Chapter 3

Processions of Exploitation and Resistance: A Postcolonial Study of Badal Sircar’s “Procession”
Postcolonial theorists and writers are concerned with identifying the economic, political and cultural effects of colonial rule. The objectives of postcolonial criticism are wide ranging which include re-evaluating the history of colonialism from the viewpoint of the colonised and defining the economic, political and cultural impacts of colonialism on both the colonised people as well as the colonising power. Postcolonial criticism also examines the process of decolonisation. As Robert Young says, “. . . to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the circulation of political and cultural identities” (qtd. in Habib 739). A postcolonial critique focuses on the militant condemnation of the destructive political and financial ideologies of the colonisers. Postcolonial theory revolves around the notion that “. . . many of the wrongs, if not crimes, against humanity are a product of the economic dominance of the north over the south” (Young 6). This economic dominance was in the form of capitalist economy introduced in the colonised lands by the coloniser which caused serious damages there. This is the reason why the role of Marxism or communism is very important in the analysis of colonial domination and anti-colonial resistance because it condemns capitalism and is the fundamental framework of postcolonial thinking. Marxism is the philosophy introduced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who jointly called it communism which aims, among other things, at bringing about a classless society, grounded on the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange and criticises the capitalist economy introduced by the British colonisers which is based on the private ownership of property (Barry 150). Badal Sircar as a postcolonial playwright is also involved in criticising and demonstrating before the common masses the destructive financial and cultural effects of colonial rule and its exploitative policies which ruined the glorious structure of Indian society. In doing this, his aim is to make the common people aware of the exploitation of the coloniser. He does this through the medium of his Third Theatre. Instead of adopting the role of an “agitator” like other street corner playwrights
he prefers to remain . . . a propagandist who presents ‘many ideas as an integral whole’ trying to provide a complete explanation of the contradictions found in society. His plays have a lasting effect, which goes far beyond the immediate impact of street-corner plays. Badal Sircar is a Marxist but not a spokesperson of any established political party. (Sarkar xxxiii)

This is the reason why as a propagandist Sircar deals with multiple themes in a single play and does not follow any story line. Most of his plays highlight the ruinous effects of the capitalist system on the Indian economy such as corruption, black marketing, exploitation of subaltern and labour class and increasing greed for money among the bourgeois class which gives birth to selfishness and destroys the environment and community. The disastrous consequences of colonialism and capitalist system implemented by the British coloniser filled Sircar with abhorrence and compelled him to discard capitalism. He is a staunch believer of Marxist thoughts which criticise capitalism and promote communism. His plays Procession, Bhome, Indian History Made Easy and Stale News largely focus on the damaging impacts of colonial rule on contemporary society and deal with the miserable condition of the subaltern groups, their revolt against colonial exploitation and the harm caused by their civilisation and technological advancements.

In the present chapter, the play Procession (1974) will be analysed, focusing on the postcolonial elements at two levels; firstly, from the point of view of themes and secondly, from the view of techniques. At the thematic level, the play will be dealt, among other things, with the problem of the disappearance of young men who are victims of police atrocities during the Naxalite movement. They are victimised for standing up for their rights. Such a young man is Khoka in this play. In this chapter Procession will be analysed with corruption, socio-political violence, the adverse effects of technology and the kind of civilisation and culture brought by the colonist, class struggle, use of ideology by the ruling class to exploit the working class which is a characteristic of the capitalist economy and with several other problems of contemporary society. At the level of technique, the play will be examined as a
product of Sircar’s concept of the Third Theatre. As it is mentioned in the previous chapter, Sircar established the Third Theatre form as a reaction against the British style proscenium stage and employed some of the techniques of both the Urban (First) and Folk (Second) theatres. So, Badal Sircar’s Third Theatre is also a very important aspect of the postcolonial content from the perspective of technique.

First performed on 13 April 1974 at the village Ramchandrapur by Satabdi, the play Procession was a big success. Procession is one of the most popular and translated plays of Sircar. It has been performed in other languages in the different states of India, such as in Hindi in Delhi and Rajasthan and in Marathi in Bombay. The play appeared in a collection entitled Three Plays (1983) along with Sircar’s two other plays. The play has no distinct characters, plot or story line. It is circular and open-ended. The theme is reinforced through repetitions. Commenting on the play, Brian Crow and Chris Banfield opine:

Michhil (Procession, 1974) has been an immensely successful play using the noisy, chaotic evocation of Calcutta’s crowded streets in a theatrical setting that incorporates an audience arranged informally around the acting arena, in a fast-moving, satirical tragi-comedy of police repression, establishment hypocrisy, race riot and personal loss of direction. (129)

It is noteworthy that Procession is one among those plays which Sircar had planned to produce even before he started to write it. Sircar says, “It is one of the very few plays where I had the idea of the production even before I began writing it, particularly the procession idea” (qtd. in Dutta viii). For a long time he had the desire to make a kind of montage on Calcutta. This montage is “. . . made up of scenes of Calcutta streets, chatting in teashops, conversations in the coffee houses, different scenes in the offices” (Dutta viii). However, it is also about the problems which the post-colonial society had gone through. As Calcutta is known as a city of processions, michhil (a Bengali word for procession) seems to be a suitable name for it. Crow and Banfield clarify the purposes of various processions, “The image of the procession in Michhil is employed to present both negative and positive aspects of the joining
together of individual and communities under a common banner” (130). This banner under which people gather is varied in nature. The Old Man, a character in the play, talks about this variety, “. . . Michhil, Michhils for food and clothes, Michhils for salvation, Michhils for the revolution, Michhils in military formation, Michhils for refugees, Michhils for flood relief, Michhils mourning, Michhils protesting, Michhils festive, Michhils with stars” (Sircar, *Procession* 8). Thus, in this play Badal Sircar, with the help of processions, shows the problems and exploitation of the common people as well as their resistance against the suppression.

Sircar does not show the drawbacks and ruinous results of colonial rule directly but he ironically represents the mentality and opinions of modern men. The following conversation between the Master who represents the upper class and the Chorus that represents the common masses illustrate this point;

THE MASTER: What is the greatest enemy of civilization?

CHORUS: Communism.

THE MASTER: Who upholds, preserves, and protects civilization?

CHORUS: You, Master!

THE MASTER: Rest assured, my children, I’ll keep you civilized.

Communism is the religion of the animals. Keep in mind that you are not animals, you are men.

CHORUS: But Master, we’re dying.

THE MASTER: There’s heaven for you after you die, and heavenly happiness. Animals have no heaven. I bless you, you’d die as men, not animals. (*Procession* 23-4)

In the above conversation, through the character of the Master, Sircar with the help of irony shows that the upper classes believed that communism is their enemy. The upper class holds the belief that the concepts of equal distribution of wealth in communism and the absence of hierarchy in social structure are to their disadvantage. To quote Manchi S. Babu, “Inequality is an indispensable part of civilization and so
egalitarianism destroys civilization. That is why the Master tells the people that Communism is the greatest enemy of civilization” (106). The upper class will lose its power if communism is adopted by society. So the upper class represented by the Master, befools the common people in the name of religion. Manchi S. Babu rightly declares: “Whatever may be the noble aims of religion, it is usually used to approve the oppressive and exploitative culture and to obscure awareness” (106). Hence, the Master instructs people to bear suffering because their sufferings will lead them to heaven after death. The common people are so simple that they imprudently accept his words as truth. Thus, it is clear from the above discussion that though Sircar believes that communism is beneficial for the welfare of society as a whole and especially for the poor and the downtrodden, he ironically describes it as the greatest enemy of civilisation. The above conversation is a poignant attack on the upper class people who are influenced by the materialistic cultural and civilisational advancements brought by the coloniser. It is also used by Sircar to educate and sensitise those people who blindly accept the words and policies of the rulers.

Sircar is known for his anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement in the 1970s and Procession is one among them. During these years when the Naxalite movement was at its climax in Bengal, many young people were murdered by the police and this image has a profound effect on Sircar’s psyche: “In the immediately preceding years, so many young people and adolescents were killed by the police, brutally and cruelly, secretly and openly, that the image of the man who is being killed every day was strongly in my mind . . .” (Sircar, On Theatre 115). The incidents of the police violence, the mysterious and unacknowledged death, and disappearance of Khoka in the play are the dramatic representations of these images. The Naxalite movement, it can be said, originated from a small village called Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal in 1967 when “. . . Choru Majumdar, a communist leader, and Kanu Sanial started their armed struggle against the excesses of a big landlord of the village” (Shad 4). The initiators of the movement claimed that they have launched an active struggle to end the arrogance and exploitation of the upper class. They believed that capitalism was responsible for the division of society into the upper and the lower classes and for the exploitation of the lower strata. These Naxalite guerrillas consisted of the deprived sections of society. They were “. . . subjected to the worst kind of treatment by the Indian state and society which has forced them to take up arms for the
achievement of their rights” (3). Thus, they are not the undesirable elements of society but their movement is actually a class war. This movement is well understood in terms of the social “. . . structure of domination and subordination that is never static but is always the site of contestation and struggle” (Fiske 1268). John Fiske in his essay, “Culture, Ideology and Interpellation” (1987), states that society is not an organic whole. It is an intricate network of groups with “different interests” and each group is “. . . related to each other in terms of their power relationship with the dominant class” (1268). Right from the very beginning, after gaining the political and economic control of India; the British colonisers treated the native population of India unfairly. While the Indians were looked down upon in general on the basis of their race and colour, the depressed sections like the untouchables were treated in an even more unfair manner. Religious minorities were also discriminated against. The condition of the poor and backward sections had severely deteriorated. The irony of the fact was that after the achievement of independence in 1947, no change occurred and this inequitable treatment was continued by the government of independent India. When this burden of suppression became intolerable, the suppressed revolted. The Naxalite rebellion is to be seen in the context of Fiske’s above mentioned view that the social structure of dominating and dominated is not static. He says, “Social power is the power to get one's class or group interest served by the social structure as a whole, and social struggle - or, in traditional Marxist terms, the class struggle - is the contestation of this power by the subordinate groups” (1268-9). During the Naxalite movement, thousands of revolutionaries were killed and abducted by the police and “. . . the mysteriously disappeared can neither be traced nor acknowledged as lost” (Mitra 62). In Procession, the Officer silences the people who ask questions about the circumstances of Khoka’s disappearance. On hearing a piercing death scream, people predict the killing of someone and call the police. But the Officer scolds them in a stentorian voice and declares that killing or stabbing is a false rumour and orders them to return to their home. The death and resurgence of Khoka is highlighted with the help of repetition. However, the importance of his death and resurgence is simultaneously denied by the petty routines of common people such as; “. . . snatches of colloquial conversation [which] evoke a crowded bus, the dryness of newspaper and media bulletins, persuasive hawkers selling their wares on the street corner or in the marketplace, a factory siren’s call to work . . .” and by the Officer’s rejection of his disappearance (Crow and Banfield 129). But Sircar repeatedly shows the death and
disappearance of Khoka who was killed yesterday, today “... the day before the day before. Last week. Last month. Last year. I am killed every day” (Procession 7). This frequent affirmation of killing and disappearance can be seen in the context of the power struggle and questions, among other things, the superiority of the elite class. Here it is also pertinent to state that this play is Sircar’s attempt to show how

... the dominant classes attempt to “naturalize” the meanings that serve their interests into the "com-monsense" of society as a whole, whereas subordinate classes resist this process in various ways and to varying degrees and try to make meanings that serve their own interests. (Fiske 1269)

Badal Sircar believed that the miserable condition of the common masses was the result of the capitalism practiced by the British. This capitalism created a huge gulf between the upper class and the working class. It also led to an uneven distribution of wealth in society. At one juncture in the play, the Beggar-woman’s incessant cry for bread proves that there is poverty, hunger and unequal distribution of wealth in the country: “A piece of stale bread please, moth-e-e-e-er. O mother-O moth-e-e-e-er” (Procession 22). While the rich upper class, represented by the Master, prospers due to the capitalist economic system: “Who would enjoy the surplus. . . . Only those who had quality, intelligence and force. . . . The Master has quality, intelligence and force” (23). Capitalism can be defined as;

... a social system based on private ownership of the means of production. It is characterized by the pursuit of material self-interest under freedom . . . capitalism is further characterized by saving and capital accumulation, exchange and money, financial self-interest and the profit motive, the freedom of economic competition and economic inequality, the price system, economic progress, and a harmony of the material self-interests of all the individuals who participate in it. (Reismen 19)
In capitalism, all the means of production and consumption, raw materials, instruments such as machinery and factory are in the possession of the owner or the bourgeois. Even the wage labourers are considered to be instruments and commodities, not human beings and this commodification or “reification”, as Marx put it, initiates the exploitation of workers (Barry 151). The wage which the labourer earns in return for his labour is “. . . almost confined to the commodities necessary for keeping him alive and capable of working” (Tucker 206). The exploitation of wage labourers by bourgeois capitalists to gain more profit and control over social externalities of technological change are some damaging effects of capitalism which impact the working class negatively. Under the capitalist system there is inequality in society because all the wealth and power is under the control and in the possession of the upper class and the underprivileged class is often deprived even of their basic needs. Sircar as a staunch believer in Marx’s philosophy and as a supporter of the proletariat condemns capitalism and has full faith in communism. Marx used communism in two different but related ways; “. . . as an actual political movement of the working class in capitalist society, and as a form of society which the working class, through its struggle, would bring into existence” (Bottomore 102). In his opinion, progress is achieved through the struggle for power between different social classes for economic, social, and political advantage. Communism believes in the common interests of the entire proletariat and aims at the violent overthrow of capitalism. The protests and processions for food, clothes, salvation and revolution that figure in the play Procession are the outcome of the communist movement. It can be said that this movement started as the demand for the basic rights of the underprivileged sections seeking the downfall of capitalism; “Workers of the world, unite. Unite. Unite. Long live revolution. Long live. Long live. Break the black hand of Imperialism. Break it. Pulverize it. Finish off capitalist exploitation. Finish it off. Finish it off” (Sircar, Procession 36).

With the themes of exploitation and protestation, Sircar raises another ruinous effect of colonialism; corruption and black marketing. The development of capitalism endorsed individualism and everybody especially the privileged people started to think of their private interests. It promoted corruption and black marketing. Corruption has been defined by S. O. Osoba as
... a form of antisocial behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators, is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prevailing moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual well-being of all members of society in a just and equitable manner.

(qtd. in Mulinge and Lesetedi 15)

Corruption achieves its end by incorporating the use of public authority, office and official position for private monetary interests at the cost of public good. It is a colonial legacy as stated by Comrade Lal Singh,

Following the suppression of the Great Ghadar of 1857, the British colonialists established a state whose main aim was to facilitate maximum exploitation and colonial plunder of India. Our people were colonised subjects, deprived of basic rights. A minority of collaborators and traitors were rewarded with land, industrial licences and other privileges. This led to the rise of big landlords and big capitalists, traitorous classes who were willing to sell out to the enemy for the sake of enriching themselves. (8)

Black marketing is a form of corruption in which the goods and services are sold illegally by these big landlords, traitors and capitalists. In Sircar’s opinion, with the advent of free market and free trade, which are the necessary elements of capitalism, black marketing came into existence. The common man is compelled to sing the glory of black marketers like the glory of Lord Krishna in the play entitled Procession; “Glory be to the Lord Krishna, incarnation of the markets. We bow at the feet of the Lord Blackmarket. Hail the Black god. The Black god will save us all. Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala. Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala” (Sircar 21). The common people are forced to sing the glory of black marketers and buy things for more than
what they are worth. The working class is in many ways dependent on the mercy of the upper class. They are compelled to buy “Rice”, “Pulses”, “Oil”, “Sugar”, “Flour”, “Coal”, “Bran”, “Kerosene”, “Baby food” and even “Textbooks” on more than their actual market prices (21-22). Even then, they support the black marketers again and again, “Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala. Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala” (22). Thus, it is evident that accepting corruption and black marketing has become a basic trait of modern society. This is so because the upper class is in power and the working class is subjugated by the privileged class and is left with no choice except to accept the dictates of the upper class. The upper class thus manipulates the unprivileged people for their own benefit.

The denunciation of Western civilisation and technology is a key component of postcolonial theory. The modern civilisation, according to Gandhian philosophy, is the creator of all the evils that exist in society. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who was a key figure in India’s struggle against the coloniser, disparaged the modern civilisation, ushered in by the British, as satanic and the ancient civilisation of India as godly in his *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (1910). He declares,

The British Government in India constitutes a struggle between the Modern Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of Satan, and the Ancient Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of God. The one is the God of War, the other is the God of Love. My countrymen impute the evils of modern civilisation to the English people are bad, and not the civilisation they represent. My countrymen, therefore, believe that they should adopt modern civilisation and modern methods of violence to drive out the English. 'Hind Swaraj' has been written in order to show that they are following a suicidal policy, and that, if they would but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone. (Gandhi)
In his view, people were made slaves by physical forces in pre-capitalist society but now they are “... enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy” (Gandhi). He further says that in the view of Islam, Western civilisation is a satanic civilisation and according to Hinduism “... it is a Black age” (Gandhi). The British came only with the purpose of trade and it was some Indians who conspired with them in imposing this modern civilisation and “... it is in this collusion that they forget their traditions and their past. They ignore the spiritual teachings of the Bhagvad Gita, the path of self-purification and self-sacrifice, and the relinquishment of short-term self-serving goals” (Hiddleston 60). It is believed by Gandhi that the Indian civilization elevates the moral being while the Western civilisation promulgates immorality. English education enslaved millions of Indians;

To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us. ... It is worth noting that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation. Hypocrisy, tyranny, etc., have increased; English-knowing Indians have not hesitated to cheat and strike terror into the people.

(Gandhi)

Thus, in his opinion, by rejecting the Western civilisation, culture and machinery and by returning to our roots, to our civilisation, India can get swaraj. Sircar in this play also propagates the same view. He believed that in the name of civilisation and with the help of technological advancement, the British enslaved India for such a long time. They imposed their superiority and availed the benefits of economic surplus. One of the characters in the play states that at the beginning of creation men were equal but they were uncivilised. In due course, they learnt to use animals and started agriculture which gave them property and assets in excess. This excess or surplus “... brought civilization. Men became civilized. Civilization civilized man, civilized society” (Sircar, Procession 23). But, the benefits of surplus are enjoyed only by those who have intelligence and dynamism. He asks, “Who would enjoy the surplus? Everyone?” and then answers himself, “No. Only those who had quality, intelligence and force” (23). The Master symbolises the privileged or ruling class who have
power, quality and intelligence due to capitalism. On the basis of these qualities, they dominate the poor-underprivileged class,

The Master has quality, intelligence and force. So the world has masters and slaves, will have masters and slaves. That’s how the gods have laid it out. . . . The progress of science, the progress of civilization. Production is on the increase, wealth is on the increase, there can be even further increases. (23)

Here, Sircar also indicates that in this modern capitalist world monetary gain and power have taken the place of ‘gods’ and the way this world is organised is now decided by these ‘gods’. He further points out that this modern civilisation and progress of science brought wealth and ensured a good life. He also suggests that if wealth increases rapidly in society, soon it will eradicate poverty and guarantee a good and comfortable life for all people. But this increase of wealth will not be beneficial for civilisation, “There will be wealth to ensure a good life for all men. But that will eliminate the Master, and civilization will come to an end” (23). If poverty is eradicated from society and everybody starts to live a good life, there will be equality in society. This equality will eliminate the Master. The masters or capitalists will never allow this to happen since this will reduce their status, wealth and power.

Due to rapid technological advancements, people are losing their rationality and humanity. They have become comfort seekers but through the character of young Khoka in the play Procession, Sircar propagates that if the young generation keeps itself away from the effects of Western civilisation, this civilisation will soon come to an end. When Khoka goes missing and cannot be found, people try to allure him by various things such as chocolates, books, pass, job, land, house, car, gold, happiness, peace and salvation. But he does not return. The Old Man says about Khoka, “Khoka means Little. Khoka means one who hasn’t grown up yet. Khoka means Green, Raw, Immature” (Procession 10-11). On people’s repeated call for Khoka, The Old Man replies; “Khoka’ll never come back to the O-o-old house. . . . if he comes back it’ll be to a new home, a real home, a really real ho-o-ome” (11). Here, Khoka and home have symbolic meanings. Manchi Sarat Babu provides the following interpretation;
Khoka symbolizes a child who is not spoiled by civilization. He still possesses humanity. He is not dehumanized. . . . The old home is the present society where humanity is constantly destroyed. . . . It is a dehumanizing environment where we vainly search for humanity. And the solution of one problem invariably leads to another . . . (103-04)

The new home is the symbol of the future society where there will be humanity and this dehumanised civilisation will be absent. It is up to the young generation to build this new home by rejecting the Western civilisation. This new home refers to a classless society that must be based on the values of the glorious Indian civilisation.

In the play, the characters of the Officer and the Master symbolise the ruling class. Instead of working for the prosperity and well-being of the common masses they are indifferent to their welfare and problems and are pre-occupied with their personal profits. Louis Althusser in his book *Essays on Ideology* (1971) states that according to Marxist tradition, this ruling class is the modern incarnation of the nineteenth century bourgeois class or the class of big landowners. In capitalist society, this class is empowered by the State which is “. . . explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus. The State is a ‘machine’ of repression, which enables the ruling classes . . . to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation)” (Althusser 11). Thus, according to the Marxist theory, the State is a repressive State apparatus. Althusser further opines that the State apparatus consists of the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, and the Prisons etc. State apparatus is repressive because it “. . . ‘functions by violence’ – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)” (17).

Althusser while developing the theory of the State considers it necessary to take into account “. . . another reality which is clearly on the side of the (repressive) State apparatus, but must not be confused with it” (16). He calls this reality the Ideological State Apparatuses. He opines that in capitalist democracy the Ideological State Apparatuses play a significant role because the ruling class tries to control and exploit the working class by making it believe that this society is the best of all societies that one can ever have by offering them a sense of identity and security. Ideological State
Apparatuses are “. . . a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (17). They are religious, educational, political, legal, and cultural Ideological State Apparatuses and also include the family, trade-union and communications Ideological State Apparatuses. There are some sub-divisions of these Ideological State Apparatuses such as the communications Ideological State Apparatus has press, radio and T.V. apparatuses. Likewise, literature, arts, music and sports are some of the apparatuses of the cultural Ideological State Apparatus. Althusser adds, “All ideological State apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation” (28). There are some differences between the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses. The first is that the Repressive State Apparatus is one while “. . . there is a plurality of the Ideological State Apparatuses” (18). The second difference is that the Repressive State Apparatus belongs to the public domain while the Ideological State Apparatuses are from the private domain. The third is that the Repressive State Apparatus functions by violence whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function by ideology. Ideology is, in Karl Marx’s opinion as stated by Althusser, “. . . the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or social group” (32). It is the process by which inequitable social relations are reproduced. The aim of the ruling class is not only to rule, “. . . they rule as thinkers and producers of ideas so that they determine how the society sees itself” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 221). But, in Althusser’s opinion, ideology is not a matter of the imposition of the ideas by the powerful on the weaker section. In defining ideology he goes a step further than Marx and states, “. . . subjects are ‘born into’ ideology, they find subjectivity within the expectations of their parents and their society, and they endorse it because it provides a sense of identity and security through structures such as language, social codes and conventions” (221). Thus, ideology not only dominates the mind of the subject but in ideology the subjects make adjustments keeping in mind those conditions of survival which are offered to them. This play of ideology by the ruling class is clearly visible in Procession in the rejection of the killing of Khoka by the Officer. When Khoka continuously asserts his repeated death and the common people express their concern about it, the Master asks the Officer about Khoka’s repeated death and the concern shown by the lower class. The Officer replies that there is nothing to worry about and everything is quiet and under control, “It’s nothing, sir.
It’s all quiet” (Sircar, *Procession* 34). At this the Master’s comfortable reply shows that he is the constructor of the subject by ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. The answer also exhibits the Master’s confidence over his power to determine how society views itself and the common people’s acceptance of the conditions which he offers;

That’s fine. Keep men happy, in peace, and disciplined. Let people enjoy their lives. Give them art and culture. Art. Culture. Let people immerse themselves in a flow of pleasure. When the dirty doubts surface, let the flow of pleasure wash over them. Keep in mind, men are not animals. Men alone can lose themselves in the flow of pleasure, sink into it. (34)

Art and culture are Ideological State Apparatuses and are offered to the people with the intention of diverting their attention from their own miserable and exploitative conditions. Like their older counterparts-the bourgeoisie-who relied on Ideological State Apparatuses “. . . to ensure not only its own political hegemony, but also the ideological hegemony indispensable to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production”, the ruling class of modern capitalist democracy also offers Ideological State Apparatuses to hegemonise the common people by convincing them that the upper class is their benefactor (Althusser 26). But, in reality, the State apparatuses are used as the apparatuses of domination which ensure the oppression of the lower class and guarantee the production and reproduction of the conditions of exploitation. Ideological State Apparatuses also contribute to the same exploitation in the ways proper to them, such as; “The communications apparatuses by cramming every ‘citizen’ with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc. by means of the press, the radio and television” (28). In the same way, cultural apparatuses also fill the people with joy and enthusiasm for national art, heritage and culture and persuade them to establish an imaginary relationship with their real conditions of existence. The use of religious Ideological State Apparatus is also visible in the course of the play *Procession*. In Althusser’s opinion, recalling sermons, ceremonies of birth, marriage and death, the preaching and celebration of festivals are
religious Ideological State Apparatuses. These apparatuses are employed by the ruling class to ensure their own domination. In the play, there are various kinds of religious processions; a Rathajatra procession, Muharram procession, Christmas procession, and procession for the immersion of Mother Durga, Kali, Lakshmi and Karthik at the end of the annual invocation. These processions are organised with the order and under the patronage of the Officer who belongs to the ruling class. Another procession cries out, “Bhola Baba will save us all. . . . ‘We serve at the feet of Baba Tarakanath, Mahade-e-v’, and lies head downwards on the floor and crawl along” (Sircar, Procession 17). Then the Master enters the stage and preaches like a religious preceptor (Gurudev). He says that old men, working men and children are the past, present and future of the nation respectively. He suggests that these three stages must be tied together in a single bond of religion and his preaching is heard and accepted by the common people fascinatingly. The domination of the religious preacher can be seen as the play of ideology by the dominant group to construct the subject for their personal interests and advantages. The submission of the people to his preaching can be seen in the context of Althusser’s definition of ideology according to which people approve ideology because it gives them security and identity through social structures and State Apparatuses. People seek their identity in society through the situations which have been presented before them by the ruling ideology and they find satisfaction and happiness in these deceptive situations. Althusser says that “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (36). He further argues that this imaginary relationship is created with a cause by a small number of cynical men who are “Priests or Despots” (37). These Priests work in alliance with their impostures, the Despots or vice versa and “. . . ‘forged’ the Beautiful Lies so that in the belief that they were obeying God, men would in fact obey the Priests and Despots” (37). Thus, these cynical men exploit and enslave the imagination and faith of the people with the help of a falsified representation of the world in order to achieve their own ends. This blind faith in religion, the distraction of common man’s awareness from national and international problems and politics by involving them in alcoholism, spiritualism, communalism and materialistic gain are some of the problems of post-colonial India parodied by Sircar. The following lines from the play will illustrate this point:
CHORUS. Glory be to the Lord Krishna, incarnation of the markets.

We bow at the feet of the Lord Blackmarket. (Sircar, *Procession* 21)

Here is an example of alcoholism. When the sufferings of the common masses have become unbearable, they beg the support of the Master. Instead of helping them, he offers liquor so that their attention can be distracted from their miseries:

O Master, we can’t bear it any longer.

THE MASTER. Take this. This is for you.

CHORUS. What’s it, Master?

THE MASTER. The elixir that will bring you oblivion.

THE MASTER leaves the bottle with them. They snatch at it from one another to have a sip.

... 


Thus, it seems apt to summarise with Manchi S. Babu’s observation, “The process of making people mindless, in the family and the society, is successfully effected through religion, fine arts, mass media, education, unnatural ideals and drugs” (101).

The freedom struggle of India and the partition of the country play a major role in this play entitled *Procession*. India’s struggle for freedom was an anti-colonial movement and hence is significant from the point of view of postcolonial studies. Though all the people of India were under the hegemonic control of the British government, most of them realised that foreign rule was harmful for the country. Some patriots revolted against this colonial rule and started violent and non-violent anti-colonial struggles against “the British dogs” (*Procession* 19). Anti-colonialism can be defined as “... the point at which the various forms of opposition become articulated as a resistance to the operations of colonialism in political, economic and cultural institutions. It emphasizes the need to reject colonial power and restore local control”
The independence movement of India was a revolt which was taken up unitedly by different ethnic, cultural, religious and racial groups which believed in rejecting the colonial power and in re-establishing local control. This sentiment finds a suitable place in the play *Procession*:

ONE. Free-ee-ee-dom!
TWO. Non-violence!
THREE. Non-coopera-a-a-ation.
FOUR. Satyagraha-a-a-a.
FIVE. The spinning whee-ee-eel!
ONE. Let Hindus and Muslims unite.
TWO. Quit India.
THREE. Do or Die.
FOUR. *Karenge iya marenge* (Do or die).
FIVE. British Imperialism, leave India! (Sircar 19)

In spite of the efforts made by some Indian leaders, the divide and rule strategy followed by the British colonisers resulted in confrontation, communal riots, and eventually the partition of the country after independence. This division of the country into India and Pakistan by the British led to riots and bloodshed:

ONE: We’d have our Pakistan by force.

_The CHORUS at once splits into two groups confronting each other._

ONE PART OF THE CHORUS. Allah Ho Akbar.

THE OTHER PART OF THE CHORUS. Bande Mattaram (Hail Mother).

_After a few such exchanges, the two groups clash._

CHORUS. Beat up the bastards. Beat them up. (19)
Thousands of people have become homeless because of this partition and searched for refugee camps. This led to another procession; the procession of the refugees. Though after independence India became a democracy, Sircar believes that “It’s a phony freedom” (20). It is fake also because this democracy has succeeded in only replacing foreign rulers with native rulers. According to Marxist thought as stated by Bottomore,

...true democracy involves the disappearance of the state and thus the end of the separation of the state from civil society, which occurs because Society is an organism of solidary and homogeneous interests, and the distinct "political" sphere of the "general interest" vanishes along with the division between governors and governed. (133)

But, the Indian democracy is a bourgeois democracy which is like a form of class rule, “...to be 'smashed' and replaced by the DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT . . .” (134). Individuals who constitute this bourgeois democracy which believes in capitalist ideology works only for self-interest, no matter how much the common masses are suffering due to the greed of the bourgeois. The common man who struggled to gain freedom from the British is not rewarded in any way. Frantz Fanon aptly says in this regard, “During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight against oppression; after national liberation, they are called upon to fight against poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment. The struggle, they say, goes on. The people realize that life is an unending contest” (93-4). In their day to day life, people are suffering from price-hike, black-marketing, joblessness, factory lockouts, food poisoning; they have no money to pay school fees, etc. Their exploitation continues. The play Procession highlights this situation clearly,

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

TWO. It’s the thirty-sixth day of the factory lockout. There’s not a morsel at home.

THREE. The untimely rain left all the rice rotting, our debts with the moneylender have risen to a mountain.
FOUR. The whole family’s laid up with food poisoning from adulterated cooking oil. I don’t have the money to pay a doctor.

FIVE. I got a First at the Art School, I don’t afford to paint, I’m a canvasser for soap. (Sircar 24)

In this way, it can be said that Badal Sircar is correct in his belief that the capitalist economy is the biggest enemy of the common people, irrespective of colonisation or independence. Until and unless this destructive economic system is uprooted and communism is implemented in society, people will continue to suffer and be exploited by the privileged class. In Sircar’s view, it is in the hands of the common masses to stand up and make efforts to uproot the defective system. Khoka enthusiastically addresses the audience accusing them of sitting quietly and not raising voices against oppression:

Every day in the battlefields thousands die, thousands of I’s like me.  

(To the audience) You sit on the sidelines watching processions, (shrieking) you are watching murders, murders! You sit in peace watching murders, you are killed yourselves, you kill. Yes you kill, you have killed. I’m killing, you are killing. We are all killers. We all kill, we all get killed. We kill by sitting quietly and doing nothing at ease, we get killed. Stop it. Stop it. (37)

Hereafter, the play will be discussed from the point of technique i.e. Sircar’s Third Theatre which is one of the important elements of postcolonialism because it was established as a reaction against the British style proscenium theatre and was also against the commercialisation of theatre. Procession follows all the Third Theatre techniques. The plot of the play is a collage of different episodes. Sircar adopted this technique because he wanted to bring about change in society by raising various issues in a single play and put it before spectators in a short period of time. In the early 1970s, the idea of making a play on Calcutta in the form of a collage came to his mind. He discarded the usual story element and adopted the form of a collage because
in his opinion if a play follows the storyline the spectators become so absorbed in it that they lose their ability to think rationally. He also believed that if the play progresses following a story, the scope of a story is often too limited to allow him to raise several issues at the same time. This has been pointed out by Subhendu Sarkar in the Introduction to Badal Sircar’s *Two Plays*: “As a ‘perfect’ story often leaves the audience unaware of the message of the play, Sircar uses a chain of episodes that helps him treat a number of issues in a single play . . .” (xxvii). Using the form of the collage as a device also helps him to repeat the same idea many times through different episodes so as to implant the idea in the mind of the audience. It is also possible with the help of this form to have one actor performing a number of roles in a play without any change of make-up and costume. Subhendu Sarkar further observes,

It is effective for yet another reason: as Sircar’s plays are enacted in places where many casual visitors get a chance to see the performance, a person may form an idea about the message of the play even if he manages to sit/stand through any one episode. Naturally, Sircar could not ignore so many facilities provided by the technique of collage and, therefore, used it in plays . . . (xxvii-xxviii)

Another characteristic of the Third Theatre is the synthesis of both the urban and folk theatres. This is a characteristic of *Procession* as well. Sircar takes various features from the folk theatre of India as well as from the Western theatre. An element which he has taken from the folk theatre is song. Sircar delivers some of the significant issues and thoughts with the help of songs and amuses his audience as well during the serious course of action. In the following lines, the Chorus praises the glory of the country through 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. (Sircar, *Procession* 33)

Another example from the play suggests the influence of Western theatre. Sircar adopted the Living Newspaper theatre technique from the West and Indianised it which “. . . has become a distinctive feature of street plays. . . . he used this format to full effect. Reciting facts and figures in tandem the performers create a mosaic of the current Indian situation” (Srampickal 127). An example of the Living Newspaper theatre technique used by Badal Sircar in *Procession* is as follows,

ONE carries in his hands six fool’s caps made out of newspapers.

. . . ONE stands still at the end of a round. One by one the others complete a round, take a cap from ONE, put it on, and resume running. ONE puts on his cap, last of all, and joins in the running.

Two. Conflict again in the Middle East.

Three. Oil Crisis All Over the World.

Four. Hydrogen Bomb Exploded Again in the Pacific.

Five. The UN Security Council Meets.

Six. Another Experiment with the Artificial Heart.

. . .

One. Earthquake in Peru.

Two. Cyclone in Bangladesh.

Three. Uprising in Chile.

Four. Train accident in Italy.

Five. Inflation in Japan.

Six. Test match in New Zealand. (12)

The dramatisations of current events, social problems, and controversial issues, with appropriate suggestions for improvement are the starting point of Living Newspaper theatrical production which has been used for propaganda in the U.S.S.R. from the
time of the 1917 Revolution. This form was popular in Western drama as an instrument of social change. Badal Sircar has learnt this technique from Utpal Dutta, one of the members of Indian People’s Theatre Association and the originator of street theatre during India’s struggle for freedom. He also learnt this technique from his own experiences with Julian Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theatre and used it in his own theatre. He adopted this format “... in almost all plays [which] helps to prepare the background for the theme about to be analysed in the play” (Srampickal 128). Sircar’s Third Theatre form is considered to be a rural-urban link which is equally effective and successful in the villages as well as in the cities. Ella Dutta opines,

*Procession* . . . is considered by many to have a universal appeal despite its strong Calcutta oriented origin and its urban appeal. Sircar and the other members of Satabdi hesitated about its appeal elsewhere, but their experienced proved otherwise, the play was well received even in the villages. There, the image, for example the one of Khoka’s repeated death, is not anything abstract, anything distantly removed as it is to the urban middle class. Experience has shown Sircar that it is not just correct to predetermine what will go down well in cities and what will communicate better in villages. (ix)

The third characteristic of Sircar’s Third Theatre is its emphasis on audience participation. For the maximum participation of the audience Sircar paid special attention to the arrangement of seats. The seating arrangement for this play entitled *Procession* highlights Sircar’s desire for the involving of the audience. The play “... is meant to be performed in an open space, with the road, through which the processions of life will thread their way, intertwining themselves around the islands of seating spaces for the audience” (Sen 75). During the performance, the actors sit among the audience in order to establish a rapport with them. With the idea of writing and performing the play *Procession* in his mind, even before he had written it, Badal Sircar, went a number of times to Angan Manch, at the studio of the Academy of Fine
Arts, “... to arrange the seats in a way that streets and lanes were worked inside the audience. He did it to see whether the idea would work or not, and then, satisfied with its workability, he began to write the play” (Dutta viii). Third Theatre is not only about viewing and hearing but also about being within and experiencing. In Sircar’s words, “In theatre, communication can occur in four ways: performer to spectator, performer to performer, spectator to performer and spectator to spectator” (On Theatre 81). It is believed that the first two ways are usual but when people think of the other two ways of communication they believe that these ways can create panic. If the spectators start to communicate with the performers or to the other spectators, a situation of disorder is produced according to proscenium theatre practitioners. But in Sircar’s opinion, this is a mistaken notion,

The attention of the spectator, concentration, the reaction of the performance reflected in his facial expression or the tension in his body- all these can be a form of feedback to the performer or to another spectator. And once the performers recognize the presence of the spectators by coming nearer, by putting them in the light, other opportunities of voluntary or spontaneous participation on the part of the spectators can be included in the theatre. (82)

The anti-proscenium nature is another important characteristic of Sircar’s Third Theatre, of which this play entitled Procession, is a good example. Sircar removes the safety cover of darkness and distance of the proscenium arch beyond which the audience sits in the darkened place and create the illusion of absence for the performers. In the Third Theatre performances, there is no stage, no stage props, no arc, and no head or side lights. Here the trace of the Western experimental theatre is evinced as observed by Sarbani Sen, “In this recording of the theatre space, Sircar’s technique recalls Schechner’s ‘Environment Theatre.’ By breaking these connections, theatre becomes live and powerful” (74). In the play Procession, the seating arrangements as well as the participation in the processions of those members of the audience who arrive late also demonstrate its anti-proscenium nature,
Michhil Michhil. Funeral michhils, demonstrations, walks, auspicious journeys, inauspicious journeys, non-journeys. Come along, come along, the michhil’s on the move. Be quick and join.

. . . *Latecomers stopped at the gate after the play had begun may be allowed to enter at this point.*

Take your seats on both sides of the course, choose convenient places. Come along, come along fast, take your seats . . . (Sircar, *Procession* 7-8)

Badal Sircar’s Third Theatre is portable, inexpensive and flexible. Sircar has reduced the cost of stage properties; light effects, make-up and costumes and made his theatre portable and flexible so that he can take his theatre to the people who do not come to see plays in the theatre. Sarbani Sen aptly remarks about the Third Theatre, “Through its parikramas, it can unite the illiterate villager and the poor urbanite in the movement for change” (74). Sircar believed that theatre should be free to facilitate its approach to the widest possible audience and by making his theatre portable, inexpensive and flexible, he achieved this aim. Sircar’s theatre is free in two respects: firstly by it is up to the audience to use their imagination in interpreting any action performed before them and secondly it is unshackled by Sircar from the constraints of Western theatre’s naturalistic paraphernalia and literally free for its audiences, who are supposed to pay only when they can afford to do so. So the freedom of imagination and the freedom of payment i.e. the anti-commercial nature of the Third Theatre make it attractive for the underprivileged classes in the cities as well as in the villages.

Sircar’s Third Theatre plays depart from the traditional Western style proscenium stage in another way as well. They do not follow the unities of time, place and action. The division of a play into acts and scenes are rarely seen. Different roles are performed by a single performer in different scenes in a play. The foremost objective of Sircar for adopting this technique is to convey his message to the audience. This objective is successfully fulfilled, “The method worked efficiently in conveying to the viewer the thoughts and feelings of the play, without identifying them with any character in particular” (Srampickal 107). The members of the Chorus
in the play *Procession* who do not have any name but are identified by numbers ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR, FIVE and SIX play different roles in different situations. They sing the songs in chorus at one place, in another situation they take the form of a procession or transform into a train. On some other place, they perform individually as a common man or the devotee of *Gurudev* or a hawker in the train. Here are some examples which illustrate this technique as used by Sircar in the play *Procession*:

CHORUS (singing).

Adore Gouranga, Pronounce Gouranga, Take Gouranga’s
name, ho.

He who adores Gouranga, I take him to my soul, ho

Adore Gouranga, pronounce Gouranga, take Gouranga’s
name, ho.

He who dies every day I take to my soul, ho. (7)

. . . the CHORUS imitates a train’s siren and transforms itself into a train making a round with the whistles and jug-jug of a train.

Then it breaks up into familiar suburban train types like the hawkers, beggars etc. suggesting scenes within railway compartments through their positions.

ONE. Attention, ladies and gentlemen, I have a message for all of you who use this railway route every day. I’m sure you all use pens.

I’m here to bring to you a new pen . . . .

*They all speak together, overlapping, and moving all over the space.*

Two. Lozenges, lozenges. Four different tastes-spicy, hot, salty, sweet.

Pickle lozenges – ten paise a pair . . . .

Three. Water, sir, water! Water for anybody?
Four. Betel leaves, dry leaf cigarettes, cigarettes! Betel leaves, dry leaf cigarettes, cigarettes! (13-14)

Badal Sircar observes that “. . . the basic tool of trade of the art of the theatre is the human body” (qtd. in Sarkar xix). He accentuates the attitudes, gestures and movements of the body of the performer. Through physical gestures and expressions he creates various images on stage. To achieve his end, Sircar organised workshops in which he trained his group members to get rid of physical and psychological inhibitions. In this connection Sircar comments,

To be aware of one’s own body; to discover the hidden potentials of the body; to develop mutual trust, both physical and psychological; to learn to relate to the space and to the others in one’s movements; to explore sound, movement and rhythm individually and in a group; to bring out and channelize one’s creative faculties and to establish a strong sense of community and team spirit—these we categorize as the ‘external’ workshop exercises and they are carried out through games with definite rules. (*On Theatre* 103-4)

The above mentioned exercises are categorised by Sircar as external exercises and their accomplishment is essential for the success of the play. Sircar further declares, “The next step is to take up themes, thus bringing the mind into play or . . . to establish the mind-body relationship . . .” (104). This next step is the beginning of internal workshop exercises and this process helps to explore the “. . . ways of relating one’s feeling about the theme to the expression through the body, through movement, sound, rhythm, energy and the totality of linguistic expression” (104). Thus, the workshops that Badal Sircar organised and the training that he imparted played very important roles in instructing physical acting. Some examples from *Procession* show how performers express the situations through physical acting, how beneficial are the workshops and how they negate the use of mechanical devices:
. . . the CHORUS imitates a train’s siren and transforms itself into a train making a round with the whistles and jug-jug of train. Then it breaks up into familiar suburban train types like the hawkers, beggars etc., suggesting scenes within railway compartments through their positions. (Sircar, Procession 13)

On another place the Chorus members are making animal sounds during a procession which is the result of vocal exercises taught during the workshops attended by the actors:

*A member of the CHORUS comes in, singing a classical composition.* . .

. . . He is followed into the arena by the five members of the CHORUS, this time as a group, making animal cries-braying like a donkey, bleating like a goat, mewing like a cat, quacking like a duck. They are chased along by the OFFICER as Bloodhound. THE MASTER appears, and is lifted up by the CHORUS, who carry him round in a procession. The OFFICER leads the procession, twirling his baton behind him like a tail. (34-5)

The visualisation of the murder of young Khoka through physical gestures is another scene which if enacted in keeping with the directions would constitute an excellent piece of acting;

*They [Chorus] take KHOKA to different points in the space and kill him. The first time it is decapitation. One of the actors stoops low from the waist, the OFFICER paces KHOKA’S neck on his shoulders to form an executioner’s block, KHOKA’S hands are tied behind his back. On instructions from the OFFICER the executioner cracks at the head with an imaginary blade. Then the CHORUS mime a gallows.*
The OFFICER lifts KHOKA up to the post and puts an imaginary noose around his neck. Then it is a firing squad. Then a gas chamber closed within human walls. At the end the OFFICER and the CHORUS turn into a bomber aircraft pouring bombs on KHOKA. (37-8)

In this way, Sircar brings his theatre out of the confines of stage paraphernalia and makes physical acting the strongest tool for self-expression.

Sircar gives short and brief dialogues to his characters. The brief dialogues help the audience in focusing on the action and endow the play with dramatic pace. It helps the actors also because “... they make much use of their bodies and are, therefore, unable to speak at length. Moreover, the idea of ‘group acting’ suffers if the characters are given lengthy speeches. To enhance the idea of group acting, a lengthy speech is often broken up, thus adding to the dramatic quality of the play (Sarkar xxx). In Procession, there is a scene where some freedom fighters are struggling with British forces and the scene is full of action. In this scene of Procession, it is difficult for actors to speak lengthy dialogues:

ONE. Free-ee-ee-dom!
TWO. Non-violence!
THREE. Non-coopera-a-a-ation.
FOUR. Satyagraha-a-a.
FIVE. The spinning whee-ee-eel!
ONE. Let Hindus and Muslims unite.
TWO. Quit India.
THREE. Do or Die.
FOUR. Karenge iya marenge (Do or die).
Five. British Imperialism, leave India! (Sircar 19)
The play ends with the union of the old alive Khoka and the young dead Khoka with the Chorus who invite the audience around the acting area to join the singing procession of dreams. There is a note of hope that ‘a real procession’ brings to an end the search of life and will show a way to a real home. Rustom Bharucha rightly opines, *Micchil* is one of Sircar’s most intricate . . . plays. . . . The play begins abruptly. The procession fills the space of the room . . . they move closer to the spectators who are compelled to become part of the procession . . . and the entire space of the room becomes a swirling mass of humanity. . . . Transcending the immediate issues of the play, it lingers long after the play ceased, compelling the spectators to re-examine their affinities and responsibilities as members of a society. (qtd. in Sen 77)

In this way, the play which has been presented by Sircar in the form of various processions exposes how colonial rule has harmed the common man immensely and how in spite of gaining independence common man is still in the clutches of capitalists who continue to exploit the masses. It also expresses Sircar’s anger against this situation. In the play *Procession*, Sircar not only generates awareness but also creates the hope that a day will come when there will be equality in society and no one will exploit the other.
Works Cited


