CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
Drama being an audiovisual medium of expression has been a very effective and influential genre in the world literature. It is a precise mode of fiction embodied in performance. The birth and development of drama in various countries accentuates upon the fact that it has always been an integral part of culture, highlighting and assessing moral commitments, spiritual convictions and political changes. Drama combines the real and the fictional world and presents the actions and characters within a facet of space and time.

India is one of the few countries which can brag of an aboriginal drama, unaffected by any foreign influence. As an expression of our national intellect, Indian drama, with its extensive history of 2000 years, is an exclusive phenomenon in the literary world. It is not easy to say when and how the Indian theatre originated as the origin of the Indian drama is enfolded in obscurity. According to the critics, the origin of Indian drama must be inferred from the plays themselves, from references, and from other literatures and dedications. Some critics opine that the Indian drama originated from the ancient convention of reciting the national poetry at social and religious gatherings and seasonal festivities of the country. Apart from the opinions of critics, various theories are also advocated to explicate the
spiritual origin of the Indian drama. Some are related to the religious practices and some to the secular.

According to the conventional myth, the science of dramaturgy is of divine origin. Bharata’s *Natyasastra* is the earliest and the most comprehensive dissertation on dramaturgy. Our knowledge of the early dramatic studies in India rests exclusively on *Natyasastra*. The traditional account in Bharata’s *Natyasastra* gives a divine origin to Indian theatre, relating it to the *Natyaveda*, the holy book of dramaturgy created by Lord Brahma. In his *Natyasastra*, Bharata combined and codified various traditions in dance, mime, and drama. He describes ten kinds of drama ranging from one act to ten acts. Farley P. Richmond observes:

> The text has exerted a profound influence over the formation and structure of successive theatre genres throughout India. Our understanding of the musical system of ancient India is based almost entirely on the *Natyasastra*.... In attempting to interpret the various aspects of the *Natyasastra*, a whole body of theatrical texts has come down to us from ancient times. And debate over the meaning of certain important words and phrases
still occupies the attention of scholars throughout the world.¹

According to Bharata, 'kavya' (poetry), 'nritta' (dance), and 'nritya' (mime) in life constitutes 'leela' (play) which in turn produces 'bhava' (emotion) but it is only 'natya' (drama) which produces 'rasa' (flavour). He says that the drama uses the eight basic emotions, love, joy, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion, and wonder attempting to resolve them in the ninth holistic feeling of peace. No book of ancient times in the world has such a comprehensive study on dramaturgy as Natyasastra. According to Bharata, the playwright, the director, and the actor are inseparable in the conception of the drama. As per the story narrated in the first chapter of Bharata's work, with the arrival of silver age, Indra, with the rest of the Gods approaches Brahma and requests him:

People all over the world have taken to vulgar ways: they have grown greedy, avaricious, jealous and quarrelsome; they don't know if they are happy or miserable ... please let us have some diversion ... which could be both heard and seen. The Sudras can't have access to the Vedic
works, therefore, create a fifth Veda which could be accessible to all the castes.²

Brahma agrees to this sensible request and falls into deep meditation. He compiles the Natyaveda as the fifth Veda after having extracted the quintessence from all the four Vedas – element of recitation from the Rigveda, the oldest book of hymns, song and music from the Samaveda, imitation (acting) from the Yajurveda and aesthetic (Rasa) from the Atharvaveda. Roughly, the Indian drama can be divided into two distinctive kinds: the Sanskrit drama (classical drama) and the Modern drama.

In the history of Modern Indian drama, the colonial period brought a drastic and almost whirlwind segment for the Indian dramatists. The most renowned drama during this period was Kalidasa’s Sakuntalam translated by Sir William Jones in 1789. The play was so successful that it had lasting impression on the great scholar, Goethe. According to critics, the socio-political set up in India played a major role in the development of Modern Indian drama. Before Independence, many Indian dramatists primarily used their drama as a weapon to protest against the “British Raj”. Hence it is certainly not a hyperbole to say that the two hundred years of British
colonialism brought the Indian drama into a direct acquaintance with the western drama. Very soon the melodious blend of eastern and western culture gave birth to a new form of Indian drama. It gradually became an imitation of the western plots. Indian dramatists started writing plays to entertain the British soldiers and their families. Slowly sensible approach and naturalistic appearance marked the change in the thematic progress of Indian theatre. Ancient themes such as lives of heroes, Gods, celestial beings and myths which ruled ancient Indian drama completely vanished and the common men, their daily household tasks, their qualms and moans are preferably depicted in the modern Indian drama. Calcutta and Madras became the first two capitals to introduce their theatre brands based on the London models. With this modern Indian drama witnessed the wide change not only in the socio-political level and in the economic condition but also in the creative and cultural aspects of India. The modern Indian drama started to grow more in 1850s as the playwrights started to act upon their own plays on different languages based on western style. This new tradition slowly crawled to Bombay and to many North as well as South Indian states. Hence, at the end of nineteenth century, modern Indian drama became the source of earning bread and butter to many Indian playwrights.
Bengali plays have a coalition with *Jatras* as in the early days Bengali plays were prejudiced by the folk plays acted on the open stage. Religion, myths, tradition, and customs are the central themes chosen by the playwrights for their plays. Bengali drama has its roots with the appearance of the English theatre in Calcutta as well as with the introduction of western education in Bengal. The plays were staged for the entertainment of people whereas the newly established English schools and colleges offered them as a textual matter for studying. The first Bengali play was staged in 1795 at the ‘Bengali Theatre’, owned by a Russian adventurer, Gerasim Stepanovitch Lebedeff. It was an adaptation from the English play, *The Disguise*, a comedy by M. Jodrell. The play was translated as *Kalpanik Sangbadal Ba Sajbadal* in one act with three scenes. He wrote it in a colloquial Bengali so that the common man of the society can understand it. Lebedeff’s intention was to construct a play for the Bengali citizens who had no theatre of their own. The second play in Bengali was *Vidyasundar* (1835) which was staged at Nabinchandra Basu’s Theatre. The play is based on one of the popular poems of the great poet Bharatchandra. The third Bengali play staged was *Abhijnanasakuntala* (1857) translated from the original Sanskrit play of Kalidasa by Nandakumar Ray. There were also other translations in sixties from English plays by major
playwrights but they were not successful, as the audience of Bengali was not satisfied with the translation of classics and foreign plays. They wanted original Bengali plays which were concerned with the current problems of the society. Hence, the stage was set for the growth of the real Bengali drama which later became the echo of life and the most influential medium for social and political changes in the society.

G. C. Gupta and Taracharan Sikdar published *Kirtivilas* and *Bhadrarjun* in 1852 and became the first playwrights of the time for producing the Bengali plays in original. Both the playwrights inspired by the Shakespearean dramas and followed the dramatic technique of Shakespeare in the construction of their plots. Though the play *Kirtivilas* has an unhappy ending, it cannot be called a tragedy. *Bhadrarjun* is based on the story of Arjun and Subhadra from *Mahabharata*. The language of the play is natural and the characters look realistic. It is Ramnarayan Tarakaratna who wrote the first social play, *Kulinakulasarvasva* (1854) in Bengali. The play is on a social iniquity ensuing in polygamy, a curse of culture in the society. In his dramatic career, Ramnarayan wrote three farces namely *Nabanatak* (1866), *Ubhaysankat* (1869), and *Chaksudan* (1869). Critics opine that Ramnarayan followed the Sanskrit dramatic pattern for his plays. He
also wrote some mythological plays but they were not received well by the viewers. Many playwrights emerged during the period and wrote plays dealing with the burning social problems of the time, such as polygamy, widow-remarriage, caste system, and child-marriage. But because of the lack of dramatic material and partly developed construction, they were never staged. There is only one drama, *Bidhavabivahanatak* (1856), written by Umeshchandra Mitra which created deep and lasting crash on the minds of spectators and strongly advocated the cause of widow-remarriage. The tragic end of the play strengthened its effect on the compassionate Bengali drama viewers of the time.

According to some scholars, the development of Bengali drama actually begins with Michael Madhusudan Dutta, the great revolutionary in the history of Bengali literature. In the opinion of Madhusudan the existing Bengali drama up to his time is immature. With the characteristic enthusiasm and fervour, he began to write dramas different from those written by his predecessors. He decisively kept his trust on the dramatic techniques of Shakespeare in regard to plot construction, characterization, and tragic consequences. He wrote his first play, *Sharmista* (1859) based on the triangular story of Yayati, Sharmista, and Devayani of the great epic *Mahabharata*. His
Padmavati (1860) is a romantic comedy which he adapted from a Greek legend. Madhusudan also wrote two farces, Ekei Ki Bale Sabyata (1860) and Buro Shaliker Ghare Ro (1860). In Ekei Ki Bale Sabyata, he portrays the preposterous facets of the young Bengal of the time whereas Buro Shaliker Ghare Ro satirises the extravagance and oppression of a village Zamindar. Though Madhusudan produced many dramas in his dramatic career, his Krishnakumari (1861) is considered as the milestone in Bengali literature. The play is a historical tragedy and considered to be one of the few great tragedies in the history of Bengali drama. Madhusudan became the first Bengali playwright to show outstanding concern for his art in enhancing his skill with every new play.

As a contemporary of Madhusudan Dutta, Dinabandhu Mitra is influenced by the farces written by Madhusudan. While Madhusudan chose different areas like mythology, legend, and history for his plays, Dinabandhu chose real life sketches of people around him for plot construction. His first and epoch-making play is Nildarpan (1860). As a play of protest it deals with the pitiless domination of indigo-planters which fills the hearts of the viewers with mercy and empathy. The success of the play encouraged many proletariats of north Calcutta who shared their efforts to establish a public stage in the city, which at last
led to the establishment of the ‘National Theatre’ in 1872. *Sadhabahar Ekadashi* (1866) is considered as Dinabandhu’s masterpiece in the history of Bengali drama where his luminous wit and humour touched with sorrow are beautifully exhibited. He wrote many plays among which *Biye Pagla Buro* (1866), *Lilavati* (1867), and *Jamai Barik* (1872) are worth mentioning in the Bengali literature.

While both Dutta and Mitra borrowed themes from English and Sanskrit literatures, their contemporary Manmohan Basu borrowed themes from Indian classical literature. The influence of Sanskrit drama and the native elements of ‘jatra’ and ‘panchali’ are predominant in his ‘geetabhinaya’, a new kind of drama introduced by Manmohan. Though he tried to uphold the stability of the indigenous dramatic tradition, some of his plays like *Ramabhishek* (1867), *Sati Natak* (1873), and *Pranay Pariksa* (1869) show little growth in the form of art. Next came Jyotirindranath Tagore, the pioneer of romantic historical drama who with his plays, *Puruvikram* (1874), *Sarojini* (1875), and *Svapnamayi* (1882) overvalued the distinguished fight for freedom. Jyotirindranath was greatly prejudiced by Moliere that he modified some of Moliere’s plays especially farces in Bengali and his impulsiveness in this domain has been highly praised by the modern
critics. As a translator, Jyotirindranath translated many Sanskrit and Shakespearean plays.

As a dramatist with originality Jyotirindranath’s dramatic talents found expression in two distinct lines. One line led to the production of comical dramas and the other to historical dramas depicting patriotic and heroic acts. Jyotirindranath’s dramas enjoyed tremendous popularity those days; and many of them were played on public stages, by professional actors.³

Bengali drama to a great extent is enriched by Girish Chandra Ghosh and his contemporaries. Though Girish Chandra was an actor and producer by profession he started writing plays when the Bengali theatre was in great need of plays with new concepts. He wrote many devotional plays based on the mythological subjects mainly on the lives of saints and preachers. *Chaitanyalila* (1886), *Bilvamangal* (1888), *Jana* (1894), and *Pandaba Gaurab* (1900) are some of his devotional plays. He also wrote some social plays in which he highlighted the lives of middle-class families of the late nineteenth century. At the last stage of his dramatic career, Girish Chandra wrote a few historical plays among which the most noteworthy is
Sirajaddaula (1906) which became a living inspiration to our freedom movement. Amritalal Basu, the contemporary of Girish Chandra strictly wrote comedies and satires coldly revealing the void, unpleasantness, and insincerity of the so-called progressive people who tried to imitate western manners and traditions.

After Girish Chandra, Dwijendralal Roy, an idealist and a staunch nationalist, became the chief dramatic force of Modern Bengali drama who ruled it for some time. He is a master in characterisation and his dramatic dialogue is noteworthy. Though he contributed many farces and mythological plays for the Bengali theatre, his royal supremacy lies in historical plays. His Pratap Sinha (1905), Noorjahan (1908), Shahjahan (1909), and Chandragupta (1911) are considered milestones in the Bengali drama as they unite high thespian qualities with burning patriotism.

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the leading dramatists of India and his dramas are different from those produced on the professional stage. Brought up in the theatrical custom of his family, Tagore himself acted in some of his plays. He started his dramatic career with musical dramas, then wrote poetic dramas, comedies, symbolic plays, and ended his career with dance-dramas. Tagore initially produced two
regular five-act plays with plots and subplots developing out of the familiar causes such as envy, revenge, love, and hate. Iyengar remarks of his plays:

Tagore could start the play, strike the opening chords, name the characters – and memory and imagination would do the rest. Not the logic of careful plotting but the music of ideas and symbol is the ‘soul’ of this drama… (it) kindles the sluggish soul to a new awareness of life’s “deep magic”.  

Tagore’s plays are different both in form and content. In most of his plays, the readers come across the male protagonists who are ready to sacrifice their lives at any cost according to the various circumstances. In *Saradotsav* (1908) and *Phalguni* (1916), one could find the festivity of the seasons. For these two plays, Tagore chose Nature as a background. In *Saradotsav*, Tagore portrays the story of a young boy who works hard during the autumn holidays to pay back the debts of his deceased master while his friends play around. In *Phalguni*, Tagore shows how a group of young men rejoice the spring festival. In *Raja* (1910), Tagore depicts the story of a king who with his dark and terrible appearance remains unnoticed throughout the
play. To hide his physical personality, he even meets his queen, Sudarsana only in a dark chamber. Sudarsana predicts her husband as a handsome king. Her conception of beauty is nothing more than attractiveness. She is easily tempted by the external glamour of a charlatan, Suvarna, who declares himself to be the real king. At the end of the play, Sudarsana comes to realize that life is not handsome but unrivalled. Tagore wrote his next play *Dakghar* in 1912. The play depicts a simple story of an inventive little boy ailing and waiting for death. In the play, the boy observes life enthusiastically and identifies himself with everything and everyone he looks at from the window of his house. Encircled by the people like the village headman, and with a firm faith in life and love, the boy dies peacefully at the end of the play. In *Muktadhara* (1922), Tagore depicts the revolution against the evil system that has been pointed out by the uprising of the common citizens, the labourers, and the untouchables who come from the lower layers of life. Through his *Raktakaravi* (1926), Tagore projects the lives of browbeaten people who lose their individuality in a highly mechanized society.

After the Second World War, the professional theatre witnessed a great decline which in turn gave rise to a strong amateur theatre movement. Playwrights started introducing radical ideas by initiating
new forms and techniques in their plays. Bijan Bhattacharya, Digin Benerjee, and Tulsi Lahiri produced plays on the contemporary issues that prevailed at that time and became the pioneers of the revolutionary movement. On the other side, Badal Sircar and Mohit Chatterjee followed the stride of the theatre of the absurd. Sudhindra Sircar, prominently known as Badal Sircar is usually known for his subversive plays in 1970s. He is an influential playwright and theatre director mostly known as the modernizer of contemporary Indian theatre. He is the founder cum director of the theatre group, ‘Satabdi’ (1976). He started his literary career with comedies and made himself distinct from other playwrights of his time. He is a pioneer of ‘Third Theatre’ Movement that acquired an identity of its own. According to him, a theatre should be cooperative work-out to rouse and improve the social awareness of both the actors and the spectators. Sircar frequently throws up the perpetual debate, questioning which is more important - form or content. According to him, ‘content’ is primitive whereas ‘form’ always follows content. His plays reflect the violence that prevails in the society. They are a part of a counter-culture, intending to depict media deception and government untruths. Uncovering patent lies and myths through powerful research, Sircar’s plays are proposed to catalyse social change. Natesan Sharda Iyer says:
Badal Sircar is against the theatre being a commodity for sale to the audience resulting in the detachment between the player and the spectator. He has always argued in favour of spectators being an integral part of the theatre… to him theatre is a live wire and its strength lies in direct communication.  

Sircar was fully aware of the dichotomy between urban proscenium theatre and traditional rural theatre. He realized that the distinctive nature of theatre is a "live" show which creates a scope for a direct communication between two persons. His convictions led him to moderate and even eradicate the obstacles between the performer and the viewers. He broke down the proscenium and experimented with circular staging without props, sets, and stage-lights. He believed that ultimate theatre depends on the performer’s body and spectator’s imagination. According to Sircar, an important means of participation is by urging the audience to concentrate carefully on the actions of the play, most of which were done in highly inventive mimes. He also encouraged the process of direct eye contact with the audience in order to heighten participation.
Sircar formed Third Theatre absorbing ideas from the traditional and folk theatre. It arose from the educated of typical society who are neither the peasants nor the landlords. In a letter to Richard Schechner, Sircar describes the members of his theatre group:

... They work in banks, schools, offices, factories; they assemble in evenings exhausted by loveless work and sardine-packed public transport. On Sundays we can work for five hours, provided we are not invited to perform somewhere—a village, a “bustee” (slum), a suburban town, a college lawn, an office canteen. Shows on Friday evenings; Thursday evenings spent on the rehearsal of the play to be performed the next day. How much time can we get for working on a new project? Eight hours in a week is an optimistic average...⁶

Sircar’s dramas do not have a significant plot. Similarly, no concrete characterization is found in his dramas. The actors are free to choose their roles and exchange them on the stage. Even the spectators can take part in the same. There is also freedom of movement and no constraint of space. Body language is given greater importance than the facial expressions. Often the stage machinery can be constructed by the
mere utilization of body language. The plays often deal with the middle-class and their problems, annoyances, and inconsistencies. For example, in *Evam Indrajit*, the structure of the play is cyclic. The cyclical nature of the play is emphasized echoing people “go round and round.” We find Aunty persuading Indrajit, the protagonist, to have his food at the beginning of the play. Later, we find Manasi saying the same thing. People change, but the action is the same without any change in the concept. Again, we find many characters played by the same person. Writer plays the role of both the peon and the boss in the office. In general, Sircar wants to imply that there is no essential difference between the two (peon and the boss): both are human beings. Likewise, the different characters of the play appear to be different aspects of the writer himself reflecting his psyche. Throughout the play, the readers search for something useful as in the conventional plays, but it reflects the writer’s attempt to find something meaningful in his life.

Sircar’s formulation of the Third Theatre led him to produce several plays, the first being *Spartacus*. The most prominent of Sircar’s plays based on the concept of Third Theatre was *Procession* (1972), *Bhoma* (1974), and *Stale News* (1979). These three plays have placed him on a platform higher than other contemporary playwrights of
Indian drama. Through his Third Theatre, Sircar makes the middle class people of the society feel guilty for being indifferent towards man and his problems. Through his three typical street plays one can observe the consciousness of Sircar’s philosophy and vision of making people aware of their social responsibility. He made theatre a medium of conveying individual responsibility of the people towards the society.

Badal Sircar wrote more than fifty plays in his career. Out of which eight plays are selected - *Evam Indrajit, Procession, Bhma, Scandal in Fairyland, Indian History Made Easy, Beyond the Land of Hattamala, Stale News, and Life of Bagala*. Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* (1965) is an absurd play like Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* as it represents the emptiness and ineffectiveness of an artificial modern existence. The play is a theatrical outcrop of all wild approaches, movements, outlooks, and undefined frustrations disturbing the heart of an educated urban middle class youth. It is about the remnants who have failed to adjust, assemble, and clogged to desire, and also those who are entangled in the day to day struggle for existence. It is through his protagonist Indrajit, Sircar presents the dregs of middle-class people who are entangled in the daily struggle for endurance. Sircar
describes Indrajit in terms of society, but not in stipulations of his own existence. K. V Surendran writes:

... with the performance of Sircar's "Evam Indrajit" in Bengali in Calcutta in September 1965, theatre practitioners all over India became aware of a major talent and a major play. The play provided for them the shock of recognition. It was about the Indian reality as they knew it; it was a theatrically effective and crystallized projection of all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations gnawing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class. 7

Sircar's Procession (1972) deals with the theme of a 'real home' or a real way of living in the world with various sorts of deviations and corruptions. The playwright imagines an ideal world in which man does not live by exploiting others. There are two main characters in the play, Old man and Khoka, who represent the old and new generations of life respectively. Bhoma (1974) is a dramatization of life of the browbeaten peasant, Bhoma in Indian rural society. In a series of scenes he is exploited. Sircar not only presents the seriousness of the problem but also suggests a solution by employing powerful symbols.
and images. The society full of opportunists and exploiters is presented as a forest of poisonous trees and Bhoma, a native barbarian as a woodcutter. Bhoma is an archetype of the oppressed and exploited peasant who, at long last, takes up his “rusty axe” grinds and sharpens it to cut the poisonous trees that grow around him.

Sircar’s *Scandal in Fairyland* (1974) is a fairly close adaptation of a story for children written by Premendra Mitra. It is Sircar’s criticism on the conceptual civil society. The play focuses on the self-centred entity, Midas, the protagonist who always troubles the harmony and unanimity. In an interview to Samik Bandyopadhyay, Sircar reveals:

…it’s so hard to write for children...whatever is thematically valuable in my play came from this story. The paperboy, however, was my improvisation. If I had written it for children, I could not have used the idiom of the popular press so extensively.  

*Indian History Made Easy* (1976) is significant in counterfeiting a unique relationship between form and content. Using the form of classroom teaching with teachers instructing the students, Sircar covers more than three hundred years of British rule in India without
developing a ‘story’. The play describes the most crucial periods in the history of India – British colonialism. Critics opine that the play bears close resemblance to Brecht’s *Lehrstück* as the end of the play deals with the mechanism of colonial exploitation.

Sircar’s *Beyond the Land of Hattamala* (1977) is an impersonation from Premendra Mitra and Leela Majumdar’s novel, *Hattamalar Deshey*, which was serialized in a children’s magazine, edited by Nalini Das and Satyajit Ray. It is a witty and tongue-in-cheek comedy written by Sircar to communicate relevant social message to the contemporary society. Substituting the society stood on money and egoism, Sircar shows us the means of salvation by taking two thieves, Kena and Becha, who jump into a river to escape and get washed up on the shores of a ‘never-never land’ where buying and selling are alien concepts, since everyone works unitedly and everything belongs to the entire community. Several misadventures follow as the pair adjusts to the situation and at last renovate themselves, and turn into common men. *Stale News* (1979) deals with the theme of revolt that centres round a young man who is bombarded with shattering information full of contradictions and contrasts which come to him as “stale news”. Though he becomes aware through the inspiring guidance of the Dead Man of the pathetic conditions of the poor and the need for social
reform, young man is not ready to come out of the strange hold of the traditional, routine life and hence develops a sense of commitment so as to revolt against the social and economic justice.

Apart from fantasy, humour also plays an effective role in the plays of Badal Sircar. Though he did not write any full-length comedy after the uproarious proscenium plays at the beginning of his career, it does not necessarily entail that humour completely departed from Sircar's collection. In fact, humour, pure or satiric, reserves a place even in his serious plays. However, the only play written by Sircar where the pure humour of the early period and the serious message of the Third Theatre phase combine is *Life of Bagala* (1998). It deals with the story of a magician, Bagala, who through supernatural intervention finds himself an ordinary man and stands against injustice. He decides to leave his magic and acts all by himself when he comes to believe that no change can be brought about by magic; it is only through human will and action that something worthwhile can be achieved.

No doubt, Badal Sircar gave a powerful weapon to the theatre groups by way of his Third Theatre. Working in a street play requires a great dedication. Maintaining delicate balance between commitments to one's own responsibilities, family relationships, and genuine theatre
work is firmly important and it is Badal Sircar who ultimately remained and achieved a great success in it. Through his Third Theatre, Sircar mainly wishes to communicate the clear cut facts and concrete truths about the contemporary society. Instead of promoting strikes, lockouts, and overthrow of the government, Sircar feels happy to disturb the ideologies of his audience by influencing them to contribute their strength in reconstructing the state of disorder.
REFERENCES


