CHAPTER - III

PROCESSION OF DREAMS
Procession is the most translated and most performed of Badal Sircar's later plays written for the Third Theatre. It is one of his most intricately structured plays with numerous transitions and concurrences. It was first performed on 14 April, 1974 by Satabdi under the title Michhil at the village named Ramchandrapur in West Bengal. It is not meant to be performed in the proscenium stage. It has to be staged in an open space with the audience seated all around on the floor of a large arena. The audience is made to sit on benches with their backs facing each other. In this way a mysterious atmosphere is created with the bodies, backs, faces, and profiles of the audience. Actors moving in between the seated spectators make the spectators feel as though a procession was started winding its way around the streets of Calcutta.

The theme of the play is contained in the very title, Procession itself. Sircar presents a series of colourful processions, each suggesting various means that are used to change the society. Calcutta is satirised as a city of processions which are short-sighted and flashy signifying nothing. It is an odd play. Despite its strong Calcutta-oriented origin and urban ambience it has a universal appeal. In an interview Sircar reveals that his Procession is one of the very few plays where he had the idea of production even before he begun writing it.
The play begins with five young men namely, One, Two, Three, Four, and Five and a young woman, Six searching for a place to sit. All of a sudden, the lights go out and the place becomes entirely dark. Meanwhile, the voices of the characters predicting various reasons for the sudden power-cut become audible to the audience from the dark arena. At this critical juncture, the characters suddenly hear a piercing scream as if someone has been murdered.

ONE : What’s happened? Why did the lights go out?
TWO : Is it a fuse?
THREE : Loadshedding! What a bother, everyday …
FOUR : No, it’s sabotage. Someone must have cut the wire …
FIVE : Careful! It’s perfect for pickpockets and thieves …
SIX : Can’t see a thing. What’ll happen?
…
ONE : What’s that? What’s that?
TWO : Who screamed?
THREE : Murder! There’s been a murder.
FOUR : No, no, someone must've fallen in a hole.

FIVE : Someone's been stabbed! Watch out! (14) *

They then run in all directions asking the audience to put on the lights. Like a sudden blow of wind, several matchsticks flicker into flame at once from the audience and with the help of it they start a silent search in the glittering glow. They receive a great shock when they found no corpse on the ground. But Five strongly believes that somebody must have stabbed someone to death and whisked the body away. When they are whispering about the situation, a stentorian voice of a police officer is heard from a long distance. He approaches them and starts interrogating the purpose of their presence there. They describe the officer that they had heard a piercing scream as if someone has been killed a few seconds before. But the officer shouts at them saying, “Nonsense. False rumours. Go home, all of you.” (16) The voice of Khoka is heard faintly in the beginning, but it grows louder gradually. He sits, walks, and runs in order to draw the attention of the audience as well as the Officer but nobody notices him, even when he is right before them. Grieve stricken Khoka then speaks out directly to the audience.
KHOKA: I was killed. I. Me. Here I am. I’ve been killed. I. I. Here – here I am. They killed me. I’m dead. I was killed just now. I was killed today. I was killed yesterday. I was killed the day before yesterday. The day before the day before. Last week. Last month. Last year. I am killed every day. Every day, killed, every day, dead, every day. I’ll be killed tomorrow. Day after tomorrow. Day after, the day after that, next week. Next month. Next year. I, me. Why can’t you see me? Why can’t you hear me? I. Here I am – I – was killed – I am dead – I am killed every day – every day, every day killed every day dead every day – (17)

Khoka’s words again turn into a piercing stream and he finally falls in a heap. Officer then simply walks over the body of Khoka as if he is unaware of it. Very soon Chorus enters the scene in the form of a funeral procession, singing a song in the typical ‘kirtan’ style. Four members of the procession carry the stiff body on their shoulders, and
Khoka’s sticky situation in the play is beautifully examined by the playwright in combination with the predicament of another character, Old Man. If Khoka, a young man, is constantly murdered, the Old Man is hopelessly lost till the end of the play. As soon as Chorus goes out with Khoka’s body, Old Man wearing a clown’s cap leaps into the acting area from the other entrance. He invites the audience who failed to join the play from the beginning and had stopped at the gate. He then utters various processions of the society.

OLD MAN : Chha Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ya Hu-u-u. Michhil! Michhil! 
Funeral processions, demonstrations, parades, walks, auspicious journeys, inauspicious journeys, non-journeys. Come along, come along, the Michhil’s on the move… it’s the Michhil, Michhil, Michhils for food and clothes, Michhils for salvation, Michhils for the revolution, military Michhils, Michhils of refugees, Michhils for flood relief, mourning Michhils,
protest Michhils, festive Michhils, 
star-studded Michhils. (18)

Old Man then recollects his past and describes the audience the way he lost his home as a young boy. He tells them that his parents named him Khoka. He further tells them that one day when he was walking along the road holding his father's hand, he was very much excited when he found the roads are vanishing at every bend and in turn giving birth to a new road. In a great anxiety to see a new road beyond the every bend, he lost his connection with his father. Since then he has been searching for a procession which would put him on the road which leads to his real home.

OLD MAN : But where's the road? You go far and wide, you turn round and round and round, and come back to the same road. You turn corners and more corners and it's the same road again. Where's the Michhil? The Michhil that can show us the right road? The truly true Michhil? (22)

Sircar now shows how the life in Calcutta continuously interrupts the Old Man's search for a real procession. Chorus enters the scene and start shouting headlines from various newspapers.

TWO : Fresh conflict in the Middle East.

THREE : Oil crisis all over the world.

FOUR : Another hydrogen bomb explosion in the Pacific.

FIVE : Another experiment with the artificial heart.

ONE : Earthquake in Peru.

TWO : Cyclone in Bangladesh.

THREE : Uprising in Chile.

... 

FOUR : More losses for State Transport.

FIVE : Another breakdown in Railway schedules.

SIX : Examinations postponed again. (22-23)

The newspaper sequence is put beside with an effective evocation of sounds in a railway station by vendors, salesmen, and beggars.

TWO : Lozenges! Lozenges! Four delicious flavours – spicy, hot,
salty, sweet. Chutney lozenges – 10 paise a pair. Lasts half an hour in the mouth, quenches your thirst. Anyone? Lozenges ...

THREE : Water, sir, water! Water, anyone?
FOUR : Paan-bidi-cigret! Paan-bidi-cigret!
FIVE : Cha! Cha-grram! Cha!
SIX : *(singing a typical beggar woman’s song)* Oh come to me dancing, Mother Shyama, Let me join, I want to go with you ... (24)

The railway station scene is then followed by an overcrowded bus sequence which depicts the experience of the people of Calcutta getting to work every morning.

TWO : Oh sir my foot my foot just a bit of space for my foot –

THREE : But you can’t just put your foot on mine!

TWO : Sorry but what to do? The footboard’s crammed with one foot upon another.

THREE : You could’ve just waited for the next bus. (25)
Old Man and Khoka now reappear on the stage crying as both of them are lost amidst many processions in their search for a real procession.

OLD MAN : Michhil Michhil I’ve lost my way. I seek a road through road after road Michhil Michhil the road home. Not the old home, another home, true home, truly true home Michhil Michhil –

KHOKA : Michhil Michhil on the highways on the footpaths Michhil Michhil. Every day on the highways on the footpaths the Michhils grind me to dust crush me underfoot kill me Michhil Michhil … (27)

Both Old Man and Khoka leave the stage running from one end to the other. Chorus enters the stage as a brass band, playing tunes of Hindi film songs. Then the band turns into a Rathyatra procession. Raising their hands upwards to suggest the crest of the rath, they mime at pulling the chariot with shouts of glory to the great lord ‘Jagannatha.’ They then turn into a ‘Muharram’ procession carrying aloft the ‘taziya’ and beating their breasts to cries of ‘Hassan’ and ‘Hussain’. The next procession sings ‘Christmas’ carols. Then it turns into a procession
carrying images of the goddesses ‘Durga’, ‘Lakshmi’, and ‘Kali’ for immersion. They then stop at a point and prostrate themselves on the floor as they are serving at the feet of master.

The scene now changes to the time of Indian freedom movement where various processions proceed with slogans.

TWO : Quit India.
THREE : Do or Die.
FOUR : Karenge ya marenge.
FIVE : British Imperialists, leave India!
ONE : Ladke lenge Pakistan. We’ll win Pakistan by force.

... 

TWO : Jai Hind.
THREE : Hail to –

CHORUS : Free India! (30-31)

Now a leader called ‘The Master’ enters the scene and reminds the people about prominent personalities of India and numerous martyrs who fought to free India from the clutches of British. He further reminds them of various responsibilities of being a citizen of India.
THE MASTER : Remember our national heritage.
Remember the numberless martyrs in our struggle for freedom.
Remember the revolutionary heroes of our fiery days. Remember –
India is the country of Manu, Parashar, Kalidas, Bhababhuti, Sita, Savitri, Sri Chaitanya and Gandhiji. Remember the invincible strength of the principle of Non-violence. Remember that it is our responsibility to give spiritual leadership to the world. Remember the greatness of democracy in India. Remember the fundamental rights of the constitution.... (31-32)

Old Man and Khoka again appear on the stage. All of a sudden, the lights go out and the place becomes entirely dark. Old Man tells the audience that the sun is set and reminds them saying that it is time for getting home. When he starts his way in search of a real home, he stumbles against Khoka’s body lying on the floor. Considering Khoka as a drunkard, he wakes him up and advises him to go home. But Khoka replies that he can’t as he has been killed. Old Man then consoles Khoka and asks about his home.
OLD MAN : I know it feels like that, son. I'd also thought – blackout. But let's go now.

KHOKA : Where?

OLD MAN : Where else? Home. Where's yours?

KHOKA : I don't have a home. I had one, now I don't. I've been killed.

OLD MAN : I see, lost your way haven't you? Why talk in riddles dear boy? That's the problem with your generation – no straight talk, only poetry. (39)

Sircar takes Old Man and Khoka as examples to show the gap that lies between the mentalities of the older and the younger generation. According to Sircar, older generation had a deep sense of commitment and a clear vision whereas younger generation is more emotional and less practical. Veena Noble Dass rightly remarks, “The past and the present, youth and age coalesce as the Old Man and the Boy discover that they are part of the same continuum, and share a similar dilemma”
Old Man invites Khoka to his house which is located towards the North direction. As the Old Man and Khoka struggle to find a way to the real home, they find a number of colourful processions meandering their way around the streets of the city. Old Man feels that he is lost in the dim and uproar of the processions and cries for the way to his real home.

OLD MAN : Such colours of the processions, such forms. So many words in the processions, so many sounds. I'm lost in the colours of their banners, lost in the sounds of marching feet, lost and straying, lost and straying, lost and no returning. Lost as I walk the roads and crossroads, roam the byways and highways, still lost – which way is home? The way home is lost to me. To my real home, my really truly only home. Where’s the procession that’ll show me my way home? The really truly only Michhil? There – again! Again a procession, more processions, there, coming – there! (46)
Chorus then enters the scene shouting slogans. Very soon the sky is charged with different kinds of slogans uttered vociferously by Chorus indicating various processions. But Old Man feels greatly annoyed at them and with a ray of hope looks forward to the real procession to come.

**CHORUS**: Student’s unity zindabad — zindabad, zindabad!

Workers of the world, unite — unite, unite!

Inquilaab zindabad — zindabad, zindabad!

Break the black hand of Imperialism — break it, crush it!

Finish off capitalists exploitation — Finish it off, finish it off!

**OLD MAN**: Processions. Processions. They come. They will come. They will come one day. They really truly only procession. When will it come? When will it? When? When? (46-47)

At this critical moment Khoka rises driving out his anger with a sense of revulsion and disappointment. He reveals his disagreement towards
the various processions to the audience and considers them as death processions. He then tells the audience that for every six seconds one like him is dying of starvation. He accuses audience saying that every day in the battlefields thousands like him are dying and they are simply watching processions. He condemns them saying that they are not watching processions but in fact watching murders. Though they are silently watching the killings, they are unaware of the fact that they are in turn killing themselves.

KHOKA : .... Yes, you kill, you have killed. I'm killing, you are killing – we are killers, all. We all kill, we all get killed. We kill by sitting quietly and doing nothing at all, we get killed. Our silent watching our silent sitting all this kills. Stop it! Stop it! (48)

While Khoka is accusing the audience, the police officer enters the scene assisted by five men in the form of Chorus. He then arrests Khoka and in a series of stunning scenes they murder Khoka in different ways by beheading and hanging him cruelly. The lights go out at once and the death cry of Khoka becomes audible in the darkness to the audience. As the lights come up, Khoka’s dead body is
found lying on the floor. Old Man tells the audience that Khoka is not
dead in fact he is lost. But Khoka starts arguing with Old Man saying
that he is dead.

OLD MAN : .... But Khoka’s not dead. He is
only lost. Getting lost and staying
lost and now grown so old ...

KHOKA : I’ve been killed.

OLD MAN : (patiently) No, not killed. You are
lost.

KHOKA : They have killed me. I am dead.

OLD MAN : No, you are not dead, you are lost.
Like me.

KHOKA : It’s the same thing.

OLD MAN : The same thing? If you are lost you
can search, if you search you can
find. But if you are dead, can you
search? Can you find if you can’t
search?

Nothing to search for, nothing to
find. Only death! (48-49)

When Khoka choose a way to walk in, Old Man tells Khoka that he too
follows him as he had lost his home in childhood. But Khoka stops him
saying, “Why are you following me? Go back.” (49) Old Man replies to Khoka as he had lost his home, he has no any choice left other than following him.

After walking a few steps Khoka finds himself at the same place where he started his journey. Old Man repeatedly suggests Khoka to keep searching the road at every bend. But Khoka finds the same road and the same place again and again. Getting angry with Old Man’s suggestions, Khoka shouts at him saying, “Been searching so long now you’re lost?” (50) When Khoka asks Old Man the reason for not going back to his home, he reveals the patent truth that lies behind it.

OLD MAN : Lost and lost and lost again ...

KHOKA : But never gone back?

OLD MAN : But never gone back. There’s no going back, once you’re lost you can’t go back ...

KHOKA : Why didn’t you die?

OLD MAN : One can’t die, one can’t search once one is dead ...

KHOKA : Why do you search?

OLD MAN : So that I may find, one can’t find if one is dead …
Later, both decide to search together the real home and begin to walk together. During their journey they realize the awful truth that they are not different but are one and the same person in reality.

KHOKA : What’s your name?
OLD MAN : Khoka. It was. Yours?
KHOKA : Khoka. It is.
KHOKA : Is. Was. Is. Was. (51)

Old Man then hears a faint note of music coming from a distance. He tells Khoka that a real procession is coming at long last to show them a way to the real home which they dreamt. Meanwhile, Chorus comes in as a procession accompanied by music holding one another’s hand singing a song of hope. Old Man holds Khoka’s hand and leads him up to the procession. Very soon they become part of it. The play ends with the audience joining the procession.
A close study of the play reveals the readers that it is intensely sensible and extremely satirical in nature. By dramatizing a series of processions, Sircar wants to present the contemporary city life in all its aspects. The play is realistic not only in content but also in expression. All the processions that Old Man and Khoka witness from the beginning of the play are the processions that are generally seen in Indian society. The final simple procession consisting of the proletariat and people-oriented political ideology is what a real procession ought to be. “The conclusion of Michhil unites the two Khokas, dead and alive, past and present, young and old, lost and found, victim and conscientized. In an enormously optimistic and rousing conclusion, the chorus link hands to form a ‘procession of dreams’ around the acting arena, joined by the Khokas who invite those members of the audience who would like to do so to follow on in a singing procession.” 2
REFERENCES

*. Badal Sircar, *Procession, Three Plays* (Calcutta: Seagull Publications, 1983). All further references are from this text parenthetically numbered.
