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## The Dark Period of Indian History: Sircar's *Indian History made Easy*

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### Abstract

Badal Sircar is regarded as a promising author in Indian literature. He enhanced and contributed to Indian theatre simultaneously. Badal Sircar was an eminent playwright whose works significantly transformed society for the better. He is a staunch advocate for the impoverished and marginalized. Badal Sircar adeptly illustrates the contemporary socioeconomic landscape. Most of his plays address issues that are societal, religious, political, personal, or interpersonal. His plays precisely depict the current state of the globe. Sircar is a highly perceptive writer who must contemplate and articulate the events occurring in his surroundings. His plays effectively illustrate the experiences of those enduring significant hardships due to various social and political challenges, both physically and mentally. He has authored over fifty plays. He mostly composed his plays in Bengali, although some were subsequently translated into English. His plays generally address social themes, the struggles of the underprivileged, and power dynamics. This study examines Badal Sircar's *Indian History made Easy* that emphasize significant historical events and contemporary human experiences.

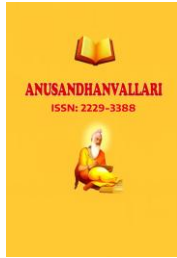
**Key Words:** British, History, Colonial, Exploitation, business, exchange

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### Introduction

Badal Sircar established his own home theatre group, Shatabdi, in 1967. Sircar directed the inaugural Shatabdi musical with Ebong Indrajeet, in 1967. The protagonist, Indrajeet, is a recluse. The narrative revolves around three individuals: Amal, Bimal, and Kamal. Shatabdi has produced numerous plays and has significantly influenced the theatre scene in Bengal during that period. The Shatabdi theatrical ensemble commenced staging performances both indoors and outside, in streets and open spaces, from 1969. This resulted in the establishment of a courtyard stage called the Angan Manch. The rural home theatre ultimately became recognised as the Third Theatre, representing a revolt against the conventional Proscenium Theatre and the prevalent commercial theatre of the era. It has constituted an anti-establishment gesture directed at a New Theatre, a Free Theatre. In practice, it is an open theatre devoid of sound or lighting effects, clothes or makeup. The viewers have actively participated in the performance, enhancing the authenticity of current theatre. This emerging trend of experimental, avant-garde theatre in India has demonstrated the fervor and commitment of the youth following independence. The Angan Manch's street performances have utilized few props and incorporated unscripted communication with the audience to generate both auditory and visual effects.

In India, modernist and occasionally postmodernist viewpoints have functioned as a strategy to circumvent historical difficulties. Our understanding of history during the colonial era was shaped by the liberal English education system introduced by Lord Macaulay in this country. The stance is inherently paradoxical, as it compels us to both renounce the past and embrace it for re-interpretation, given that we have acquired, for better or worse, a historical identity. Accepting the past is challenging due to our feelings of pride or shame, both of



which adversely affect our mental health. Thus, the unavoidable impact of history accentuates modern reality in our perception, becoming the past a “metaphor of contemporary reality.” The Avant-Garde Movement in literature has recognized the issues within the prevailing surroundings. Contemporary Indian playwrights are, if unwittingly, endeavoring to “conquer history through history.” Our finest theatrical compositions, characterized by their realism, possess the ability to transcend historical confines.

### Discussion

*Indian History Made Easy* is a significant drama by Badal Sircar during his later career. Sircar illustrates the impact of British colonial dominance on India in this play. The colonial policies of the colonizers influenced many aspects of Indian social life during this period. Prior to colonization, India has possessed a robust economy and an agricultural system capable of self-sustenance. An Indian village has functioned as an autonomous economic unit.

Badal Sircar instructs his students about three centuries of British supremacy in the classroom. The performers portray various roles to animate history for the pupils, akin to Brecht’s “Learning” or “Teaching” play, which exemplifies a radical and experimental form of modernist theatre developed by him and his collaborators from the 1920s to the late 1930s. There exists no definitive boundary or script separating the performer from the audience in his performance. The concept of distinguishing the audience from the performer is absent. The emphasis on performance shifts from the final outcome to the process itself. Marx’s discourse on India has also influenced Sircar. In the play, he illustrates how individuals can advance and achieve progress. The playwright, while holding a Marxist viewpoint, does not advocate for Marxist theory; instead, he invokes the revolutionary potential of the youth. According to Sumanta Banerjee, *Indian History Made Easy* “is a satirical exposition (in the form of school lessons) of the history of British colonial exploitation of India” (261).

The performance occurs in a public venue, observable from three sides. A platform is situated with a curtain or wall at the fourth side. The audience resembles children in three distinct classes. Two actors are positioned in the front, facing an audience comprised of pupils. Three supplementary actors are Master, Britannia and Mother India. The Master is seated on the platform. Upon the ringing of the bell, three educators enter and position themselves before the Master. The Master instructs all to commence History Class.

Teacher: History of which country, sir?

Master: This country. Bharat. Hindustan.

Hindustan. India. India.

Teacher2: Which period, sir?

Master: The first period.

Teacher3: No sir, which period of Bharat’s history?

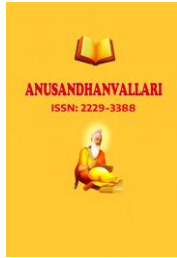
Master: The dark period (3-4)

Subsequently, the teachers return to their respective lectures, situated on three sides of the stadium. The students and educators recite their morning prayer hymn. Attending school is essential; without education, there is no hope; Indian history is invaluable; understand the present, grasp the chronicles. In the play, educators instruct their students to repeat their words.

Teachers: Say - Rama

Students: Rama

Teachers: Sama



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Students: Sama

Teachers: Raj

Students: Raj

Teachers: Rajya

Students: Rajya

Teachers: Ramrajya

Students: Ramrajya

Teachers: Samrajya

Students: Samrajya (5)

Individuals in India believe that Ramrajya represents an optimal approach to governance. Samrajya, conversely, signifies “Empire.” The lecture discusses the various empires established in India, including the Aryan, Sak, Hun, Pathan, Mongol and others. The Master instructs them regarding all the villages and their communities that owned land. The individuals who possessed land were not the actual proprietors. Cottage industries flourished with artisans such as weavers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters and others. The settlements are self-sufficient, producing all necessary goods independently. They were required to compensate the monarch with a substantial sum, and in exchange, he constructed ponds, canals, and highways. Despite the succession of countless monarchs and emperors, the communities persisted. The educators and students collectively sing about the transformation of India’s history: “Kingdoms appear on top, fall down later village community stags in the same manner... who the kings fight, it’s the commoners that expire village community dies here, shoots up elsewhere” (6)

In the seventeenth century, under the leadership of Akbar and his son Jahangir, Masters and Teachers commenced instructing students about the Mughal Empire. However, the educators interrupt the discussion to remind the students about the foreign merchants that arrived in India prior to that period. The students raise their hands and question about the meanings of “business” and “exchange.” The educators elucidate concepts by dialogue:

Students: Sir, what’s the meaning of business?

Teacher: Exchange

Teacher 1: I give you something...

Teacher2: you give me something.

Teacher3: Something whose value for you and me...

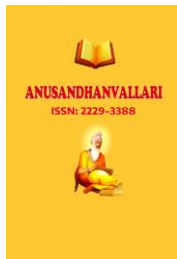
Teacher: Is considered to be the same.

Teachers: Clear?

Students: Yes, sir.

Teacher: Business. Businessmen. European Businessmen.

Teacher: Businessmen from Britain?



Students: English

Teacher: Businessmen from France?

Students: French.

Teachers: Businessmen from Holland?

Students: Dutch.

Teachers: Businessmen from Portugal?

Students: Portuguese. (7-8)

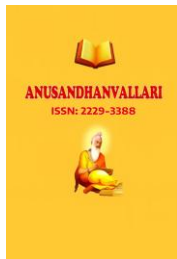
The Teacher discusses the British request for permission from the Mughal Emperor and the signing of the charter in 1600. Factories were established at Surat, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. The students respond with the years 1612, 1639 and 1696, which correspond to the founding years of the schools. Students adopt combat stances to illustrate the decline of the Mughal Empire in India. The lecturers generate distinct noises to illustrate the various inventions introduced by the British to India. Britannia is pleased that her son may acquire gold and silver from India. Bharucha points out: "The lesson is a microcosm of the colonial rule in India" (170).

The scenario transfers to the second historical epoch, whereby Industrial Capital supplants Mercantile Capital. The Master elucidates how the funds appropriated from India constituted Britain's initial capital, while the educators exhibit robotic movements. The scene transitions to Mom Britannia ascending the platform and conversing with the Master while cradling her infant in her lap. When Britannia is present, educators and the Master discuss the adverse conditions in India during British rule. The master informs the children about Edmund Brake's remarks regarding the detrimental period of British dominance in India. They discuss the failure of Indian cottage firms due to their inability to compete with factories producing British goods. They discuss how British governance diminished the self-sufficiency of peasants. The subsequent conversation likewise indicates the same conclusion.

It is progressing exceptionally nicely; Factory-produced thread or cotton clothes are unavailable for purchase here. All items are selling rapidly: iron and aluminium products, woollen garments and others. The majority of items produced here are on the verge of becoming obsolete. Individuals desire to circulate currency beyond their national borders. Individuals desire items from foreign nations. It is asserted that Indian products are inferior.

It's going on very well, Mom, Factory-made thread, cotton clothes they can't get here. Iron and aluminum goods, woolen garments, everything is selling like hot cakes. Almost everything that was produced here is about to go out of circulation. People want foreign circulation. People want foreign goods. They say Indian goods are inferior. Britannia: Great, great, what about agriculture? Master: Mom, your elder son almost rained it. Now it's alright. I have fixed revenue by permanent settlement. (27)

Badal Sircar also discusses another aspect of Indian history. This is the functioning of Zamindari. Landlords extract financial resources from impoverished farmers. If payment is not made, their land will be confiscated. The students and educators are arranged in a circle and sing about the fate of impoverished villages. Two explanations elucidate the rationale behind British rule in India: the drain hypothesis and the notion of de-industrialization. The Indian nationalist leaders proposed the drain theory to ascertain the financial outflow from India to England. Students and their instructor discuss the 1857 mutiny, which culminated in the dissolution of the East India Company. Britannia is positioned with her back to the Master. Students and educators demonstrate the distribution of railroads throughout India. The subsequent scenario pertains to the need for independence.



The teacher engages with Britannia and the students to discuss the fundamental necessities of individuals in India once again. The discussion next transitions to the Second World War. Britannia fears that India's quest for independence will jeopardise their wealth and the territory of India. Britannia enquires with a troubled demeanour.

Britannia: "would you tell me what all this is? Ma: British imperialism..."

Students: Quit India!

Britannia: look! It's a blunder!...

Master: what do you want?

Ma: Independence.

Teachers: Silence! We want independence.

Students: Yes, Yes. Independence! Independence" (39).

Sircar's *Indian History Made Easy*, examines the exploitation of the Indian populace during British dominion. The colonial policies of the colonizers have influenced many aspects of social life under this rule. The themes of the play are parallel to those of Marxism. The play *Indian History Made Easy* features various actors who enact distinct roles to vividly illustrate history for the students. The instructor and the children are seated in a circle, singing about the plight of impoverished farmers and communities. Gilbert and Tompkins states:

Historical recuperation is one of the crucial aims and effects of many post-colonial plays, which frequently tell the other side of the conquering whites' story in order to contest the official version of history that is preserved in imperialist texts. Like his/her version of history, the colonizer's language has assumed a position of dominance which must be interrogated and dismantled as part of the decolonizing project. (12)

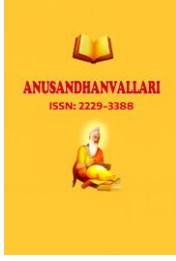
Individuals stage Badal Sircar's plays in public venues. The drama *Indian History Made Easy* is performed outdoors, with the audience positioned on three sides. A platform is situated with a curtain or wall at the fourth side. The audience consists of three distinct groups of children. Two performers are students positioned before the instructors, Master, Britannia and Mother India. Clothing, colours and music are unnecessary for the performance. Badal Sircar is renowned for staging his plays in parks, on the ground and in open settings. He endeavors to establish direct connections with numerous individuals.

Badal Sircar concludes the play with a sardonic remark, indicating that although India is ostensibly free, the concerns of the average citizen remain unresolved. The cessation of British control has not elucidated the reasons behind India's tranquility and prosperity. He has effectively revitalized certain elements of unconventional free theatre. He has drawn inspiration from the works of Bernard Shaw, Molière and O'Neill in his artistic endeavors. His incorporation of humor, absurdity, existential themes and surreal elements distinguishes his plays from conventional realistic drama.

## Conclusion

Badal Sircar *Indian History Made Easy* is grounded in actual events that transpired inside his community. This dissertation clarifies and illustrates how, as a dramatist, he skillfully depicts present events and circumstances in the lives of readers to act as a reflection. The study work solicits viewpoints from both the dominant and subservient classes. B.Charanya and A. Selvam say: "the play with the point that though India has become Independent with wealth, prosperity, happiness and development in the lives of the people, there is discrimination based on race, caste, sex and religion and violence. Sircar feels that in equality, lust for job power, money and reputation are found everywhere in the post colonial India" (3)

The research work critically reveals the severe situations and adversities experienced by the lower classes. Human connections or social relations encompass all interactions an individual engages in with others. The relationships among individuals residing in the same neighborhood or country constitute society. An organization must respond to the diverse needs and challenges of individuals within society and devise solutions



to emerging issues. Society is governed by establishing protocols for fulfilling fundamental requirements such as housing, education, security, nutrition, employment, healthcare, leisure, apparel, and transportation. An individual cannot progress in all areas; therefore, societal advancement is essential for development.

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