

EXPERIMENTATION



CHAPTER III

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I hear and I forget

I listen and I remember

I do and I understand.

– A Chinese proverb.

The mystery of life is revealed through well-defined actions. Among the literary genres, action packed drama is the most effective tool for communication. The dramatist projects a photographic view of man and society through the live presentation of emotions, inner and outer conflicts and thought processes of both an individual and a group. The permutation of the aural, visual and verbal impact of a play lasts longer in memory than any other repertoire, for the audience participate instantaneously in the activities that proceed on the stage. But Badal Sircar's theatre is much more, which involves 'being within and experiencing' laying stress on the actively involved participation of the audience either as characters or as onlookers who understand the message clearly by close contact.

The prominent reasons for transferring the venue of performance from the proscenium to the Third Theatre have been discussed in the "Introduction" itself. Yet, to ensure coherence it is listed and reinforced briefly here also. The reasons are his aversion towards the sentimental plays performed in the proscenium arch, the theatrical impasse created by the 'Folk' and 'Western' theatres of Calcutta, the financial constraints, his visit to some foreign countries and above all his humaneness to take theatre unto the last man. Chris Banfield interprets the rejection of proscenium arch stage as not only "a move towards a more flexible and

intimate playing arena, but also as a refusal to be compromised by both the dramatic fare of bourgeois entertainment and the commercial ethos of the inheritors of the colonial theatre in Calcutta" (119-120).

Sircar's Third Theatre is also a "theatre of synthesis", which synthesizes rural and urban forms of theatre within India and also the Western elements.

Reductively described as 'Street theatre', its advent in the 1970s marked a significant point of departure in Sircar's career as dramatist, hitherto existent within the frame work of conventional indoor stage settings. 'Third Theatre' or 'Free Theatre' heralded a theatre intended for large audiences who could appreciate it paying only a minimal fee, if they could afford. Voluntary contributions could be made at the end of the play, but were often pre-empted by Panchayat funds or offers to be hosted.

Owing to all the aforesaid reasons, Sircar metamorphosed himself into a "performance theoretician" with the advent of lecture hall performances and "Angan Mancha" – small room theatres, which led to the formulation of the Third Theatre or the open-air, street theatre in the Seventies. He evolved his own style of intimate theatre, content and exploration of social issues. Though his theatre is an amalgamation of the influences of Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, and Julian Beck, it can never be perceived as a grafting of foreign concepts and practices.

Before commencing work in his Third Theatre, Sircar's theatre group, Satabdi had performed the most inoffensive comedies using all the conventions of the commercial theatre. Very soon they exhausted all financial means and ran short of both money and inspiration. At this juncture, Sircar disowned the theatre. Luckily for theatre goers, fortune favoured him and he toured the U.S.S.R., Poland and

Czechoslovakia and revised his idea of theatre. He made up his mind to do something radically different in the theatre.

Sircar's discussions with Richard Schechner, a Professor of Drama in the New York University and his wife Joan, the Principal actress of the Group "Environmental Space Theatre", paved the way for his tour of the U.S.A. which resulted in meeting the notable personalities of the "Living Theatre", Julian Beck, director of Living Theatre and Judith Malina. In Beck's theatre, the distinction between the 'stage' and the 'auditorium' is completely ignored. Performance goes on as a communal art. The plays deal with man's consciousness and responsibility. The sole purpose of Sircar's theatre is almost exactly the same. Sircar transported to his theatre the best elements which he had culled out from his encounters, exposures and experiences with theatre and theatre personalities of his time.

The Living Theatre of Julian Beck, which has a propagandist aim while forcefully engaging the audience, attracted Sircar's dramatic genius. Beck's play, The Connection uses a play within the play structure. About sustaining audience participation through that device, Beck writes:

It is true that our message, if you want to call it that, or our mission, was to involve or touch or engage the audience, not just show them something, but we did realize that these play – within-play devices arose out of a crying need on the part of the authors and of us, to reach the audience, to awaken them from their passive slumber, to provoke them into attention, shock them if necessary, and, this is also important, to involve the actors with what was happening in the audience" (Beck 21-22)

Instead of making an indirect appeal through such a device, Sircar makes a direct appeal to his audience- participants, through eye contacts with the audience or addressing them or calling them to participate.

Sircar's Third Theatre plays are significantly different from the conventional plays in the use of physical action to express certain themes which cannot be expressed effectively in words. Hence the actors in his theatre group are given special training. For instance, when Spartacus, which portrays a highly complex epic theme, was prepared as a Third Theatre play, Sircar gave the script to the members of the group, they "confronted the script, tried it, tested it, accepted, enriched, rejected and gradually began to build a structure that was much more than the written script" (Sircar Third Theatre 36). The process continued in the form of a workshop and "the performers explored and discovered the hidden potentialities of their bodies, of their voices. Basic exercises were learnt and new exercises were evolved from them to suit our needs" (Third Theatre 36), says Sircar.

In such theatre workshops, the participants are made to sit in a circle, so that there is no difference in status. The workshops remove the "psychological blocks" from which the "civilized" participants suffer. In the name of civilized behaviour man usually hides his real self and only what is desired most in the society is exhibited. Sircar is against such a pretension. A series of psycho-physical exercises are taught not for muscle building but to strengthen the flexibility of the spinal system. These exercises generate an inner voyage towards one's own self. The similarity of purpose achieved by these exercises can be compared with Yoga and Meditation practices which are perpetuated for disciplining thoughts, words and deeds, which ultimately lead to self-realization. The workshops also develop

the spirit of team work and trust. One of the most rewarding results of the workshops is the production of 'instant plays'. The workshops pave the way for free conversation, among free people about the problems of the world and find out the way towards mutual respect and tolerance. Plays like Stale News and Bhoma are workshop productions.

'Satabdi' was the first Bengali theatre group to recognize the value of a 'Poor theatre'. It minimized the use of sets, background music, costumes, tape recorders and projections by degrees. The idea of minimizing lights occurred due to technical failure during a performance. The incident is that the electric fuse blew during the most dramatic moment of a performance. The performance continued in complete darkness for nearly a minute and a half. Then the house lights on the ceiling came up, not the spot lights but the performance continued for nearly five minutes during which time "there was not a comment, not a murmur, not even a sign or rustle of movement from the audience" (Sircar Third Theatre 28). This emboldened Sircar to perform plays without using stage lights.

Sircar has been labelled as 'barefoot playwright' for having brilliantly succeeded in his attempt at discarding elaborate stage accessories like sets, props, costumes, make-up, spot lights, and sound effects. He has also reduced drama to its barest by dispensing with conventional story, plot, characters and dialogue. In the Third Theatre the distinction between the stage and the auditorium too is blurred. The same space is shared between the spectators and the performers to make theatre a "three dimensional reality" (Sircar Changing 20). He utilizes the poverty of his theatre and turns it into advantage instead of a restriction. The simplistic sets or even the absence of them are praised by both the audience and the critics alike for

being very creative. The *raison de'tre* is that these sets can be carried and erected anywhere.

In the context of theatre of conscientization, the plays are dialogic in the sense of catapulting open questions for further reflection. This reflection is usually a two-way process between the performers and the audience but it is a four way process in Badal Sircar's theatre. Sircar, an architect of theatre in modern India, feels that the relationship between the actors and the spectators is not that of a seller and a buyer. He expects the performer and the audience to be on the same wave length physically and mentally. Accordingly, theatre becomes a live wire whose strength lies in direct communication. While analysing the relationship between a poem and the reader in conveying the experience, Jayanta Mahapatra, an eminent Oriya poet, envisages a possibility of the poetic experience which reaches the reader spontaneously in the manner of electric charge passing through a good conductor as copper or iron. Theatrical experience of Sircar's plays does the same through four way communication from performer to spectator, spectator to spectator, spectator to performer and performer to performer.

An illustration of Sircar's emphasis on communication can be understood from the experience of Aravasu, a character who plays the role of an actor in Karnad's The Fire and the Rain: "I can feel the audience reaching out to me – their warmth coming in wave after wave lapping against me. I am good" (83). It is vice-versa too in Sircar's theatre, for the audience also gain a similar experience. The observation of Martin Cobin about Indian theatre is that the interaction between performers and audience at the moment of performance is given undivided attention in Asian theatre and thus it achieves more consistent intensity than in the theatres of the West. It is noteworthy and applicable to Sircar's theatre. Sircar's

insistence on the actor's body as the chief instrument for communication in theatre is a stylized, modified version of what is said in The Natya Sastra. The Natya Sastra describes four types of vehicles or conveyances relating to Speech, Body, Spirit and Assemblage which the performers use in theatrical communication. Of these the greatest attention is lavished by way of most detailed description and minute classification of body related conveyance. The body movements which are equated to 'Abhinaya' in a dance performance as used in The Natya Sastra means "that which carries across, conveys the significance of the theatrical performance" (Kale 117) through various movements, postures and gestures of the limbs. Speech, physical actions and the spectacle are aspects of a theatre. The aspect which is emphasized most decides the nature of a particular theatre. "The character which a theatre takes depends upon the weight distribution of the literary, the physical-mimetic and the optical events" (Kale 146). According to this classification, Sircar's Third Theatre is the "play stage" of a physical-mimetic event.

Sircar's approach to acting is unique, since the whole unit and not the protagonist, an individual, is important. The effort is a joint, co-operative one, and its effectiveness is in proportion to the co-operation and solidarity among the members of the group. Here the potentialities of the human body for communication are utilized to the maximum. "Because of the use of these vast potentialities, because the content is closely related to the issues and problems of the audience in the village, and finally, because the form is so closely related to the culture of the people, the Third Theatre is not at all a poor medium, but rather a very rich form" (70) says, Desmond A. D'Abreo.

Today Sircar stands in the forefront of a new theatrical movement called 'free theatre'. He defines the word free in two dimensions: firstly, one need not pay to watch the show. Secondly, in a much wider connotation, there is no bondage, no dependence, and no domination. In the words of Ipsita Chanda, "it worked a free flow between the viewer and performer; and it was free of commercial or stage patronage" (69).

Just like the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, whose primary concern was the intense training of actors, Sircar's theatre workshops for actors benefitted them to a great extent. Every actor felt equally important and the result is a "universal active interest" on the part of the actors. Even those who were considered as bad actors either by themselves or by others excelled in physical acting. The inhibition or shyness, the chief enemy of an actor was removed through the eradication of "psychological blocks". By this act the performer is able to remove his mask of 'civilization' and lay bare his real self, to make an earnest appeal to the spectators to take off their masks too. "When that happens, theatre becomes a real human event, a real meeting of human beings; not mask to mask, armour to armour, but man to man" (28), says Sircar in Changing Language of Theatre.

Sircar's Third Theatre serves two purposes: Firstly, an intimate theatre is established to enable intense emotional communication possible between the performers and the spectators. Second, a theatre which goes to the threshold of the peasants and the proletariats, free of cost, is evolved on humanitarian grounds. Sircar sums up indicating the difference between the small room theatre and the open air performance:

Although the philosophies of the two kinds of the new theatre are the same, the respective languages differ considerably. The environment of the

intimate theatre obtained by the arrangements of seats, the individual approach made possible by the proximity of the spectators, the intensity of communication, the subtlety of projection – all these are not to be had in an open air performance in a village or a park where sometimes thousands of people gather. (Changing 36)

But this may be compensated by the fact that his theatre reaches the working classes, who would never have come to his intimate theatre. Sircar's ideas and concepts of the Third Theatre are thus explicated and explained. Through his Third Theatre, Sircar wants to communicate clear-cut facts and concrete truths about the oppression or exploitation of the rural folk. He wants his message to reach both the urban and the rural audience of India, especially the villagers and the labourers. A work of art is an act of reverence to the community and Badal Sircar expresses his social commitment by raising the conscience of his audience both in the proscenium and the Third Theatre. His theatre aims at conscientization of the masses and social reform.

In the words of Kironmoy Raha, Badal Sircar shows, "a grasp over the craft of play writing, a flair for dramatic language and a confident spirit of experimentation". Above all, he is "concerned with contemporary problems of individual and collective existence" (177). His exploration has never been motivated by a desire to experiment for the sake of experiment. But he has been motivated by a passionate personal response to the injustices and oppressions endured by the poor, which gets effectively exemplified in his Procession and Bhoma. This chapter takes up these two plays and explores the experiments of Sircar in the light of his Third Theatre.

Sircar produced his own plays and adapted old plays or assembled workshop creations to embody and emphasize the concept of live communication in his Third Theatre. In order to meet the demands of his theatre he started with Procession. It is a brain child of Sircar which has a long gestation period in his mind about making a kind of montage on Calcutta, its streets, chatting in tea shops, conversations in the coffee houses, and different scenes in the offices.

Calcutta symbolizes divergent ideas to different writers. The city of "Calcutta is projected as a powerful symbol of the twin aspects of creation and destruction and also the overwhelming, indifferent forces of life against which human characters heroically struggle to find some personally relevant meaning" (Chakraverty 54), to Anita Desai. In his Changing Language of Theatre in 1982, Sircar described Calcutta as an artificial city created in the Colonial interest of a foreign nation, a monster city that grew by sucking the blood of a vast rural hinterland which perhaps is the true India. He finds it a city of alien culture based on English education, representing, distorting, buying, promoting for sale, the real culture of the country. Moreover, Calcutta vividly strikes Sircar as a city of processions. "It is one of the very few plays where I had the idea of the production even before I began writing it, particularly the procession idea", Ella Dutta quotes the words of Sircar. (Three Plays vii). In Angan Mancha at the Academy of Fine Arts, Sircar arranged the seats in such a way that streets and lanes were worked inside the audience. Only after ascertaining the workability, he wrote the play.

As the title indicates the central idea of the play, Procession unfolds through a series of processions that rock the city of Calcutta. It is about the search for a real home, a new society where there is no poverty, no ignorance, no inequality and no exploitation. Through Procession, Sircar exposes some of the Post-Colonial

problems like unemployment, frustration, unhealthy politics, religious fanaticism, loss of direction, materialism, heartless business and administration sectors – all leading to human degradation. The term "Procession" itself emanates from the painful Post-Colonial situation. It concretizes the agony of the suffering masses at different levels and serves as a metaphor for fighting against the evil forces. For instance the exploitation of the rural masses by the money lenders finds expression through the words of THREE: "The untimely rain left all the rice rotting, our debts with the money lenders have risen to a mountain" (24).

The theme of the play is internalized through "a relentless" flow of events "most skillfully concretized in the choreographic movement of the scene" (Dass Modern Indian Drama 65). The spectators are made to sit on benches with their backs facing each other and the actors jog, run or walk and they move in between the audience too. The characters are constantly on the move. A bewildering environment is created along with the movements of the actors. It brings out an intense dramatic effect. The spectators feel that they are in the midst of a live procession.

In Procession too, as in Evam Indrajit, where four late comers, who search for a place to sit are called to come on the stage and are converted into participating characters, five men and a woman search for a place to sit among the audience. They are not christened. They are given only numbers ONE to SIX. They function as chorus not in the traditional sense of informing about the course of the play, but they comment on the various current issues and problems of the society by putting themselves into the shoes of various other characters, performing or playing multiple roles. They represent the multitudinous common lot and become choric commentators.

The characters, Old Man and Khoka look forward to a world where there is no oppression, no exploitation and people live in harmony and peace. Sircar's dream of a Utopia is visualized in the final procession to change the existing condition of the society. Before the last procession of men, a series of other processions march on. But the protagonists have no faith in all these processions as they lead only to death – death of hope for future. All these processions symbolize the various wrong approaches made by man to establish an "egalitarian society". Finally, "a real procession" consisting of "men" arrives to show the really real way to "the real home" inviting the audience to join them.

The play begins abruptly with a confusion of voices in a black out. The chorus ONE to SIX question each other about the power shut down and wonder whether some one has been murdered or has "fallen into a hole", since they hear some one screaming. Suddenly, the lights come up. The stentorian voice of the Police officer orders the people to return home. His words, "Who is killed? No one was killed... Non-sense. False rumours. Get back to your homes" (5-6) checks the cacophony and confusion for time being. The repeated admonitions of the Police officer, bawls them into silence. It brings to mind the police repression at Calcutta.

Khoka, a young man, one of the central characters, the other being an old man, sitting with the audience suddenly falls to the floor in a heap. He represents the present and also the younger generation. His fall symbolizes death, innumerable deaths taking place everyday throughout the world, due to various forms of oppressions. He rises up, sits, begins to walk but everyone ignores his presence. It again represents the recurrence of such death- like struggles and man's disregard

for the problems of fellow-human beings. Khoka's words draw the attention of the audience:

Khoka. I was killed. I am here. I've been killed.... They killed me. I'm dead. It was just now. I was killed right now. I was killed today. I was killed yesterday.... I was killed the day before the day before. Last week. Last month. Last year. I am killed everyday..... dead everyday. I'll be killed tomorrow. Day after, the day after day after, next week. Next month. Next year. I. I. Why can't you see me? Why can't you hear me? (6-7).

Khoka's words gather into a piercing scream as earlier but the Police officer goes across the fallen body of Khoka oblivious of its presence. Khoka's death thus becomes a symbol of many other identical deaths owing to death of values which lead to oppression and inhumanity. In the opinion of Bharucha, as the play progresses, "Khoka continues to be 'murdered' by the daily pressures, the political hypocrisies and the everyday calamities of life in Calcutta. The dreadful irony, of course, is that he continues to survive being murdered" (158).

Khoka's predicament is juxtaposed with the dilemma of another character, the Old man. Khoka is constantly murdered whereas the old man is lost, having lost his sense of direction to his real home, throughout the play. The Old Man jumps into the acting area, wearing a clown's cap, from the other entrance. Though he resembles a clown, he in reality is like Shakespeare's fool with wisdom and philosophical bent of mind. He enters, reminiscing about the day on which he was lost when he was a child. "With infectious charm, Sircar plays the curiosity of a child discovering streets for the first time. He runs through the passages in the audience marvelling that the corner of one passage leads to another which ends in a

corner that leads to yet another passage"(158), comments Bharucha after watching Sircar play the role of the old man.

The chorus performs the role of the father and relatives of the lost child who search for him. They announce over the radio, through the customs station and give various SOS messages, to search for the lost child. After this "marvellously evocative" scene the old man returns, maintaining that he is still lost. He continues to roam the streets but they are a maze to him. There is no one to lead him towards the right direction. In accordance with the saying, "All roads lead to Rome", he goes through various streets, crosses and lanes but comes to the same road. He asks addressing the audience, "Where's the Michhil? The really real Michhil?" (11) [Michhil is a Bengali word for procession], which will take him to the new home. The protagonists Old Man and Khoka represent the past and the present, old age and youth respectively. When they meet each other, they realize that they are one and the same with the same objectives and search for a real home, an ideal society.

The old man's search for the 'true' procession is interrupted by the members of the chorus who jog around the performing area, shouting headlines from different newspapers. Hot news pertaining to the ever contemporary situation from hike in oil prices and food commodities, train accident, earth quake, cyclone, test match cricket, loss for the transport, postponed exams, the charges and counter arguments of politicians, spiritual messages to the pride of a patriotic poet are reported by the chorus, by taking different points along the road. ONE, a member of the chorus, brings six fool's caps made of newspapers. The actors, ONE to SIX, wear the caps and run along the road. Running fast, they begin to spread news with great

enthusiasm at the beginning, then they walk slowly and finally the gait changes into a tired, slow walk.

The play is a typical collage of the assorted scenes of life in Calcutta. The newspaper scene is juxtaposed with a most effective evocation of sounds in a railway station. This scene is enacted by the members of the chorus imitating a train's siren and transforming themselves into a train making a round with whistles and 'jug-jug' of a train. Then they break up into familiar train types like, vendors and beggars. They vie with one another to attract the attention of the spectators. While the members of the chorus ONE to FIVE imitate hawkers in a train, SIX takes up the role of a beggar woman with a song.

Yet another vignette of life in Calcutta is presented through passengers hanging out of the entrance to a bus. "The actors mimic this familiar sight by clustering together in a mass with their hands stretched upward and clasped in a tight knot. When they begin to shuffle around the room in this state, fighting, arguing, shouting, one has a most vivid image of the people of Calcutta getting to work every morning" (159) Bharucha says. Life continues in the same fashion not only in Calcutta but all over India even today.

The search for the true procession continues as Khoka and the Old Man reappear. The Policeman also makes a sudden appearance repeating his familiar lines : "No one is murdered , no one is lost. Everything is in order" (17). He orders the procession to start. As a reaction to this reassurance that life in Calcutta is normal, the chorus in the form of a band of singers plays various musical instruments off-key. The musical interlude leads to a riotous sequence where the chorus enacts the frenzied "devotion" of young Bengalis who take clay deities to the river Hooghly to immerse them during the Festivals. The Goddess Kali is

represented by an actor who lolls out his tongue irreverently. They also enact a "Ratha yatra" by keeping their hands upwards over their heads to suggest the crest of the "Ratha". They mime pulling and say, "Glory to the great God Jagannatha". Suddenly they turn out to be a 'Muharram' procession. The next procession chants Christmas carols. The enthusiasm of the religious activities is the counter point for a melange of patriotic cries and slogans like "Quit India", "Hindu Muslim Ek Ho", "God save the King", "Death to the British Dogs", from yet another sequence.

It is one of the strategies of Sircar which alternates the nationalist slogan of India "Bande Mataram" with the religious cry of the Muslims, "Allah O Akbar" to heighten the effect of contrast. It provokes the communal riot and the actors fight and collapse on the floor. As soon as they recover, they go to every individual spectator seeking their assistance, begging for survival. The scene makes a strong appeal to the emotions of the spectators and they begin to feel deeply for the utter helplessness of the refugees. Immediately, the chorus gathers together and sings "Sare Jehan se Achcha" – one of the most popular songs of the Freedom Movement in India. According to Bharucha, "there cannot be a more ironic juxtaposition even though the rendition of the song is appropriately fervent" (160).

The barrenness of Indian patriotism is exposed in the next sequence which is an ironic comment about the state of 'Free India'.

FIVE. Freedom is Saffron.

FOUR. Revolution is Green.

THREE. The pocket is red.

TWO. The market is black.

ONE. The mustard flower is yellow. (21)

The last line refers to a common Bengali idiom which translates 'seeing the mustard flower' as 'feeling lost in utter confusion', according to the translator's note. The chorus dances imitating the pot bellied black marketeers. This scene clearly illustrates the greed of business people in free India.

As in the morality plays where 'virtues' and 'vices' assume and evolve human characters, the ruling class is caricatured in the guise of 'the Master' in the garb of a pure Punjabi and Nehru cap. The depiction of the ruling class thus emanates from Sircar's characteristic way of producing anti-establishment plays. The relationship between the master and the masses is that of master and slave. As soon as the master enters, the [crowd] chorus kneels at his feet and he sits on their backs and utters pious platitudes as follows:

Remember our national heritage. Remember the numberless martyrs in our struggle for freedom. Remember the revolutionary heroes of our fiery days.... Remember the invincible strength of the principle of non-violence. Remember it's our responsibility to give spiritual leadership to the world. Remember the greatness of democracy in India.... Remember the Green Revolution, the Nationalization of Banks, Family Planning, the Dollar aid, the nuclear blast, arrest under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act".

(21)

This sequence, as a political satire presents the highly incompatible situations in Indian politics. It is interesting to note the words of Bharucha in this regard: "The preposterous juxtapositions of "Help the Dollar" (an imaginary scheme), "M.I.S.A." (a repressive law passed by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency) and Indian "democracy" never fail to amuse Sircar's audience" (160).

In the course of the procession it becomes increasingly clear that the masses of Calcutta represented by the chorus rely on the ruling class for their sufferance. They continue to accept the corruption and beg for relief from their sordid life and wish to be enlightened by 'the Master'. Their conversation reveals their despicable condition of life by presenting the problems of unemployment, exploitation of the poor, adulteration of food, harassment of the police and domestic discord, in general the mound of corruption in society resulting in human degradation. The stress and strain of living is unbearable to the masses. They ask for a solution to their problems but 'their master' gives them a 'solution' – in the form of liquor. While they touch his feet, he reassures them with false hopes. Despite his hypocritical blessings nothing changes the life of the people. The master figure also symbolizes innumerable fake-religious leaders who cheat the innocent masses.

The Old Man and Khoka meet again. The Police officer appears and repeatedly orders the people to go home. The lights go off and come. This scene takes one to the assimilation of the happenings of the opening sequence of the play. Khoka informs the Old Man that he has been killed. Again the Old Man reassures him that he has simply lost his way like him and offers to show him the way. It is quite ironical that the Old Man, who has lost his way home, comes forward to show the way. He has no clear sense of direction, though belonging to the elder generation he is unable to guide the younger ones. The old man says, "I see. It's the road that's got lost. Fine, you can come to my house. My house is to the north. Hey can you tell me which way is the north?" (29).

In accordance with the non-sequential movement of the entire play, the next sequence is radically different in tone and perspective. Sircar exploits the chorus to voice out his condemnation of certain values and assumptions shared by the

bourgeois audience. Through the chorus Sircar presents a "litany of middle-class prejudices, complaints and demands" (Bharucha 161). He indirectly attacks the ennui and selfishness of the middle-class:

ONE. Why should we remain a weak nation for ever?

TWO. How could he marry that girl? A Brahmin marrying a low caste?...

THREE. The lower classes are getting so impertinent. Even the rickshaw-wallahs put on airs.

.....

FIVE. Eat, drink and be merry, and don't care a damn.

That's the finest policy. We've just had enough of sermons. (32-33).

All the above expressions of the members of the chorus amplify the narrow mindedness, reservations, jealousy and complacency of a particular section of Indian society who are opposed to any change in society.

'The Master' instructs the Police officer to provide art and culture to keep men happy and enjoy their lives. He says, if "dirty doubts surface, let the flow of pleasure wash over them"(34). This is how the ruling class desensitizes the people through aesthetic pleasure. In the name of art, culture and civilization ordinary man is quietened of his ability to question the oppression and suppression through caste, religion, class, gender, and also education. After witnessing a colourful lucrative procession, which sings the glory of the nation hiding all anomalies, Khoka shouts:

Stop it. Stop fooling the people. It's not the truth. (To the audience) How can you tolerate it? Don't you see it's all lies? A fraud on you? An attempt to get you all confused? I have been killed, I'm killed everyday. I shall be

killed everyday. That's the truth. You try to cover that truth up in the dark of the night, in the din of the day. But you can't. I won't allow you to cover it up. Please don't allow them to cover it up. (34)

Sircar unveils or hits at police untruths, government or political hypocrisies, media lies etc., due to which his plays are commented upon as anti-establishment plays. He considers art, culture, and civilization as factors benumbing the sensitivity of people because they have become pseudo-arts in the contemporary world. He whips at the exposition of such pseudo-factors of the media, for they entertain people and divert their attention away from the vital issues that trouble humanity.

The chorus enacts numerous processions in a frenetic sequence, including the employees' association demanding the government for a pay hike, the students' federation and that of the workers' union with some other demands. The Old Man is carried away by the words, sounds and banners of the colourful processions and eagerly looks forward, with hope for "the really real Michhil". But, Khoka is hopeless. He has no faith in all the shadowy processions. With anger and a sense of disgust and disillusionment he makes a reference to those who die everyday of starvation, atomic explosions and the day to day battle for survival. He makes a direct appeal to the audience:

Everyday in the battle fields, thousands die, thousands of I's like me. (To the audience) You sit on the side lines watching procession, (shrieking) you are watching murders, murders! You sit in peace watching murders, you are killed yourselves, you kill. Yes, you kill, you have killed. I'm killing, you are killing. We are all killers. We all kill, we all get killed. We kill by sitting quietly and doing nothing at ease, we get killed. Stop it. Stop it. (37).

The central idea or the crux of the play thus conveyed resembles Baki Itihas and Sesh Nei, where Sircar deals with the relationship between individual guilt and social responsibility. The words of Khoka, hit hard at man's ability to stay happy in his own happy world without caring for the unhappy surroundings.

Once again Khoka's death cry is heard. He gets up and walks very fast. The Old Man follows him. The old man convinces Khoka that he is not dead but 'lost' like him in the quagmire of loveless life. He offers to join Khoka in his search for a new home. He says, "I was supposed to lead. I couldn't. I got lost. Now I can only follow." (39) Khoka, like Indrajit is tired of treading the same road and says with dejection, "Where can I go? It's the same old road. You go round and round and come back to the same, the same old...." (40). Like the Writer in Evam Indrajit, the old man encourages Khoka to walk some more distance and continue his search for the real home. Led by Khoka the Old Man continues his search. But they are unable to find the road. Finally they decide to search together despite many differences between them. The ending of the play is reminiscent of Evam Indrajit at one stage but it is farther than that in overtly projecting an optimistic note. It denotes a bright future. Khoka and the Old Man walk together holding their hands. Their grave faces change, there is smile on their faces, the tired pace is firmer now. There is still no definite hope but a passion for movement and rhythm.

The past and the present, youth and age coalesce as the Old Man and Khoka realize that they are a part of the same continuum and share a similar dilemma. Bharucha states: "In one breath-taking sequence that becomes increasingly spirited and hectic, the two characters stride around the stage chanting, 'Was. Is. Was. Is....' two seemingly innocuous and colourless words that bind them together in

their final search" (163). When they are awestruck at their newly found stamina, the Old Man hears the sound of the true procession, with pleasant music, approaching. It is the much-awaited procession of men, the procession that will show the way home.

The true "procession of men" appears represented by the members of the chorus who hold their hands together, singing the most haunting song suggesting that it is a "procession of dreams" which Khoka and the Old Man have dreamt. It also implies the humaneness which leads to a new world. The Old Man and Khoka join the procession with those who join them from among the audience to find out the really real road. The moment the spectators and actors intermingle is one of those moments in theatre when one becomes aware of the possibilities of life and the essential brotherhood of men. Sircar thus emphasizes the need for collective effort to find solution to the existing problems of society.

Procession is therefore a sardonic satire on Calcutta which symbolizes the entire country, perhaps the whole of the third world countries. The processions which are short-sighted, showy and full of "sound and fury" signify nothing. According to Reddy, "the only procession that is spared, rather welcomed is the last procession consisting of peasants and workers who seem to take a procession with a view to enlightening the masses on the need for the collapse of the capitalist system and the consequent rise of a socialist system" ("Real way" 154).

Though the playwright does not aim at structural unity in Procession, it is moulded into an organic whole by virtue of its thematic unity. The similarity of the various processions with a common feature – the ideas of survival geared towards the fulfilment of short term goals, which are characterized by their

reformatory and not revolutionary nature – represent a unified spectacle, thereby achieving a unity of its own (Reddy “Real way”156).

Badal Sircar, an experimenter and planner of communicative processes entered the Indian theatre at the time of innovations and experiments. There is no plot, story or character in the conventional sense in his Third Theatre plays. His unconventional dramatic techniques nourish the themes and give wholeness to the plays. Though he refuses the employment of technical devices to enhance the play, his brilliant wielding of form is exemplary. In this affiliation he is highly technical and technically innovative. For instance, his theatre, following the theatre activism of Jerzy Grotowski, discards elaborate stage paraphernalia like costume, props, make-up, light and sound and uses human body as the only tool. He adopts theatrical simplicity. The actors choreograph the pattern of their bodily movements to suit the message with the accompaniment of a song and dhol (drum) percussion. The strength of this new form is its reliance on the strength of the message conveyed, the physical acting of the actors, an intimate environment, considerable use of chants, non-verbal sounds, alternate music and above all a set of enthusiastic spectators without whom no theatre is complete.

Almost all the features of the Third Theatre are found in the experimental play Procession, written exclusively for the Third Theatre. The seating arrangements differ from play to play and thereby a greater flexibility is achieved in performer-spectator relationship. The system of using chairs, which means seats of the same level, poses difficulty for the back row audience, as the performance is held on the floor and not on a platform. Therefore, seats of three different heights – low, medium and high – are furnished. This kind of seating arrangement enables audience participation and intimacy. For Procession the seats are arranged in such

a way that a maze of passage is obtained with the spectators sitting on both sides of the passage. There are two entrances and the performers are always on the move and take positions among the audience. The seating arrangement is very important for it is inherent in the structure of the play. The actors move among the spectators and create a feeling of a live procession and it facilitates the audience to become a part and parcel of the play with optimum involvement. The criss-cross roads in Procession symbolize the cultural labyrinth where people get lost, by being disoriented and dehumanized. The play generates a live first hand experience for both the actors and the audience by directly involving them with the current problems of the society. The structure of the play itself thus paves the way for proximity between the spectators and the performers, direct communication, and involvement.

In the Elizabethan play house or any kind of theatre where the stage and the auditorium are very close, the force of the aside, the soliloquy and varieties of other ways of indirect addresses to the audience are essentially invitations to participate in the dramatic experience. Contrary to this, in Sircar's theatre, direct address, close-contact or direct interaction between the performer and the spectator takes place to facilitate personal involvement on the part of the spectators in the dramatic proceedings as well as theatrical experience. In Procession the Old Man's very first dialogue is an invitation to the audience to participate in the numerous processions. The Old Man invites:

Chha Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ra Ya Hu-u-u- Michhil Michhil. Funeral Michhils, demonstrations, walks, auspicious journeys, inauspicious journeys, non-journeys. Come along, come along, the Michhil's on the move. Be quick and join.... Take your seats on both sides of the course,

choose convenient places. Come along, come along fast, take your seats – it's the Michhil, Michhil, Michhil's for food and clothes, Michhil's for salvation, Michhil's for the revolution.... (7-8)

Then again towards the end of the play Khoka, who is disgusted with the false "processions of death" conscientizes the spectators by addressing them and points out to their ineptitude in controlling the disasters in the world: (To audience) "You sit on the sidelines watching processions, (Shrieking) you are watching murders, murders! You sit in peace watching murders" (37). Genuinely the shell – shocked audience realize that in reality they have been watching scenes of utmost cruelties without cognizance and are ashamed to comprehend their inhuman inconsideration.

This sort of direct address to the audience and the proximity between the actors and the spectators lead to the whole-hearted physical and conscious not imaginary involvement of the audience. The audience in the play participate in the final procession, the "really real" procession of "men" with the chorus, Khoka and the Old Man holding one another's hands. Sircar's theatre thus makes use of distinct "words" addressed directly to the spectators than "dialogues" among the characters. The audience are also participants in the play, so that the personal involvement which arises on behalf of the actors and the audience makes them leave the theatre with a troubled conscience which will certainly result in a desirable change in the social set up in the future.

For a long time in the history of theatre, particularly in India, a play depends mainly on story and characters. The intention behind such a depiction is to make the spectators identify themselves with the characters and their problems which are extensions of the social problems. However, the view of Sircar is different: "This

is all very well, but this certainly is not the limit of theatre. For a long time I have been trying to break through this system of 'story' and 'characters' and in my plays 'theme' and 'types' respectively began to replace them gradually " (Third Theatre 34). Hence he began to use 'groups' in place of 'characters' or 'types'.

Sircar emphasizes group acting and subsequently the members of the chorus ONE to SIX, five men and a woman enact all the processions in the play and they invariably represent the common human beings. The different parts of the play are assembled together only through the chorus-based sequences. Sircar has dispensed with the mechanical division of the play into acts and scenes, the sequence of time and space too.

Jatra is a long-established indigenous folk theatre tradition specific to the region of Bengal. The function of chorus is exemplified through "Vivek" in Jatra which is a traditional open-air performance in the form of a devotional procession. Balwant Gargi summarizes the function of 'Vivek' which means conscience in the twentieth century and describes it as a character who warns the central character against his misdeeds. He appears, "dressed like a mad man – his eyes glazed, his head and feet bare, his beard tangled – he wears a robe of black, saffron, or white. His movements are sharp and conclusive. He enters the gang way on the run and disappears in the same way" (Folk Theatre of India 29). Though he does not stay on the stage for ever he has a definite dramatic function. He comments on the action by his song, externalizes the feeling of the character, plays his double that is his conscience, and puts questions to him. "He is everybody's shadow, a running commentary on actions and events. He lives in the past, present and future" (Folk Theatre of India 29).

Unlike 'Vivek' enacted by a single character in Jatra plays, chorus in Sircar's theatre is a group of actors representing everyman and the follies and foibles common to humanity. The character of chorus becomes 'choric' as it pervades throughout the play, whereas "Vivek" appears at times of crises and then disappears. Another distinction from the traditional function of chorus in Sircar's theatre is 'role playing'. It comes handy to Sircar and the chorus takes innumerable roles in the play. In Procession the spectators are continually engaged by a bombardment of sound and action from the chorus, from the beginning of the play amid confusions during the black out and also intermingled in every procession and other activities throughout the play.

The positive and negative aspects of joining together of individuals and communities under a common banner is presented through the multifarious processions. Sircar employs the chorus to mock at blind faith in religion, sloganeering for its own sake, communal riots and black marketeers. For instance, the chorus sings: "Glory be to the Lord Krishna, incarnation of the markets. We bow at the feet of the Lord Black market. Hail to the Black God. The Black God will save us all. Vote for Mr.Blackie Marketwala. Vote fore Mr. Blackie Marketwala" (21).

As Chris Banfield puts it, "the rhetoric of power from the mouths of religious leaders, politicians or from along the corridors of bureaucratic officers is placed in disturbing and ironic juxtaposition with the awful whine of (ignored) beggar woman appealing for bread" (131) and many more assembly of sounds which have poetic intensity are also performed by the chorus. Sircar's use of chorus is ultimately vital, stressing not only the universal nature of the characters or groups he creates in his plays, but also exemplifying the fragmented collage of

perspectives and identities. A remarkable feature of the chorus in Procession is that the actors fluidly take on roles and then merge back into the group, naturally and efficiently.

Apart from the chorus, the protagonists, Khoka the youngman and the Old Man, the Police officer, and the master have no individual traits and are not 'characters' in the real sense of the word but they have symbolic functions. Khoka, the everyman victim, is repeatedly killed by the forces of authority like police repression, establishment hypocrisy, race riot and so on. "Sircar imaginatively exploits the comic potential of Khoka's continual death and resurrection" (Banfield 129) and sets this against the mundane urban routines of daily life. Khoka's repeated death symbolizes oppression and inhumanity. For instance, the Police officer and five men of the chorus take Khoka to different points in the acting space and kill him. First, it is decapitation. On receiving instructions from the officer the chorus mimes a gallows. "The officer lifts Khoka upto the post and puts an imaginary noose around his neck. Then it is a firing squad. Then a gas chamber closed within human walls. At the end the OFFICER and the CHORUS turn into a bomber aircraft pouring bombs on Khoka" (38). Khoka's death scream is heard and he is found lying on the road. This scene is reminiscent of the pictures of man's inhumanity to man shown by Seetanath to Sharad through a photo-album in Baki Itihas. The image of Khoka suggests how innocents are victimized and oppressed by those in power.

The old man is repeatedly lost from the beginning of the play till the end. Throughout the play, he searches for the right way to the real home. His search symbolizes loss of direction. On his way, he joins hands with Khoka, the young man. Together they realize the awful truth that they are one and the same:

KHOKA. What's your name?

OLDMAN. Khoka. That was my name. what's yours?

KHOKA. Khoka. That is my name.

OLDMAN. (to himself) Was. Is. Was. Is.

KHOKA. (to himself) Is. Was. Is. Was. (40-41)

The name Khoka becomes a symbol of universal man. The Old Man says, "Thousands of parents with thousands of Khokas. Khoka means little. Khoka means one who has not grown up yet. Khoka means Green, Raw immature" (11).

The Old Man's revelation that his name is also Khoka presents another of Sircar's fragmentation of his play's central figure. The search for the right path is equal to the road chosen for travel by Indrajit and the Writer in Evam Indarjit. The pair Khoka and the old man also remind the readers of Seetanath and Sharad, in Baki Itihas or Sumanta and the ghosts of his conscience in Sesh Nei. In the opinion of Banfield "the conclusion of Michhil unites the two Khokas, dead and alive, past and present, young and old, lost and found, victim and conscientized" (131).

The Police officer symbolizes physical oppression and the forces of authority. He bawls into silence the chattering chorus, who question among themselves about the disappearance of Khoka each time. The officer instructs the masses: "Attention! Nobody's has been killed. Nobody's lost. Everything's in order. Start it. Sta-a-art the procession...." (17).

The master figure is a symbol of ruling class or oppressive power as such. A farcical episode with the Police officer occurs when the master is carried on the shoulders of the chorus members. When 'the master' explicates his views on peace the Police man follows in front like an obedient dog emitting piteous howls

punctuating the cliches of the ruling class as follows: "In the power of tradition – in devotion to God – in peace and non-violence – out of social responsibility – in the context of the constitution – in legal procedures – on the basis of class unity" (40). He uses religion, liquor and even arts to deaden the awareness of people. Sircar indirectly whips at the media of entertainment that diverts the minds of people from perceiving the real problems the society encounters.

Sircar's realization, that he should train his actors as a "group of workers" rather than as "individual characters", is suitable for his non-proscenium explorations in the Third Theatre. In this connection it is apt to recall the words of Max Stafford Clark, the artistic director of London based Experimental theatre group "Out of Joint" that "theatrical performance is not a game of tennis but a game of cricket, where every player has an important role to play but the success of each one depends on the success of the team" (Chadurvedi 12), which reminds the fact that theatre is a collective, co-operative, communal art.

The general belief of many actors is that they do not need any training to act as the process is quite natural and casual. Sircar points out the view of majority of actors: "An average theatre worker in India would shudder at the thought of devoting as much time and energy for training as one has to devote in order to master 'Bharat Natyam' or 'Sitar' or 'Sculpture' (45). But Sircar emphatically voices out that theatre cannot be done without intense training. It is unswerving since the plays like Procession, Bhoma and Stale News are presented in the form of sequences which are juxtaposed in a series, in quick succession. It demands great skill on the part of the actors.

The actors of Sircar's theatre group are volunteers, activists trying to convert people to their fiercely-held convictions of social justice. Since street theatre

dispenses with the use of elaborate costumes, sets and lights, it is portable economical and flexible and so the actors use their body as a tool to deliver messages both didactic and simple. The use of actor's body as a tool to convey messages is well brought out in the funeral procession where Khoka keeps his body stiff, like a corpse and four members of the chorus carry it on their shoulders. Again when Khoka is repeatedly murdered in different ways by the officer along with the members of the chorus the entire scene is mimed exploiting the body movements of the actors to the greatest extent possible. For instance, all the six members of the chorus enact a scene where ONE takes up the position of a bus and all the others hang on to him like bats. They imitate an over crowded bus through their actions and dialogues. TWO asks for "a little space for a foot just a foot hold, only a foot" (14). A routine comic scene which takes place in a bus is improvised by SIX, a lady who gets down with much difficulty:

SIX. Stop, Stop, my slippers....

(The bus has moved up a little distance already)

FIVE. (Shouting) come back same time tomorrow, you'll get your slippers back.(15)

Sircar's physical training of his actors help them act such scenes effectively.

Again the chorus displays some scenes of action in a factory and in a theatre. After a screaming siren THREE, FOUR and FIVE take up position and turn into machines in a factory. SIX takes up position as Telephone Operator at a different point. It is just a mime and no words are involved. Sircar himself reasons out that, "theatrical experience, rather than the narration of a story, is more relevant in the Third Theatre, for it affords much more directness in communication than the conventional proscenium theatre. Physical acting and improvisation are more

effective than an abject dependence on language" (Third Theatre 79). The chorus thus functions as the simulacrum of Train, Bus and Machines.

Sircar's "experimental form involves a minimum use of dialogue (to avoid the disturbance of street and traffic sounds), and an emphasis on dramatic, stylized movements that communicate more effectively than words", says Sumana (64). The use of pantomime, rhythmic movements, songs and dances considerably reduce the importance of language. Stichomythic structures, as pointed out by Pfister, are dialogues with a high frequency of interruption. They are used not only to heighten conflict-charged speech but also occur when the dialogue is based on consensus as in Shakespeare's As you Like It:

PHOEBE. Good Shepherd, tell this youth what it is to love.

SILVIUS. It is to be made of sighs and tears;

And so am I for Phoebe.

PHOEBE. And I for Ganymede.

ORLANDO. And I for Rosalind.

ROSALIND. And I for no woman. (V ii 76-86)

Like Shakespeare, Sircar makes use of Stichomythic structures every now and then. The members of the chorus say that they are dying every day with day to day problems. Five members of the chorus present a sordid picture of life, which is the common factor uniting all utterances into 'consensus dialogue':

ONE. Three years without a job, father's retired.

TWO. It's the thirty-sixth day of the factory lock-out.

There's not a morsel at home.

THREE. The untimely rain left all the rice rotting, our debts

with the money lender have risen to a mountain.

FOUR. The whole family's laid up with food poisoning from adulterated cooking oil. I don't have the money to pay a doctor.

FIVE. The police took my brother away, and beat him to death.

.....

THREE. Elder brother and sister-in-law broke away from the family. They don't even write to us any longer. (24)

The above conversation unmasks the stark realities of life which include problems of unemployment, exploitation by money-lenders, harassment of police resulting in lock-up deaths and domestic discord.

Innumerable dialogic patterns are used by Sircar to serve multifarious purposes. Instead of lengthy speeches by one orator-like character circular dialogue is used, where one member of the chorus begins, another continues and yet another concludes. Such a pattern befits the scenario because the problems discussed are vital issues that are universally experienced and that is how instead of any exchange of ideas or contradiction, there is significant contribution from each speaker which naturally kindles the next one to continue. Each utterance is not complete by itself, but it depends on the next utterance for completion of sense.

For instance when Khoka, the old man is lost as a small boy, the members of the chorus take up various roles and call Khoka to come back by offering things which are attractive to one from childhood to adulthood:

FIVE. Khoka come back, you'll get whatever you want....

SIX. Bats, balls, biscuits, chocolates.....

ONE. Books, note books, school, college....

TWO. Pass, failure, job business.....

THREE. Land, holding, house, property.....

FOUR. House, car, gold, jewellery.....

CHORUS. There'll be everything for you, everything for
you, come back.... (10).

Though no individual trait or specific characteristic feature is assigned to any character in the play, each member of the chorus represents a particular type at times. It is revealed through the analysis of the relationship between the utterances made by the same figures. For instance one of the members of the chorus, TWO represents a narrow-minded, traditional person who opposes any change in society. His utterances at different sequences prove this: "How could he marry that girl? A Brahmin marrying a low caste?" (32). Again opposing women taking jobs he says, "All the house wives are out on the streets, in jobs. What else do you need to bring morals to a finish?" (33). ONE always speaks about his concern for the country thus: "This country needs military dictatorship. They should be all thrashed into order" (32). In another sequence he says, "Why should we remain a weak nation for ever? We have just begun making atom bombs" (32).

THREE represents a conventional narrow-minded person who is intolerant of the progress made by lower classes: "The lower classes are getting so impertinent. Even the rickshaw-wallahs put on airs" (32). Again in another series he speaks, "The servant demands higher wages. Ungrateful wretches!"(33). FOUR representing a highly religious person says, "The world's turning atheist. It was our country alone that had some religion, but even that's going out" (32). He continues the same fervour in his next utterance: "America goes wild over Hare Krishna. Still we don't see its worth" (33). Through these experimental dialogic

patterns, Sircar pounces on the convention ridden, backward-looking, religious fundamentalists who are opposed to the progressive well being of India.

Procession is highly rated not only for its revolutionary thematic content but also for its modernist forms or techniques like montage, simultaneity and juxtaposition. It is not meant to be performed in the proscenium stage. It has to be staged in open space with the audience seated around the playing area. The play has a troubled, fast pace. Scenes change in quick succession at breakneck speed. The actors are able to cope with such strenuous processes of acting, because they are volunteers, like Sircar, with a mission. The fact that they do not receive any monetary benefit for their job adds another feather to their caps. Adhering to the Indian traditions of complete theatre, Sircar uses haunting music, familiar rhymes, earthy metaphors and traditional symbols to highlight the “soullessness of modern religion and politics and the endless crowds, continuous agitations, serpentine queues and senseless rush of contemporary Indian life” (76), observes Sen about the uniqueness of Procession.

Sircar uses theatre to create awareness among the people. He believes in collective endeavour to understand and solve social and political problems. He does not believe in the omniscience of political leaders but prefers to learn from the so-called illiterate people. To authenticate his faith, he also repudiates the authorship of certain plays, and attributes them to the collective effort of Satabdi. Bhoma, Sircar's next play emerges by putting together the pieces of information he received, seeing, feeling, and learning about his surroundings. The members of Satabdi have also contributed their experiences and feelings to the creation of Bhoma.

"Theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and everyday, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings", (61) says K.Sumana with reference to the plays of Badal Sircar. True to the above statement, literally Sircar's Third Theatre addresses the audience directly, involves the participants and audience in theatre activity and paves the way for discussions pertaining to man's relationship with his society.

One of the most important characteristics of the socio-economic conditions of India is the miserable dichotomy between urban and rural life. This dichotomy is fundamental for the disparities at different levels like economic standards, development services, education and culture. Sircar's favourite play Bhoma deals with the rural-urban dichotomy along with the exploitation taking place at grass-root levels, man's callous disregard for his fellow-human beings, and spiritual deformity. Bhoma in general depicts the loss of genuine love and its impact on the society.

Bhoma is the central character but he never appears in person. He is often referred to or spoken of by other characters. The playwright learns about real Bhoma and Sundarbans, his homeland in West Bengal, from Tushar Kanjilal, the headmaster of Rangabelia village School. In his preface Sircar writes:

But Bhoma's story is not there in this play: seeing, feeling and learning about our surroundings shock us, hurt us, anger us – these have come out in disjointed, dramatic pictures. Bhoma's picture was then part of those pieces. But when those pictures were strung together into a play then somehow it was Bhoma's image which started to become the link and at the end the play could not be called anything but Bhoma. (Three Plays 45)

Therefore Bhoma is not about India's exotic romantic past. As a recent production defines, "Bhoma is around us, Bhoma surrounds us, Bhoma hounds us, Bhoma transcends us, Bhoma tells us who we are, where we are, why we are....Bhoma is a masterpiece of India's alternative theatre from the seventies. Re-invented, re-invested, re-intended for our world, our times, our politics. Bhoma is NOW." ("Bhoma")

Sircar worked in tribal and rural areas for various projects and lived among the poor and the down trodden. This gave him the first hand knowledge of the exploitation, and oppression suffered by the rural masses. Rejecting the 'Jatra' and the city theatre traditions, he got out to work with the residents of the villages and produced plays which brought out their "struggles and perceptions and enhanced their social consciousness" (Raha 181). As a Third Theatre play, Bhoma has no story, no character, no continuity. Whatever is the message, it is communicated by the actors directly to the audience through words, sounds and their whole body. Like Procession, it is a mixed fusion of various incidents and situations that are strung together by a central theme of lovelessness. Sircar himself says that this play is not meant to entertain the well-dressed front row audiences in a lush theatre and those who do such kind of theatre will never touch his play.

To present precisely the theme of the play, Bhoma is a dramatization of the life of the oppressed peasant in rural India projected through a series of sequences which portray his social and economic oppression. Sircar does not stop with presenting the exigency of the problem, but offers a solution by employing powerful symbols and images. According to Reddy, "the society full of opportunists and exploiters is presented as 'a forest of poisonous trees' and Bhoma, an aboriginal barbarian as a woodcutter. Bhoma is an archetype of the oppressed

exploited peasant who, at long last, takes up his 'rusty axe', grinds and sharpens it to cut the poisonous trees that grow around him" (Barefoot playwright 134), the solution to the problem lies in Sircar's appeal to the audience to rise up with Bhoma to cut the poisonous trees in the forest of society to end exploitation of man by man.

The play begins as six actors ONE to SIX dressed alike mime various agricultural activities. ONE attracts the attention of others by telling that he knows Bhoma but he is unable to give any details about him. A discussion about 'evolution' follows:

TWO. The blood of fish is cold.

ONE. The blood of man is also cold.

THREE. No. The blood of man is warm.

ONE. It was. Before. Now it's cold....

Had man's blood not grown cold, he wouldn't have survived. (47)

The discussion throws light not on Darwin's theory of evolution but implies that man has become cold-blooded and loveless. It suggests that human beings will become extinct like Dinosaurs if they continue to lack love and fellow-feeling.

When the actors talk about tourism, cities and urban development, beautifying Calcutta and so on, ONE draws their attention to the fact that seventy five percent of India's population lives only in villages and not in cities. Simultaneously a dance of greed signifying acquisition of wealth and hoarding is acted out, juxtaposing the poverty of villagers and the affluence of the rich aristocrats in the city. Suddenly ONE calls out "Bhoma-a-a" aloud. Bhoma symbolizes love, innocence, a forest, a village, and a farm labourer who is not corrupt by the culture

and civilization of the city. The dichotomy between city life and village life is well-brought out in this sequence.

Another sequence throws light on the poverty-stricken life of the peasants. They grow food grains for all people but they go without food. As they do not have water, seeds and fertilizers, they become hired labourers on the lands of rich land lords. They get four rupees a day as wages but they have five to ten dependants. ONE describes their plight: "At four rupees a day you can't afford to buy rice; wheat, yes, but not enough for chapattis. If you make a porridge of it with water and salt it goes a long way and fills you up. If you can't get wheat flour, there is cornflour, if you can't even get hold of that, you starve"(54). Even "a four rupees a day job" is not continuous, it may last at the most for hundred or hundred and twenty five days. They remain jobless and foodless for the remaining days of the year. But the urban middle class remain heartlessly indifferent to the poverty of the villagers. This relentless, but rigorously controlled anger is forcibly directed against the well-fed, easy-going bourgeoisie of Calcutta in Bhoma. Bharucha says: "It is this anger that makes the play more than a lament for Bhoma himself as an individual or for the thousands of Bhomans who continue to survive from day to day in Bengal, scavenging for food in garbage heaps and sleeping on dusty pavements" (174).

Sircar sharply contrasts the impoverished condition of the villagers against the sophistications demanded by cities. The actors TWO, THREE and FOUR talk about the development of their city. Six hundred million rupees is enough for the second bridge, only 2000 million rupees is spent so far for digging sewers and better streets, the metro rail will cost only 3000 million rupees. A city demands billions of rupees for its development whereas a few million rupees are enough for

the irrigation of a few thousand acres of land in villages. ONE genuinely says: "There is no electricity but there are poles and wires – all these three years.... If we get electricity, if the canals are dredged, if we have more tube wells – only 3 million rupees – then the whole of Simulpur Anchal, all the 3000 acres of land – will yield gold! Gold!" (54).

The play throws light on the city and village polarization and the exploitation of millions of villages which become poorer by enriching a few cities. Sircar is apolitical and free from political bondage of any party. So, he daringly unravels government untruths by juxtaposing the radio advertisement against the real condition of villages:

THREE. The village! The lovely village! The charming

Village! the beautiful village!

FOUR. The special village welfare programme on the

radio.(50)

Talking about Sircar's mission of doing theatre, Ella Dutta rightly points out: "what he wishes to communicate through his theatre are clear-cut facts, concrete truths about what is happening in the villages at the grass-root level, the nature of exploitation both industrial and agricultural, the urban stranglehold on the rural economy" (Three Plays viii). It seems that Sircar is galvanized by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi who said that the villages are the heart of the nation, and reiterates it.

Bhoma exposes the supremacy of the cities over the country side which is a colonial import. Renuka and Shampa Bhattacharjee quote the analysis of an economist for using the term "urban bias" in relation to urban-rural dichotomy in Bhoma. Stefen de Vylder, an economist summarises under eight headings the

biases that impede a better utilization of rural community's resources. They are: the urban bias, the foreign bias, the bureaucratic bias, the capital bias, the production bias, the land lord bias, the rice bias and the private bias. He emphasizes the need to meet the central dynamics of the society as a whole instead of eliminating one or two of the most powerful biases. He also adds: "... the use of the expression urban bias in no way means that the consistent class character of the policies should be overlooked [. . .] basic contradiction is not between rural and urban residents but between classes - both in the countryside and in cities" (Renuka 76). This idea leads to the notion that Bhoma has latent class leanings and the dichotomy is not between villages and towns alone but between classes too.

Exploitation or oppression of the weak by the mighty is a global one. The landed gentry exploit the poor peasants to such an extent, the humble poor, genuflect or prostrate in front of them, in the villages, while industrialists exploit craftsmen in the cities. The same is the case with nations where the powerful ones exploit the lesser ones under different names. The play presents vividly how a small scale industry like, Mahamaya Engineering Company is utilized by Samson and Blackbird Company a larger firm for its survival. Mahamaya produces diesel pump sets for Samson and Blackbird and even stick their name plate and prepare specification literature for them. They get only two thousand five hundred rupees for each set whereas Samson and Blackbird sells a set for four thousand six hundred and twenty five rupees. They settle the money to Mahamaya only after the sets are sold. It is a sort of exploitation in business sector.

A small industry like Mahamaya needs working capital to manufacture new sets. If they approach banks for loan, the managers refuse to sanction loans for lack of security. The same banks are willing to sanction enormous amount of loans

to companies like Samson and Blackbird without security. The telephonic conversation in which the manager says, "Hello...yes, sir! How much? ... hundred and thirty thousand? Ok, sir ... (smiles) oh, that's only a formality, sir, there is no question of securities!yes....yes....o.k.",(58) reveals the double-standards, ambivalent nature of the bank officials who work as the agents of aristocrats. Again the simple peasants who have no pump sets buy water for irrigation from rich land lords whereas pump set owners like Gadai Mittar are provided loan to buy the pump sets but not the peasants. Sircar satirizes the services of banks through FIVE who role-plays the bank manager saying, "Nationalized banks – in the service of agriculture!"(61).

Another conflict, the disparity in status between the employer and the employee is exposed through TWO, a stenographer in Samson and Blackbird Company who repeatedly complains about his meagre pay, hand to mouth existence, and a large family which has to be supported. It depicts the disparity in status between the capitalists and proletariats, the class conflict and the exploitation of the lower classes by the upper classes. The capitalists who have enough money to deposit in Swiss Banks, never care to raise the position of their employees. Lovelessness or man's disregard for his fellow human beings is the basis of all these anomalies. All these sequences are juxtaposed in a series, in quick succession. It demands great skill on the part of the actors.

The most haunting statement in the play "The blood of man is cold, cold, cold!" is used as a refrain to hammer the growing inhumanity of man into the minds of the audience. It is one of the familiar oft-repeated techniques of Sircar. The image of 'blood' used in the play gains intensity gradually. ONE wistfully laments: "My heart bleeds. Can a drop of it germinate even a prickly thorn on this earth?" TWO

responds telling, "This earth has sucked up so much blood already, hasn't it?" (58). The playwright, by exploiting the image of blood expresses the intensity of exploitation very effectively in these lines. Saratbabu quotes a similar image of blood in Sircar's Stale News in a different manner: "Blood has an advantage. The rains wash away all the blood on the earth. It is washed into drains, from the drains to the rivers, from the rivers into the sea. It is not generally known that the sea water has a high blood content, and the blood content is increasing day by day"(133).

In Shakespeare's Macbeth, 'the smell of blood' pervades the whole play. Lady Macbeth whose conscience is guilt-ridden, after King Duncan's murder, becomes mad. Her painful words "Here is the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (V i L 54 – 57, 866) express the impact of the indelible horror associated with blood. The association of the idea or image of blood makes any one shudder. In Bhoma, the demand for blood makes one shudder. FIVE says: "Give me blood, I'll give you jobs", "Give me blood I'll give you permits" (62) and "Give me blood, I'll give you a Kingdom" (63). He uses the word 'blood' to convey various meanings "The word thus means 'money', 'murder' and 'sacrifice'. But it generally implies exploitation and oppression" (Babu 122). It also denotes the blood thirsty parasite-like imperialists and bureaucrats.

The oppression of the rural population against the backdrop of the grandeur of the city is harshly exposed through the 'blood' image thereby making especially the urban middle class feel remorse for their passivity. How the hungry villagers' blood transforms into food for others is shown: "Bhoma's blood, red blood, blossoms into white jasmines of rice on our plates. Twice every day"(76). The same idea is shown in a gruesome manner towards the end: "There's the taste of

Bhoma's blood on the tongue. We drink Bhoma's blood, and laugh and play.

There's blood dripping down the sides of our mouths, dripping, the poisonous trees are growing, growing. My blood, man's blood becomes cold, c-o-l-d, c-o-l-d"(88).

The play deals not only with urban-rural dichotomy, oppression of the rural masses, but also oppression in cities where the economically weaker sections are exploited by the elite, privileged lot. The 'oppressed people' include "the Bhomas who come in groups after groups to Calcutta", living in "shanty towns in the suburbs of Sealdah, Tapsia, Bediadanga, Dhapa, Kusum Kumari", wash "pots and pans in the houses of the gentry carrying in their wombs the children of the gentry" (86), "the pavement dwellers of Calcutta" (87), and small entrepreneurs like Mahamaya Company too. Bharucha in this regard aptly comments: "I can think of no other play in the Bengali theatre that makes an audience question its relation to the oppressed people with such emotional power and clarity" (181). Renuka and Shampa Bhattacharjee point out that Bharucha very appropriately uses the term oppressed in his final opinion about the play and sees similarity between Sircar's Third Theatre and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed for the treatment of exploitation.

A series of chorus-created scenes alternate between city preoccupations and the life of the villagers in villages like Sundarbans, a desolate and wasteland where nothing grows and "the people are lucky to eat a meal a day." (Bharucha 114). Chris Banfield states that, interweaving themes like "the place of love, humankind's inhumanity, usury and its impact on agricultural development, third world debt, the atomic sword of Damocles, and the calamities of flood and famine" (132) bind the rural and urban worlds together. Apart from these, many strong

issues like the deadening impact of atomic warfare and radio activity are also discussed in the play. Though he attacks the Bourgeois values and innate selfishness of his spectators, he appeals to their humanity earnestly. He urges them to be sympathetic towards the underprivileged sections of society who are denied the basic amenities of life.

The atomic devastation which completely annihilated Japan during the Second World War has absolutely riveted Sircar's sensibility and gets expressed in this play in the form of his concern for the safety of the Earth. Nuclear weapons not only cause sudden demise of millions of people but also leave a permanent handicap both physical and mental due to their radioactivity. Millions of children in their mother's womb at foetal stage were deformed by the atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. ONE, invariably played by Sircar, expresses his concern thus:

ONE. All the experiments with atom bombs that have been
conducted upto 1962 on this earth....

TWO,FOUR,FIVE,SIX. The Earth....

ONE. Have released enough radio activity to cause the birth of two million
maimed and deformed children. I'm one of the first lot. (71-72)

THREE does not agree with the view of ONE and explains how atomic energy can be used for peaceful purposes. But ONE deflates the complacency: "Peace. Peaceful birth, Peaceful death. In between the two – a peaceful, deformed life"(72). Sircar again questions, whether explosion or peaceful use, how the problem of atomic waste and radioactivity will be tackled. Sircar tries to awaken both the literate and illiterate audience who are blind to certain debilitating advantages of science. ONE's words, "The total stockpile of atom bombs can

destroy the whole world-four hundred times" (73), submit evidence to the above argument. Sircar is constantly haunted by the fear that the atomic experiments whether for good or evil purposes will result in the devastation of not merely its inhabitants but the entire Globe. Sircar's fear that the Earth may be lost to posterity is reflected in some other plays like Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas and Tringsa Satabdi too.

Albert Einstein, a great scientist, declares that science without religion is lame. The great Indian Philosopher and teacher, Dr.S.Radhakrishnan is of the view that science and religion should go hand in hand. If science overtakes religion, it will cripple the minds and hollow men will lead an empty and meaningless life. By 'religion' both the great personalities mean only 'humaneness', the loss of which is behind all kinds of violent conflicts from domestic feud leading to murder, to a world war causing "a colossal carnage".

The play time and again attempts to prove that inhuman exploitation is caused by lovelessness of man. Lovelessness originates from selfishness which in turn leads to exploitation. For instance the actors FOUR and SIX appear as thieves who rob the belongings of people. At another sequence, they appear as the rowdies who are protected by the politicians for they indulge in illegal acts on behalf of the politicians. SIX, addressing FIVE who impersonates a politician, asks:

SIX. How much blood do you want, BOSS?

FIVE. Super, that's it. Keep it up. (Aside to ONE)

Sometimes of course their own blood too flows in the melee. (63)

It expresses oppression of a different sort wherein the poverty of the ignorant lower classes is exploited in the name of politics, where anti-national elements are created by the politicians. It also brings to focus the hypocritical nature of the

politicians who treat their party men as hired goons to carry out their dirty deeds. Sircar also hints and hits at the illiteracy of the politicians by the use of the word "super" instead of "superb".

Saratbabu points out that "lovelessness is encouraged and promoted in several ways. Fine arts are used to make people loveless and indifferent to the suffering of the poor"(123). TWO has been narrating in a rapturous tone the different beautiful forms of nature. Suddenly his voice sinks and narrates a horrible sight: "(in agony) Beggars and dogs fighting over leftovers from the wedding feast thrown out on the street" (64). ONE asks him to drown that noise with Ravi Shankar's sitar. The same idea is explicitly expressed in Procession also where 'the master' figure gives instructions to use fine arts to numb people's awareness of their suffering. The master says: "Let people immerse themselves in a flow of aesthetic pleasure. When the dirty doubts surface, let the flow of pleasure wash over them. Keep in mind, men are not animals. Men alone can lose themselves in the flow of pleasure" (34). Aesthetic pleasure is thus shown as an intoxicating drug which blunts the consciousness of people.

Loss of genuine love or fellow feeling occurs due to man's greed for material things, competitiveness and a spirit of individualism. Subsequently people forget to love their neighbours as themselves. Sircar makes a sarcastic comment about materialism through the words of ONE: "Lots of things, lots and lots.... You'll find them, if you open your eyes. In life's walls there are many shelves and niches. There are rows and rows of fascinating objects. Look at them, mark them, choose them" (64). Again when THREE asks whether there is love on those shelves. ONE asks him not to believe in love and rather they should believe only in things, more and more things. In the modern world even God has been looked upon as an

agent who fulfils the material wishes than a Supreme Being who grants salvation or divine love. ONE says, "You can even believe in God. A God that gives you things. A God that takes away things from the unbelievers"(65).

Consumed with a desire for job abroad and wealth, many middle-class parents educate their children by making themselves bankrupt with a fond hope to reap a golden harvest after their children get employment in foreign countries. The dream becomes a reality very rarely. For majority of parents it is a terrible bolt from the blue when their children turn their backs on them. The two facets of materialism, "Competitiveness and individualism strain the relations between parents and children and lovelessness boomerangs in every family" (Babu 124). Even the nation spends a great deal on their education. But they leave the parents and the country in debts and serve their foreign pay masters:

TWO. I'll sell my pots and pans, but he'll get his education.

THREE. Yes, yes, sell your pots and pans.

FOUR. Your country will also sell its pots and pans to educate him.

FIVE. Thousands and thousands of pots and pans will be spent to educate him.

SIX. Educated he will depart in glory for America.(68)

This illuminates how the youth of the third world countries are lured by the otherwise undreamt of salary and sophistications offered by developed nations like America. So they become willing slaves and get exploited and also deprive their nations of their intellectual wealth.

Selfishness breeds dishonesty and corruption. The politicians swindle the wealth of the nation and hoard riches and deposit money in 'Swiss' banks. The

country becomes bankrupt while the politicians become opulent. They exploit the services of press and mass media to conceal their true colours and expose themselves as noble patriotic statesmen and champions of people. The following example illustrates this aptly:

ONE. You'll borrow a hundred, and repay a hundred?

TWO. That's what it amounts to.

ONE. That means you'll become bankrupt then?

TWO. Bless me, it's the country that will become bankrupt, why should I?

My money is in a bank in Switzerland. (69)

In a democratic set up all are equals. But in reality only very few privileged lot like the politicians get opportunities and become the beneficiaries.

Though Bhoma's name is mentioned for the first time only in the middle of the play, every now and then an anguished cry – "Bhoma" is heard and overpowers the projections of all sequences. The refrain, "the blood of man is cold, c-o-l-d.c-o-l-d. c-o-l-d" symbolically refers to the exploitation meted out to Bhoma and his family and the refrain also represents the all pervading, off-stage presence of Bhoma.

Repeated relentlessly throughout the play, the refrain acquires a terrifying significance. ONE believes in the existence of Bhoma: "I haven't seen Bhoma. But Bhoma is there! I also know that unless Bhoma sustains us, I can't live, nobody lives!"(66). The other actors reject this and claim that they alone exist. Sircar presents it in the manner of a mad race where everyone vies with each other showing selfishness, greed, individualism and competitive spirit of the modern especially the Bourgeoisie world. TWO declares, "There's no Bhoma. There's only I" and takes a start. The race starts and everyone tries to push the other aside and go ahead and speak thus:

THREE. No, no, it's I. (Tries to overtake ONE)

FOUR. Not you, it's I.

FIVE. Oh no, it's I.

SIX. Stop, Stop, it's I.

ALL. I.I.I.I.I. (66)

The repeated use of the first person singular I, quite obviously emphasizes the selfishness of the people. ONE, Sircar's mouth piece, striking the keynote and message of the play avidly asks, "Bhoma, you, I, they, when will it all become a great "we" can you tell me, Bhoma?" (67).

Claude M. Steiner through psychology explains that competition and individualism cause lovelessness. He adds that the antidote to this is collectivism and co-operation. One of the solutions to problems is the dissolution of all egos into a great unified 'we' as wished and visualized by Sircar. But it is generally believed that competition increases productivity. Saratbabu quotes the observation of Steiner. "Competition between people brings about increased productivity, the major benefit of which is reaped by a privileged few with enough given back to people to keep them competing" (Babu 126). TWO, the politician who shows the way to deposit money in a Swiss bank, to a few people, drives home this fact:

TWO. To every single 'I', I shall show the way to a Swiss bank.

ONE. How many I's will reach a Swiss bank?

TWO. One or two. One in ten million. So what? This is called ambition, this is called 'being established'. (69-70).

All religions teach universal love, although it is not practised. All sorts of audacity in the world in the form of violence, oppression and exploitation is attributed to man's animal instinct which is inherent in man according to some

writers, like Vijay Tendulkar, and refuted by some other thinkers like Erich Fromm. Erich Fromm in The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness argues:

The study of animals shows that mammals and especially primates – although possessing a good deal of defensive aggression, are not killers and torturers. Paleontology, anthropology and history offer ample evidence against the instinctive thesis: (1) human groups differ so fundamentally in the respective degree of destructiveness that the facts could hardly be explained by the assumption that destructiveness and cruelty are innate; (2) various degrees of destructiveness can be correlated to other physical factors and to differences in respect of social structures, and the degree of destructiveness increases with increased development of civilization, rather than the opposite. (Babu 118)

Accordingly lovelessness is not inherent but acquired as human civilization advances. The greediness and selfishness of the civilized man result in a strict confinement of a cocoon existence that he neither offers nor accepts genuine love crossing that barrier. As pointed out by Claude M. Steiner who also shares the view of Erich Fromm, scarcity of love is created artificially by suppressing man's capability for genuine love, in compliance with the norms of the society. Hence, such loveless people will resort to any amount of violence, oppression and exploitation. Based on the above arguments it is considered that Bhoma is a study in spiritual deformity, owing to the depiction of lovelessness and exploitation.

Lovelessness leads to indifference towards the suffering of fellow human beings. Man's callous disregard for his brethren is crystallized through the verbal exchange between ONE and TWO:

ONE. My heart has dried up. My heart is a piece of leather. Can you spare

me a drop of water to moisten it?

TWO. Sorry go on. (74)

These lines bring to mind the famous lines of T.S.Eliot depicting spiritual sterility in his "The Wasteland". Eliot's words, "Here is no water but only rock/Rock and no water and the sandy road" (101) express sterility of love in human hearts and spiritual sterility as well. Water symbolizes rejuvenation of life, love, and compassion. The denial of water in Bhoma refers to loss of genuine love, compassion and concern for fellow human beings, showing the vast expanse of desert in human hearts.

After the sequence which conscientizes the pregnant women among the audience about the dangerous, harmful effects of radio-activity THREE shouts, "No this cannot happen, we won't let this happen," and desperately asks ONE whether there is any way to bring back love, to change the world. ONE assures 'Bhoma', as the remedy. Bhoma thus becomes a symbol of ideal manhood. Suddenly the muffled tone of an actor speaking in the voice of Bhoma is heard. As it continues the actors run around in circles trying to find Bhoma. "Bhoma is hungry. Bhoma wants rice" (80) is often repeated by FIVE. As a flashback, Bhoma's story is unfolded. Bhoma, a destitute villager, came to Sundarbans, a wasteland, a marshy and desolate forest, where nothing grows, to make it a cultivable land with his parents and two brothers. Bhoma, the wood cutter has cleared the jungle of its frightening wild animals and poisonous reptiles by sacrificing his father, mother and a brother in the process and converted Sundarbans in to cultivable land. Now he is hungry but there is no one to offer him food.

ONE, with an air of dreaminess says, if "all of us, could work our hardest to make everything we need and then all of us shared all we produced, then that queer picture that lets us buy up your blood to drink, the picture that you don't have", (86) is destroyed, Bhoma will get his food. So he asks Bhoma to cut down the jungle of poisonous weeds and parasites and clear the forest of society and purge the air of its poison, with his rusty axe. Sircar means money which disables Bhoma to get his rice, by the usage "that queer picture". It shows his hatred of the financial system. "However at the play's core is Bhoma, variously defined by the chorus at different points as individual, collective, and cultural [...] icon." (Banfield 132).

Though Bhoma constitutes personal victimhood, like Khoka's oppression in Procession, his image also encompasses the forces of disintegration acting on both individual and cultural identity. The end of the play presents the hungry and exploited Bhoma rising up with his sharpened axe to strike out the "poisonous forests" as the chorus mime together their energetic struggle. The play thus harnesses people's collective will to struggle against the forces of oppression.

According to Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, violence, oppression and man's inhumanity are indications not only of chaos and caprice, but of moral disorder. He adds, "when the fundamental law of nature, which is coherence, unity, respect for man and brotherhood is trampled upon, no other result can we expect than confusion, hatred and war" (19). Sircar explicates the same idea in his plays with a greater force and immediacy.

Through his theatre Sircar wants to create awareness among the people regarding the sort of exploitation that takes place socially, economically and psychologically, especially in a rural set up. In this regard Ella Dutta aptly states:

"He does not wish to create new myths in place of old. He prefers to raise the consciousness and create awareness of the issues" (Three Plays viii).

Acoustic effects play an eminent role in any theatre production. According to the requirements of the play the sound effects are created. They are either actor-operated, tape-recorded or created through a live orchestra. The appeal of music in Bhoma is very significant, because the dramatist assigns a specific kind of melody to depict loss of genuine love, the central idea of the play. Therefore, the use of popular tunes is not an interruptive device in a dialectical relation to the dramatic action which is simultaneously taking place. The dhol percussion serves as background music while the actors create the tunes and songs vocally. Apart from these no instrumental music is played.

In Procession also throughout the play many songs are sung by the chorus. In addition to these songs, sound effects are created through the beating of the drum often and through the effective use of the vocal organs of the actors intermittently. For instance, after the Master leaves, the actors sing the glory of God, the nation and even the British government, and FIVE makes the sound of a gun shot. Simultaneously the chorus sings a marching song and steps in rhythm. This sequence replaces the function of an orchestra.

To make his plays very effective Sircar makes use of non-verbal, unconventional devices. The play has no story, no character and no continuity in the conventional sense. It is a melange of events strung together in a dramatic structure, through the brawn of the message. Girish Karnad in his article, "Drama with a Distinct Vision", quotes the words of P.D. Shenoy, one of the teachers of Satyadev Dubey, theatre director and critic: "The structure of a play is the network of tensions that holds its different parts together. Once that was grasped,

everything became clear" (Hindu Magazine 2). In Sircar's Bhoma, the central theme becomes the network of tensions which connects the different sequences in the play.

A dramatist who works with human nature as his material is surely interested in character delineation, but Sircar is concerned more with the society than the individual. He merges the identity of his characters with the universe, presenting them only as types representing humanity, yet the central characters are given names like Khoka [Procession] and Bhoma. The other characters are given only numbers, not names in order to depict a world of everyday reality and a world of non-heroism. Despite the negation of story element, his theatre is a colossal success owing to the power of the voice of the actors, their body language, the proximity between the actors and the audience and above all the power of the message.

No specific characteristic feature or role is assigned to any character. Yet certain functions are identified with every actor. Bhoma is performed with six actors with another four or five joining in the singing and in creating sounds. ONE consistently goes on searching for Bhoma and he is a constant reminder of Bhoma's exploitation. He also takes a lead role in uniting the various collages by connecting them with the theme of Bhoma's exploitation. When THREE asks, "Who is Bhoma?" ONE answers: "A man. Bhoma doesn't destroy. Bhoma creates. We destroy Bhoma... Bhoma is the jungle. Bhoma is the cornfield. Bhoma is the village. Three-quarters of India's population live in villages. Millions and millions of Bhomas. In cities we live on the blood of Bhomas"(76). Bhoma's image and story emerge only from the descriptions of ONE.

The actor who plays the role of THREE always speaks of love: "You know – I fell in love with a girl.... That is, a girl – a girl fell in love, I mean – I love a – I fell – " (65) hearing his speech everybody bursts into raucous laughter. Though THREE speaks of his personal love affair his words also express his faith in love as a unifying factor of all humans. Therefore it is estimated that love is not only an emotional realization of personal experience but rather a vitalizing force or a healing principle, a boon to humanity. In Auden's poetry love is personified as an integrating force that cures and pacifies the troubled heart. Likewise it is presented as a balm for the troubled society in Sircar's Bhoma. By presenting a negative portrayal of lovelessness, he underscores the need for genuine love.

The strength of Sircar's Bhoma is its simplicity. Sircar concentrates much on the subject matter without paying greater attention to the conventional theatrical devices. But at the same time his actors require great skill to project the oppression with intensity though the techniques used by the actors remain invisible. The close contact between the actors and the audience is an influential feature in this connection. This proximity demands sophisticated forms of verbal, mimetic and gestural impersonation from the actors as in the Shakespearean theatre where the actors and the audience are divided and occupy two different spaces. But the demand for excellence in acting, arising out of proximity is still higher in Sircar's theatre where the performers and the spectators share the same space. He achieves this through the physical training of the actors and a device of direct contact with the spectators.

When the play begins, six actors with identical dress enter performing some warm up exercises. They form a circle holding their hands and make eye contacts with one another. Then they move separately and look intently at the spectators.

A chorus chants in the background and they pose as trees. They perform various farm activities and also act as wood cutters. When they crouch on the floor they respond minutely to the mournful cadence of the song. "The crouching of the actors, as they cave their bodies inward and bury their faces in their hands, evolves the suffering of the people in an uncanny way. It is by no means overdone or melodramatic" (176), says Bharucha who has seen almost all the performances of 'Satabdi'.

London Globe Theatre could hold an audience of 2000 but Sircar's open space theatre could enthrall and enlighten even 3000 spectators. At the same time his Angan Mancha had only around hundred audience to facilitate close contact and intimate relationship between the actors and the viewers. It is mainly because the spectator is not a mere onlooker but "assumes a protagonist's role in the theatre of Sircar, making the theatrical incident experimental, indeterminative and open-ended", (Dass Experiment and Innovation 69). For instance the actors FOUR and SIX suddenly jump into the crowd of audience and confront them with imaginary daggers and pistol. They act out their roles as thieves who snatch their belongings. FOUR demands: "Now mates, out with whatever you have – cash, watches, rings". Then Six addressing the ladies asks: "All the jewellery – you dames there". FOUR frightens them telling, " Try to act smart, and you get your belly slit". (53). A concomitant emphasis on the fundamental importance of a direct relationship between performers and spectators is thus established in Sircar's Third Theatre.

Direct communication with the audience has a tremendous impact, when FIVE in a stentorian voice addresses the audience looking into their eyes: "Rise up, all women that have conceived, Draw in atomic radioactivity into your wombs! Give birth to disabled, deformed, atomic children!" (75). The words flow out from his

mouth like a curse and there can be no worst means through which the masses can be conscientized about the dangers of atomic radiation. Mahesh Dattani's point that "theatre is living in the actors, and it is living in the performance, it is a shared experience,..." (Angelie 159) is authentic as far as Sircar's theatre is concerned, since intimate theatrical experience takes both the actors and the audience on a journey into themselves. Sircar thus educates his audience not with sermons but with dramatically powerful participation and interactions of the actors and the spectators.

Sircar, an actively committed spokesman for socially under-privileged groups, discusses the 'hydra-headed exploitative mechanism' found in the society. "Sircar's reflective theatre explorations right from *Evam Indrajit* to *Bhoma* have created deep historical resonances for Indian readers and audience of this drama. His 'theatre of rural-urban links' has classic reverberations with concerns of development philosophers who have tried to bridge the gap between rural and urban India"(98), observes Neelima Talwar with special reference to Bhoma. These plays throw light on the slice of the country's socio-political and economic life. Sircar's theatre defines an integration of intellect and instinctive emotion to induce some fruitful action to change the society for better. Sircar does not stop with voicing out his protest or pointing out the complacency of the people but finds solution which lies in concerted effort for the maladies of the society.

This chapter has analyzed Sircar's experiments in Third Theatre exemplifying his protest against the existing system. He advocates collective endeavour or combined action to ward off calamity which will function as an effective balm to heal the wounds of society.

It would be highly surprising to note that Sircar, a playwright with a serious intent, is equally versatile while handling themes of lighter vein. The following chapter captioned "Contribution" analyses two comedies of Sircar and bring to light the writer's mettle in passing on even a serious message in a lively and distinct manner. His innate desire to conscientize man is substantiated highlighting his unique contribution to theatre community and its impact on the society at large.