

A Laudable Endeavour

Jolly Das

Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad form a loose group of playwrights comprising the New Movement in modern Indian theatre. Karnad had made a translation of Sircar's *Ebong Indrajit* into English and that too from a Hindi rendering. So, it was twice removed from the source language. Therefore, it was imperative that direct translations of Sircar's plays be available to those who were unfamiliar with Bengali. Sircar's contribution to Indian theatre in particular and world theatre in general has, possibly, not met the right accolade (as if he cared for it!) and has, more importantly, deprived non-Bengali-speaking theatre-lovers from getting a taste of the variety of his plays—both in theme and form. This deficiency will now be partially filled by Subhendu Sarkar's *book *Two Plays : Indian History Made Easy, Life of Bagala*. The first of the two plays in this slim volume, 'Indian History Made Easy,' is unique in its experiment with creating a relationship between its content and its form. The other play, 'Life of Bagala' deals with Bagala, a simpleton, who is initially aided by the supernatural towards self-assertion, and who later finds the confidence he originally lacked, to stand upright on his own without the supernatural intervention.

A close look at the Contents page reveals the significance of the book. Every part of it is informative. The Introduction builds one's acquaintance with Sircar's position in the field of theatre (not merely drama) and his contribution to it. Then come the translations (or, rather, trans-creations) of the two plays, made by Subhendu Sarkar. The third section comprises an interesting conversation Subhendu Sarkar had with Badal Sircar, entitled '*Facets of the Third Theatre : Conversation with Badal Sircar.*' Finally, there is a comprehensive list of Sircar's plays under the heading, '*Badal Sircar's Third Theatre Plays,*' to which a footnote is added, mentioning the names of the earlier English translations of five of Sircar's plays.

The Introduction acquaints the reader with the playwright's major innovations in theatrical practice, which resulted in the emergence of his *Third Theatre*, besides *anganmancha* performances. While developing the idea towards this end, the author, Subhendu Sarkar, has traced Badal Sircar's gradual yet steady involvement with not just theatre, but the essence of the art—the impact of the performance on the audience. After all, a play has no meaning without an audience. With this understanding, Sircar took his plays to the masses—his audience. So, the open spaces, like parks in cities, and anywhere in the villages, were good enough for him because the audience became an active participant of the performance. The essence was the complementary interaction of action and audience, a unique feature of *Third Theatre*. The logic was to eliminate the detachment of the audience with the performance, which was a prerequisite for proscenium theatre. He also minimized the cost of production by shunning the use of props, curtains, improvised stages, costumes, make-up or anything that came secondary to theatrical communication by the actors to the audience—herein lies the difference. Very often, even dialogue was considered unnecessary

by the playwright, the themes of whose plays touched upon contemporary relevant issues.

The translations have been as close to the original Bengali plays as feasible. A reading of these two plays communicates the aura of the original plays as far as practicable for a translation, with language being no great obstacle for the communication of the themes of the plays by Sircar. Subhendu Sarkar's choice of these two plays demands special mention because they are not just different from each other in subject matter, they also differ in form.

The Introduction is complemented by the conversation, *'Facets of the Third Theatre : Conversation with Badal Sircar,'* where Sircar emphasizes that 'The only place where one can freely express oneself is the theatre' (113) and 'Inhibition is the deadly enemy of acting.' (114) He goes on to reveal in this engrossing *tete-a-tete* his development of the concept of the *Third Theatre* and the effectiveness of workshops to this end. Collaborations of his group, *Satabdi*, with *Ayena*, and *Pathasena* have been successful. His plays are performed regularly in Loreto School, Sealdah and in the Nandan premises, Kolkata.

Subhendu Sarkar has, thus, made a significant contribution to the tradition of Indian theatre, by trans-creating two different plays by Badal Sircar and making them available to English-speaking readers, for the present, and hopefully, an audience in the near future. □□□

BADAL SIRCAR

*TWO PLAYS : 'INDIAN HISTORY MADE EASY', 'LIFE OF BAGALA'

—Translated, and with an Introduction, by Subhendu Sarkar.

[New Delhi : Oxford UP, 2010, hbk, 134 pages. Rs 395/-]