From Page to Pavement: The Plays of Badal Sircar

Sudhindra Sircar, known as Badal Sircar was born in Calcutta, on July 15, 1925. Sircar’s father was earlier a professor and later he became the principal of Scottish Church College, Calcutta. His mother was Sarla Mona Sircar. He came from a middle class family. He did his graduation in civil engineering. On 13 May, 2011, Badal Sircar breathed his last, and unfortunately, with his passing away, the Indian theatre lost one of its major innovative exponents.

Getting trained to be an engineer, Badal Sircar started his career as a town planner. His association with the theatre began after his graduation. At the time of his college period, when he was in Calcutta, he became seriously involved in politics, but theatre always seemed to him a more emphatic medium than politics to approach people. In 1947, Sircar passed his civil engineering examination and in 1958, he got his first job at Damodar Valley Complex. During his job time, he visited Nigeria, England, and France. In order to devote himself completely to theatre, in 1977 he gave up his job with CADC [Comprehensive Area Development Corporation].

Along with doing his job in India and foreign countries, Sircar made an entry into theatre with different roles as an actor, director and also as a playwright. As a playwright, he started with comedies. Badal Sircar’s career in drama started with quite light and humorous plays getting written from 1956 to 1960. These plays were titled as Solution X, Ram Shyam Jadu, Baropishima and Shanibar. Having stayed for around two years in London, Sircar got influenced by such personalities as Joan Littlewood, an English theatre director, Richard Schechner, founder of ‘The Performance Group’ of
New York, and Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski. This made the body of his future work distinct from other Bengali playwrights like Sombhu Mitra and Utpal Dutt. With the establishment of his ‘Third Theatre’, the influence of Richard Schechner, founder of ‘The Performance Group’, an experimental theater troupe, became more significant. Jerzy Grotowski’s ‘Poor Theatre’ in Poland, also influenced him a lot in constituting his ‘Third Theatre’ when he first came in contact with him in 1969. For the first time, he acted in 1951, when acting in his own play, *Bara Trishna*, performed by a theatre group called ‘Chakra’. Sircar became famous with the writing of the play *Evam Indrajit* in 1963. His later plays as *Baaki Itihaash* (Remaining History) (1965), *Pralap* (Delirium) (1966), *Tringsha Shatabdi* (Thirtieth Century) (1966), *Pagla Ghoda* (Mad Horse) (1967), *Shesh Naai* (There’s No End) (1969) are also significant.

He established ‘Shatabdi’ his theatre group, in 1967, which used to give theatrical performances both on and off the proscenium. Sircar did not admire artificiality and just for this reason ‘Shatabdi’, under Sircar’s leadership, rejected the proscenium and dispensed with such artificial aids as lights, sound, elaborate costumes, props and make-up. The first production, which Sircar directed under this theatre group was *Evam Indrajit* in 1967. During the coming five years of its existence ‘Shatabdi’ theatre group gave the performance of Sircar’s so many plays. It had a significant influence on contemporary theatre, particularly after 1969 when it began to perform plays both indoors and outdoors among people. In this way, this theatre troupe originated the *angan manch*, in other words to be called as courtyard stage, and getting influenced by the direct communication techniques of *Jatra*, a rural theatre form, his ‘Third Theatre’, practically became a protest against the existing commercial theatre establishment.
‘Shatabdi’ theatre group made the contemporary dramaturgy to be quite realistic, containing in it all the qualities of a socially concerned theatre. It made the Indian theatre quite experimental in approach with the performance of plays anywhere or at any place as market, bus stop, tea shop etc., in place of particular theatre halls on rent. Without paying attention on the artificial elements used in theatrical performance as elaborate lighting, make up of the characters and their costumes, it focused on interaction between the performer and the audience. In this way, the audience became the active participant in theatrical performance in place of a passive one. In 1976, the performance of this theatre group began at Kolkata’s Surendranath Park (then Curzon Park) on the last days of the week. In order to make more participation of the audience into such performances, ‘Shatabdi’ theatre troupe used to travel to the nearby villages also to perform there with the least props required.

Sircar was also conferred the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1968, Padma Shri in 1972, and the highest honour in the performing arts by the government of India, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship - Ratna Sadasya, in 1997. Badal Sircar, labeled as a ‘barefoot playwright’, can be seen as the forerunner of a new succeeding theatre movement which started before independence with the establishment of ‘Indian People’s Theatre Association’, which promoted and regenerated theatre and other arts. In West Bengal, Utpal Dutt became the chief representative of this political theatre with the success of ‘Indian People’s Theatre Association’ and two other prominent Bengali playwrights, Sombumitra and Manoranjan Bhattacharya, became the patron of this political theatre by the nineteen-sixties but, ultimately, it developed itself at the hands of
Sircar into the ‘Third Theatre’ also known as ‘Street Theatre’ or ‘People’s Theatre’ during nineteen-seventies.

The ‘First Theatre’ is associated with popular folk art forms. The ‘Second Theatre’ is western Theatre. ‘Third Theatre’ contains ‘Street Plays’. The performance area of ‘Street Plays’ used to be quite unusual as it comprised bus stop, market place, the street outside office, etc. Lengthwise, ‘Street Plays’ are short and as they are for a social purpose they are performed in such a way by a group of people that anyone, who is interested passing by, can stop and watch them. As no artificial aids, as stage setting, lighting and elaborate costumes of the characters, are required in such plays, they are quite inexpensive, flexible and mobile. Structure wise too, they are simple but, content wise, they are didactic as they deliver some enlightening or awakening message to the audience. Actors, engaged in ‘Street Theatre’ are basically teachers and students who are possessed with the idea to bring about a social change, without caring for their returns regarding finances or fame. Most of the time, they are busy with the rehearsal and the preparation for the plays.

‘Street Plays’, in this way, can be taken as a mutual effort. In place of waiting for an audience to come to the theatre to watch their performance, they prefer going out to be directly in touch of the people. Being outside in open spaces like parks, street corners, bus stations, etc., they approach people directly and people also take interest in them, finding something new and unusual. Some people just look at such performances out of curiosity and move on, while some other are there who take keen interest in this and cheer them with clapping, and they playfully reply to the questions of
the actors, they raise. In this way, through these plays, an interaction is made between the actors and the audience. Such interaction is a vital part of this medium, for it provides instant feedback whether the play has been able to convey the message, it targets or not. Script wise, these plays are dynamic in place of static. Their script is never a limited or fixed entity as it depends on the participation and reaction of the actors as to where the play is heading. In a way, ‘Third Theatre’ may be called a free theatre because people are not required to buy a ticket to watch its performances. In order to avoid discrimination, all the characters wear the same ordinary clothes, and they are also not given any name but are numbered. In their dialogues they use conversational and informal language with quite short sentences and the main focus is on body presentation.

‘Street Plays’, in other words to be called as Indian Nukkar natak, are serving as a kind of carrier mobilizing public opinion and they are also contributing to a kind of political, social, economic and cultural reformation. ‘Street Plays’ are working as a great weapon to stimulate and arouse social and political consciousness of the people. Along with their being quite entertaining and recreating in nature without any cost, these plays are filling the mind of the people with rational, secular and democratic consciousness. In this way, they serve a social cause their being very close to reality.

‘Street Theatre’ concentrates on the prevalent social problems. Its aim is not to give solution to the problem but surely to probe the concerned issues using humor to satirize them. Actors in various ways communicate with one another using varying tones of their voice, their ‘eye to eye’ contact with the audience and their changing body
language. Such theatre in an unusual way has a widened horizon approaching people of all strata and places which theatre cannot be able to access, such as the streets, markets, slums, village, schools, office complex, parks, and residential areas etc. With no discrimination, they display free performances without selling any ticket for all the people such as a shopkeeper, labourer, a housewife, or a student. Its purpose is to reach out to all the people and make them conscious of the happenings around them and encourage them to bring a change in the corrupt social system and eradicate the prevailing social deformities.

In India, Safdar Hashmi, Habib Tanvir, Utpal Dutt and then Badal Sircar used ‘Street Theatre’ as a weapon arousing political and social concern. On Sircar’s aim of writing ‘Street plays’, Ella Dutta opines in this way:

What he wishes to communicate through his Third theatre are clear cut facts, concrete truths about what is happening in the villages at grass root levels, the nature of exploitation both individual and agricultural, the urban stranglehold on the rural economy. He feels that his first mission is to make people aware. ¹

The ‘Third Theatre’ and the traditional folk theatre are two different entities. The focus of Sircar’s ‘Third Theatre’ is on the change brought in audience’s thinking, as in place of being just an spectator, an spectator too has to participate in the performances of the plays. Sircar’s preference is quite distant to the conventional theatrical performances. He is seen reluctant to the gap between performer and spectator. He is

found wishing to bridge this gap with an interaction between the actors and the audience. Actually, he wants a person to person communication converting it into a live show.

Sircar’s ‘Third Theatre’ emerges with the production of his ‘Street Plays’. *Procession, Bhoma and Stale News* are the most significant of them, translated into English. The performance areas of these plays were parks, street corners and remote villages and the spectators used to sit all around the performance. These plays displayed the oppression that dominated the society, the worn-out and corrupt system; and they were full of social enlightenment. Sircar is an exponent of the ‘Third theatre’ which involved ‘Street Plays’, in which there is no difference in the attires of actors and the audience. This also dispensed with the formal bindings of the proscenium theatre.

Before coming to the detailed discussion of Badal Sircar’s ‘Street Plays’, it is better to discuss about his most famous play, *Evam Indrajit*. As Sircar probes into the problems of middle-class society, he reflects the existential attitude of modern life through contemporary situations. Sircar wrote his first serious and most celebrated play, *Evam Indrajit*, in 1963. The publication and premiere of this play in 1965 appealed to the mass with its noticeable originality and brought Sircar to the limelight. The play won a widespread recognition with its translation into various languages along with English. With a different structure and the theme of social use, this play caught the attention of almost all concerned in the society. Girish Karnad translated Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* into English. The passion, ambition and frustration of the youth are well displayed in the play. The characters in it feel quite happy, consoled and relieved at the
time of moving on to their way. In the play, Manasi is a woman character and Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit are young youths who keep changing their roles, language and dresses, etc. with the progress of the play. *Evam Indrajit* is a tragicomedy, inventive and contemporary in spirit. Sircar’s focus was on the meaninglessness of existence, filled with a sense of concerned guilt and responsibility, in maladjusted persons who belong to the urban middle class, in a world which is full of violence and inhumanity. A new aspect is seen to be added in drama by Sircar, as he not only demonstrates the external world but also the internal world of psyche into his play, making people share a new and innovative experience. As Sircar’s plays display a true picture of the contemporary society, he is mainly bothered about the meaninglessness and pointlessness of modern life. The study of *Evam Indrajit* exposes all the distinctive qualities of Badal Sircar for which he is acknowledged as a harbinger of modern Indian drama.

Satyadev Dubey, in his introduction to *Evam Indrajit*, praises the play as a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama, as he says:

> With the performance of Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* in Bengali in Calcutta in September 1965, theatre practitioners all over India became aware of a major talent and a major play. The play provided for them the shock of recognition. It was about the Indian reality as they knew it; it was a theatrically effective and crystallized projection of all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and
undefined frustrations gnawing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class.²

Talking about the influential and emphatic theatrical qualities of Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit*, it is clearly observed that all the conventional traditions of drama were given up. In the opening of the play just when the curtain is pulled, there is seen a writer on the stage, scribbling something on the papers, sitting with his back to the audience. *Evam Indrajit* is the story of such a character, named as Writer, who struggles a lot to write a play but all his efforts are in vain. Being unable to write something meaningful, he gets frustrated and tears up his manuscripts in anger. Though he tries to write a play yet he is not aware of the downtroddens – the labourers in the mines and the fields, the snake charmers and the fishermen; which he himself admits. He is so much busy in his efforts of writing that he does not even respond to the character named as Auntie who asks him repeatedly to come for lunch. At this point of time comes a lady asking him to select the characters for his play from the people he knows and, in this way, Writer seeks inspiration from this woman who is called Manasi. In spite of having no knowledge of the basic realities of life, Writer is asked to write about those people who are sitting in the audience only, and who are quite undramatic in his eyes. Now Writer, getting inspired by the prompting suggestion of this lady, calls out four late coming youths from the audience to come on the stage and asks their names. In response to his question, they give their names as Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal. Listening to them, Writer gets perturbed and yells at the fourth one and challenges him that his name can be anything but Nirmal. So, the interaction between Writer and Indrajit is seen like this:

FOURTH. Nirmal Kumar ...

WRITER. [Suddenly shouts.] No....It can’t be!

[ Silence. The four look at him in surprise, and freeze.]

Amal, Vimal, Kamal and nirmal? No, it can’t be. You must have another name. You have to have. Tell me truly, what’s your name?

[ The stage is plunged into darkness. Amal, Vimal and Kamal withdraw leaving the fourth man centre-stage. The writer’s voice is heard in the dark.]

What’s your name?

FOURTH. Indrajit Ray.³

In the end, the fourth man is bound to expose the reality and confesses that his real name is Indrajit. He does so not to invite disturbance by breaking the set rules of the society. As against Indrajit, the characters like Amal, Vimal and Kamal are seen to be entirely different in their approach towards life. They represent the mass getting themselves satisfied only with their worldly comforts and never wishing to bring any change in their fixed routine. Such people are counted as the intellectuals of the society as they are knowledgeable about science, arts and worldly affairs. The only aim of their life is to achieve as many comforts as they can as it provides them with a higher social status. They keep on doing all this without making a single attempt to think of the significance of their existence. As their existence is meaningless, they may be regarded

as dead. The very first scene of the play does also suggest the same idea, when Writer inquires Indrajit about his existence, whether he is dead. At this, Indrajit replies that he is not sure about it. Here a point to be noted is that Writer does not ask Amal, Vimal and Kamal the same question, which means that he already considers them dead. At this point is seen an interaction being started between Writer and the audience and it is just on this interaction that the structure of this concise and significant play of Sircar is built. This technique used by Sircar has been profoundly admired and acknowledged as a useful device for the dramatist’s interaction with the audience. The structure of this play comprises various interviews of the four male characters Amal, Vimal, Kamal, Indrajit and the female character Manasi taken by Writer. The other female character in the play is Auntie, who is a typical elderly woman, understanding nothing about Writer’s attempts of writing something meaningful and, thus, represents the mass who is unable to realize what Sircar is writing about.

Badal Sircar in his play, *Evam Indrajit*, with the help of the character of Writer, attempting to produce a play demonstrating the life of the middle class people, focuses on the middle class set of values which is rendered absurd. The very title of the play, *Evam Indrajit* or ‘And Indrajit’ suggests that the identity of Indrajit is not ‘only Indrajit’ but ‘and Indrajit’ and is presented being associated to the society and not being independently associated to his own existence. This play presents the hollow and futile picture of the pseudo-modern existence. Today with the progress of science, we are living in a world which demands success from every individual. Man, being a social animal, has been completely lost to its requirements and, in this way, he has lost his own individuality. Having been on such a stage in place of defining society, man is
defined by society itself. Now man is bound with endless problems and frustration. The play *Evam Indrajit* is quite relevant to this very age as it suggests the identity crisis of the modern man through the title itself which means ‘And Indrajit’; a single unit of the whole. He can be taken as a puppet at the hands of the social system. His preference to his being called as Nirmal, keeping pace with the continuing chain of the same sequential names as Amal, Vimal and Kamal, shows his conformation to the existing social system. It shows that Indrajit individually does not have any recognition, but his identity is based on his association with someone else in a sequence which is the system of the existing society. He is bound to like being called as Nirmal like Amal, Kamal or Vimal and follow social rules. His teacher also questions his identity by calling him with mere a roll number. He is not taken as an individual man of society but is counted statistically with a mere roll number which is easily replaceable. Along with this, his failure to marry Manasi is not due to the fact that he is Indrajit but because he is her cousin, thus, having his associated identity.

The characters like Amal, Vimal and Kamal are moulded in set rules as they all move in a circle having no forward or backward movement. These characters are taken to be insensitive as they look to be least concerned with their meaningless activities; and just for this reason, they do not feel restless. There are still some characters like Writer and Indrajit who suffer tremendously with their capability of probing and criticizing their futile life, and just this awareness of the futility of life makes them restless and disturbed. They are the suffering entities, as they are unable to attribute meaning to life. Indrajit’s preference to be called Nirmal like Amal, Kamal, or Vimal was an obligation in order to conform to the dictates of society. He also feels the loss of his identity when his
teacher addresses him just with a roll number. In order to search a purpose in life Writer writes even at the cost of neglecting important biological functions. There is provided in the play a picture of Indrajit’s life, love and his rebelling efforts in opposition to the humdrum set-up of society but he is gradually crushed under the gnawing structure of society. On one hand, there are Amal, Kamal and Vimal who move in the established social system as cogs in the wheel while, on the other hand, there is Indrajit who has a daring attitude to protest against accepting a monotonous existence but, in the end, he is forced to admit that there is no escape from such a doomed life. At this point, he finds himself in such a condition where even the fulfillment of his love would not have provided him the answer of his non-recognition. A visit to London is futile and he considers suicide; he finds himself incapable of the same. So he comes to such a conclusion that: “The past and the present are two ends of a single rope.”

Through the illogical, incoherent and cyclical plot of the play, Sircar aptly reflects the mechanical, humdrum and monotonous nature of the present way of life. The humdrum existence of the contemporary society is presented with the help of repetitive dialogues and phrases. The whole structure of the play well suggests the same idea. The cyclic routine of the society goes on in which the characters change but the events remain the same. As in the starting of the play, Auntie is seen asking Writer to stop writing and then comes Manasi later in the play asking Writer to do the same. It is quite strange and awkward to Auntie seeing Writer writing, by avoiding basic biological functions. The writer has a different philosophy by which he prefers having a purpose in life to paying attention on the basic biological functions.

In the present scientific age, the attitude of the so-called modern man is seen to be quite rough, rude, scientific and logical with the lack of fine feelings and emotions. Quite contrary to it, there is seen a character named Indrajit in the play whose approach towards life is entirely different from such pseudo-modern people. He is seen making several attempts – protesting against the oppression, injustice, exploitation and hypocrisy of the society. The corruption prevalent in the society is seen in an instance of the play when Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit have to face an interview, despite knowing the fact that the interviewers have already selected their candidates, and the whole process of interviewing is just a sham. It shows that talent and merits do not hold any importance in the current society where only money, power and influence matter. The monotonous and humdrum cyclic routine of offices is also evident in the play, as: “…files – then tea – then files – then lunch – then files – then coffee – then files and then coffee transport, taxi, car.”

The character of Indrajit is chosen by Writer as the hero of his play. There was a scope of relationship between Indrajit and Manasi. Indrajit’s love relationship with Manasi cannot be considered to be appropriate in a middle class society of India. As she was his cousin, so it becomes a case of taboo. A daring attitude is demonstrated by Indrajit to protest against the rigid norms of society, but he does not find the same kind of co-operation from the side of Manasi, who prefers to be a school teacher at a distant place from her home. In the starting phase of the play, we find Indrajit being possessed with a romantic spirit, as he looks being interested in a world which is beyond geography but inch by inch, he is seen becoming disillusioned. Though he gets to

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London, ultimately, he has to come back to the same place to accept the same existing system. Abiding by the existing social system he marries a girl and leads a toiling meaningless life. Still it is his sheer consciousness of the world in which he is living, and his independent existence in the callous social system which is a point of great concern.

Indrajit represents a modern man, who is afraid of going beyond the existing system and so he assumes a name ‘Nirmal’ to go to the same order. The selection of his pseudonym in the form of ‘Indrajit’ confirms the reference of mythology. Indrajit was Ravan’s son in the Ramayana who used a covering of clouds to hide himself from getting identified, and only for this reason, he was called Meghnad. Though, Indrajit gets perturbed and scared of being exposed yet he is proud of his superior knowledge of existence. It is observed when he speaks out to Manasi: “If I hadn’t tested the fruit of knowledge I could have gone on living in this paradise of your blessed society of rules.”

Gradually, he realizes the futility of this knowledge as it does not provide him with any kind of complacence. Indrajit now finds only a big wheel which moves round and round and along with this he feels himself too moving in the same motion. Being tired of such a rotation he seeks an escape to foreign land.

Writer shares Indrajit’s disillusionment as he is also perturbed with the rotational movement. His inner feelings are expressed when he speculates about the marriage of Indrajit and Manasi: “They can get married, then the same round again. They may not get married. Again the same round. One-two-three-four-three-two-one. It’s all a question

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of going round and round. The answer is a circle – a zero.” Writer still carries on his efforts to find something which could probably not be just static but dynamic in this stagnant world. Writer feels his personality getting divided and yet, collecting all the scraps of his awareness, he keeps a view of the whole man. Writer again throws a long series of questions in quick succession, one after the other, which seem to be absurd, but they are capable enough of disturbing the conscience of the audience.

Why should you sneeze? Why should you cough?

Why should you smile and why should you laugh?

Why should you sulk and why should you shy?

Every body does it, that’s why . . .

Why should you love? why should you hate?

Why should you suffer and blame it on fate?

Why should you weep and why should you cry?

Everybody does it. That is why, that’s why.

. . . why should you always sleep in the night?

Why should you always try to be right?

Why should you live? Why should you die?

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Everybody does it! That’s why, that’s why.  

Writer is seen on the stage waiting for Indrajit. Then he starts reading Indrajit’s letter in which his disillusionment is expressed:

Calcutta, Bhopal, Bomabay, Jullunder, Meerut, Udaipur, Calcutta, London. Everything goes round and round like a wheel. Still it’s not a proper wheel, it’s spiral. And that precisely is the tragedy – the tragedy of knowing. I catch something. And just when I understand it, it suddenly ends and I throw it away. Then again I grab something else. Still the hope for a sudden, expected wonderful happening doesn’t die.  

There is evidently seen a closeness between the consciousness of Indrajit and that of Writer. Both of them consider past and present to be two ends of the same rope. Indrajit is different from Writer merely in one sense that his dream is still alive. If there had existed no dream, the future could have been collapsed and reduced to the past, and then this past would not have awaited the abstract future but been culminated to death. Writer finds it difficult to write a play about a person looking at life in a realistic way and dreaming about it in a romantic way. He says ‘The more I tie him up in a plot the more he escapes… The more lines I write for him, the more he stands outside them.’

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9 Ibid., 48
10 Ibid., 50

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Therefore, insignificance, meaninglessness and lack of traditional values are well evident in the play. The plot of the play itself is illogical and incoherent. Meaningless human associations are reflected through the use of inadequate language in the play. Word-play and playfulness of language is seen at several places. The deliberate elliptic dialogues present the fragmented and meaningless activities of the pseudo-modern man being tangled in materialistic competition and gains. Sircar has beautifully used the technique of writing a play within the play, known as meta-theatrical technique, when in the play Writer is seen endeavoring to write a play and choosing or searching the perfect hero for his play. All the external conflicts of the characters present the internal conflicts at depth in the play, projecting psychological realism. There is no static characterization as the characters interchange their roles, and Writer becomes the boss as well as the peon in the office.

Though the play Evam Indrajit is seen to be an expression of despair yet the dreams of Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit project a ray of hope. The linguistic devices used in the play, and the dialogues of the characters, attract a wide ranging audience and readers. The characters represent the common men of the society suffering from a lot of external and internal conflicts. Out of all these factors, the play Evam Indrajit is found to be unconventional. The play is contemporaneous, inventive and replete with absurdist elements. The characters of the play are seen raising a voice against man’s existential crisis, his absurdity, death-wish, unemployment and anarchy prevalent in the society. Life is to be lived with full enthusiasm, zeal and zest, in place of being relegated to death. So the desire for death is rejected in the play along with some other negative
forces as cruelty, brutality, hypocrisy and foolishness, etc. The language of the play is ironical mixed with lyrical tone and touch.

Myth is also evident in the play in the instance of the name ‘Indrajit’ as in the *Ramayana* Indrajit was the name of Ravana’s son who was later known as Meghnad. He used the covering of clouds to hide his identity and the same was done in the play by Indrajit who adopted a fake name as Nirmal to hide his identity. The playwright has written this play mainly keeping in mind the element of existentialism. The play is quite relevant to the post-modern state of India as it is the projection of ambitions, desires, frustrations and anguish of the youth of this time. Humanity is given prominence in the play and to think of taking a suicidal step is entirely objected. The message conveyed through the play suggests life to be beautiful, truthful, loveable, likeable and livable. In this way, death obviously goes undesirable. Sircar himself had been quite positive in his approach towards life which is so amply reflected in his plays. Through his plays, he wants to draw people’s attention towards the evils present in the society, and wishes them to be eradicated, and welcomes a glorious future. Sircar belongs to that generation which was the first to come of age after independence in India. Therefore, the very initial post-colonial Indian period, with a drastic change, was replete with several social crises and evils which are highlighted in this play.

Sircar uses a dramatic trick lest his play should lapse into a sequential reflections of humdrum events. He places Writer and Indrajit sitting by each other. At the time, when Writer is reading the letter, Indrajit is silent and the moment Writer stops, Indrajit starts speaking. Writer’s reading of the letter and Indrajit’s speech go on in continuation.
Many facts are disclosed in this way, as Indrajit has returned from London, he has been married to some other girl but not Manasi and Manasi is continuing her job of a schoolteacher at a distant place from her home. Through the on going conversation, one gets aware of the sadistic thoughts of Indrajit which seem to arise out of an utter lack of faith.

Now turning to the same kind of circle which everybody turns to like Amal, Vimal and Kamal, Indrajit has also become a part of that circle getting married and performing all socially demanded rites. Adhering to all this he feels restless, having no definite goal of his life, as against Amal, Vimal and Kamal who are busy in achieving their material goals through getting a promotion, owning a house and flourishing a business etc. Indrajit is not possessed with all such fake goals of life and, out of his knowledge, he is found to be an unhappy distinct personality. His realization of the truth that, following this circular rotation of life, he will not be able to do anything of some significance, which could take him to a certain destination of life. Sircar is found efficient enough in presenting the conflict running in Indrajit’s mind quite dramatically. Indrajit, in this way, can definitely be compared with Sisyphus, who is ill-destined with a task of pushing a rock to the top every time, when it rolls down, which is nothing but a continuous endless process. In the end of the play, there are seen Indrajit, Manasi and Writer who recite a psalm suggesting the endless way of life, assuming to end in death.

And hence

There’s no end.
There's no hope
Of fulfillment
By the holy shrine
At journey's end.
Forget the questions
Forget the grief,
And have faith
In the road –
The endless road,
No shrine for us
No God for us
But the road,
The endless road.\textsuperscript{11}

The conclusion of the play, thus, suggests that the present life system is fixed and it goes on the same way as everybody follows it. Still, there are a few who make an attempt to come out of this mechanical routine and think of an entirely new and dynamic system, without being afraid of getting rejected from the so called established system.

Such kind of people are represented in the play by the characters as Writer and Indrajit, having a vision of a new system, despite the existence of the prevalent one. Now the point of significance to be noted here is not this whether they are accepted or rejected but they take an initiative without being bothered of the result.

In the age of globalization at present, the condition of the modern man of sixties as presented in the play may less relate to the condition of the youth of twenty-first century India, but the psychological conflicts of the characters in the play do relate to those of the contemporary men. The main focus of the play is also on the point of existentialism, to brood over the significance and meaning of one’s existence. Though, materialistically, the twenty-first century’s youth may be in a better condition from the youth of sixties, existentially, the same question is lying for them which was felt there in the play by Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit regarding the need of their running blindly after material gains, without being aware of the meaning of their existence. Evam Indrajit was the first play which was performed by Sircar’s ‘Shatabdi’ group. It was because of the performance of this group, Badal Sircar came to be known as a ‘barefoot playwright’.

Now coming to ‘Street Plays’, one can, first of all, discuss about Bhoma. The play Bhoma presents the deplorable condition of the exploited peasants of rural India who have been a soft target or victim of the powerful oppressive landlords. It has not been the condition of the rural society peasants only but in the urban society also, poor craftsmen have been exploited at the hands of the industrialists. The central character
of the play is Bhoma. Though he is never seen in the play yet he is seen everywhere as a symbol of forest, village, innocence, love and the gullible nature of the village people.

The very starting of the play displays several problems of the ordinary people of society. A forest, full of poisonous trees, represents the society comprising people of opportunistic and oppressive attitude, and an aboriginal barbarian woodcutter, who endeavors to cut down such poisonous trees, is seen in the form of Bhoma. Bhoma represents all the peasants getting brutally and ruthlessly oppressed and exploited, at the hand of the landlords. He, at the end being fed up with such atrocities, is bound to hold his ‘rusty axe’ to cut down all the poisonous trees, growing around him. The message, Sircar seems to suggest through the play, is that it is required of everyone, now, to get up and take the axes with Bhoma to cut down all the poisonous trees, growing in the forest of society. If it is not done by the people of society then the same kind of exploitation of one man by the other will go on, and there will be no end to this. Thus, in the play, Bhoma is seen to be a symbol and spirit of social transformation.

_Bhoma_ has been written in an entirely different way in comparison to the other plays. Sircar himself calls the writing process of Bhoma to be quite unique and inapplicable to other plays. It was not written in continuation like other plays as it took around three years to be completed with several scenes being written at times. At the initial stage of writing this play, even it was not decided, that the play will be titled _Bhoma_, because then Rangbalia was taken just as one of the scenes of the play. Without keeping any structure, plot and character in mind, different scenes of the play, each around a specific theme, were written down. Badal Sircar himself says about the
construction of the play in this way, as: “The different scenes were born of our reactions to different impulses that had come from our readings, our observations, our experiences at the time…..”

Therefore, the play comprises several threads being tied together to form it as a single rope. A number of scenes, presenting the social and economic exploitation of the peasants and workers, representing the lower strata of society, are displayed in the play. As the play was a collective effort of ‘Shatabdi’ team, all the members had contributed to the play with their feelings and experiences, they were having of the oppression of the poor people. In this way, with their all the possible combined efforts, there is produced a play named *Bhoma*. *Bhoma* presents a picturesque description of the neglected position of the Indian rural population as against the urban developmental attitude. Sircar dislikes the fact that the urban people do not try to pay any attention towards the wretched condition of the village though they themselves suffer from several discomforts and problems as of unequal distribution of food, electricity supply and transportation, etc.

This play emerged as a united effort of Sircar and ‘Shatabdi’ team members, with a unique structure, comprising neither a plot nor any character. There are six actors being dressed identically to play different roles. Along with playing various roles, these actors also mime various things as machines, river and many activities as of cutting trees, working with machines, harvesting, etc. The play starts with character One as he

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discloses a fact that he knows about Bhoma but is unable to give his whole information, as it is seen in the given dialogues:

ONE. I want to speak. I want to speak to those who don’t know yet.

THREE. What do you want to speak about?

ONE. About many things. About Bhoma.

THREE. Who is Bhoma?

ONE. I don’t fully know who he is. I’ve never seen him….I’ve only heard of him.  

Later in the play, a discussion, on the topic of evolution, is found being held among the actors as they exchange their views on the causes of dinosaurs’ extinction, and their whole conversation indicates the prevalence of inhumanity in the society. They exchange the views:

TWO. The blood of fish is cold.

ONE. The blood man is also cold. Theory of Evolution. Darwin. Had man’s blood not grown cold, he wouldn’t have survived.

THREE. What would he have done then?

ONE. Died. Become extinct, like the dinosaurs.

THREE. The blood of the Dinosaurs. Was it cold or warm?

ONE. I don’t know.\textsuperscript{14}

Scientifically, it does not make any sense but, socially, it perfectly exposes the current status of society, lacking fine feelings of love, care, sympathy and humanity, among the people of society. The above dialogues suggest that, if the same goes on and people do not get humane in their attitude, they may also extinct like the dinosaurs had been long ago. Several problems of the ordinary men are also discussed later in the play. The present status of society marks the busyness of the people. They are so much involved in their own works and problems, that they have no time for others to share their pain and suffering. In the play, a character is seen who is busy just in telling his own problems to the other characters, without thinking of or listening to others’ problems. He speaks out expressing:

I am a stenographer in Samson and Blackbird Company my salary is now 455 rupees my take home pay is 428.40 rupees …. I have a wife two sons a daughter my mother two younger brothers and a younger sister at home the elder of the two brothers has passed his B.Sc. but hasn’t got a job in one and a half years \textsuperscript{15}

In his little job with a small amount of salary, it is quite difficult for him to bear the burden of such a big family with so many members. He alone is the working member of the family, as the other members, despite their studies, could not have been able to


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 61
secure a job. This shows the problem of unemployment even for the educated candidates. In such a condition, having so many problems all around them, people get indifferent towards the sufferings of others and easily irritated, which can be observed in a dialogue between the actors, Two and Three. While listening to the problems, the actor Three feels irritated and shouts at the actor Two. Thereafter, he starts telling his love story as: “You know, I fell in love with a girl... No, no, a girl fell in love with me - I mean...a love fell in me – a girl – I her – that is that girl – my love – I – love a girl....”

This shows the apathetic attitude of the people who, despite seeing others in problem, do not pay any attention to them. Later, the attention of the people is shifted from this to urban development and tourism:

FIVE. Darjeeling in summer, Kashmir in autumn, Gopalpur on Sea in winter....

ONE. Delhi, Bombay, Madras and?

TWO, FOUR, FIVE, SIX. Calcutta!...

TWO. Hindustan Mark Two! Fiat Fifteen hundred! The Maruti is coming! The small car! The people’s car!

FOUR. Television! Television! It’s here now! Don’t worry!

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FIVE. Metro Rail! Flyovers! The second Hooghly Bridge! Don’t worry….\textsuperscript{17}

The play displays impartiality in the developmental process of urban and rural areas. On one hand, a lot of attention is paid on the urban development, the rural development, on the other hand, is not taken to be a point of consideration or concern. The logical fact, actor One puts forth to promote rural development, is, as he speaks out: “But 75 per cent of India’s population live in villages, not in cities.”\textsuperscript{18} The picture of village presented by the poets is like this:

THREE. The village! The lovely village! The charming village!
The beautiful village!

FOUR. The special village welfare programme – on the radio.

TWO, FOUR, FIVE, SIX \textit{(singing a song by Tagore)}. The red path that leads beyond the village casts a spell on my heart….\textsuperscript{19}

Though the poets describe village to be a beautiful and loveable place yet practically no one seems to be concerned about maintaining its beauty. After this, the play presents the corrupt state of business world, as the rich business people are seen being involved in hoarding and acquisition, and it is presented with their dance, symbolizing their greed. This dance is disturbed at character One’s calling aloud ‘Bhoma’. He introduces others with Bhoma being the forest, the paddy field and the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 63
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
village. The play is satirical in approach regarding the poor economic condition of the rural society, which is displayed in a description of a village of West Bengal, where the worse condition of the people is displayed by character One in this way:

There are 250 families in the village of which 60 families have each less than an acre of land, 90 families have no land at all. They work on other people’s lands as hired labourers. They get four rupees a day as wages. Each of these labourers has five, six, 10 dependants. At four rupees a day you can’t afford to buy rice; wheat, yes, but not enough for *chapatis*. 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’s cornflour, if you can’t even get hold of that, you starve. You can’t always get a four rupees a day job, may be at most for 100 or 125 days a year.\(^\text{20}\)

The peasants are in a very critical and deplorable condition. They are so poor that to think of buying fertilizers and diesel pumps to have a good harvest is out of their reach as the buying is quite costly. Leaving aside these secondary aids, they are not provided with even the primary things as seeds and water to grow crops on the fields. Fertilizer’s cost has been increased as doubled. People are found at the starving state. Peasants are seen in a pathetic condition. Though they grow food grains for everyone yet are unable to feed themselves. The peasants are unable to grow crops on their own fields as it is impossible for them to afford water pumps and fertilizers, which are

required for the rich growing crops. It is the reason why they have no option except working as hired labourers on the fields of rich landlords. Even while working on their fields, they hardly get enough wages to lead their lives as each labourer has to bear the burden of five to ten members of the family.

Their crisis does not end even here. A harder time waits for them to come. When it is summer, they do not get even this much and, as a result, they are bound to starve. Though the village peasants undergo all such miseries, the urban people are hardly concerned about them. They want only urban development to take place, and more and more facilities to be provided to them at the cost of village upliftment, as is spoken by the actor One in the following lines:

There’s no electricity but there are the poles and wires – all these three years…. If we get electricity, if the canals are dredged, if we have more tube wells – only three million rupees – then the whole of the Simulpur anchal, all the 3000 acres of land – will yield gold!

Gold! 21

The fact, One presents, needs to be paid heed to that, on one hand, where the urban development programmes need billions of rupees, the rural development, on the other hand, needs only a few million rupees, with the help of which, the villages can be provided with the facility of irrigation for their agriculture. Except the actor One, other actors keep on promoting the requirement of city development which is noted in these dialogues:

TWO. The second Hooghly bridge – only 600 million rupees.

THREE. Digging in Calcutta for better streets and better sewers – only 2000 million rupees spent so far.

FOUR. The Metro rail will cost only 3000 million rupees.

ONE. Only three million! I’ve calculated it. Only three million for the Simulpur anchal...  

In this way, both the units, the city and the village, are seen being placed at two opposite poles and, the development of a few cities seems to put the primary requirements of a number of villages at stake.

Exploitation of the lower strata of society by the upper class is there everywhere whether it is a village or a city. In cities, industrialists are there to exploit workers, while in villages, there are landlords to do the same with the peasants. This is the very fact which the play projects. A company, named ‘Mahamaya Engineering Company’, produces diesel pump sets and sells them to another company named ‘Samson and Blackbird’. The latter buys each pump set from the former, at the rate of just two thousand five hundred rupees and sells it at rupees four thousand, six hundred and twenty five. The only thing it does is to stick a name plate of ‘Samson and Blackbird’ on the pump sets manufactured by ‘Mahamaya Engineering Company’ to present them as its own in the market. It is not the end, even in the payment to ‘Mahamaya Engineering Company’ for the pump sets, ‘Samson and Blackbirds’ plays a trick that the latter pays

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to the former for the pump sets only once it has sold them and made a lot of profit out of the sale.

Having paid such a little amount, the ‘Mahamaya Engineering Company’ needs some money to manufacture new pump sets so they approach a bank manager to get a loan for a few thousand rupees. The manager does not do them any favour and refuses to sanction any loan to them, showing the point of security. Whereas, at the same time, he does not find it wrong to sanction a big loan of rupees one lac and thirty thousand for ‘Samson and Blackbird Company’ without any security. Ultimately the poor craftsmen of ‘Mahamaya Engineering Company’ are bound to sell it due to the lack of working capital to manufacture new sets and maintain their company.

Lovelessness prevailing in the society for a long time, causing exploitation and oppression, is referred by the actors One and Two as One says: “My heart bleeds. Can a drop of it germinate even a prickly thorn on this earth?”23 On this Two replies like this: “This earth has sucked up so much blood already, hasn’t it?”24 The word ‘blood’ is used as a strong image to symbolize the exploitative attitude of the people of the society. In the play, this word is repeated again and again to suggest various meanings of this single word as the actor Five says: “Give me blood. I’ll give you jobs…Give me blood, I’ll give you permits… Give me blood, I’ll give you a kingdom.”25 In all these statements of actor Five, the word ‘blood’ suggests ‘money’, ‘murder’ and in the end ‘sacrifice’. Ultimately, it all is done at the cost of oppressing and exploiting the poor people of

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.,77-78
society. Each image of blood is invigorated by Sircar one by one. At last this image of blood in the form of the inhuman attitude of the powerful people towards the weak and helpless is put forth before the urban middle class people to make them realize their fault of avoiding the injustice being done to the poor rural peasants, as: “Bhoma’s blood, red blood, blossoms into white jasmines of rice on our plates. Twice every day.”

In the end of the play, the same idea is presented as One says: “There’s the taste of Bhoma’s blood on the tongue. We drink Bhoma’s blood, and laugh and play. There is blood dripping down the sides of our mouths, dripping, the poisonous plants are growing, growing. My blood, man’s blood, becomes cold, c-o-l-d, c-o-l-d.”

The play tries to suggest that the main cause of exploitation and oppression, prevailing in the society, is the lovelessness being present among people. Along with this, there are also a number of ways by which it is encouraged and increased. One of such ways is seen in the form of fine arts which allows lovelessness to last in human beings and thus, makes them indifferent towards the agonies of the people:

TWO.  (in agony) Beggars and dogs fighting over leftovers from the wedding feast thrown out on the street.

ONE.  Drown that noise with Ravi Shankar’s sitar.

TWO.  Ravi Shankar is in America.

ONE.  I have records. Want some?

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27 Ibid., 109
28 Ibid., 80
Another cause of it is the emergence of individualism and competitiveness. Everybody in today’s time is concerned about one’s own development and upliftment. People are running after material gains. They give more importance to the material things and less or no importance to human beings. It all causes lack of love among people and they do not take care of one another. This condition is projected in these dialogues:

ONE. Lots of things. Lots and lots…. 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….

THREE. Is there love on those shelves, in those niches?

ONE. (very seriously). Not on the shelves, not in the niches.29

Even religion, an institution of love, purity and all positive spirits, is not left without being detached from such evil changes. People try to take an advantage of it by exploiting it for their own evil purposes. The image of God itself is presented not as one granting salvation but material things:

ONE. ….Don’t believe in love.

THREE. Then what should we believe in?

ONE. In things. Things, things and more things.

THREE. Only things?

ONE. You can even believe in God. A God that gives you things. A God that take away things from the unbelievers.  

The relationship between children and parents is also found lacking the warm and natural feeling of love caused by individualism and competitiveness. Despite a lot of sacrifice made by parents for their children as they borrow money and sell their property to provide them with the best education, children in return do not take care of their parents. Not only the parents but the country also spends a lot of money for their good education but, in the end, being highly educated, they do not wish to stay in their own country, and leave to a foreign land leaving their country and parents in debts:

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.  

Now the same cycle of exploitation is seen being repeated on a broader level. Within the country just as cities are used to exploit villages, now at the global level, advanced countries like America are seen exploiting the third world countries like India.

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31 Ibid., 84
Individualism plays a great role in reducing one’s love to the nation, one belongs to, and brings corruption, dishonesty and selfishness. People in power do the same, as they do not hesitate in exploiting their own nation by depositing their money in Swiss bank. This is the reason why the country goes bankrupt and the rulers get prosperous. They use media to present them as a patriot:

ONE. You’ll borrow 100, and repay 100?
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.
ONE. Shalt thou not be called a traitor by the nation?
TWO. Who dares call me that? I’m a patriot and I’ll remain one.
ONE. How?

Man of today is full of ego, possessing no feeling of brotherhood, which is also a factor to add to the exploitative system of society. Though the constitution of India provides every citizen with equal opportunities, practically the same does not happen.

as only a few people, who are powerful and, thus, privileged, take advantage of it. In this way, the whole country or government, representing democracy, goes bankrupt; but a few individual rulers get affluent by exploiting the money of the country or the country’s people.

Lack of humanity has reached up to such a level that there is seen everywhere the emergence of nuclear warfare. In the name of nation’s safety, every powerful country is producing nuclear weapons. Nuclear tests, which are held by these countries, produce a lot of pollution in the environment, causing radioactivity. If these weapons are used in wars they not only put millions of people to death, but also affect the coming generations being born as the deformed one:

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

TWO. FOUR, FIVE, SIX. This earth…

ONE. Have released enough radioactivity to cause the birth of two million maimed and deformed children…

Talking about the lasting period of radioactivity as a fatal factor One says: “Twenty-four thousand years! Human civilization is only 5,000 years old. Within this time man has made arrangements for the next 24,000 years.” Despite knowing this bitter

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34 Ibid., 91
fact, people do not seem to be against it, as the idea of individual progress has rendered them blind, and they feel happy at their country’s nuclear advancement:

ONE. So many experiments. So many bombs. Who knows how many?

THREE. I don’t want to know.

ONE. The total stockpile of atom bombs can destroy the whole world – 400 times.

TWO, FOUR, FIVE, SIX. This earth.

ONE. But that won’t be needed. Only once will do.35

Therefore, the only force, which is seen working behind all these inhuman activities, is lovelessness. It is the evil obsession in the mind of the people which causes all kinds of violent conflicts, whether it is a family feud which leads to a murder, or the world wars which cause a great carnage. In spite of this fatal fact, people do not feel bad with this destructive progress:

TWO. There’s no Bhoma. There’s only I. (Starts.)

_The race starts. Everyone tries to push the other aside and go ahead._

THREE. No, no, its I. (Tries to overtake One.)

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FOUR. Not you, It’s I.

FIVE. Oh no, it’s I.

SIX. Stop, stop, it’s I.

They all are racing now.

ALL. I, I, I, I, I. 36

Sircar in this play tries to discover as why lovelessness emerges, and if it emerges then what its effects are. As its effects are quite negative, he also wishes a solution to be provided to this problem. The idea Sircar presents is that it is only individualism and competitiveness which causes the emergence of lovelessness among people, but the idea of cooperation and collectivism may remove this: “ONE. (over their voices) I, I, I, I – and a little more security. I, I, I, I, and a little ease. I, I, I, I, and a little luxury. Bhoma, you, I, they, when will it all become a great ‘we,’ can you tell me, Bhoma?”37

It is only the unity of all the scattered ‘I’s into a collective ‘we’ which can be a solution to this problem, but in today’s competitive age, it seems to be near to impossible. It is because now everybody is obsessed with the idea that it is the competition which increases productivity and, thus, causes advancement, without realizing the fact that it is going to a destructive mode. Though this competition increases productivity, the people who are benefitted by this, are just those, who are the

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37 Ibid., 83
privileged ones. The characters of the play present this idea in their dialogues in this way:

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 10 million. So what? This is called ambition. This is called ‘being established’.\(^{38}\)

Sircar in this play gives a true description of inhumanity prevailing in the society, giving rise to the exploitation and oppression in all the spheres of life, from the small unit to the large one, whether it is poor peasant or a developing country, they all are exploited at the hands of the powerful forces. A poor village peasant is suffering by the oppressive attitude of the landlord, a worker by the industrialists, a village by a city and a developing country by the advanced countries. Coming in contact with the people of Sundarbans village, Sircar came to know the deplorable condition of the villagers. Seeing them in a dehumanized condition, Sircar felt shocked, at the same time, incensed knowing the fact that despite being aware of the villagers’ critical condition, the West Bengal’s urban society is quite indifferent to them. The cause of this indifference is nothing but lovelessness prevailing in society. Not only indifference towards the suffering of the poor peasants but also lovelessness is clearly evident in the heart of the urban people for one another.:
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.

ONE. …From two million to three million to four million to 40 million – maybe we are 40 million already. Sir, can you spare me a drop of water?  

Sircar holds all the people of society responsible for the present state of injustice. He wants every single person of society to be awakened to take a step to bring about the feeling of humanity in human beings, which is projected through these dialogues:

THREE. No, this cannot be! This cannot happen! We won’t let this happen!

ONE. Who will not let it happen?

THREE. Man! Man has created all this. Man is going to stop it.

ONE. With what?

THREE. With love! Man still loves man, doesn’t he? Tell me! Doesn’t he love?

ONE. (Slowly) Man loves. He still loves.

THREE. Then?

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ONE. But the blood of man is getting cold. I don’t know how long man will be able to love.

THREE. Is there no way out then? No way at all? To keep the blood warm? To bring back love? To change the world?

ONE. (almost to himself) Bhoma.  

With the progress of the play, one finds the image of Bhoma being converted into a powerful symbol. Bhoma symbolizes gradually various images as humanity, love, compassion, a village, a jungle and a poor peasant. The only cause of all the problems is Bhoma’s oppression and the only way for the removal of problems is Bhoma’s freedom. Sircar tries to put forth the picture of the egalitarian society before everyone to adopt it. If people wish to work in such a way with which they could achieve and maintain such a society, they all will have to make an effort to eradicate the exploitative and oppressive forces:

ONE. Yes, yes, this earth. This earth belongs to all of us, doesn’t it, Bhoma? If we 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 and therefore can’t get your rice – if we could destroy for ever that queer, obscene picture – I can’t explain it, Bhoma! I can

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only understand – if you don’t rise up with your axe, then the forest of poisonous trees will never be cleared!\(^{41}\)

The poisonous trees referred in the play symbolize the class of oppressive and exploitative people. Thus, the forest of the poisonous trees represents the society comprising the exploiters, oppressors and the opportunists; and the image of Bhoma represents an aboriginal barbarian in the form of a woodcutter. In this way, Bhoma is the representative of all the poor peasants, being exploited at the hands of the landlords. Getting fed up with the oppression, he is bound to take up his rusty axe, and sharpens it to cut down all the poisonous trees growing around him.

The biological factors do not play any role in converting someone into an oppressor or the oppressed but the conversion takes place according to the social environment. This is the reason why the eradication of such a social system is so terribly required, in place of an individual. Even if a few exploiters are destroyed, it will not bring an end to the continuing chain of exploitation as it is deeply rooted in the system itself. So here are not the individuals but the socio-cultural environment or the social system which is represented by the image of the forest, replete with poisonous trees. Bhoma suggests the requirement of humanity and love to take present society forward to a better state.

The play *Procession*, in an unconventional way, has been produced without any plot. Like the play *Stale News*, it is structured after the concept of collage, as various incidents happening in human life have been compiled together producing them in the

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form of a play. The theme of the play, which keeps all these episodes tied together, is getting lost in civilization. Like the play *Bhoma*, in this play, too, characters are not individualized but they are types representing the mass. The characterization of the play consists of Khoka, Old Man, the authoritarian corrupt Officer, the manipulative Master, and a Chorus comprising six people. Two groups are seen existing in the play, one group comprises Old Man and Khoka and, the other group, Master and Officer. The play presents Khoka being killed, again and again, and Old Man getting lost in city’s labyrinthine roads:

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

_He leaves by a different route. Khoka has already entered the acting area. He continues walking, like Old Man._

KHOKA. Michhil Michhil on the highways on the footpaths Michhil Michhil. Everyday on the highways on the footpaths the Michhils grind me to dust crush me underfoot kill me Michhil Michhil…

The city symbolizes civilization becoming highly influenced under the control of the powerful Master and the corrupt Officer. The procession, representing various rituals of our civilization, is commenced at the command of Officer. Hiding the fact, that someone has been killed, Officer asks the procession to go on, as he says: “Nobody’s

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People, who are the part of this procession, have strong faith on Master, that is why they accept whatever Master says, and obey his all orders. Their mind is obsessed with the idea that the civilization cannot exist without Master: “So that there will be wealth enough to ensure a good life for all men. But that will eliminate the Master. Civilization will crumble.” While, the reality is something beyond it as the cunning Master wants the protection of the civilization for his own survival because his existence is based on the presence of civilization only:

THE MASTER. What is the greatest enemy of civilization?

CHORUS. Communism.

THE MASTER. Who upholds, preserves and protects civilization?

CHORUS. You, Master!

The play starts with the usual load shedding, taking place everyday, in an Indian city. There is utter darkness. Suddenly, there is heard a penetrating scream. People get stunned hearing this scream and they try to look for the person, who screamed, by lighting the match in the pitch dark but are unable to find anyone. Then, they all get confused and start assuming for the victim in this way:

ONE. What’s that? What’s that?

TWO. Who screamed?

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44 Ibid. 34.
45 Ibid., 35
THREE. Murder! There's been a murder.

Four. No, no, someone must've fallen into a hole.

FIVE. Someone's been stabbed! Watch out!46

At the same time, there comes Officer who orders all of them to go back to their homes, telling them that nobody has been killed. At the threat of Officer, all of them flee away. Just then Khoka is seen present drawing his attention and the attention of the audience towards his deplorable condition. Though he tries desperately to draw his attention, by coming in front of Officer, telling him that he is killed everyday yet Officer does not seem even to feel his existence, as if Khoka were invisible to him. At this, Khoka screams once again and, ultimately, falls down before Officer, but Officer still does not show any sign of marking this incident and leaves the place. Then, there is seen the funeral procession of Khoka, being carried by Chorus, which sings the funeral songs, and Old Man is seen asking the people to join Khoka's funeral procession. Thus, this funeral procession is the first procession displayed in the play. Later, in the play come various processions which are introduced by Old Man as he says: “it's the Michhil, Michhil, Michhils for food and clothes, Michhils for salvation, Michhils for the revolution, military Michhils, Michhils of refugees, Michhils for flood relief, mourning Michhils, protest Michhils, festive Michhils, star-studded Michhils.”47 Hence; the play progresses with the display of various processions.

47 Ibid., 18
Talking of his childhood days, Old Man describes the structure of the roads being criss-crossing and labyrinthine which he used to go through with his father:

...holding on to my father's hands, as the road wound and meandered along and kept vanishing under my feet only to yield an ever new road. (He begins to walk.) All the roads vanished round the bend then a new road which vanished at the bend and a new road till it vanished again at the next bend and a new one again and a bend and the vanishing road the new the road the bend vanished new the ro-o-o-o-ad48.

Now in the play, there is seen the search for Khoka as he has been lost. A description of his features is also given to trace him out easily. An announcement is made everywhere about Khoka's being lost as in press, on radio and wireless. They try to look for Khoka through all these sources to make him aware that his missing has led his family to be in extreme sorrow. All the members of his family as his mother, father, brother and sister cry for him. Even the relatives are quite sad because of his missing. They offer him various material things as chocolates, biscuits, balls, bats, college, books, job, property, land, house, gold, car, etc. and he is made tempted even to his relations as his wife, children and grandchildren, and some other things as peace, happiness and salvation, etc. Now Old Man gives a broader introduction of Khoka, as he says: “His parents named him Khoka. Thousands of parents with thousands of

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When Old Man sees people asking Khoka for his home coming Old Man tells people that Khoka will not come back to the old home because it is lacking human values but he wishes to come to the new home which will be full of humanity. Hence, in the play is seen a symbolic description of the image of ‘Khoka’ and the ‘home’. Khoka symbolizes a child who is full of human values and left without being spoilt or affected by civilization, and the old home symbolizes the current state of society which is lacking all human values. The old home is seen in the form of such a place where the human values are not given any importance. Thus, people, living in such a home or in other words in such a society, get quite indifferent towards others’ sufferings. The present state of society is like a labyrinth, causing a lot of confusion and turmoil. Living in such a society, one is always caught in some problem or the other. As and when, one finds the solution of a problem another problem, suddenly emerges. Such a situation is well described by Old Man as he says: “You go far and wide, you turn round and round, and come back to the same road.”

Sircar has a vision for a society which is full of human values in the form of new home to be achieved in the coming future. It will be such a society which will be keeping no connection with the unsympathetic civilization. Now the play presents the whole day’s activities of an Indian city’s middle class people. As the day starts with newspaper, people are seen buying them presented in the shape of fool’s caps. It is the

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50 Ibid., 22
symbol of people’s getting befuddled by the press. They go to their offices boarding buses or trains which are quite full with working people, vendors and beggars. Vendors are seen advertising in a tempting way to sell their products, as there is found a salesman who promotes his pens to sell them in the following way:

Attention, ladies and gentlemen, I have a new message for all of you who travel by this route every day. I’m sure everyone of you uses a pen. Well, today I’m going to show you a new kind of pen. This pen is called Fung Sung. You may ask: is it a Chinese pen? No, it’s not a Chinese pen. A Chinese pen of the same kind would cost you 18 rupees. But I offer you this pen for only one rupee. just one rupee! If you buy a set of three you pay only two rupees and fifty paise. All you have to do is ask. It’s only on this train that you get the pen at this price. It’s a very special publicity campaign by the company. A pen for a rupee only on the train. Two rupees and a half if it’s three at one go. You can drop it but it won’t crack, it won’t break. It won’t leak. So who wants one?51

In the train, there is also seen another vendor selling an edible item in the same tempting manner: “Lozenges! Lozenges! Four delicious flavours – spicy, hot, salty, Sweet. Chutney lozenges – 10 paise a pair lasts half an hour in the mouth, quenches your thirst. Anyone? Lozenges…”52 Population, a major problem, is described in a picturesque manner in the play which is presented through a scene of crowded bus. It is

52 Ibid.
really very hard for the passengers to secure a little space just to stand. Out of this problem, they get irritated and start quarrelling, blaming each other for their uncomfortable condition. For the whole journey, there remains the same kind of taxing atmosphere. There is no comfort even for the working women who have to travel and face the same kind of discomfort everyday. They have to get involved in the verbal fights to get a little space in trains and buses while travelling, which is evident in these dialogues:

TWO. Ohh! Why do women have to travel at peak office time?

SIX. We have to reach office too, OK?

TWO. Couldn’t take the ladies’ tram?

FOUR. You just shut up will you. Don’t know how to talk to a lady?  

Having reached their offices, people get involved in their work. Then getting quite tired and fed up with their busy working schedule, they try to relax themselves by playing some game, watching some movie or a match. All such activities suggest that the urban people have gone quite materialistic, as they have just a few fixed things to be done everyday. They are lacking human values. Humanity does not exist anywhere in their mind or heart. Without trying to know the reality, all such people believe the unreal reports of the newspapers which present the fake statements of corrupt leaders and commercial advertisements. Later, in the play is seen a procession presenting

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different religions. The play presents human life in the form of such a procession which is lacking meaning and the spirit of vitality. Now there is seen the reference of freedom struggle through the statement of actor Two while he speaks up: “Remember, at the moment of your birth your life has been offered in sacrifice to the great mother.”

Even the independence could not bring any peace for the people of the country. The process of exploitation goes on from the time of dependence to independence. Before independence, there were British rulers and, after independence, there are their own people who exploit them. The division of society, into two groups as the rich and the poor, is still evident. There is a difficulty for the middle class people to lead a smooth-running life because they are bound to buy the items of daily need as sugar, bran, pulse, rice, coal, oil, kerosene, notebook, baby food, etc. on the higher rates from the average through black market. Exploiting the middle class people in this way, the black market profiteers rejoice by dancing, while the middle class is made to believe whatever their corrupt leaders suggest showing their fake patriotism in the following way:

THE MASTER. Remember our national heritage. Remember the numberless martyrs in our struggle for freedom. Remember the revolutionary heroes of our fiery days. Remember – India is the country of Manu, Parashar, Kalidas, Bhababhuti, Sita, Savitri, Sri Chaitanya and Gandhiji. Remember the invincible strength of the principle of non-violence. Remember that it is our responsibility to

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give spiritual leadership to the world. Remember the greatness of democracy in India. Remember the fundamental rights of the Constitution. Remember – the Green Revolution, the Nationalization of Banks, Family Planning, Dollar aid, the nuclear blast, MISA arrests.  

Sircar’s satire is cast on India’s achievement of independence with a proud nationalism as he barely exposes the actual state of independent India, where the exploitation of the poor people is still existent. He does not attack any individual but the system which ever takes the poor from bad to the worse condition. Despite being called a civilized society with the material progress, the present society is full of deformities. Today’s so-called civilized people in true sense are the dehumanized one’s. Thus, the playwright holds the fake civilization to be responsible for all such human sufferings. The whole historical description of the civilization is given by Chorus in these words:

ONE. The Sun is a star in the Cosmos. The Earth is a planet revolving around the Sun. Man is a greatest creature on Earth.

TWO. All men were equal at the beginning of Creation. But they were uncivilized.

Three. All day long they worked yet there was never enough to eat. So they were equal!

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FOUR. Then men learnt to use animals, learnt how to farm. Then they had surplus.

FIVE. Surplus brought civilization. Man became civilized. Civilization civilized man, civilized society.

ONE. Who would enjoy the surplus? Everyone? No. Only those with virtue, with intelligence, with strength.

TWO. The Master has virtue, intelligence, strength. So the world is divided into masters and slaves. And always will be. Thus have the gods willed for us.56

In this way, Master, an evolution of civilization, seems to be quite cunning, selfish and dehumanized. He plays tricks to befool the people to serve his ends. His purpose is to hold a command on the people and govern them, for which he preaches them quite stupid and illogical facts. According to him, all the people believing in communism are nothing but animals. As communism is based on equality, he is against it. Communism and civilization are two opposite poles so they can not exist together. If communism exists then it will cause an end of civilized society and the presence of uncivilized one. The uncivilized society consists of uncivilized people and such people are equal to animals. Projecting this idea, the master suggests that inequality is required for civilization and the egalitarian society is fatal to civilization. So, Master assures people

with these words: “Rest assured, my children, I'll keep you civilized. Communism is for animals. Remember – you are not animals, you are men.”\(^57\)

Master does not leave even the religion to serve his evil purposes. He manipulates the whole meaning of religion to exploit it for his own benefits. He misinterprets religion to approve all the oppression and exploitation done to the common people, presenting before them the idea, that, the more you suffer, the smoother way you secure to the heaven. So, he asks people to keep suffering without complaining because in return of it they are going to have heavenly pleasures. People find this oppression and exploitation beyond their tolerance power and tell Master the same. At this Master replies in this way: “There’s heaven for you after you die, and heavenly happiness. Animals have no heaven. You’ll die as men, not animals: this is my blessing.”\(^58\)

Though Master’s preaching soothe the suffering people for a while yet their sufferings reach to the extreme limit. They once again start telling Master all about it like this:

ONE. Three years without a job, even Father’s retired now.

TWO. Thirty-six days now there’s been a lockout at the factory, not a morsel at home.

THREE. Unreasonable rain makes all the paddy rot, mountains of debt collect at the moneylender’s.


\(^{58}\) Ibid.
FOUR. Adulterated cooking oil’s given the whole family food poisoning but there is no money to pay for a doctor.59

Thus, the pathetic condition of the people is well evident in these dialogues. Poverty is their biggest problem because they are lacking money and are even in debts. They, therefore, cannot deal with the problems of their lives. One of the causes of poverty, as reflected in the play, is the problem of unemployment. Though people are educated yet they cannot secure any job to earn their livelihood. Not to speak of men, even the divine powers add to their sufferings in the form of untimely rain causing a disaster to their crops, a source of their income, which their lives depend on. These are the reasons why poor people fall in all the more debts. Except these financial problems there are also some family issues which trouble them a lot. It all is reflected through these dialogues:

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

ONE. Chhanda won’t marry me, she’s told me so.

TWO. My son didn’t sit for his examinations, joined the street gangs instead.

THREE. My older brother and sister-in-law stay separate now, don’t even write to us.

FOUR. I can’t bear the people at home, they’re always quarrelling.

FIVE. A first at Art School but I can’t even paint, I’m a canvasser for soap instead.\textsuperscript{60}

A picture of inhumanity of the police is also presented in this play. Some people do not look happy because their love life is not going well. The atmosphere of society has also been contaminated. The youth is misled to get involved in wrong activities. An instance of family disintegration is also displayed in the play as how the children get separated from their parents and siblings after their marriage considering them to be a burden. People are lacking mental peace. Many talents are there which are unable to flourish out of poverty. In this way the picture of all suffering people, out of some reason or the other, is barely presented in the play to make people aware of the actual condition of post-independent India. Not even a single person seems to be satisfied.

The play shows how the suffering people once again complain Master for their intolerable suffering. They any how want to get rid of it but Master is cunning enough to deal with all such things, as now, he plays his another trick and that is to offer them liquor to forget their sufferings and miseries. All the people drink the liquor and get lost into its effects. Old Man, too, along with all the people, drinks the liquor and says: “Sura. Somarasa. Liquor. Daru. The best medicine for getting lost. Lose yourself lose yourself get lost stay lost to hell with searching.”\textsuperscript{61}

So, people are once again seen getting misled and misdirected by Master without their being aware of his cunningness. Now Old Man is seen making a search for

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 36
the real home through a real road leading to it. This search of Old Man symbolizes the search of human beings for their earlier world which was full of humanity, love and care, without the existing civilization causing the emergence of the exploitative and oppressive attitude of the people. This old home only is the real home. Old Man finds a trouble that he, time and again, finds himself standing at the same place, despite making a search for it for a long time. In this way, Old Man gets lost, being drunk in the labyrinth of confusing roads, and all his efforts to get to his destination go in vain. At the same time, he comes across Khoka. They start talking to each other. Old Man is seen asking Khoka to get up to go to his home, but Khoka feels it impossible as he says:

KHOKA.                I’ve been killed.

OLD MAN.             Good for you, now go home.

KHOKA.             (looking up at him). But how can I? I’m dead.

OLD MAN.            I know it feels like that, son. I’d also thought – blackout. But let’s go now.

KHOKA.              Where?

OLD MAN.             Where else? Home. Where’s yours?62

Khoka seems to be extremely depressed, filled with the feeling of getting killed again and again, and it is the only thing which he tries to make Old Man aware of. All the efforts of Khoka for finding his real home do not bring him any result and he is unable to find his real home. This is the reason why on Old Man’s asking for his home,

Khoka replies that earlier he used to have a home but now he does not have any. Hearing such words from Khoka, Old Man tries to make him understand that his home is not lost but he is just confused about the road which leads to his home. Thereafter, both of them try to make a mutual effort to search for their home, the real one, but this time, too, it happens the same and they find themselves reaching the same place where they had started their search from. Once again, Khoka is seen being killed and Chorus, marching in a funeral procession, carrying his dead body.

Sircar gives a true description of society contaminated with evil ideas and polluted thinking. It is seen possessing a deformed culture. People of society have become narrow-minded, and filled with the corrupt ideas, they get self-centered. They get prejudiced about the other members of the society. As all of them are having the same feeling, the whole society is filled with negativity. The negativity is that much deeply fixed in people’s mind that they can not think of approving any social reform. The established system, replete with a number of social evils, is the only ideal state for such people. Even if a little reformation seems to take place in society, people do not wish to accept it. It can truly be seen in the dialogues:

TWO. A brahman boy marrying a low-caste sadgope girl? Thst’s why they say: when it’s love, one doesn’t care whether it’s this low-caste or that!

THREE. The lower classes are getting so impertinent. Even the rickshaw-wallahs put on airs.
FOUR. The world’s turning atheist. It was our country alone that had some religion but even that is going out.

ONE. Whips. They need whipping. Whips alone can straighten them.

TWO. All the housewives out on the kitchens and dancing off to work, what depravity can there be left?

THREE. The servants demand higher wages. Ungrateful wretches!⁶³

Such ideas have caught so deeply the mind of the people that it is really very difficult for them to come out of it, and produce positivity in the whole atmosphere. They are too rigid in their thinking and do not wish any reformation to take place. So the point here to be noted is that, until people think of abandoning such deformed thinking, they can not imagine a healthy atmosphere to prevail in society. Later, in the play, is seen Chorus which sings a patriotic song:

It’s a fine world we live in, made of a jumble of spices,

In the midst of it lies a land, the best mash of all,

It’s a glorious hotchpotch of odds and ends,

You’ll find a land like this nowhere else,

It’s the best of all lands, the land of my birth.⁶⁴

Just then, there is seen Khoka trying to make people aware of Master's hypocrisy. He wants people to know that they are being cheated. That is why he tries to expose Master and his ways as how he befools the people by telling lies to them. At the same time, when Officer finds Khoka doing all this, he comes to stop him doing all this by shutting his mouth and taking him away. The Officer is all concerned about Master’s convenience. Now Master orders Officer to make people enjoy with the help of fine arts:

Good good. Keep the men happy, give them peace, discipline. Let people enjoy their lives. Give them art and culture. Art. Culture. Keep them submerged in aesthetic pleasure. Every dirty doubt that surfaces – drown in it pleasure. Keep in mind, men are not animals. Only men can swim along the floodwaters of such pleasure, lose themselves in its depths.⁶⁵

Hence, Master plays all the tricks to get everything done according to himself. He brings everything in use as religion, nationalism, fine arts and liquor to serve his purpose by keeping people’s attention away from the deep-rooted social evils. Master keeps people so much involved in all such things that he does not allow them to think of bringing any change in society by eradicating all these social evils. Master is powerful enough to influence them through his speech and keep a hold on their minds upto the level that they do not think beyond his preaching. He is seen with great reverence in the procession by people. After that there are seen a number of other processions coming

⁶⁵ Ibid., 45
and, with all them, Old Man is seen becoming completely disillusioned. Old Man gives a
description of a number of processions which have been befooling him:

Such colours of the processions, such forms. So many words in the
procession, so many sounds. I’m lost in the colours of their
banners, lost in the sounds of marching feet, lost and straying, lost
and straying, lost and no returning. Lost as I walk the roads and
crossroads, roam the byways and highways, still lost – which way is
home? The way home is lost to me. To my real home, my really
truly only home. Where’s the procession that’ll show me my way
home? The really truly only Michhil? There – again! Again a
procession, more processions, there, coming – there!66

There are some processions which shout the slogans having no meaning. All
these processions follow a revolutionary one. Khoka feels restless and starts asking
people to stop doing all that. Khoka takes these processions to bring death. They do not
bring anything fruitful. They also do not lead to the real home which has been Khoka’s
search for a long time. Talking about the death ratio, Khoka says that in every six
second in the world, there is a death due to starvation, and a war taking place in a year
causing death to the millions of people. Khoka does not blame any individual but the
whole mankind to be responsible for such carnage. To awaken the people to be
conscious of this fact, he addresses them in this way:

Every day in the battlefields thousands of me are dying. *(To the audience)* You sit on the sidelines watching processions, *(shrieking)* you watch murders, murders! Silently you watch the killings, you are killed in turn. Yes, you kill, you have killed. I’m killing, you are killing – we are killers, all. We all kill, we all get killed. We kill by sitting quietly and doing nothing at all, we get killed.67

Khoka, who comes across Officer being followed by Chorus, is ultimately decapitated by them. Now is seen a preparation taking place of the execution of Khoka. A number of things are seen bringing Khoka to death as a firing squad, a gas chamber and in the end a bomber aircraft comprising Officer and Chorus which pours bombs on Khoka causing him death. Just then is seen dense darkness out of power cut and, in such a dark the death scream of Khoka is heard. Later when the lights come up, there is seen Khoka lying dead on the road. There are seen a number of ways by which Khoka is killed. Old Man looks at Khoka in such a condition, goes to him and asks him to get up. On Old Man’s such a request khoka gives an excuse that he can not get up because he is not alive but dead. Hearing this from Khoka, Old Man tells him that it is his misunderstanding that he is not alive because he is just lost, not killed. Old Man makes all his efforts to convince Khoka to make a new start to search for his real home. Ultimately, he is able to convince him, and both of them mutually start searching for the real home, which a real road leads to. Now one another procession is seen approaching

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them. This is a procession comprising such people who are holding one another’s hands, which Old Man considers to be the real procession, as it does not represent any particular class, caste, party, religion and ideology etc. This is the procession of mankind, replete with humanity and all human values, which takes the problems of all the people as one’s own, without making any differentiation, and try to solve them mutually and collectively.

Throughout the play, one finds Old Man getting lost again and again, and Khoka being killed repeatedly. Every time when Khoka says that he is killed, he represents the truth. So, Khoka’s such killing symbolizes the killing of truth. Officer symbolizes the police department which is full of corruption. Officer threatens the people when they say that some one has been killed and orders them to get away from there as there is no killing. He tries to hide the truth. The way, Old Man gets lost at the time of searching for the real road leading to the real home, symbolizes the deformed culture, the prevalent social evils getting deeply established in society which hinders any reformation to take place. Similarly, the way Master misuses nationalism, religion, liquor and fine arts in the form of entertainment to stop people from being aware of the truth, symbolizes the blind faith of the people.

Badal Sircar’s play Stale News, produced in 1979, was the result of the mutual efforts of the ‘Shatabdi’ team. The theme of the play is based on revolt. The play starts with a young man who comes across several news items through which he comes to know about an ethnic group named ‘santhal’, the oppression and exploitation done to it and its revolt against it. At the same time, he deals with the life and surroundings he is
having. In such a condition he finds it quite difficult to take any decision. So he carries on his routine work. Like any particular social member, he studies hard and then gets a job and ultimately gets married. By now, Dead Man has made him aware of the deplorable condition of the poor people and a requirement for social change and reformation. Young Man finds it difficult to withdraw himself from the existing life conditions and get encouraged to take a step against injustice prevailing in society. He then comes across the whole journey of agonies and sufferings of the ‘santhals’ and gets shocked by this. This brings in him a great change with which he gets conscious of his social responsibility of taking some step to eradicate such social evils.

The play gives a satirical description of the oppressive and corrupt attitude of the police and landlords. The cunning landlords in a quite tricky way force a number of rural peasants to be enslaved for life signing a bond of perpetual slavery:

TWO. According to a survey on bonded labour or on men who have been forced to sign bonds enslaving themselves for life, there are 5,55,000 of these in Uttar Pradesh, 4,67,000 in Madhya Pradesh, 3,25,000 in Andhra Pradesh, 2,05,000 in Tamil Nadu, 1,93,000 in Karnataka, 1,71,000 in Gujarat, 1,11,000 in Bihar, 1,05,000 in Maharashtra, and 67,000 in Rajasthan. Sixty six per cent belong to the low caste and 18 per cent to the aborigines. Eighty-four per
cent of the owners are high caste Hindus. Most of the bonded labours have been driven to this pass by extreme poverty…\textsuperscript{68}

Children of the poor people are in a worse condition. Most of such children die because they do not get a required proper treatment. At the time, when they should go to school for studies, they are working as child labourers. Now when they require nutritious diet, they do not get even anything to feed themselves. As a result of which they are weak and sometimes die due to starvation. Though the government organizes various welfare programmes for children, the condition remains the same:

Five. Ninety-two per cent of Indian children live below the poverty line. One hundred and twenty of every 1,000 newborns die every year. Every month, 1 lakh children die of diseases caused by malnutrition. About 25 lakh children suffering from Vitamin A deficiency may go blind. The number of child labourers in India is the highest in the world.\textsuperscript{69}

The play starts with the characters repeating the word ‘damin-i-ko’, time and again. Some later, they repeat the word ‘diku’ and ‘hei hoop’ or ‘hoo-oo-oo-ool’. All these words represent a group of people known as ‘santhal’ pargana, the oppressive landlords and the oppressed peasants’ revolt respectively. In the play there is seen a character as Dead Man whose whole body and face are wrapped in white bandages. He is seen frequently in the play. Something is written on the palm of Dead Man which he shows to Young Man, the protagonist of the play who, after reading it, starts

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 142
following him. It is nothing but the present and past news written on his right and left palm respectively. The play now gives the whole description of the ‘santhal’ revolt. A long time ago, an ethnic group, known as ‘santhal’, settled in an Indian region Bihar. If one believe the scholars, for the first time in India, who had cut down the forest to start agriculture and establish homes, were no one but the ‘santhals’. They were leading a quite smooth and peaceful life with the barter-based economic system which they had introduced, but the same could not remain for a long time. With the influence of the British merchant who replaced the santhals’ barter-based economy with their economic system based on money, the ‘santhals’ were put in the manipulative predicament and their peaceful lives were collapsed.

Out of this interference, the ‘santhals’ started coming out of their confined settlements and scattered here and there around Bengal and Bihar by the year 1790. Now their self protected smooth running life style was highly disturbed. The place, where ‘santhals’ had collected in a great number forming a majority, was a part of Bhagalpur being called as ‘damin-i-ko’ or ‘santhal’ pargana. The various groups of moneylenders as in the form of Bhojpuries, Bengalis, Bhatias and Punjabis, etc. collected on ‘santhal’ pargana, whom the ‘santhals’ called ‘dikus’. They disturbed their barter-based economic system which they had established for their own self by lending them a small amount of money, tobacco or cloth and used to buy their produce quite below the required price. They used to increase the rate of interest even upto five hundred percent which was definitely quite impossible for the poor peasants to pay. Thus, the poor peasants were bound to sign the bond of slavery for their whole life.
Such higher loans could never get repaid so the peasants remained slave for generation after generation.

Ultimately, when it was beyond limit, a revolt of ‘santhals’ known as ‘santhal’ hool took place. On 7 July 1855, this revolt got to its peak and covered a wide area where a number of police officers and ‘dikus’ were killed along with their homes being looted and put to fire. Then on 16th July, a severe battle took place between two groups, one was of the ‘santhals’ who were thirty to fifty thousand in number, in half naked condition, carrying their primitive weapons in the form of boas and arrows, swords and battle axes, and the other group was of the British soldiers who were fifteen thousand in number, armed with modern weapons as guns and cannons. The British soldiers, in a quite ruthless manner, killed a number of ‘santhals’ without having any pity for the children, women and the old people. A few ‘santhals’ who could save their lives in this battle fled to the forest and tried to continue their struggle adopting *gurilla* style. The end of the play displays as how Young Man gets deeply moved by getting aware of the pathetic story of the ‘santhals’ and his attention is entirely drawn to his social responsibility. Sircar along with other members of ‘Shatabdi’ team produced this play collecting several news items referring to the oppression and injustice done to the ‘santhals’, making a collage out of it which portrays man. Sircar presents a juxtaposing picture of social inequality and injustice prevailing from the pre-independent time to the post-independent period. The worse condition of society which, was existing during the British Raj, is still prevalent.
The play *Stale News* gives various examples of the oppression and exploitation, both in pre-independent and the post-independent India. Exploitation, which took place in pre-independent India, is seen through the instance of ‘santhals’, getting oppressed at the hands of rich landlords and British government. The tricky landlords took their lands from them through cheating. In need of money, the poor ‘santhals’ were bound to approach the rich landlords, who used to take advantage of santhals’ this adverse condition and give them loans at a very high rate of interest which they were unable to repay and, unfortunately, remained their slave for their whole life. This fact can be well evident through these dialogues:

FOUR…. strengthen the foundations of British rule over India. Large quantities of rice, mustard and other oil seeds were sent off to Murshidabad, Calcutta and England. In Return the Santhals received …

FIVE…. a small sum of cash, some salt, tobacco or cloth, the prices of which added up to something far below a reasonable price for their produce. In the rainy season the moneylenders would lend them some money, rice maybe a few other commodities, thus …

SIX…. remaining masters of the Santhals’ destinies for the rest of their lives. The rates of interest were exorbitant, going upto 500 per cent at times. A Santhal …
SEVEN…. would lose the crop on his field, his plough, his oxen, even himself and his family to pay the interest. Even after he had repaid 10 times the original loan, the burden of the loan …

EIGHT…. remained as heavy as ever. In this great festival of plunder …

The exploiters are not found just in the form of landlords but the British government also comes in the same category. They exploited the ‘santhals’ in the name of collecting revenue which the starving ‘santhals’ were definitely unable to pay. At this, the British magistrates, getting bribed by the landlords, used to punish them heavily. This condition is displayed through these dialogues:

ONE. The British judges and magistrates were bribed by the landlords and moneylenders. Innocent Santhals were therefore dealt the severest of sentences while their oppressors never received even a warning from the court.

TWO. The British rulers were concerned only with collecting revenue. From 2,000 rupees their collections had gone up to 43,000 rupees by 1854, in just 16 years. The Santhals region was frequently cited as a model of effective administration at low cost.

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71 Ibid., 133
The pathetic condition of women is also displayed in the play. The higher strata of society exploits the poor women, taking advantage of their illiteracy, out of which, they were unable to take any action against them as lodging a complaint against the injustice being done to them. On the whole, from every side and in every way, this game of exploitation goes on and, if they try even a little to oppose them, then they are treated even in a worse manner like this:

THREE. The peaceful, poor, illiterate Santhals were cheated and forced out of their property; their vegetables, goats and poultry were snatched away; insults, beating, torture, the rape of their women – nothing was left out.

FOUR. Spurious scales were used in the markets to cheat the Santhals, false weights were plastered over with vermillion and the naïve Santhals were cowed down with religious awe.

FIVE. At the slightest sign of protest, donkeys, horses, cattle and even elephants were let loose on their fields to destroy their crops and teach them a lesson.\(^{72}\)

The oppression of the poor is a continuous happening which goes on even after independence. Though India has got democratic and the government is elected by the citizens yet once getting elected, the leaders forget all their duties and do not do anything good for the people of the country. Even if something is done, that is done just for the rich, not for the poor. It shows that no matter who is the ruler but the victim for all

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of them remains the same and that is the weakest group of people existing in society. So the instance of the post-independent exploitation of the poor is seen in this way:

THREE. In the first nine months of 1978, 3,019 cases of atrocities on the Harijans. One hundred and seventy-five Harijans killed, 129 Harijan women raped, 289 cases of arson . . .

FIVE. 13 April 1978. The police fired on a peaceful demonstration of 500 workers at the Pantnagar Agricultural University in Uttar Pradesh after blocking up the entrance and exit to the place. One hundred and fifty workers were killed, figures for the injured are not available. The dead bodies were later piled up in a sugarcane field and set on fire.73

Sircar has also referred in a satirical way to the role of mass media in deviating the attention of the people from injustice prevailing in society, by keeping them engaged in the tempting commercial advertisements, as:


FIVE (a ‘no’). Cinevista.

TWO (pleading). Dial a Discount! Kwality Ice Creams.

FIVE (a wavering, and then a ‘no’). Come alive with Nescafe.74
Some great intellectual leaders are also satirized for communicating wrong notions to the people as they say:

RAMMOHUN. ‘I now conclude my Essay in offering up thanks to the Supreme Disposer of the universe, for having unexpectedly delivered this country, from the long continued tyranny of its former Rulers, and placed it under the Government of the English. . .

BANKIMCHANDRA. . . . For we are a nation under foreign rule and we shall remain under under foreign rule for many years more.75

Along with this, some other kind of biases are also there which cause trouble for everyone as the actor Eight says: “Twenty percent of the posts are reserved for schedules casts and scheduled tribes.”76 So, the play is seen to be a collection of satire, on the most relevant points of concern, attached to society. In the form of political satire, Indian government is taken to be an issue which does not work properly and, despite being elected by the people, it does not think of their comfort. Even the basic requirements of the poor people, as food, cloth and homes, are not met with, which is displayed in such an instance:

THREE. Seventy per cent of the population of West Bengal live below the poverty line, and 95 per cent below the basic nutrition line. The five per cent at the lowest rung of the income level have a per capita expenditure capacity of only 31 paisa a day. Between

76 Ibid., 127
1961 and 1971, the number of landless agricultural labourers has almost doubled in India. Their spending capacity has gone down by 27 per cent.\textsuperscript{77}

The government and the police are also satirized for their inhumanity. If any revolt takes place against the injustice being done to the people, the government and the police suppress it ruthlessly. An instance of it can be seen like this:

ONE. In August 1971, more than 150 people were killed in two days in Baranagar with the acquiescence of the police. The dead bodies lay on the street in clear daylight before they were lifted up in rickshaws and handcarts and deposited in the Hooghly river. A 60 year-old man was soaked in petrol and burnt to death because he could not give the killers any information about his nephew. The hand of a schoolgirl was cut off and …\textsuperscript{78}

It shows that there is no limit of exploitation and oppression. Police and government can go to any extent in showing their cruelty to the low class just to protect and take care of the comforts of the higher class. No one is concerned about the improvement of the deplorable condition of the poor people. Even the welfare programmes, being organized by the government, do not bring anything fruitful for such people. The reason behind its failure is corruption which has been deep-rooted in every unit of the government. Political leaders are concerned just about their own development in place of the country.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 161
Thus, a deep study of all these four plays, *Evam Indrajit*, *Procession*, *Bhoma* and *Stale News*, gives a sequential development of Sircar’s concept of an ideal society. As the play, *Evam Indrajit*, presents a picture of freeing man from the fake identity and finding the real one; the play, *Procession*, suggests a search for the real road leading to the real home, a home which is free from any kind of exploitation and corrupt forces; then comes the play, *Bhoma*, which shows the need of removing all the hindrances coming on the way of progress and, ultimately, the play, *Stale News*, presents man to be daring enough to protest against the inhuman treatment and injustice being done to him. Being aware of the real meaning of one's existence, resulting in the abandonment of any attachment to the material things, by making oneself a part of the procession comprising the real men obsessed with humanity, leading to the real home, which is full of love and care and, in the end, by cutting down all the poisonous trees causing hindrance to the way of success, man can easily be able to establish an ideal society, full of equality, in which the comfort of each and every man is taken care of, and every man of such a society gets according to his talent and requirement.

Thus, Badal Sircar, in his unique dramatic way, could be able to portray the real picture of the present society along with its past history. The bigger issues or the problems of society as of poverty, unemployment, population, child labour and corruption, etc. are presented with potent drama elements. Many social evils are also dealt with excellently. Sircar’s ‘Third Theatre’, taken to be a theatre of protest, is quite effective and appealing as it directly strikes the conscience of the men. As the audience of his theatre does not stay like a passive spectator but it emerges then to be an active
participant of it, no spectator of this theatre is left without being influenced by the message the plays of his convey.

Hence; Sircar has made his theatre quite free from the conventional requirements and accessories of the traditional theatre as stage, lights, sounds, make-up and costumes, etc. He did not only break down the boundaries between the actors and the audience but also did pave a new track to the formation of drama by dispensing it with the set style of plot, character, story and dialogues of the play. Therefore, the effect of Beckett’s the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ is clearly visible on his ‘Third Theatre’ but Sircar has made this form of theatre entirely his own. In this way, Sircar’s plays comprise the distinctive characteristics in the form of (i) presenting just the middle class people as the characters of his plays, (ii) exposing the deep rooted social and moral evils and (iii) making a drastic change in the techniques of drama. All such characteristics add to his status of an eminent Indian playwright.

Thus, with the production of ‘Street Plays’ under ‘Third Theatre’ and their performances through ‘Shatabdi’ theatre group, Badal Sircar gave a whole new concept of presenting drama in the open areas with the participation of the audience. Infact; Sircar brought his plays from page to pavement and just for this concrete reason he has been eminently known as a ‘barefoot playwright’.