Chapter 5

Remembering the Colonial Past: A Postcolonial Study of Badal Sircar’s “Indian History Made Easy”
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The term postcolonialism is rooted in the history of imperialism which is regarded as a policy in which a country or a state aims to broaden its control forcibly beyond its own borders over other states and peoples but this control is not imposed only by military force but also by imposing the economic and cultural ideals (Habib 737). Postcolonialism is also concerned with the proclamation of the underlying political structures of colonialism. In Robert Young’s words, “Postcolonial theory involves a political analysis of the cultural history of colonialism, and investigates its contemporary effects in western and tricontinental cultures, making connections between that past and the politics of the present” (6). Postcolonial literatures and criticisms took birth during and after the struggles of various countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and other colonised places for independence from colonial rule. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin describe the term in a broad sense which covers “... all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” because of the “... continuity of preoccupations” between the colonial and post-colonial periods (*The Empire Writes Back* 2). Postcolonial discourse is associated with an extensive range of dialogues of colonising powers, which address the numerous forms of internal colonisation. The main concern of these dialogues is to challenge western philosophy, literature and ideology. Badal Sircar as a postcolonial playwright is also concerned with the analysis of the colonial rule in India and the political, cultural and economic ideals and policies adopted by the coloniser for the successful imposition of colonialism. In one of his plays *Indian History Made Easy (IHME)*, originally written in Bengali with the name *Sukhapathy Bharater Itihas* which is the focus of attention in the present chapter, Badal Sircar as stated by Subhendu Sarkar in the Introduction of *Two Plays* “… . . lays bare one of the most crucial periods in the history of India-British colonialism” (xxxii). In *Indian History Made Easy*, Sircar reveals the oppression and the oppressive strategies implemented by the coloniser. Sircar used the form of classroom teaching which is an experimental theatrical technique adopted by him to convey his message to the common people in an easy and interesting way. Subhendu Sarkar further states that Badal Sircar also used some other “… dramatic and theatrical devices to make it both effective and memorable. Besides, it encompasses Sircar’s vision of progress
that can be achieved by the people’s movement” (xxxi). Thus, through his Third Theatre Sircar wanted to bring about revolutionary changes which would lead to progress, if common people became aware of the strategies used by the coloniser to suppress and exploit them. In writing this play Sircar was influenced by “. . . Marx’s writings on India”, Marx’s criticism of capitalist economy and his theory of communism (xxxi). One of the major strands of postcolonialism is Marxist ethics which offers a good understanding of dominant currents in postcolonial philosophy as Robert Young states;

Postcolonial critique incorporates the legacy of the syncretic traditions of Marxisms that developed outside the west in the course of anti-colonial struggles, and subsequently in the development of the further forms of emancipation, of gender, ethnicity and class, necessary for liberation from bourgeois nationalism. (10)

The other postcolonial traits which shall be analysed in this chapter are the hegemonic control exerted by the British rulers on the elite or the upper classes of India, anti-colonialism, neo-colonialism and the play of knowledge and power as analysed by Edward Said and Michel Foucault. The play will also be analysed from the point of view of the use of Third Theatre techniques. The Third Theatre was set up by Sircar as a reaction against the British style proscenium theatre, as pointed out earlier.

The play Indian History Made Easy was first performed in Bengali on 17 December 1976 at the Calcutta Theosophical Society Hall by Sircar’s play group Satabdi. This play was translated into English by Subhendu Sarkar and published in a collection entitled Two Plays (2010). This play, it can be said, is based to quite an extent on Marx’s writings on Indian colonisation and the exploitative economic policies of the British as indicated by Marx in his two essays namely “British Rule in India” (1853) and “The Future Results of British Rule in India” (1853). Marx’s overt comments on colonial ideology especially his critique of capitalist exploitation and his call for revolt inspired several postcolonial thinkers and litterateurs. Karl Marx in various journals, essays, and letters and in his book Das Capital has discussed and criticised colonialism, the subjugation and economic exploitation of the
underprivileged class by the colonisers, among other things. It is clear that these writings of Marx moved Badal Sircar greatly and he wrote *Indian History Made Easy* that dramatises the exploitative rule of the British colonisers in India, as a result.

In the play *Indian History Made Easy*, Badal Sircar has focused on British rule in India. He begins from the time when the British came to India during the Mughal period and got permission for business. In due course of time, the British acquired control of the entire economic and political systems of India and became the rulers. In Sircar’s view, as revealed in *Indian History Made Easy*, British colonial rule was the worst kind of rule in India. This play exhibits how the colonisation of India by the British is responsible for the social, financial and psychological damages and backwardness of Indian society both during and after the colonial period. But, as stated by Sircar in the play, the British were not the only conquerors of India. Before the advent of the British, India was conquered by other peoples from outside the Indian sub-continent such as, “Aryan. Sak. Hun. Pathan. Mogul” people (Sircar, *IHME* 5). But, these conquerors did not damage the social, political and economic frameworks of India the way in which the British coloniser did. Since it was during the Mughal period that the British traders were allowed to conduct business in India and this gave them a foothold which was eventually exploited by them to their benefit ultimately leading to the colonisation of India by them, Sircar calls the Mughal period “The dark period of Bharat’s history” in this play (4). If the Mughal emperor Jahangir would not have given the permission to the British traders to “do business” they may not have succeeded in colonising India (7). However Sircar also points out that the rule of the Mughals was beneficial for Indian villages, especially from the point of view of farming and cottage industries. During the Mughal period, points out Sircar, “The owner of the farming land is the village community-not the individual. The cottage industries thrive in the villages. Weaver, blacksmith, potter, carpenter, brazier, goldsmith, etc. Food and everything else for the village-produced in the village itself” (5). Millions of Indian villages were self-sufficient. The head of those villages was the king. The revenue which was the part of the harvest was collected on behalf of the emperor. Less revenue was collected if “. . . the harvest’s bad, more if it’s good. In return, they dig pond, canal, make roads, carry on maintenance” (5). For this fact, Sircar seems to be indebted to Marx’s writings on India in which he says that “. . . artificial irrigation by canals and waterworks [were] the basis of Oriental agriculture”
Sircar further observes that Indian cottage industry was world famous and Indian cotton and silk clothes and metal works were exported to the entire world, especially to Europe. India was self-sufficient and “It was still Bharat” (Sircar, IHME 7). But, in the seventeenth century, the British traders got the permission of business from the Mughal emperor Jahangir as said earlier. “The first Charter” was accepted by the Mughal emperor in 1600 and “the factory in Surat” was established in 1612 (8). The second factory at St. George, Madras in 1639 and the third factory was founded in Calcutta in 1696. In 1698, the East India Company brought a new Charter and received the permission “for monopoly business” in India (8). The British traders “ Took clothes-cotton, silk, muslin, and benarasi. . . . Took iron, brass material. . . . Took what not!” (8). In return they gave “. . . silver worth 30,000 sterling pound-s to India every year” (10). During the Governor General ship of Robert Clive, after the battle of Plassey in 1757, the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orrisa came under the possession of the British East India Company. After this, as described in the play Indian History Made Easy, since the Nawab had become a puppet in the hands of the company, the British East India Company was able to buy anything from Indian markets at a very low price and sell their own goods in India at a price that was exorbitant. In the play, Robert Clive informs Mother Britannia, “There’s no need to worry now. Silver’s needed no more. Got dewani of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. The Nawab’s puppet in our hands. What we’ll buy—we’ll buy for a penny. But sell at a price that’s four times” (11). They imposed unbearable taxes on the Indians

30 September 1765. Respected Directors. It is expected that your company will be able to extract revenue worth two and half crore of sicca rupees this year on account of the dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orrisa. Later it will increase by twenty to thirty lakh in a year. . . . Therefore there is a net profit of one crore twenty-two lakh of sicca rupees or sixteen lakh fifty thousand nine hundred sterling pound-s.

Your, Robert Clive. (12)

The banks of Britain swelled with the revenue collected from India and factories were set up in India as well as in Britain with the money available in these banks. Due to
the establishment of factories inventions such as the "steam engine" by James Watt, the "spinning jenny" by Hargreaves and the "power loom" by Arkwright were utilised (15). As stated by Sircar in the play, these inventions were not new, “Earlier too there had been inventions here. But they were of no use. . . . There wasn’t any capital, . . . How could the factories be set up without capital? If the factories aren’t set up, how can the inventions be used?” (15). After extracting money from India, factories were established in India and these factories and discoveries conjoined in looting the wealth of India. India’s cottage industries were also adversely affected by these factories. Hence Britain prospered at the cost of India and Indians. Marx in his essay “The British Rule in India” also observes that while restructuring their economy and achieving maximum profit the British have crossed all the limits of humanity and inflicted extreme misery, poverty and tortures on the natives of India. He writes,

England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history. (Marx 12)

Marx further adds, “British steam and science uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindostan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry” (14). The play Indian History Made Easy makes it clear that from 1766 to 1768 materials worth six lakh twenty-six thousand three hundred and seventy-five pounds came from Britain to India and the materials worth sixty-three lakh eleven thousand two hundred and fifty pounds were exported to Britain which was “Ten times” more than the materials imported to India (Sircar, IHME 17). The amount of revenue earned from the land increased by leaps and bounds. In the year 1764 which was “The last year of Bengal’s last Nawab’s rule. Total revenue earned from land [was] eight lakh seventeen thousand pound-s” (19). In 1793, it increased to “Thirty-four lakh pound-s” (22). Due to rigorous taxation and the British government’s negligent attitude towards farming there was a famine in 1770 in which “. . . one-third of Bengal’s population has died”
This fact has been highlighted in Marx’s essay “The British Rule in India” in which he says, “. . . the population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants to 20,000” (14). One-third of the farming land has turned into forest. In spite of the famine, the British did not give any relaxation to the farmers and continued to collect revenue at the same rate. The upper limit of revenue was fixed by another policy meant for exploitation namely the Permanent Settlement implemented by the Governor-general Lord Cornwallis. The British looted India in the same manner in which vultures devour dead bodies, “The TEACHERS turn into vultures. Cry ‘Tcha. Tcha’. They peck at the nearly-dead bodies of MA and the STUDENTS” (Sircar, IHME 20). Here the teachers symbolise the British coloniser. Ma represents India, while the students represent the poor peasants of India.

During the second period of British colonisation, according to the play Indian History Made Easy “The money looted from India turns into Britain’s initial capital. The industrial revolution is made possible” (23). Factories were established in England to produce commodities. England, now, needed markets to sell her goods. This is the reason why seventy to eighty per cent tax was imposed on the clothes exported from India to England so that the import from India could be prohibited and the products of the British factories could be sold in Britain’s domestic markets. This is evident from the Master’s statement in the play Indian History Made Easy who complains to Britannia, “You’ve ruined my business to provide him with the market, mom. You’ve imposed seventy-eighty per cent tax on the silk and cotton clothes I sent from India so that your younger child could sell the products of his factories in the domestic market” (23). The unbearable taxes imposed on goods from India paved the way for the destruction of cottage industries and impoverished the Indian weavers, blacksmiths and goldsmiths. Deprived of work the unemployed artisans moved to the villages in groups and became peasants. But in the village the zamindar was made the “. . . owner of the land” by the British East India Company whereas earlier the land was owned by the village community (27). Now it was the zamindar who gave “. . . the right to cultivate land” and collected “. . . revenue from the peasants” (27). He kept “. . . 2.5 per cent for himself” and gave the rest to the British East India Company (28). Revenue was “. . . fixed according to the quantity of land” by the British (27). In the play, Mother Britannia who stands for the queen of Britain is informed by the Master who represents Lord Cornwallis: “I’ve fixed revenue by Permanent
So even if there was a bad harvest, revenue would remain constant and no mercy was shown to the cultivators. *Indian History Made Easy* also provides the information that there were thirty-one famines in 125 years from the year 1776 to 1900, claiming the life of at least thirty million Indians because “All the canals and ponds are silted up. No one pays attention. They extracted only revenue. Revenue. Revenue. And my son dies. Dies. Dies” (32). This serves as a contrast to Mughal times when canals and ponds were well looked after by the government of the day who “… dig pond, canal, make roads, carry on maintenance” (5). On the other hand, after the destruction of Indian cottage industries and the industrial revolution in England, factory-made things were in great demand in India. People did not want to buy Indian goods, because they considered them inferior and goods made in England were considered superior by the Indians because of their novelty. The Master in the play informs Mother Britannia, “Factory-made thread, cotton clothes-they can’t get here. Iron and aluminium goods, woollen garments-everything’s selling like hot cakes. Almost everything that was produced here is about to go out of circulation. People want foreign goods” (27). Thus, as a result, as shown in the play, during this second period the “… industry-agriculture combined rich self-sufficient village community-ruined” (26).

In the third period of British colonialism in India, as highlighted by Sircar in this play *Indian History Made Easy*, “Industrial Capital” was changed to “Finance Capital” (31). After the industrial revolution, Britain tried to monopolise Indian markets and the markets of other colonies. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 ended the rule of the East India Company and India came under the direct “… rule of Britain’s Queen” (32). Soon the available Indian, American and African markets became saturated with British goods. As a result, England needed more markets. The British made great efforts to sell their commodities and to buy raw materials so that they may earn more profit. They tried to approach the villages and faraway places and to carry raw materials from those places, roads and railway tracks were made,

MASTER: Need a bigger market!

TEACHER 1: Market’s saturated.

TEACHER 2: Sharing ended.
TEACHER 3: The world’s ended.
MASTER: (roars): Need market!
TEACHERS: There’s no market.

BRITANNIA: What’ll happen to my fat sons? What’ll happen to their goods, their accumulated capital?


TEACHERS: There aren’t any roads.

MASTER: Make roads. Lay railway tracks. (33)

In Sircar’s opinion, Britain’s strategy to monopolise the markets for more profit was the biggest reason of the First World War as stated clearly in the play:

BRITANNIA: More profit! More capital! More in bulk! Where do I go now?

(The TEACHERS being fatter, search everywhere.)

MASTER: Where are we to go? Where are we to go? Where are we to go?

BRITANNIA: What’s up? What’s up?

BRITANNIA: The rowdy sons of other countries. Fatter sons. They’re coming to beat up my sons!

TEACHERS (as if to strike): We need market! Need market! Need Market!


During and after the World War I, anti-colonial sentiments had emerged in India and people demanded independence. In August 1917 the British liberal
politician Edwin Montagu announced that the objective of British rule in India would be the “. . . ‘gradual development of selfgoverning institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire’” (Metcalf and Metcalf 167). The educated people of India were involved by the British in this government. Montagu called these educated people “. . . ‘intellectually our children’, who had ‘imbibed ideas which we ourselves have set before them’” (168). “Babu-s” or clerks, “brokers”, “zamidars and moneylenders”, who were English in taste but Indian in blood and colour, were patronized by the British (Sircar, IHME 37). The year 1919 brought “. . . the repressive Rowlatt bills and the catastrophe of the Amritsar massacre” (Metcalf and Metcalf 167). Due to these selfish and repressive policies, anti-colonial sentiments heightened in India and self-rule was demanded by the people. Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders began non-violent and violent movements against the British Raj. Gandhian movements opposed British rule using non-violent methods like non-cooperation, civil disobedience and economic resistance. On the other hand, as said earlier, in order to retain control over the Indian population Britain promoted the classes of the Babu-s or clerks, some zamindars and educated people as well as moneylenders who served the interests of the British during the British rule and even after the British Empire in India came to an end.

In Sircar’s opinion, Britain’s greed for more profit and Russia’s protest against capitalism gave rise to the Second World War as is clear from the following conversation of the play Indian History Made Easy:

MASTER: Spain! Germany! Italy! Japan!

BRITANNIA: What a dangerous look!

MASTER: Those’re wolves! Those’re hounds!

(Violent roaring.)

BRITANNIA: Why’re they roaring in that manner?

MASTER: They’ll go hunt the bear. The world’s most dangerous animal—the Russian bear.

BRITANNIA: What has the Russian bear done?
MASTER: Killed capital!

BRITANNIA: But the wolves are advancing in all directions! Look!

They’re heading towards us too!

MASTER: Don’t be afraid. We’ve to tackle them artfully. They’ll kill
the bear but they’ll suffer wounds too. Then we’ll kill them.

TEACHERS: The World War.


(41-2)

During the Second World War, the call to quit India gathered pace. The Second
World War weakened British and it liberated India in 1947. Though India became free
but this occupation left imperishable marks on Indian society, politics and economy.
Britain divided India into “Hindustan” and “Pakistan” (45). There was a deal between
the Babu-s and the British administration that independence will be given to India but
the Babu-s would keep the ‘capital’ alive according to Badal Sircar’s play Indian
History Made Easy, “‘You’ take independence. Keep capital alive” (45). Though
India became independent but the underprivileged people continued to suffer due to
resources being inaccessible to them. Mother India says, “My son’s dying. Famine.
Riot” (47). Sircar is of the opinion that independent India is still struggling from some
of the same drawbacks from which it did during British rule. The following
conversation from the play suggests that a lot of people in India are living in
miserable conditions even after the liberation of the country:

MA (whispers): My son’s dying.

. . .

Son’s dying! Son’s dying! (Cries) Son’s dying!

STUDENTS: (Lifeless tone): Who’s killing him?

MA: Capital!

Sircar ends the play on the note that though India has become independent and signs of prosperity and progress can be seen in every walk of life, yet inequality, violence and hunger still exist:

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Food. Give us food. (47)

In Sircar’s opinion, the only visible thing after independence is inequality on the one hand and greed for “Job. Money. Fame. Power. Commodity”, on the other hand (50).

Sircar while writing *Indian History Made Easy* depended to an extent on facts and figures found in Karl Marx’s writings. But it is also evident that, as mentioned by Robert Young in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, in spite of denouncing capitalism, Karl Marx never directly talked about or criticised colonialism. In his and Friedrich Engels’ opinion, colonial expansion was used by colonisers only to develop their capital. The global expansion of European empire

. . . functions as an integral part, even the engine, of the dynamics of

the new economic system: colonial expansion provides the key to the

development of capitalism through the increase in markets, which in
turn works as a revolutionary force against the old structures of

feudalism. (Young 102)

There was a greater need for trade because the growth of capitalism needed markets, raw materials, and investment and it was colonial expansion which supported the bourgeoisie and helped them to hoard enough capital. This accumulation of capital by
the bourgeoisie divided society into upper and lower class and promoted the exploitation of the lower class. This is the reason why Sircar denounces capitalism and highlights the evil designs of the colonisers in the play *Indian History Made Easy* while describing the third period of British colonialism in India. After the first war of Independence in 1857, which the British referred to as the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the rule of India came directly into the hands of Britain’s Queen. Serving the interests of her country the Queen in this play supports capitalism and ordered her ‘sons’ to increase factories, workers, commodities, banks so that the capital could increase. In the absence of markets, she ordered her sons, “Go to the villages. The mountains, forests, and deserts. Go wherever men hide. Sell them commodities. Buy raw materials. . . . Make roads. Lay railway tracks” (Sircar, *IHME* 33). Thus, every effort had been made to produce capital and commodity. Another significant argument advanced by Marx is that

. . . the transfer of capitalist economies outside Europe will actually have the effect of preventing the socialist revolution in Europe, since in global terms the bourgeois revolution is still in the process of occurring. Marx saw the globalization of the world economy, with its attendant phases of colonialism and imperialism, as a means through which the bourgeoisie could avoid socialist revolution at home.

(Young 105)

This prevention of socialist revolution in Britain was very beneficial for the bourgeoisie, because it gave them more opportunities to exploit the poor and to accumulate capital. But this caused exploitation and damaged Indian social and economic systems immensely as is revealed in the play:

TEACHER 1: Due to taxation Indian goods stop selling in Britain.

TEACHER 2: Under the cover of taxation Britain’s factories improve.

TEACHER 3: Competing with factory-made British goods, Indian cottage industries finished!
TEACHER 1: Millions of efficient Indian artisans are unemployed! . . .
TEACHER 1: The industry-agriculture combined rich self-sufficient village community-ruined! (Sircar, *IHME* 25-6).

The Indian cottage industry was ruined, leading to unemployment. The self-sufficiency of the Indian rural society was destroyed, making the village community poor. In Marx’s opinion, the intense misery inflicted by the British on India is the result of their “. . . breaking down ‘the entire framework of Indian society’ through the introduction of industrial competition and free trade” (Young 108). While in pre-industrial or cottage-industry system of production, the home and the working place were the same. The producer did the entire production process in all its variety, and sold the manufactured goods to the buyer, directly. But in the modern industries the workers are forced to perform fragmented repetitive tasks which led to a feeling of alienation. In Marx’s view, because of the repetitive tasks the workers underwent the process of ‘reification’ or objectification. This means that when capitalist aspirations of profit and loss are of supreme importance, workers are deprived of their full humanity and are thought of and even referred to as “hands” or “the labour force” so that “. . . the effects of industrial closures are calculated in purely economic terms” and people are considered as things (Barry 151). The modern industrial capitalism and ‘reification’ of human beings are introduced by the colonisers in the colonised lands. This adversely affects the people of these lands. Sircar focuses on this in the play *Indian History Made Easy*; “Millions of efficient Indian artisans are unemployed!”,” “The population of Dhaka goes down from two hundred thousand to thirty thousand!” and “The unemployed artisans move to the villages in groups. They have become peasants” (Sircar, *IHME* 26). Thus, Marxist analysis of modern colonialism is that it was established alongside capitalism by Europe which did not give the working class the status of human beings but took them to be tools necessary for producing capital. In this connection Ania Loomba opines,

Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of
the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries. (9)

The result of this flow is that the colonising or mother country is always in an advantageous and profitable position. All the techniques and patterns of domination adopted by European colonialism were to generate “. . . the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry” (9-10). Thus, it is clear that colonialism was only a tool for the production and increase of European capital and to satisfy this greed Britain made great efforts to colonise peoples wherever the opportunity occurred. It made railway tracks, roads and tunnels in the occupied colonies so that they would provide access to every nook and corner of the colonised countries and it would become possible to extract raw materials for the factories in England.

Hegemony is also an important element of postcolonial studies and clearly visible in the play Indian History Made Easy. Hegemony is,

. . . initially a term referring to the dominance of one state within a confederation, is now generally understood to mean domination by consent. This broader meaning was coined and popularized in the 1930s by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who investigated why the ruling class was so successful in promoting its own interests in society. Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class’s interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted. . . . Hegemony is important because the capacity
to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized regions. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 116)

In Gramsci’s opinion, the term hegemony itself has two faces. Firstly, “. . . it is contrasted with “domination” (and as such bound up with the opposition State/Civil Society)” (Gramsci 20). Secondly, hegemony is

. . . sometimes used as an opposite of “corporate” or “economic-corporate” to designate an historical phase in which a given group moves beyond a position of corporate existence and defence of its economic position and aspires to a position of leadership in the political and social arena. (20)

Hegemony gives political and economic power to the ruling class to subjugate other classes. It is used by the ruling class to convince the working masses that the interests of the powerful groups are the interests of all. Thus, domination is neither exercised by power nor by active persuasion. It works by an intelligent and broad command over economy, education and media so that the dominant classes can make the subordinate classes believe that the interests of dominant groups are common to all. Hegemony as a theme is present in Sircar’s play *Indian History Made Easy*. This play highlights that the British colonisers established factories in the big cities of India and introduced “steam engine”, “spinning jenny” and “power loom” apparently for the sake of India’s development, but all these efforts were for their own profit (Sircar, *IHME* 15). Indian cottage industries were destroyed as a result of the establishment of foreign factories in India, as discussed earlier. After looting enough money from India by imposing taxes on Indian goods and agricultural products, factories were set up in Britain as well. Efforts were started to sell goods of these British factories in India. Indian markets were flooded with these factory-made products. The cottage industries of India on the one hand were unable to compete with these products while on the other hand the skilful weavers, blacksmiths and goldsmiths of India who worked in these cottage industries, were now made to believe that India is an agricultural
country and they will succeed in earning their livelihood by practicing agriculture. On being questioned about the Indian workers Mother Britannia in *Indian History Made Easy* replies, “They’ll work in the fields. India is an agricultural country. This is history. . . . From today onwards. With time, the Indians will believe it too. My sonny will make them believe. My son, my child, my lulu lulu lulu!” (24). Hence, it is evident that the colonisers convinced the native working masses to work in the fields. The colonisers intelligently hegemonised the working class for their personal gain without using power but by controlling the economy. The term hegemony is also

. . . useful for describing the success of imperial power over a colonized people who may far outnumber any occupying military force, but whose desire for self-determination has been suppressed by a hegemonic notion of the greater good, often couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, all of which are defined by the colonizing power. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 116)

The colonisers influenced the thought of the colonised through hegemony. The ruling class attains the consent of the colonised “. . . by the interpellation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro-centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes . . .” accept to be superior (117). Interpellation is the process through which the colonised subject accepts its marginality and the centrality and superiority of the coloniser. Ania Loomba while explaining Gramsci’s notion of hegemony opines that it is a power which is achieved through a combination of compulsion and consent. Discussing this further she says that, “Playing upon Machiavelli’s suggestion that power can be achieved through both force and fraud, Gramsci argued that the ruling classes achieve domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who ‘willingly’ submit to being ruled” (Loomba 30). Colonial regimes had gained the consensus of some native-elite groups, while excluding others. But this consensus involved some profit of the colonised peoples as well. In hegemony, the ideas and practices of dominated people were incorporated and transformed into the practices of the oppressors as is clear from this, “Hegemony is achieved . . . by
playing upon . . . what Raymond Williams calls their ‘lived system of meanings and values’” (30). Such transformation is seen as central to colonial rule and can easily be traced in the play. The British were the biggest importers of Indian goods till the sixteenth century, but they were not satisfied with doing business with Mughal emperors. Their main aim was to facilitate the industrial revolution in England and established factories for which they needed capital. Badal Sircar in his On Theatre throws light on it,

In the first phase of colonial exploitation, the products of the highly developed cottage industries of India were purchased at unfair rates by the East India Company and paid for by the money collected by taxing the Indian people; and cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras were created to serve as centres for collecting and exporting such products to Europe. The capital accumulated through such exploitation enabled Britain to complete her Industrial Revolution. Then, of course, it was not in the interest of Britain to import Indian products but, rather, to sell her own industrial products in India. Hence, firstly, the Indian cottage industries that tended to compete with the British industries were systematically destroyed and, secondly, India was converted into a backward agricultural country to serve as a gigantic market for British industrial goods on the one hand, and to supply raw material to the British industries on the other. (87)

The colonisers who had earlier taken the permission for business from the Mughal emperors of India by convincing them that India would be benefitted by this trade between them, later with the passage of time, due to the weakening of the Mughal emperors as well as other rulers exploited the Indians and accumulated wealth at their expense. This is well documented in the play Indian History Made Easy. Robert Clive’s speech in the play is a good example of this;
Government and military expenditures shall not exceed sixty lakh by any means. Allowance for the Nawab has already been reduced to forty-two lakh. The Mogul emperor’s allowance is twenty-six lakh. Therefore there is a net profit of one crore twenty-two lakh of sicca rupees or sixteen lakh fifty thousand nine hundred sterling pounds.

(Sircar, IHME 12)

The act of hegemonising was of great benefit for them. Thus, after looting the Indians they founded factories in England and exported their goods to India. To sell their products, they instilled in the mind of the Indian population that it will be beneficial for them to buy factory-made goods because they are superior. Their novelty also affected to the Indians and soon factory-made products were in great demand in India. Indians believed that, “Factory-made thread, cotton clothes-they can’t get here” (27). Iron, aluminium goods, and woollen garments were in great demand in Indian markets and Indian products were “. . . out of circulation. People want foreign goods. They say Indian goods are inferior” (27). Thus, by hegemonising, the British ruled over India for three hundred years with their partial consent.

In the play Indian History Made Easy, the demand for independence and for leaving India is also presented. The British left India but they harmed the country broadly speaking in two ways. Firstly, by dividing the country on religious grounds and secondly, by establishing factories and industries so that they could cash on the Indian markets even after leaving the country. According to the play Indian History Made Easy the coloniser gave up the political control of the country on the condition that the economic control would remain in their hands. After the end of the Second World War, when the exploitation of Indians had become unbearable and the Quit India movement got pace, the British were ready to leave India. But they were worried about the investment of their capital and their profit. Before leaving India, they prepared the ground for the security of their capital so that there could be no hindrance in making profits and they would also be supplied raw materials from their ex-colony. The following conversation from the play well illustrates this:

MASTER: I’ll grant you independence. But what about capital?
TEACHERS: Our capital’s accumulating. We’ll invest.

... 

BRITANNIA: From where did they get capital?

MASTER: By being brokers in selling our goods. By being brokers in supplying raw materials. By being zamidars and moneylenders.

BRITANNIA: So will they set up factories?

MASTER: They’ve already set up a few. Will set up a few. (IHME 37-8)

The economic control of the ex-colonised country in the hands of ex-colonising power even after independence falls in the category of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is an important element of postcolonial studies introduced in 1961 by Kwame Nkrumah. Neo-colonialism designates “... a continuing economic hegemony that means that the postcolonial state remains in a situation of dependence on its former masters, and that the former masters continue to act in a colonialist manner towards formerly colonised states” (Young 45). In Nkrumah’s opinion, independence is a deceptive phenomenon and it gives only political possession and not economic control of the country into the hands of the natives. This view is applicable to the situation presented by Sircar in the play Indian History Made Easy. After making all the arrangements for economic gain the colonizers left India on 15 August 1947. India got political independence, but the financial matters remained in Britain’s hands,

MASTER: I’ll grant you independence. But what about capital?

TEACHERS: Our capital’s accumulating. We’ll invest. (Sircar, IHME 37)

The post-independence condition of a country is well described by Henry L. Bretton in his book The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah: A Study of Personal Rule in Africa when he says,
Not only were export and import trade, banking, insurance, transportation, and communications essentially in expatriate (i.e. mainly British) hands, but the country’s major source of foreign exchange... was securely tied up in a maze of international financing, marketing and processing arrangements. (qtd. in Young 45)

After achieving independence, the formerly colonised countries attained political control but they remained subject to the world’s powerful countries that were the former imperial powers. Sometimes, neo-colonialism is understood to be another name of modern imperialism. According to Oxford English Dictionary, as mentioned by Loomba in Colonialism/Postcolonialism, imperialism is the “... rule of an emperor, especially when despotic or arbitrary; the principal or spirit of empire; advocacy of what are held to be imperial interests” (10). So, imperialism in its general sense is the domination of one nation over one or several other nations by the military extension of its territories for economic, strategic and political benefits. In this way, imperialism is different from colonialism in which the people of colonising nations live in a distant country. Imperialism got a new meaning when Lenin, Kautsky and other writers linked it to a specific stage of the development of capitalism as indicated by Loomba. Lenin, in his Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1947) explains that “... the growth of ‘finance-capitalism’ and industry in the Western countries had created ‘an enormous superabundance of capital’” (Loomba 10). But these Western countries cannot invest the capital in their own country due to a shortage of labour power. They invest their capital in the under-developed non-industrialised countries where labour power is in abundance. So, in this way they subordinate these countries to maintain their growth. For this kind of subordination of poor countries direct colonial rule is not needed because these non-industrialised countries are economically and socially dependent on the European industries and goods. Thus, modern imperialism is well defined as neo-colonialism. There is another aspect of this neo-colonialism or modern imperialism. The ruling and privileged classes of the earlier colonised country become puppets of previous colonising powers who act in accordance “... with the needs of international capital for its own benefit” (Young 46). The colonisers leave the colonised countries on the condition that these
puppets will retain the economic control of the coloniser after their departure. The “brokers”, “zamidars” and “moneylenders” mentioned by Sircar in the play Indian History Made Easy belong to the class of the privileged who serve the neo-colonial interests of the ex-colonising power (Sircar IHME 37). Thus, it is clear that national sovereignty is in reality a fiction, and “. . . the system of apparently autonomous nation-states is in fact the means through which international capital exercises imperialist control” (Young 46). The main claim of Nkrumah’s book Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism (1965) is that neo-colonialism is another method of traditional colonial rule. It is a deception that powerful countries invest their wealth in the poor nations for development; instead it is an unequal and unbalanced system of exchange. Nkrumah says, “The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world” (qtd. in Young 47). Investment of wealth in the less developed parts increases the gulf between the rich and the poor countries of the world as well as between the rich and the poor people of a country. In the play Indian History Made Easy the unequal distribution of money is easily visible in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. The benefits of the economic policies reach only to the selective resourceful people of the country who can avail all luxuries as mentioned in the play; “cutlet at a hotel once or twice”, “private tutor for the children”, “a test match ticket and a seat in the theatre” (Sircar, IHME 39), “air conditioner, fridge and a car”, “English medium school”, “golf, billiards at the club and night club at hotel” (40). Thus the elite-bourgeois class of society elevate their standards with time, whereas the condition of the underprivileged class deteriorates. The toiling underprivileged masses are neglected and often unable to get even enough to eat in spite of the large amount of wealth invested in the country. Thus, the gulf between the rich and the poor increases and the people remain dominated by their ex-colonisers, indirectly.

Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism is very useful in comprehending the manipulations and tricks played by the British rulers on the colonised Indians and this is another theme of Indian History Made Easy. This theory of Orientalism is based on the Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse and the production and dissemination of power and knowledge. Said in his book Orientalism (1978) highlights how Western scholars perceive and construct the Orient and use this to dominate. In Said’s view, Orientalism covers three inter-related areas of study. First, Orientalism is the
academic study of the Orient; second, it is the study of the ontological and epistemological differences between the Orient and the Occident; and third is the “. . . western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). In this last sense Orientalism is a discourse which with the help of a wide-range of texts, images and preconceptions serves to designate the Eastern other as “. . . a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). Michel Foucault’s works and philosophies on power and knowledge have proved to be very useful for postcolonial thinkers and writers such as for Edward Said. Foucault in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) portrays a well-developed theory of the connection between the production and distribution of knowledge, and the function and growth of power structure. He

. . . establishes a full-blown theory of the intersection between the production and dissemination of knowledge on the one hand, and the operation and expansion of power structure on the other. Foucault’s philosophy invents a unique mode of analysis which he terms “archaeology”, and which retains as its goal the exploration of how knowledge operates as a part of a system or network propped up by social and political structures of power. (Hiddleston 76)

By saying this Foucault posits that the production of knowledge in itself is a political process developed by powerful persons and if people do not act in accordance with the norms of the dominant discourse it can be used to marginalise and oppress them. This production and distribution of knowledge, among other things, serves as a tool to understand the cultural encounter between the British and the South Asians and is identified as a crucial element in the function of colonial institutions, and is seen as a fundamental feature of the colonial political economy. In the course of the play *India History Made Easy* it is evident that the British rulers were very strategic and clever and had political and military power to execute their programmes. Wherever they established their colonies, in due course, they found out all the shortcomings, weaknesses, benefits and strengths of the occupied lands. They knew that India was rich in the production of cotton, silk, muslin, Banarasi clothes, iron and brass material.
All these items were of use to them and they took permission for business from the rulers of India at that particular time, as is evident by the following example from the play Indian History Made Easy:


TEACHERS: 1600. The factory in Surat?

STUDENTS: 1612.

TEACHERS: The factory at Fort St. George, Madras?

STUDENTS: 1639.

. . .

TEACHERS: The factory in Calcutta?

STUDENTS: 1696.

TEACHERS: The New Charter of the East India Company - permission for monopoly business?

STUDENTS: 1698. (Sircar 8)

With the passage of time when India became politically unstable they quenched to seize the opportunity. Eventually, the coloniser controlled both Indian politics and economy. They exploited the weak Nawab Shah Alam and obtained the Dewani or finance office of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa so that they could buy and sell things arbitrarily. Nawab Shah Alam realised that he needed the British East India Company in order to retain his throne. Thus, the play makes it clear that the British were well-versed in the political knowledge of their colonies which helped them to rule India for three hundred years.

In one of his lectures “The Order of Discourse” (1970), Foucault describes discourse as a field of social knowledge and a system of statements through which one can know the world. The world is brought into existence by discourse and it is this discourse which gives knowledge and understanding about mankind. People can only know and understand about themselves, their relationship and their place in the
world by means of discourse. Discourse is an object of desire and it is “... not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power” (Foucault 52-3). Discourse, in its most powerful appearance, is the cause of struggle. It is this discourse that adheres power and knowledge in a way that the people “... who have power have control of what is known and the way it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 72). In this way, the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is grounded on the connection between power and knowledge expanded by Said as the basis of his Orientalist discussion. In his view, this Orientalist discourse is a way of representing the Orient with a number of prejudices and biases which strengthen the position of the West as the site of power. He develops the notion that Orientalist discourse which provides knowledge about Oriental culture to the West enables them to subjugate and marginalise the people of the East. Thus, Orientalist discourse is a valuable emblem of the power employed by the West over the Orient. This element is clearly seen in the play. When the colonisers came to India and established East India Company they were only merchants. They had little knowledge about the local agriculture in the early formative years of the East India Company. They tried to implement the British principles of laissez faire and laissez aller on Indian farming and started to take unbearable taxes and revenues from the farmers. An excerpt from the play *Indian History Made Easy* will illustrate this point:

MASTER: The last year of Bengal’s last Nawab’s rule. Total revenue earned from the land-eight lakh seventeen thousand pound-s. Next year? The first year of the Company’s rule?

TEACHERS: Fourteen lakh seventy thousand. (Sircar 19)

But the imposition of taxes and problems arising due to this affected the agricultural produce. In order to make more profit the Company “... set out to inform itself about the character and value of landed property, expressly so as to command the natives who worked on it” (Hiddleston 71). They achieved the knowledge of Indian history, politics and administration from the Eastern literature and history by their historiographical methods to derive more benefit “... in order to impose their own
administrative system more effectively” (71). In turn, they began to spread English education in order to consolidate and extend their power because the British were few in number and they needed more people who were Indians in colour, but English in taste and could help them in administration. Master, a character in the play *Indian History Made Easy* who represents the British ruler says, “We had to construct railroads to look for the market and to bring raw materials. After consigning capital we’d to set up factories to make use of cheap labourers. Had to educate a few to work as clerks” (Sircar 38). The endeavour to impart English education to the Indians was an act of domination in order to take maximum benefit from them. Ranajit Guha’s statement in his *Dominance Without Hegemony* also supports the view that education “. . . was designed to harness the native mind to the new state apparatus as a cheap but indispensable carrier of its administrative burden” (167). The British made efforts to convince the Indians that their native tongue is inferior while ironically they themselves acquired the knowledge of the languages of the East such as Sanskrit and Persian in order to control the Indians better. The British made efforts to convince the Indians that if they would imbibe Western culture and master the English language their job prospects would improve since Indians with such an education would be preferred for government jobs. Thus, the British cleverly used colonial discourse, which can be defined as “. . . a system of statements that can be made about colonies and colonial peoples, about colonizing powers and about the relationship between these two”, as a tool to empower themselves and exploit the colonized people. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 42)

Now, the analysis of the play will focus on the characteristics of the Third Theatre that are present herein. Badal Sircar, as stated by Ella Dutta in the Introduction of *Two Plays*, after passing a resolution in 1969, left the proscenium stage completely. Right at the beginning of the play *Indian History Made Easy*, the anti-proscenium nature of the play is focussed upon;

*The play is not meant for the proscenium stage. It has to be performed either under the open sky or on the floor of a room. The spectators are to sit on the three sides of the acting arena. There is a platform on the fourth side, with entrances from both sides. Behind the platform, there*
is a curtain or a partition. One can directly mount the platform hiding oneself behind the curtain. The spectators on the three sides are like students of three different class-es. In each class, there are at least two actors as students—sitting in the front row of the spectators, right from the very beginning. Besides, as actors, there are three TEACHERS, a MASTER, BRITANNIA and MOTHER INDIA (or in short, MA). The last two, it goes without saying, are women. (Sircar 3)

Thus, it is clear that the play does not follow the techniques of proscenium theatre. The unity of time and place are also not adhered to. The actors and spectators are not separated by the invisible fourth wall like it is customary in the proscenium theatre. The audience is the part of the performance of the play is made explicit by the stage directions. This play, by being flexible, portable and inexpensive is anti-commercial in nature. Costly stage décor, huge auditoriums, lighting, sound effects and expensive costumes are not used in the play. It can be performed both in the Anganmancha and Muktamancha. Thus, its flexibility and portability make it possible to perform it anywhere without difficulty.

Another element of Sircar’s Third Theatre is the use of the collage form. By following this form, he puts before the audience three-hundred years of British colonial rule in a single play. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, by following the form of collage Sircar dramatises various issues of colonial and post-colonial India so that he can make people aware of their suppressed conditions without revealing the story in the conventional way. Subhendu Sarkar in the Introduction of the play comments on the relationship between the content and the form of Indian History Made Easy,

To match the content, Sircar uses the form of classroom teaching. Therefore, with the Teachers instructing the Students, he could easily cover more than three hundred years of British rule without developing a ‘story’. Teachers, Students, and the Master take up different roles
making the entire period come alive before the audience. It is to be remembered, however, that though the Students are taught, it is actually the audience who learns about the mechanism of colonial exploitation. (xxxi)

At one place in the play *Indian History Made Easy*, Master teaches the students about the history of India as is clear from the conversation given below:

**MASTER:** The first period. History. History. Story. Tale. Tale from history. History. Teachers ... attention!

**TEACHER 1:** History of which country, sir?

**MASTER:** This country. Bharat. Hindustan. Hindostan. *H*India. *I*ndia.

(Sircar 3)

In another place, while portraying the miserable condition that India has been reduced to as a supplier of raw materials and describes the distribution of India’s cottage industries, the Master assumes the role of Lord Cornwallis the Governor General of India and reports the progress of his work, which is actually a description of the destruction of the Indian economic system:

**MASTER:** Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General of India-speaking. .

. .

**BRITANNIA:** Sonny. Cornu. My little one!

**MASTER:** What is it, mom?

**BRITANNIA:** How about my little one’s game, sonny?

**MASTER:** It’s going on very well, mom. Factory-made thread, cotton, cotton clothes-they can’t get here. . . . Almost everything that was produced here is about to go out of circulation. (26-7)
In the same manner, the characters of Students are portrayed as the taught, in some places, while on other places when Sircar delineates the sufferings of the Indian populace, the Students assume the role of the common masses. Thus, by adopting this technique Sircar achieved his aim of imparting the knowledge of colonial exploitation to the audience, with the help of a very small group of actors.

To depict situations not through words or with the help of any other tool but through physical acting is one of the most important features of Badal Sircar’s Third Theatre. This is achieved by hard physical and vocal exercises which enhance the performance of the actors. In Indian History Made Easy, the characters make use of their bodies and voices for effective portrayal of situations. At one place in the play, the war scene is performed by the Students without the help of any instrument or tool; “The STUDENTS, giving war cry, jump to fight. They fight on horseback with swords in their hands. All fight against all. . . . (With an outcry the STUDENTS fall-in slow motion as in films)” (10). On another occasion, they use their bodies to serve another purpose, “A heap of Students in the centre. The MASTER descends, stands keeping one leg on the heap, as a hunter poses for a photograph keeping his foot on the dead tiger” (11). Thus, by faithful use of physical acting Sircar has lessened the cost of his theatre, by abandoning the costly paraphernalia and “. . . by depending on the human body, he has freed his theatre from an abject dependence on money” (On Theatre 86).

Sircar has freed theatre in being a commodity as is evident here, “In a society based on buying and selling, art unfortunately also becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold, and he was forced so far to accept that condition. But now the possibility of creating a free theatre opens up” (86).

Another feature of the Third Theatre, found in the play Indian History Made Easy is the brevity of dialogues. Short dialogues “. . . besides providing the plays with dramatic pace, help the audience to concentrate on the action” (Sarkar xxx). Another reason for the dialogues being brief is that actors, during the performance, are involved in rigorous physical movements, so they are unable to speak lengthy dialogues. An example from the play is as follows:

MASTER: Three cheers for Robert Clive! Hip hip ...

TEACHERS: Hurray!
MASTER: *Three cheers for the battle of Plassey! Hip hip …*

TEACHERS: *Hurray!*

MASTER: *Three cheers for the East India Company! Hip hip …*

TEACHERS: *Hurray!*

MASTER: *Long live British …*

TEACHERS: *Hindia!*

MASTER: *British …*

TEACHERS: *Hindia!*

MASTER: *British …*

TEACHERS: *Hindia-a-a!* (Sircar, *IHME* 11)

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Songs play a very important role in the plays of Sircar, a feature for which he is indebted to the folk theatres of India. Sircar uses songs because they help in retaining the interest of spectators and convey serious issues with great ease. In this play, with the help of a song Sircar describes the immortality of the Indian village community:

TEACHERS-STUDENTS (*sing)*:

Kingdoms appear on top, fall down later

Village community stays in the same manner.

Arsakhun and Pathangul remain active higher

Village community doesn’t notice them down there.

When the kings fight, it’s the commoners that expire

Village community dies here, shoots up elsewhere. (6)

Through this song, Sircar communicates how the Indian village community saw the rise and fall of various empires. Aryans, Saks, Huns, Pathans and Mughals came to India and fought with Indian emperors. This affected the life of the common people but couldn’t ruin the village community. Thus, songs are used by Sircar because they
are helpful in conveying the most difficult messages in the easiest possible way even to illiterate people.

Thus, it is clear from the analysis of the play that Sircar wanted to bring before the people, especially before the common masses, the actual reasons of their miserable condition. In the play *Indian History Made Easy*, he successfully presents his interpretation of the economic and political strategies of the colonisers and the effects of their policies on Indian society. The policies of the British made the condition of the underprivileged classes miserable. A large number of these policies still exist in independent India according to Badal Sircar. These policies continue to have a negative effect on the poor people and contribute greatly in making their life miserable. Sircar made use of various Third Theatre techniques such as, the classroom teaching form, very little use of stage paraphernalia, brief dialogues and songs, to make his play simple to understand.
Works Cited


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