2 rupees 25 paise
for travelling by bus. Ahead of me
– the entire life. Behind me – Uncle
– Aunt – the would-be father-in-law
– mother-in-law – wife – the
police, military, sniffer-dog,
detective. Around me the deserted
ground, ditches and pits. Far away
across – the highway. Far away this
side – railway tracks. In pocket – 3
rupees 75 minus 2 rupees 25 equals
1 rupee 50 paise. (Looks above and
raises hands) Hey daddy! Hey
mom! O father who’s greater than
heaven! Could you tell me what for
you've given birth to such a child?

.... (70-71)

Unable to decide what to do, he at last decides to commit suicide. Initially he plans to hang himself with a rope but as he hasn't enough money to buy a rope, he quits from the plan. Later he thinks of many ways to commit suicide but in each plan he finds an obstacle. Finally he strongly fixes his plan to attempt suicide at the railway tracks. Various plans for his suicide create a comic flavour and make the audience laugh at him.

BAGALA : .... Hang by a rope? Where's the rope? One can get a thread for one and half rupees, not a rope to hang by. Potassium cyanide – who's to give it even if I pay? Sulfuric acid – that too can't be had for one and a half rupees… Jump from a seven or a ten-storeyed building? That's in the centre of the city! All the uncles would be there! Jump into the water – yes, that's right. One doesn't need money to drown… Jumping would find me in knee-deep water. Which way's the Ganges? That too is full of boats.
Someone will definitely fish me out. Then the police, the uncle’s place, and from there the father-in-laws’s. Where’ve I come? One and a half rupees isn’t even enough for dying! Crematorium on this side, railway tracks on the other – railway tracks? Yes, a train’s past too. Tracks! Let’s go Bagalacharan – forward march! (72)

Bagala at last goes towards the railway tracks. Then an old man enters the scene from the other side of the tracks. Standing at a place he strikes the lighter. But there’s no cigarette in his mouth. Then he starts talking to an invisible image. He first talks about the philosophy of death saying that getting old means getting closure to the graveyard. He further says that the death ratio of the old is greater than the younger ones. The words he speaks makes the audience understand that the old man is giving courage and assurance to some invisible image.

OLD MAN : Why’ve I come here? It’s hard to explain. Young people don’t understand the old ones. And you?
You’ll never be old.... Listen. You
know what’s on that side? Crematorium. The old ones come very close to the crematorium ...
Stop sobbing! It’s a philosophical discussion. There’s nothing to cry in it. Shall I give you a handkerchief?... Listen. I’m a man. And men must die.... We’ve been together for so long. Bound to feel bad. But when I die, you must fall in some able hands – got to settle it while I’m still alive. Isn’t it right?

(72-73)

After hearing the sound of a train from a long distance, Bagala puts his head on the railway tracks to commit suicide. The old man who is watching all the activities of Bagala, very soon orders his invisible partner to pick him up from the tracks. Before his head crushed under the train, an invisible hand pulls Bagala away from the tracks. When the old man asks Bagala the reason of his attempt, he replies that his odd name is the root cause for all. He further starts describing his condition at his maternal uncle’s house to the Old man.
OLD MAN : ... why'd do you put your head on the tracks?

... 

BAGALA : (excited and remorseful) Why? Do you know my name?

OLD MAN : Whatever it is ... Does anyone want to die because of that?

BAGALA : Is it only the name? My entire life ... uncle, aunt, father-in-law, mother-in-law ...

... 

OLD MAN : Don't you have parents?

BAGALA : No. That's why I was ...

OLD MAN : Brought up at uncle's.

BAGALA : How do you know?

OLD MAN : It's you who said, My uncle ...

BAGALA : Yes. But ...

OLD MAN : Was uncle marrying you off by force?

BAGALA : How ...?

OLD MAN : Sonny. You said it all. I love playing chess. That's why I always
think two-three moves ahead....
(74-75)

After hearing the flash back of Bagala, Old Man invites him to dinner at his home which is near the railway tracks. When Bagala hesitates to come, he advances taking a dazed Bagala with him. After walking some distance Bagala asks Old Man about the invisible hand that pulled him away from the tracks. Old Man reveals that the invisible image is ‘Nilpari’ who nurses him like a mother, daughter, and sometimes like a granddaughter. After having food, they both sit for a while in the living room. When Bagala praises about the delicious supper, Old Man says that the whole credit goes to Nilpari who is so efficient in everything. Bagala in anxiety asks Old Man to introduce her. But Old man diverts the topic by abusing him showing his mental illness.

OLD MAN : In short, you’re extremely honest. And you – what I think – suffer from an inferiority complex. Moreover, you’re too reticent. You got a first-class degree in B.Com, yet couldn’t answer simple questions at the interview. Rather than facing life, you prefer escaping to a hole.
BAGALA : You’re ...

OLD MAN : Yes, right. I’m abusing you. Why don’t you protest? Why aren’t you angry?

BAGALA : No, I mean ... er ... you ...

OLD MAN : That’s all! You lower your face! Don’t utter a word! ... (78)

Later, Old Man reveals Nilpari’s identity which gives a great shock to Bagala. He says that Nilpari is not a human being but a spirit. The Old Man gives a lighter to Bagala and orders him to strike it. After several attempts Bagala at last succeeds in striking the lighter. He suddenly jumps up and retreats when he sees a gracious lady dressed in blue on her knees in front of Bagala asking him to order something that he needs. Old man then introduces her to Bagala saying, “This is Nila. I mean Nilpari. Now you can see her. Can listen to her. I can’t. Don’t worry. Give orders!” (79) Unable to speak a single word, Bagala humbly makes a gesture to say that it would be better if Nilpari goes away. Understanding the gestures made by Bagala, Old Man then describes him the whole process of calling Nila and sending Nila away. He further demonstrates Bagala how to strike the lighter. Following the orders of Old Man, Bagala with a lighter in hand observes and tries to learn but fails. But after several attempts he at last
succeeds in the process. Old Man then says Bagala to call Nila and ask her to make his bed to sleep. But Bagala hesitates saying that he doesn’t want to trouble Nila as it’s a simple process. In response to Bagala’s hesitation, Old Man says that Nila never feels it as a trouble as she is a spirit.

OLD MAN : Phew! Give it to me. (Takes the lighter) Listen. Nila won’t have ‘trouble’ making the bed, won’t have ‘trouble’ cooking as well. It’s all done by magic. Haven’t I told you – Nila is Nilpari?

BAGALA : You ... are you Aladdin?

OLD MAN : (laughs) No. But this lamp’s the same stuff. Like Aladdin, I too found it in the street.

BAGALA : Lamp.

OLD MAN : It’s all the same. Keeping with the times, the lamp’s become a lighter... (82)

Stage Manager 3 and Stage Manager 4 again enter the scene and tell the audience that their hero slept well that night on the bed brought by Nilpari and the next morning he woke up at 11 o’clock. Soon the conversation between Bagala and Old Man begins on the topic of job.
Old Man tells Bagala to call Nila and order her to bring the last Sunday's newspaper as there are more job-advertisements on Sundays. When Bagala is frightened and hesitates to call her, Old Man by giving courage suggests him to accept Nila as his maid or a girlfriend. He further says Bagala to make a request to Nila asking for a glass of water. But when Bagala counters that he himself can do it, Old Man scolds him.

OLD MAN : I see. Never ordered anyone in your life. (BAGALA shakes head.) Never made a request as well? (Shakes head again.) Only followed what others ordered. (This time BAGALA nods) That's why you were to marry and stay at father-in-law's following your uncle and aunt's order. (84)

Not finding an alternate measure to motivate Bagala, Old Man suddenly orders Bagala in a harsh tone to call Nila by striking the lighter and give an order to bring last Sunday's paper. Unable to escape from the situation, by behaving in a strange manner Bagala at last calls Nila who appears and sits on her knees in front of him urging for the order. Bagala then orders Nila to bring the three most popular newspapers. Within a couple of seconds, three newspapers, rolled and
tied with rubber bands, drop into the arena. After scrutinizing the whole paper, Old Man finds some commission based sales jobs which he feels suitable for Bagala and orders him to go ahead. But Bagala shows his disinterest towards the idea of Old Man saying that he has to attend an interview next Friday. He further exclaims that he can’t attend the interview because the interview call letter is left behind at his maternal uncle’s house. Old Man motivates Bagala to take the help of Nila in getting back his interview call letter from the house of his maternal uncle. This time Bagala follows the order without hesitating and starts describing the address to Nila in a doubtful manner.

BAGALA : (to Nila) Er ... From 13 Pratap Sashmal Lane ... my ... would you bring the interview letter? If it doesn’t ...

NILA : Where is it, master?

BAGALA : Table ... I mean ... on my table ...

NILA : How will I recognize the letter, master?

BAGALA : It’s ... what’s the name of the company ...

OLD MAN : If there aren’t lots of papers, ask her to bring them all.
BAGALA : If ... all the papers ... I mean ... er.. (86)

Next, Old Man asks Bagala to rehearse the interview scene which he is going to attend next Friday. He further says that in the trial scene of interview he would play the role of an interviewer and orders Bagala to play the role of the interviewee. He concludes saying that in the trial at any point of time if he feels that he needs help, he can take it from Nila without any hesitation.

OLD MAN : (shouts) Next!

What’s up? I’m asking your name.

BAGALA : (weak voice) Bagalacharan ...

OLD MAN : Louder please. Speak up!

BAGALA : Bagalacharan Batabyal.

OLD MAN : Qualifications?

NILA : B.Com honours first-class. Say.

BAGALA : B.Com honours.

NILA : A first-class.

BAGALA : A first ... er ... first-class.

... 

OLD MAN : Do you have any experience?
BAGALA: No, sir.

OLD MAN: Without experience why've you come to the interview?

NILA: Didn't write I'm experience-d. Besides, if I don't get a job, how can I gain experience?

BAGALA: (like before) Didn't write I'm experience-d. Besides, if I don't get a job ... If I don't ... I don't ...

OLD MAN: Hopeless! Okay you may go. (shouts) Next!

NILA: (wry smile): Thank you sir.

BAGALA: (speaks humbly) Thank you sir. (89-91)

After observing Bagala’s dull performance in the rehearsal, Old Man scolds Bagala saying that he wouldn’t get a job until he leaves his inner fear. Getting frustrated, Old Man at last seeks Nila’s help for the remedial measures that can taken against Bagala’s mentality. Nila then reveals the reason for Bagala’s odd mentality to Old Man. She says that it is mainly due to his uncle and aunt’s rough treatment and cruel orders since childhood. Bagala became sensitive especially regarding his name. It is because of all poking fun at him since childhood he
became pessimist by nature. She further reveals the only possible remedial measure to Old Man.

NILA : .... But I think if he could stand once boldly facing his uncle and aunt ...

OLD MAN : Would it be possible? What’ve you seen just now?

NILA : Don’t know. But there’s no other way! Without this ... without this we can’t keep him alive. Now our only duty’s to keep him alive. (93)

Old Man then advises Bagala to go to his uncle’s home back and tell them that he is not going to live with them anymore. When Bagala exclaims that it is highly impossible for him to go and face his uncle and aunt, Old Man advises him to write a letter.

OLD MAN : Perhaps you won’t be able to say. Write a letter and take with you. Write – expenses you’ve borne for my food, clothing and studies for all these years, I must have repaid as the hardworking manservant and the private tutor of your son. Still I’m leaving behind ten thousand as homage. (94)
Nila supplies Bagala a pen and a paper. Thinking for a while, Bagala at last picks up the pen provided by Nila and writes the whole matter as suggested by Old Man. Later, the letter being put in the envelope, Bagala along with Nila leaves for his uncle’s house. Now the Stage Manager 3 and the Stage Manager 4 enter the scene and describe to the audience that Bagala has become a bit more courageous when compared to his days in the past.

S. M. 3 : 13, Pratap Sashmal Lane

S. M. 4 : The living room.

S. M. 3 : The maternal uncle and aunt of our hero …

S. M. 4 : And an angry gentleman. (101)

The scene opens with Bagala’s uncle, aunt, and a man (Bagala’s father-in-law) who are in a serious conversation regarding Bagala’s escape from the house. Bagala then enters the house slowly and stands at a side of a room quietly for a while. Seeing Bagala, the man asks him the reason for rejection of the marriage proposal. When Bagala’s uncle and aunt try to convince Bagala’s father-in-law saying that he has no any objection to marry their daughter, he shouts at them, “Aah! I’ve heard you many times. Now I want to hear straight from his mouth.” (103) Though Nila from behind forces him to say that he has
the objection, Bagala maintains silence without uttering any word. Becoming helpless, Man at last leaves the house. When Bagala’s uncle starts scolding him, Bagala picks up the courage, tears up the letter, and talks to his uncle in a harsh tone.

UNCLE : (bursts) Shut up! You bastard! Son of a Bitch!

NILA : Give him the letter. Give him the letter.

BAGALA : No. I won’t give the letter. I don’t need the letter.

Bastard? Son of a Bitch? I? It must be. Otherwise why’d I suffer smacking and spanking in your hands for all these years? Yes. You’re right. I’m a bastard. Son of a bitch. But no more of it. What I’ve written in that letter – I’m telling you. Listen. I wrote – Whatever you owe me, I’ve repaid by hard work. If there’s still something left, then ... take this! There’s ten thousand here. And listen – you bastard uncle! Brother-in-law of my father. If you aren’t a son of a bitch yourself, return five
When Bagala reveals the entire story to Old Man, he feels very happy and admires him for his achievement. Bagala further says to Old Man that he had now gained enough courage to face any obstacle in life. In a conversation that follows between Bagala and Old Man, we come to know about Bagala’s strong mental condition which he developed himself. The play ends with Bagala leaving a message to the youth of Kolkata.

OLD MAN : Bravo. Then the interview on Friday...

BAGALA : I’ll go all out!

OLD MAN : With Nila’s help …

BAGALA : Don’t need it. Go all out myself! Go to stand on my feet!

OLD MAN : Bravo! If all of your age could stand on their own feet, could say they’d go all out, then …

BAGALA : Then what?

OLD MAN : Then the world wouldn’t have been like this. We haven’t learnt to stand up, never went to fight. We always
think that everything will be changed by magic.

**BAGALA**

: No magic! No magic! Everything’s to be done with one’s own strength! With one’s own hand! I’ll tell everyone!

... 

Magic doesn’t help a real attempt ... what’s up? Why don’t you join?

**BAGALA – NILA**

: Magic doesn’t help a real attempt

Do away with it at this moment

Come with brooms, running

Clean the filth by sweeping

Sloth, coward, idler – all

Brooms in your hands, have a ball.

(107-110)

*Life of Bagala* demonstrates how varied Sircar’s plays are. It does not deal with the serious issues found in other Third Theatre plays; instead, it tells a story that is obliquely political. Dialogues spoken by Sircar’s characters are seldom lengthy. The brief dialogues, besides providing the plays with dramatic tempo, help the audience to concentrate on the action. They assist the actors as well because they make much use of their bodies and are, therefore, unable to speak at
length. Moreover, the idea of ‘group acting’ suffers if the characters are given lengthy speeches. To enhance the idea of group acting, a lengthy speech is often broken up, thus adding to the dramatic quality of the play. Sircar’s intention in writing *Life of Bagala* emerges quite clearly from the events of the play. He reminds the people that no change can be brought out by magic and only through human strength of mind anything worthwhile can be attained. His message is reinforced at the end of the play through a song sung in chorus by all the actors.
REFERENCES

*  Badal Sircar, *Life of Bagala, Two Plays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010). All further references are from this text parenthetically numbered.
