

# BADAL SIRCAR : MIDDLE-CLASS RESPONSIBILITIES

*Article and Interview*

---

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Though it is difficult to trace a Badal Sircar style running through all the twentyone plays that he mentions in the biodata I have before me, a commitment to the milieu of educated middle-class life in Calcutta might define the common basis of almost all his plays. The choice of this particular area of experience can be explained in terms of an intellectual humility, a sense of the limits of knowledge and experience: "I do not know the oppressed masses. I do not know the workers slaving in the coalmines. I do not know the peasant toiling in the cornfields. I do not know the *bedeys* playing with snakes, the Santhali chieftain, the fishkillers of the big river. Those whom I see around me have no shape, no colour, no substance. They are undramatic. They are — Amal, Bimal, Kamal, And Indrajit". That statement of a credo by the Lekhak in *Evang Indrajit* provides an insight into one of the typical Badal Sircar situations — the confrontation between the structure of mediocrity and the lonely individual struggling to rise above the mundane. Sircar takes care to keep his Indrajits earthbound in their submissions and compromises; his dreamers are not exceptional, but men slightly different. The antiromantic sense of reality is carried into the plays in bits of irony: Indrajit's wanderlust redefined by the Lekhak as "an Introduction to Geography. Recommended by the Directorate of Public Instruction as a textbook for Class Six", 'The Tiger's' passion for knowledge delimited to a problem with simple arithmetic. Sircar's "other" men stand out in a spirtual nonconformism rarely worked out into gestures or actions: *Baaki Itihaas* closes on Sharadindu, checked in his attempted suicide, sitting with his forehead on his "firm wrists. His body is rigid with pain, the pain of living the rest of his life with a consciousness of the rest of history".

Attached to the city of Calcutta in more ways than one (ranging from ancestral connectious and growing up in a big house in one of the older sectors of the city, to a professional interest as a townplanner). Sircar has an intimate feel of the urban conscience of this city, has a profound understanding of

the middle-class intelligentsia so passionately worked up time and again over political issues and situations apparently remote and indulging at the same time effortlessly in a continuum of humdrum desires and aspirations. *Evang Indrajit*, *Baaki Itihaas*, *Tringsha Shatabdi* and *Shesh Nei* constitute a Calcutta quartet through which Sircar probes into the Calcutta middle-class mind. Sircar's indifference to the tradition of the professional theatre in Calcutta has proved to be an advantage; for the traditional professional theatre here has been catering for the last hundred years at least to a strangely mixed audience not particularly urban in its character. In a desire to appeal to the sentiments of those who come on short visits, to appeal to the sentiments of those in North Calcutta as part of a schedule which includes the city zoo, the city botanics, the city museum and a number of temples architecturally nondescript, the professional theatre has tried to cling to the lowest common denominator in its choice and handling of themes. Fortunately this theatre has never really existed for Sircar. His early connections with nonprofessional theatricals has given him almost an instinctive sense of the theatre as entertainment, but he had to forget even that before he could write *Evang Indrajit*.

One of those theatre memories that I shall cherish for long is the first time I heard Badal Sircar give a private reading — the play, *Evang Indrajit*. Here was a play which was ruthlessly authentic, which reflected doubts and uncertainties that the post-world war generation shared side by side with the more common pursuit of success; and a play that I could not relate to the familiar body of Bengali plays. Introduced to Sircar that evening, I persuaded him to read out for me and my friends all the plays he had written up to that time. *Evang Indrajit* had virtually nothing in common with the set of early comedies that I discovered only after *Evang Indrajit*. The comedies were consciously derived from screen comedy; and the fun lay more in elaborately contrived situations — a trio of good-natured criminals using a snake to get rid of undesirables, a scientist experimenting with an elixir that should restore youth or may be childhood, and the scientist's wife taking the neighbour's child for her husband restored to childhood, and an amateur group placating an orthodox aunt who would not allow theatricals in the house — than in comic style. Sircar remains strangely earthbound even in the comedies, even when he reaches out for fantasy — in the jealous wives in *Solution X*, in the excitement and small tensions that go into the preparations for the performance in *Baro Pishima*.

*Evang Indrajit* is a work of style, of levels; an area of middle-class consciousness is explored through abstractions of situations and attitudes. Sircar avoids both facile optimism and faddish pessimism, but is able to capture a more authentic state of mind — the sense of waste through which an enlightened middle-class youth passes as he fails to bridge the gap between his sense of a mission or a purpose and his life of trivialities to which he is doomed and the consequent sense of an otherness that only lacerates him. He tries to submerge himself into the mass inertia — he tries to become a Nirmal; but he still remains different in his rejection of the grossest material values that determine the limits of the existence of his fellow beings; the Lekhak says, ".....we have a road. We shall walk. I don't have anything to write, yet I shall write. You don't have anything to say. Yet you will speak. Manasi has no point in living, yet she will live. We have our road, we shall walk". Indrajit refers to the myth of Sisyphus, but a ready identification with Camus' reinterpretation of the myth is not called for; the myth rediscovered is an element in the middle-class conscience of

the urban intelligentsia, and it comes up just like that. A confrontation with a relentless reality leads to a recognition that "we do not have a *teertha*. We have our *teerthavatra*". Structurally *Evang Indrajit* has a freedom in the casualness with which Sircar juxtaposes the two points of view, the poetry in *Indrajit* and the Lekhak sharply counterposed against the cryptic monotonies of Amal, Bimal, and Kamal. The unusual structural freedom may be explained in terms of Sircar's claim that he had not conceived it as stage drama at all.

The three comedies after *Evang Indrajit* do not seem to belong to a single phase of creativity they represent an uncertain groping, may be a waiting even, I consider *Ballabhpurer Rupekatha* as Sircar's best comedy. It is a spoof on ghost stories, and manages to place a four hundred year old ghost in the house of a young dentist, creating trouble for the latter by philandering with the daughter of an industrialist who is interested in buying old houses. Colloquial nuances in the references to the familiar ghost provide for quite a number of laughs; and the newly rich industrialist's passion for old houses to prove ancestry, a passion for possession that extends even to bats and ghosts, has the necessary satiric line that adds to the richness of the comedy; the creditors dressing up as attendants to a landowner who does not afford attendants any more bring in an element of masque which is comic in its shabbiness, its conscious derivation from the historical line in the traditional professional theatre, and the running fear that they might get caught.

*Baaki Itihaas* is Sircar's second major problem play after *Evang Indrajit*. Basanti who is a storywriter and Sharadindu who is a lecturer in Bengali literature form a typical couple, representative of the world of the educated middle-class in Calcutta. Sircar accumulates details from the elaborate arrangement of the entire flat with its kitchen, its drawing room, its dining space, the importance of the bookcase in the setting as described in the stage directions to the slight discord over an unpaid electricity bill with which the play opens. The news of a suicide by a chance acquaintance whom they remember faintly sets them on a pastime — storywriting. Thinking of spending the Sunday on an outing to the Botanicals, or Diamond Harbour, or on a social call, they cannot agree and hit upon the least troublesome alternative of all — writing stories on a suicide, speculating on the reasons that must have been there. The two stories are theatrically presented in the same manner: while Basanti's story is obviously Ibsenic, Sharadindu's is of a sensational-psychological kind; they quarrel over the merits of the stories; and there is irony in the way the death of a man provides matters for light-hearted literary conversation with the inevitable suggestion of a common tendency towards selfcentred indifference to the world outside. The last Act is a confrontation between Sharadindu and the dead Seetanath. Sircar does not try to rationalize the encounter; for all practical purposes, it is an encounter between two living men and at the same time a confrontation between two Sharadindus, the public self and the private self. Seetanath hands Sharadindu an album of pictures culled from newspapers, a parallel to Sharadindu's own collection of newspaper clippings (in his case of news and editorials) — and Sharadindu discovers a whole history of oppression and torture and cruelty — from the myths to history, from the building of the pyramids, the Christians thrown to the lions, the German concentration camps, to Hiroshima and Vietnam — "the rest of history". Sharadindu says, "History is not this". Seetanath Sharadindu banter, "What is history? A history of passing examinations? the comfort in the company of a lively bright and enthusiastic wife?" Seetanath challenge,

him, "What about the rest of history?" Sharadindu cries out, "But what can I do about it? Seetanath's tone is now different, cold and quiet: 'No. You can't do anything. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't do anything. Nobody can do anything. Oppressions, killings, riots, wars,— all these will continue, men will commit these — yet man has nothing to do. The man who is satisfied with two meals a day will pierce another man with a bayonet. The scientists who cannot bear the pain of an animal will create a weapon to kill a million people. They are all men. Like you. Like me. They have all tried to live on one or another meaning they have given to life'. Seetanath finds an absurdity in a life of continued custom, a life blind to concern and responsibility; and asks Sharadindu a question that he has already asked Seetanath. "Why have you not committed suicide"? And Sharadindu tells Seetanath in a moment of intense drama, "Go away, Sharadindu"; and Seetanath has to remind him, "I'm Seetanath". Sharadindu makes the same movements as made by the two Seetanath in the two stories — preparations for a suicide. But the drama comes full circle with Basudeva's entrance with the news that Sharadindu is finally going to become an Assistant Professor, a promotion. Sharadindu tries to come back to the security of his reality, the last few minutes of the play Sharadindu is torn desperately between his craving for contentment and his sense of "the rest of history".

Structurally *Baaki Itihaas* achieves a peculiar tension between the apparently regular construction framed within a typical Sunday with the reference to a party in the evening and Basudeva bringing the news of the promotion on his way back from the party and the disturbing pattern of reality and an objectification of conscience confronting each other. The point of the play reaches the spectator or reader more sharply through that tension.

Badal Sircar's statement of the "philosophy" of *Tringsha Shatabdi* as "the responsibility of all mankind for the events of our times" (as quoted by E. Alkazi in his director's notes in the brochure for the Dishantar production of *Hiroshima*) links *Baaki Itihaas*, *Tringsha Shatabdi*, and *Parey Kono Din (Some time, later)*. On his return from Nigeria in 1967, I remember Sircar describing the three as a Trilogy, and in the first reading of *Tringsha Shatabdi* Sharadindu and Basanti reappearing as the central couple. While *Baaki Itihaas* probes into the first strings of a reawakened conscience, *Tringsha Shatabdi* takes it a step further in the intellectual exploration of the reality, in the investigation. My latest interview with Sircar gave me the impression that *Tringsha Shatabdi* originated as a documentary play, which he framed with a 'quotation' from Sartre's *The Condemned of Altona*, a 'quotation' in terms of the drama that underscores the point of responsibility, and brings in at the same time the international relevance of this attitude of responsibility, and can draw in for the more sensitive reader or spectator associations from Hochhuth's *The Deputy* or Miller's *After the Fall* or Weiss' *The Investigation*. Sircar thoroughly resents now any over-emphasis on the documentation at the cost of the local and contemporary relevance. In the choice of his witnesses for the Hiroshima catastrophe Sircar is careful to choose only those (with the exception of Einstein, who provides a necessary climax to the series of 'appearances') who were cogs in the insensate machinery or the victims and who share in common with their middle-class 'judges' a blind helplessness, the incapacity and powerlessness to check the ruthless course of institutionalized and organized and politicalized violence or torture. Sircar manages to suggest the sheer size of the crisis and its aftermath and yet keep it within human

dimensions, within individualized modes of suffering enabling a redefinition of the issue in strikingly everyday middle-class terms: "You and I are passengers in a bus, backseat customers. The driver drives on recklessly at a speed of eighty miles per hour. But we don't have the right to tell him: 'Soft; keep your eyes open There's a child crossing! Be careful!' We don't have the right to ask him whether he has a licence, whether he is sane. We have to look out of the window all the time, keep our eyes away, and say; 'How beautiful!'"

*Perey Kono Din*, Sircar's only science fiction play, gives the Hiroshima experience another dimension, the issue of responsibility a further complexity, as he brings back a group of travellers from the future to study human suffering in a village destroyed by a meteor in 1926; one of the travellers — Clea — experiences pity as she falls in love with the young protagonist of the play; but there is something inevitable and inescapable in time past — a subtle variation of that sense of helplessness and inertia that a tension between Serin who hears a music in suffering and is fascinated and Shankar who must stand in the ruins and the flames and the cries, and speaks in starts: "If I.....If.....I knew.....knew somehow.....may be..... I could have checked it.....stopped it.....somehow. Or.....Something.....I could have done..... could have held them.... forced them.....so that.....so that.....there would have been.....at least not that amount.....that amount of suffering.....something.... ohh.....I'll.....write it down.....I.....I'll tell people..... tell people.....tell everyone. This time.....I could n't do anything.... now.....the people.....tell everyone. This time.....I couldn't do anything.....now.....the people now.... they can't be saved. But later.....later some day.... in the future.....later.....later sometime..... later, sometime.....".

Stylistically, *Perey Kono Din* is the first Badal Sircar play with a strong nonverbal content; the crisscrossing of the two segments of time and the fictional content of the future make the mundane colloquialism that Sircar handles with such precision elsewhere ineffective. Language-wise, he breaks the colloquialism with an offstage narration by the protagonist himself in a chaste formal language (in Bengali sharply different from the colloquial in the separate forms of the verbs), which serves to bring in a tone of history, impersonal and formal and past-oriented. Sircar exploits the magical properties inherent in a fictional future in a recourse to the cinematic: "Clea's hand on handle — reposing on the surface of the door. A wallbuilt arm, sparking in the light. A moment. Then Clea, She passes the door in calm measured steps"; or "as Shankar descended into the spell the lights had started taking on a smoky tint. The room almost dark. Shankar and Clea were floating on the dim light. Now it went totally dark. Shankar comes upon Clea listening to Serin's recording of the music of suffering in the Great London Fire of 1664:" "The window was no longer there. The wall was lost in a thick spiral of fog — a spiral of innumerable moving shadowy figures. Only shapes, no clear images. The moving shapes rolled and disintegrated and turned, one after another, in the moving spiral of fog, they merged into the music of sounds, into the shrill cry to build an image of the final and ultimate catastrophe. The world was sinking in the overwhelming horror manifest in the shadows, dances, sounds, and music mixed up with the agonised writhings of the human race and its shrieks distorted by pain."

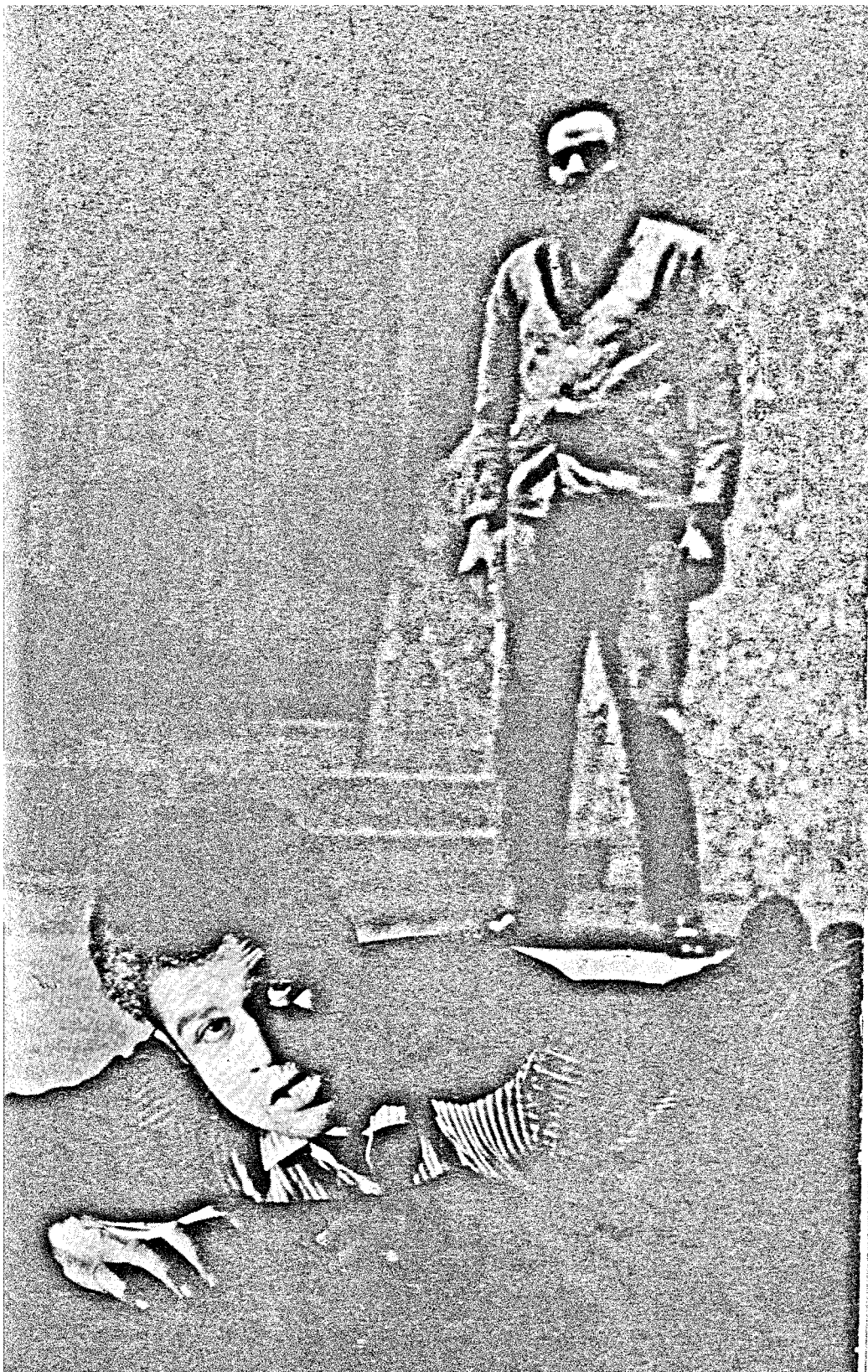
Badal Sircar has a personal way of treating foreign plays that come his way; he has never tried to adapt a play in the sense plays are adapted in Indian languages from foreign sources. He prefers describing these plays as "inspired by" rather than adaptations of the original plays. He does not keep the play by him when he works on the derived play and depends on his memory or an early reading; a method that allows him greater creative freedom. This is the approach that has gone into *Baagh* from Murry Schisgal's *The Tiger*, *Jadi Aar Ekbaar* from J.M. Barrie's *Dear Brutus*, and *Pralaap* from James Saunders' *Next Time I'll Sing to You*. In these play he allows a crust of foreignness in the circumstances. In the kind of communication into which the characters enter, and in the very central experiences — a man acting a tiger to kidnap a girl and then submitting to the girl: a spirit giving a group of characters a second chance to organise their lives and the characters remaining equally discontented in their new relationships, and a group of actors improvising a play which tries to be ruthlessly objective but the experience turning out to be one of disconnected tensions and sheer tomfoolery. While *Baagh* and *Pralaap* touch connections in contemporary reality, *Jadi Aar Akbaar* (If there was another chance...) remains in a sweet never never world made more obvious in the common speech verse of the characters and the more rhythmical chants of the Buddha Jin, a mythical child dressed up as an old man appearing on horseback and speaking most of the time to percussion *bols* of a particularly lively kind. These 'derivations' show a greater concern with style while the issues are only lightly touched; while a strong intellectual passion tears its way through the form itself in the problem plays concerned with suffering and responsibility, the group of 'derived' plays use conscious stylisation or carefully modulated and worked out disruptions and conventional structure.

*Bandyopadhyay:* In the first place, how did you come to playwriting?

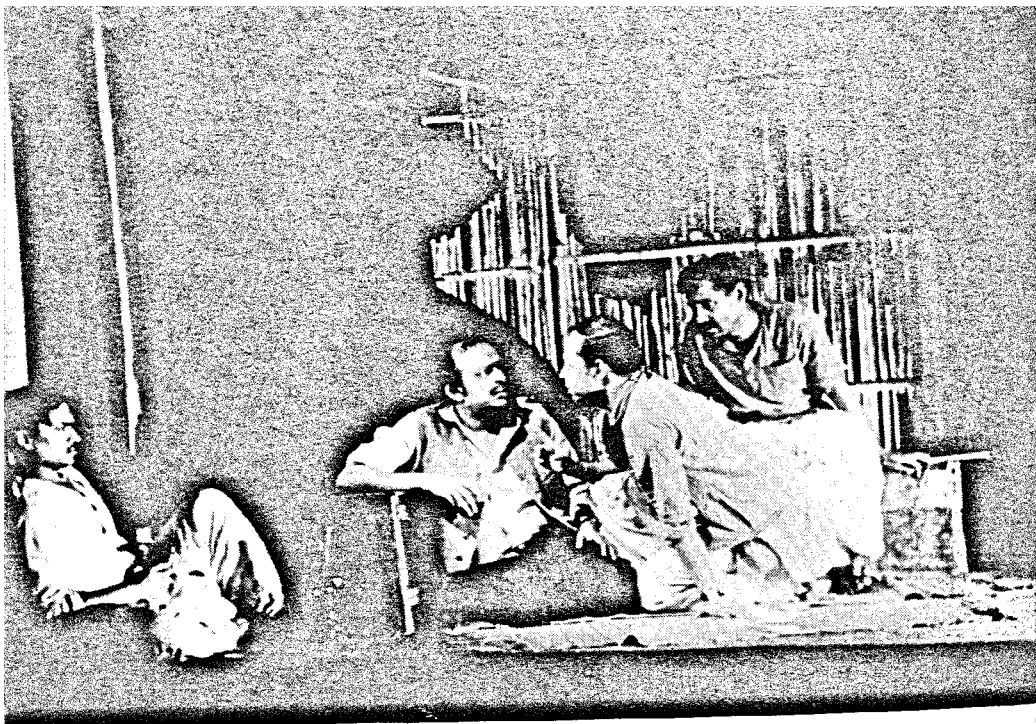
*Sircar:* Quite early in my life I came to prefer plays to other forms of literature. Right from my days in school I was a prolific reader of plays. My readings in drama covered a wide range — from the Bengali classics of Girishchandra Ghosh, Kshirodeprasad Vidyavinode, and Dwijondralal Roy to Bernard Shaw and Galsworthy. One of my earliest exercises in playwriting was an adaptation of Galsworthy's *Roof* in 1945.

I had little direct experience, however, of the theatre as performance on the professional plane. As a student I had seen not a single professional performance. In the fifties, I saw two productions by Sisirkumar Bhadury — *Sadhabar Ekadashi* and *Michael Madhusudan* — as productions, inadequate, but redeemed by great acting. The one thing I really liked was Manoranjan Bhattacharya's performance as Rammanikya in the former. As an actor, I acquired some experience as a comedy actor in domestic theatricals, and tried my hand at adaptations from stories. I came to have a really positive interest in playwriting only in the early fifties, when I came to act in amateur groups. *Solution X*, virtually my first worthwhile play, came in 1956. It was directly inspired by a film I had seen — *Monkey Business*. I had seen it only once, and had missed most of the dialogue, a factor that proved to be advantageous, for I had to write my own dialogue.

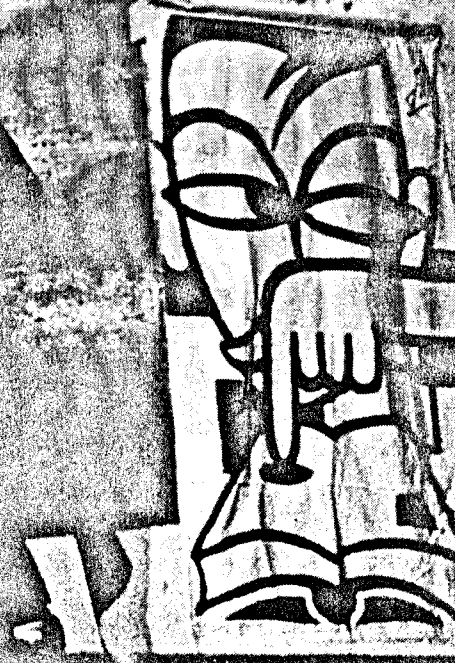
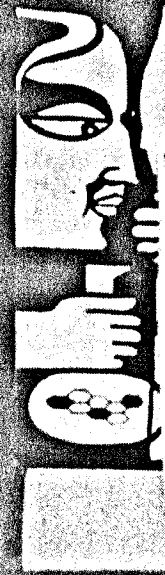
*Illustrations:* P. 11 "Evum Indrajit". Shyamanand Jalan and Kalyan Chatterji in the Anamika production, Calcutta, directed by Jalan. P. 12 Two scenes from the Anamika production of "Pagla Ghora", directed by Jalan, with sets by Khaled Chaudhury.

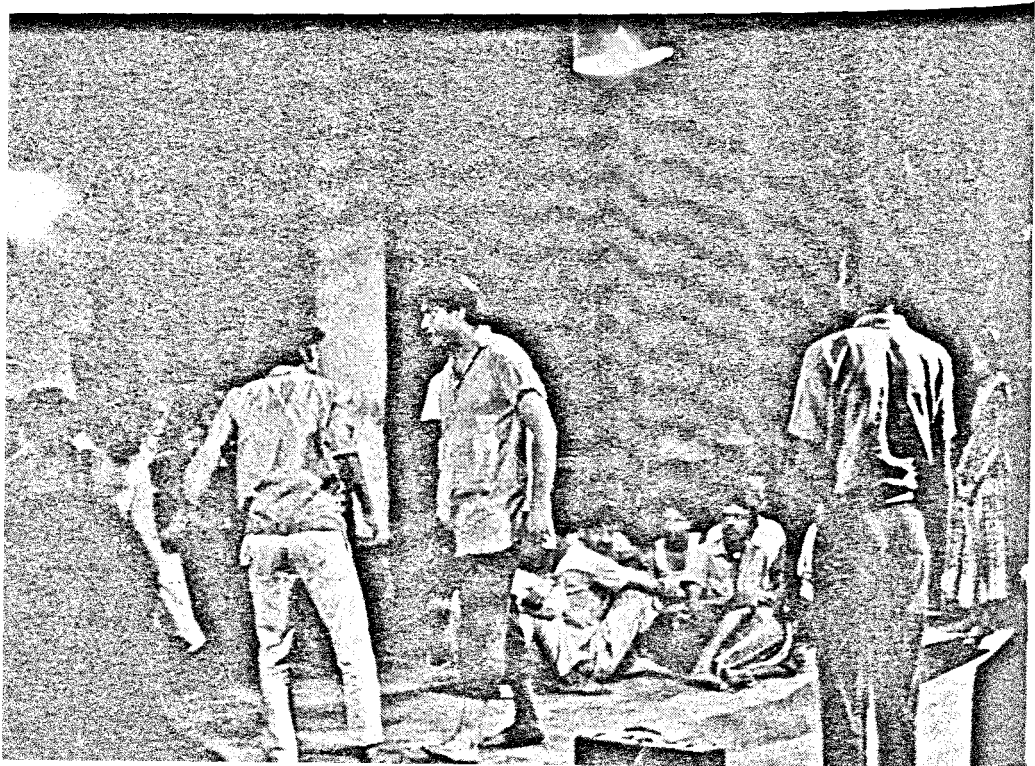
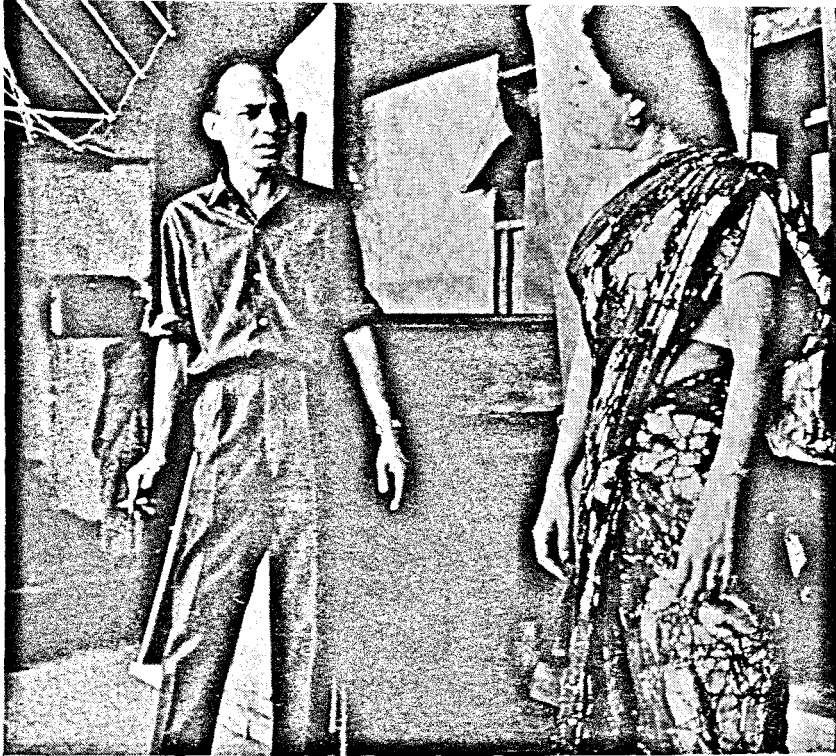












It was an exercise in bringing a plot with a wide span into the limits of a single set.

In 1957, I went abroad for the first time, and was exposed to a rich field of theatre. In the U.K., I saw two Joan Littlewood productions—*The Hostage* and *A Taste of Honey*—, *Long Day's Journey into Night* with Alec Clunes as the Father, *Party* with Charles Laughton, *Duel of the Angels* with Vivien Leigh, and phenomenal hits like *My Fair Lady*, *Irma La Douce*, and *The Mouse Trap*. On my return in 1959, I became more active in the theatre, acting, writing and directing plays for Chakra, a group some of us had set up in 1960. In the plays I wrote about this time I had the thought at the back of my mind that I had to feed the theatre in which I could work. But I never really tailored my plays to suit the resources of Chakra.

**Bandyopadhyay:** How would you assess your early plays?

**Sircar:** *Baro Pishima*, written in 1959, has proved to be quite popular with various amateur companies. But I have never thought highly of it. It has an authentic atmosphere of the theatre about it as its redeeming grace. *Samavritta*, my only crime play, was inspired by the film version of *Scapegoat*, in which I had missed the dialogue a gain.

**Bandyopadhyay:** How did you come to write *Evang Indrajit*, which is such a sharp departure from the line of your earlier plays?

**Sircar:** All the poems in *Evang Indrajit* (except *Keno tumi haanchbe?* *Keno tumi kashbe?* Why would you sneeze? Why would you cough?) were written in London in 1957-59, almost as a diary. The play was written in Calcutta in 1962, but in the same spirit, I had not conceived it as a play; it was almost a private piece of writing, and a temperamental predilection or the dramatic determined its form. Even after I had finished it, or even when you took away a script to have it published for the first time in Bohurupee, I never considered it stageable. As a matter of fact I produced *Samavritta*, after I had completed the play *Evang Indrajit*.

**Bandyopadhyay:** How was *Baaki Itihaas* written?

**Sircar:** I know you think a lot of *Baaki Itihaas*, But it is not one of my favourites. I haven't read the play after December 1965, when I read it out to Sombhu Mitra and his company. I don't feel like reading it. And if I have the choice, I'd always prefer reading out *Sararattir* to reading *Baaki Itihaas*. In Nigeria, planning a short vacation in Calcutta, I thought of taking back something for my friends, and I wanted to write a play. Kurosawa's *Rashomon* inspired the basic idea of a number of versions of the same situation. But I almost gave up the play after having completed the first episode. A friend liked the incomplete script, and I came back to the play after a long gap of time. I had to reject the first draft of the second episode. But then the going was smoother. *Baaki Itihaas* was difficult writing.

**Bandyopadhyay:** I remember you were back in Calcutta for a few months in 1965, and you read out *Baagh* to me a day or two before you left Calcutta to go back to Nigeria again . .

**Sircar:** I had read Murray Schisgal's *The Tiger* and *The Typist* in Nigeria, and had once thought of adapting the former. But I could not

Illustrations: P. 13 "Shesh Nei". A Shatabdi production, directed by Sircar. Pankaj Munshi and Badal Sircar in a scene. Posters by Debabrata Mukhopadhyaya. Above: Badal Sircar directing. Below: "Sagina Mahato", directed by Sircar in an arena production, for Shatabdi.

imagine fitting it into a Bengali context. Back in Calcutta on a vacation in 1965 I saw the Nandikar production of *Phool Phootuk ya Phootook*, an adaptation of the last act of Wesker's *Roots*. It was not perfectly transplanted to the Bengali context, it remained incongruous in parts, and yet it clicked. That assured me. If this was permissible, why should I not try? I did not have Schisgal's play before me when I wrote *Baagh* in Calcutta. I'm not sure whether you would call it an adaptation, or a play inspired by the Schisgal play.

**Bandyopadhyay:** Back in Nigeria, you had one of the busiest phases of playwriting.

**Sircar:** On my return to Nigeria I found that my attitude to playwriting had changed. On my short visit to Calcutta, I had found *Evang Indrajit* being staged with commercial success and directors interested in my work. Sombhu Mitra had already taken up *Baaki Itihaas*. There was a demand for my plays. In the past I could leave an unfinished play lying about. But now that would not do. That would explain the prolific playwriting — six plays, of which the first four came in the first three months — in 1966-67 in Nigeria.

**Bandyopadhyay:** Did you come to have a greater interest in forms from your greater involvement in playwriting? How otherwise would you explain the various kinds of plays you wrote in this phase — a documentary play, a science fiction, a verse drama,....?

**Sircar:** I have never tried to experiment with forms for their own sake, or try to work in a variety of forms. For me, the theme has always dictated the form. But the process has never been quite simple. For example, I had like Maxwell Anderson's verse plays *High Tor* and *Winter: set*. I had written poetry myself between 1943 and 1957, and felt quite confident in handling verse. But I had to wait till I had found my theme in *Dear Brutus* before I could write *Jadi Aar Ekbaar*. In James Saunders' *Nest Time I'll Sing to You* what I appreciated was the possibility of a play without a story. In fact I have never been able to build a story. The only original story I have ever handled is *Kavikahini*, and I still wonder how I made it. But once I had adopted Saunders's structure in *Pralaap*, it came to reflect my philosophy, not Saunders's. I discovered for myself the possibility of communicating serious thought and ideas through humour. If people had cared to enjoy the play without searching for meanings, they would have found the meanings alright.

**Bandyopadhyay:** *Tringsha Shatabdi* in 1966 was a more committed play than your more sceptical earlier works.

**Sircar:** In Nigeria I read *Formula For Death : E=mc<sup>2</sup>*, and thought that this book should be translated; people had to be made aware of the gruesome implications of the Hiroshima experience. But I have never liked translating. In the mid-fifties I had served on a jury, and the idea of a courtroom drama had haunted me ever since. I conceived my organization of the Hiroshima facts in terms of a courtroom play. I wanted to emphasize the relevance of those facts to an average contemporary Bengali: that would explain the Bengali context. I thought of it as a sequel to *Baaki Itihaas*. You will remember the characters had the same names — Sharadindu and Basanti — when I first read out the play to you. I had never thought it could be staged, even though some of you had talked of such possibilities after my first reading.

*Bandyopadhyay:* *Shesh Nei* was your last original play. After a reading of the play, you told some of us, "It is a punch of *Evang Indrajit*, *Baaki Itihaas*, and *Tringsha Shatabdi*". What did you really mean?

*Sircar:* That statement has caused a lot of misunderstanding by now. I'd like to clarify. *Evang Indrajit* is in a sense a personal play. While it would not be true to say that *Indrajit* is Badal Sircar, it would be futile to deny the affiliations it has with me. I had isolated a part of myself, almost in a scientific and philosophic manner, and exaggerated it to a point of intensity. Hence it does not express the whole of me or us, but retains an authentic connection with my personal history. *Baaki Itihaas* is rooted in a similar isolation and intensification. It concentrates on the question of guilt that has no place in *Evang Indrajit*. Its third act has something of *Indrajit*. If I ever rewrite the play, I'd like to change it, to concentrate on the guilt. *Tringsha Shatabdi* moves from the question of guilt to that of responsibility, from facing guilt consciously to a recognition of responsibility, as evident in the very central act of sitting in judgement. In all the three plays. I had treated segments of a single human experience, but all the time I had desired to capture within the scope of a play the entire experience.

I captured a complete image of my past in *Circus*, but it came out rather crudely and undramatically. *Shesh Nei* was a revised and diluted version; at the same time it was more theatric. To the treatment of guilt and responsibility it brought the concrete nearness of total man; it humanised the abstract issues to a far greater extent. While *Evang Indrajit* dealt only with reactions and effects, *Shesh Nei* could project more of a single, sentient man. It explored the same pattern of a development of consciousness in Sumanta's commitment at the end. But the sharp point of the earlier plays had to be abandoned to project a wider totality.

*Bandyopadhyay:* From your last play *Sagina Mahato*, it seems you are more interested at the moment in nonverbal and visual values, in theatric values to be more precise, than in idea or the merely dramatic.

*Sircar:* My first experience of the theatre-in-the-round in London in 1957-58, and again in France in 1963 gave me a vague feeling that this was better theatre than the proscenium-bound theatre. The closeness of the spectators was the first point in favour of this theatre. A number of factors — my exposure to the works of Joan Littlewood (*Oh! What a Lovely War*), the Theatre on the Taganka Square in Moscow, and Jerzy Grotowski in Poland, my conversations with my film-maker friend Barin Saha, and a number of books — led me on to think in terms of a consciously theatrical theatre, consciously opposed to the cinematic and more conscious of fundamental theatric values, and a more intimate theatre at the same time. My thinking on these lines was further clarified when I had to give a long series of radio talks from the Calcutta centre of All India Radio, and I decided to give a series on the theatrical theatre. I thought of doing *Sagina Mahato* in the round, only after I had completed the script; after a few proscenium performances by my own company *Shatabdi*, I tried it out in the round for the first time on October 24, 1971; and a single performance proved my thesis.

An audience of slightly more than a hundred people sat around us, as we performed on the floor. We could see all our spectators; we could touch them if we wanted to. At times we moved in from their sides, or even went behind them. I must say I have never felt such silence or concentra-

tion on the part of the audience. At one point the lights fused; the actors went on in the dark; the hall lights came after thirty seconds — a few neon tubes, inadequate for a stage performance. The acting continued in this for five minutes before the stage lights came back again. Yet all this time the audience retained its concentration; there was not a murmur, there was not a sound of someone fidgeting in his chair. If there had been the least of a sound, we could not miss it: we were too near our spectators! At the end of the performance not a single spectator mentioned the mishap. That first experience has given me enough courage to continue my work in this area of the theatre. Even if I am wrong, I can explore it; I can justify my work in the theatre, only when I am able to do something that no one else is trying to do at the moment.

*Bandyopadhyay:* What are you working on at the moment? Any new play?

*Sircar:* It's a new project. I'm planning an intimate theatre in Calcutta — a small theatre, which will be a rendezvous till one hour before the daily evening performance — a meeting place and a theatre; the chairs will be rearranged in that one hour for a performance in the round. I have visualized the project in great detail; some funds and all kinds of assistance will be necessary initially; but with a slight push at the beginning. I'm sure it will be a tangible and useful and effective proposition. The entire project as I conceive it is an exciting endeavour to make the theatre a more intimate and informal experience: I expect no profits financially, but a lot in terms of more meaningful theatre activity.