

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CULTURAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Vol. - XII, No. - XV



Eds.

Amitava Roy, Ronan Paterson,
Bryan Reynolds, Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas

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From the Editorial Desk

Dear Readers and Colleagues:

It has been very difficult to work out the publication of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences*, Vol.XII, No.XV when the global Pandemic is raging all over and is showing no sign of letting up. But we believe with the great Indian-Hindu Swami that nothing good or great is ever achieved by 'giving up', as Lord Krishna told the great warrior Arjuna before the all-destructive battle on the field of Kurukshetra over 3000 years ago.

Political Leaders from all over the world, like Trump(USA) and Modi (India) are quoting Swami Vivekananda all the time, though some like Trump cannot even pronounce the name properly.

In *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 22nd reprint 2003, the Swami utters a clarion call for fighting against all odds even if success seems implausible: "Keep up your strength, Shakti, power...never give up...keep your spine straight and warrior-like go on fighting...". Hence the Editorial team of Bryan Reynolds(USA), Ronan Paterson (UK), Amitava Roy, Subir Dhar and Tapu Biswas (India) ably assisted by Sekhar Bose, Tilak Naskar, Shyamal Sarkar and Pratima Das have decided to be in the front line of the Covid Warriors of Art, Cultural and Education and give it our all.

IJCSSS, No-XV begins with Arzuman Ara's theoretical paper on Hermeneutics and Multiculturalism and explores their significance for the pedagogy of English Studies in India. Ara concludes by moving from Art and Literature to our lives: "We have to move to a pedagogical practice to find the meaning of my life".

The Anglo-Indian, both individual and the community, have always found themselves in the midst of crisis situations and identity problems after the British rulers left India. Among many interesting explorations of this community in crisis we can mention John Masters' best-seller *Bhowani Junction* made into an effective film starring Ava Gardner and Stewart Granger, and Aparna Sen's much-awarded *36 Chowringhee Lane*, another moving film that brought out the fears, hopes, apprehension about 'Home' and about their identity—Eurasian, Indian or nobody at all.

Dr. S. K. Singh and Dr. Ashutosh Singh explore such problematic and

near-irresolvable themes and ideas through the real life story-memoir by Glen D'cruz's *Where are you coming from, Sir?*

D'cruz' born in Chennai, erstwhile Madras, of Eurasian parents travels across continents and times to seek out an answer to that question. Beginning in Madras. India he goes to England and Europe and finally to Australia for what proves to be an unanswerable question for him. The quest ends in a kind of qualified hope when D'cruz' begins to accept his uncertain identity 'down under' and thinks of himself as a re-born Indian in another country.

Anindita Das takes up the cause of Women's Empowerment in Patriarchal societies through a comparative analysis of characters and themes in Tagore's short story 'Punishment' and Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi'. Das utilizes the perspectives of social, moral, political, economic and psychological imperatives to focus on women's plight in pre-independence India (Tagore) and post-colonial India (Devi). Another comparative study by Shubhrasleta Banerji in no XV takes up Kamala Das and Shobhaa De as persons and writers by focusing on their auto-biographies as "Women who defied the Ordinary".

Dr. Tapu Biswas whose much acclaimed D.Litt Degree is on the achievement of Badal Sircar across genres, here focuses on the inspired transgeneric and translingual adaptations by Sircar, mainly from fiction into drama. This brilliant paper includes adaptations of Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus*, Premendra Mitra and Leela Majumder's children's fable, *Hattamalar Opare*, Gour Kishore Ghosh's story *Sagina Mahato*, Manik Bandyopadhyay's famous Bangla novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* and others. Not only does Dr. Biswas highlight Badal Sircar as an adaptor he also gives us detailed stage histories of the plays.

K.G.Singh from Manipur sees Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as a 'Womanist' text who is committed to write solely for her people. This is a thoroughgoing analysis that sums up all that have been significantly said by authors and critics on Walker.

The rest of the papers included in No. XV all use field work, statistical surveys, available and fresh original data, graphs, charts and reports to present their work. This includes study of situational stress on working and non-working mothers (Animesh Biswas); Socio-psychological Issues of Covid-19 and The Role of Yoga As A Remedy (Dr. Baishali Majumdar); Development of Pineapple Horticulture: A Study In Uttar Dinajpur District (Himika Mukhopadhyay & Dr. N.Z. Kasemi); The Effect of Out-migration of Workers on Their Family-members: A Report on the Field-survey.

No. XV concludes by going back to literature. We print here Pradeep Chatterji's *Imagination* to bring the journal to a poetic closure.

Happy reading
Amitava Roy and Bryan Reynolds
for the Editors

Fiction into Drama : The Adaptations of Badal Sircar

Tapu Biswas

Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan Badal Sircar (1925-2011) is one of the most important playwright, actor and director in the extensive and diverse field of contemporary Indian Theatre. He has written more than fifty playtexts. Some are originals some are adaptations. In this paper an attempt is made to study five novels one non fiction and one children book adapted into plays by Badal Sircar. As a dramatist and adaptor he has been inspired by a number of plays, novels, folk narratives, films from many regions, places and countries like the U.K, U.S.A. Germany, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia and India. His own native state West Bengal has enormously influenced his adaptation. Interestingly and most importantly his adapted versions are frequently not photocopies of the original works for they are as innovative as creative works all moulded to suit his dramatic art and dramaturgy, that is open theatrical requirements. All his plays are governed by his dramatic vision and need, which are enchanting new, fresh and provocative. This paper on adaptation of fiction and non fictional prose will display Sircar's genius as a dramatist of a rare kind in the whole range of dramatic art not only in India but the world as well.

Badal Sircar by his own admission was not a translator but an adapter. The difference between the two functions is of course not only prominent but also premised on entirely different motivations, translations being done in order to perform an act of linguistic transference, while adaptations are accomplished in order to re-contextualize an original text. In her seminal work *A Theory of Adaptation*, the American theorist Linda Hutcheon writes about adaptation:

“As a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work or works, adaptation is a kind of extended palimpsest and, at the same time, often a transcoding into a different set of

conventions. Sometimes but not always, this transcoding entails a change of medium.”¹.

The practice of a working theatre person, dramaturge, playwright or producer will obviously conform to the theoretical frame indicated by Linda Hutcheon, but since adapters in the medium of drama are specially inclined to a theatrical representation of an adapted text, or texts, they are there are bound to have certain divergences. Badal Sircar himself often claimed that he was primarily a man of the theatre and not a playwright. By this he meant that writing for the stage was for him a pragmatic activity and not so much an imaginative or literary effort. Indeed, the whole idea of writing for the production of a play-script in the theatre quite naturally impinges upon the whole dynamics of adaptation.

Many adapters often may not go much beyond translation, their intention being the re-working of an original literary text to produce another literary text. Dramatic adapters however have a different intention. To them, the original source text is a resource that may be shaped according to the wish, will or purpose of the adapter. The original may be a work of fiction- a novel or a story or a play either old and classical, or new and contemporary, or (less frequently) a poem or an opera. And it is important to note that the history of the practice of adaptation goes back many centuries. Plays such as the ancient Greek dramatist Aeschylus’s *Oresteian Trilogy* or the almost equally venerable Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanasakuntalam* were adaptations of extant myths and legends in the playwrights’ respective civilizations. Even so-called ‘original’ plays like Shakespeare’s Roman History Plays were adapted from the narratives of historians. It has been said too that *Hamlet* was Shakespeare’s adapted version of an older play called the *Ur-Hamlet*. Closer to our own time, there was the American dramatist Eugene O’Neill who adapted the classical *Electra* and wrote his own. It goes without saying that any adapter working for the theatre may be attracted by the plot or the fable of an earlier composition, or by its theme, or by its dramatic potential, its characters, or even its status as a world-famous text. Badal Sircar was motivated by all these impulses in his long career as an adapter, and it will be the intention of this article to examine in detail not only his adaptations, but also the whys and hows of his adaptational practice.

It is important to note at the beginning of this discussion that apart from his mother tongue Bengali, Badal Sircar was proficient in the English

language, and so it is not a surprise that a majority of his adaptations were sourced from works written either in English or in Bengali. Two significant fictions adapted by Sircar from English, mention must be made first *Spartacus* (1951) a historical novel by American novelist Howard Fast adapted as *Spartacus* (1972); *India Today* a non-fictional work by the economic historian Rajani Palme Dutta adapted as *Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas* (1976); The works adapted by Sircar from Bengali originals were the following: *Sagina Mahato*, a novel by Gour Kishore Ghose adapted as *Sagina Mahato* (1970); *Hattamalar Deshe*, a children's story by Lila Mazumdar adapted as *Hattamalar Opore* (1977); *Roopkathar Kelenkari* a tale by Premendra Mitra adapted by Sircar as *Rupkathar Kelenkari* (1975), *Nagin Kanyar Kahini* a Bengali novel by Tarashankar Bandopadhyay adapted as *Nagi Kanyar Kahini* in 1982; Manik Bandopadhyay's Bengali novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* adapted as the verse drama *Padma Nadir Majhi* in 1990.

Two things are noticeable about these adaptations however, the first being that though through his English sources, Sircar was exposed to dramatic and other writings that had originated from such European and Western nations like Britain and the United States. The second is that Sircar's stories and full length novels for his stage productions also. It is clear that what attracted Sircar to the original source text were the stories, ideas or messages contained in them. As a practitioner of theatre arts, Sircar was predominantly interested in the theatrical potential resident in his source texts. Yet, it is possible to speculate whether and to what extent Sircar's own development as a theatre person, dramatist and director-producer is reflected in his choice of texts and his adaptations of them. This point will be expounded and illustrated in my discussion of his plays that follow as under:

***Spartacus* (1972)**

Badal Sircar's adaptation of *Spartacus* in 1972 was the result not only of his reading of Howard Fast's novel which had been originally published in 1951, but also the consequence of his new ideas about script writing and theatre production in an Open Theatre format. Perhaps not insignificant to the process of adaptation was the fact that Sircar had met the avant garde American director Richard Schechner in 1971. In the Preface to his published text, Sircar wrote that he had often thought about staging the novel but had always shied away from doing so. It was only later that he

wrote a preliminary version that was a four-hour long performance outline. This version composed by Sircar was gradually revised and made more compact through a process of workshops and rehearsals involving actors, and it was deliberately designed for an Open Theatre presentational mode.

Howard Fast, the writer of the original text, had been an American communist who had written his novel during a three months stint in jail both for not revealing to the American Congress the names of the donors who had contributed to a charitable fund he was associated with, and for his links with the Communist Party of America. The novel tells the story of a slave revolt that had started in 71 BCE and which challenged the authority of even the powerful Roman Empire for a period of nearly four years. The revolt had begun from a school for gladiators in Capua. However, the initial protest soon took the shape of an organized rebellion involving an army of thousands of slaves led by a slave named Spartacus. Significantly, the rebels fought neither for territory nor for wealth, but for the basic right to live life with freedom and dignity. Before inspiring Howard Fast, the story of Spartacus had also appealed to no less a man like Karl Marx, the founding father of Communism. Reading about the story of Spartacus in history, Marx in a letter wrote to his friend and comrade Frederick Engels on 27 February 1861: "Spartacus is revealed as the most exalted in ancient history, the most representative of the Ancient proletariat"². In Fast's narrative, the slaves overcome their internal differences of race, nationality and religion and become united as the willing followers of Spartacus who offers them the spectacle of "a world where there are no slaves and no masters, only people living together in peace and brotherhood ... no more wars and no more misery and no more suffering."³ In history and in the novel, the rebellion is finally suppressed by the Roman ruling class with thousands of the rebellious slaves being crucified.

In telling this story, Howard Fast employed an innovative narrative technique involving flashbacks and flash-forwards and the occasional foregrounding of the more vital and important characters. All these devices which are suitable for a fictional representation could have been a major obstacle in a conventional dramatization of the story. But Badal Sircar who intended to utilize it for an Open Theatre production decided to break with the commonplace convention of representing different characters with specific identities and to place them in a plot generated through the interaction of the characters. Hence Sircar came up with the idea of using

only six actors, five men and one woman, all engaged in extreme on-stage physicalization, to portray a long history of oppression and suffering. The play, said Sircar, “had to do more with a political objective I sought outside the theatre than with creating merely good theatre” (qtd. in Katyal, 101).⁴ In other words, *Spartacus* was more ideological theatre than pure drama. Sircar’s political objective in composing this play was simply to make his audience aware of the parallels between their own situation and that of the slaves during the imperial Roman Empire. Completely eschewing the use of props, costumes, lights and even conventional characterisation and dialogues, Sircar attempted to embody a socio-political vision through his *Spartacus*. His intention was not to highlight the characters or the actions of a singular charismatic hero but to make aware of the contemporaneity of an historical event. Upon its production the play turned out to be extremely successful not only in Kolkata where members of the audience often spontaneously joined in the slogans being shouted out by the actors, but also in the villages. Politically, the play has a subversive and liberating spirit that countered all forms of hegemony and social suppressions.

Hattamalar Opare (1977)

Sircar’s special talent as an adapter is also evidenced by his *Hattamalar Opare* which was based on a popular Bengali novel for children written by the authors Premendra Mitra and Leela Majumder. The original fiction which was named *Hattamalar Deshe* was started by Premendra Mitra and initially serialized in the children’s magazine *Rangmashal*. However, both its publication and its writing were discontinued, and it was subsequently re-serialized in the *Sandesh* magazine by Lila Majumdar, the editor of *Sandesh* who continued and finally completed the text beyond the first two sections that had been written by its first author, Mitra.

The original fiction *Hattamalar Deshe* features two central characters named Rakhal and Bhuto, who are thieves by profession and are in fact the best thieves in the whole Dhyantarasi rural area. At the beginning of the story the two characters have been caught while stealing from the village head Haru’s house, and it is narrated that while trying to escape from the mob that chases them, they plunge into a river. After gaining consciousness they find that they are alive but are in a different land where there are no prisons, no private property, and no notion of ownership either. At the beginning they wonder whether they have landed in Kolkata,

but Rakhal says that Kolkata must be an even greater metropolis than the town in which they have found themselves. Then, as they come to interact with the other residents of Hattamala they gradually discover that there is no concept of money in the land to which they have been transported. And since all the food is free here, they do not have to pay anything for eating the various delicacies on offer.

Only some elements of the original story were retained by Sircar. The setting of the play in the land of Hattamala is taken from Lila Majumdar's story. The central characters in the drama are again two thieves but their names are changed to Kenaram and Becharam, referring specifically to the economic functions of buying (Kena) and selling (Becha), thus suggesting an economic nexus. As in the original, the two thieves are shown to be running away after an attempted theft at the beginning of the play, and as being pursued by the people of the locality. Sircar's protagonists also jump into a lake very much as Rakhal and Bhuto do in *Hattamalar Deshe*, and when they regain consciousness they are shown to realize that they too have been taken to a land which seems to be perfect in all respects. Sircar's dialogues in the play at this point closely follow those in the original story as the two thieves initially wonder whether they have come to the city of Kolkata, only for Kena to negate this through his statement that Kolkata must be a bigger place than the place where they now stand. Another episode taken over from the novel is the one of the two thieves taking a coconut from a seller and discovering that the seller (a woman, as in the original) does not want any payment. Also as in the novel, the thieves gradually discover that there are no jails in the land. In both the novel and the play, the thieves also find that there is a library in the land which freely distributes expensive jewels and valuables to whoever wishes to possess these. Sircar in his adaptation however leaves out some of the episodes in the novel, and even more significantly he radically changes the ending of the original story in his own dramatized adaptation.

In the novel *Hattamalar Deshe* when Rakhal and Bhuto try to escape with a bundle of gold and other valuables stolen from the library, they are pursued by the villagers and leave the bundle of gold behind in panic. Only, it turns out that the rural folk were not really pursuing them but only running after them to give them the valuables they had stolen, for the villagers had thought that the duo had dropped them by mistake. Also in the story, when the thieves go to the river, they find a boat sent by the Daktar (Doctor) waiting for them in which they travel back to their native

land. In Sircar's adaptation however, the conclusion is effected by the plot agency of the Doktor (Doctor) who not only praises the two thieves for having mastered the difficult art of chiseling into the walls of houses, but also tries to learn this art from them himself. Then, he gradually channelizes the two into choosing more productive professions like stone masonry and gardening. The Doktor convinces them that working for the good of everyone is the most rewarding of human endeavors and vocations, and Sircar ends his play with a Chorus which unambiguously gives expression to his envisioning of a free and truly liberated human world:

All that we need in this world
We can by ourselves make
We will work according to our ability,
And take whatever we want,
What's the use of buying and selling?
We will everything share and eat.
(Come) Let share and eat.
(We) will make everything we desire.
Why should we go to the market?
Why should we be slaves to money?
We will share everything and eat
(Come) Let share and eat. (my trans.; 405-06)⁵

Badal Sircar's adaptation of the original prose tale is functionally interesting in that the original was not a foreign text that had to be domesticated or re-written to confirm to the taste (and the cultural ethos) of the target audience. Rather, the language of the source text and its adapted version being the same, an enquiry needs to be made as to how Sircar effected a change in form from the novelistic to the dramatic, and how he brought about a transformation in spirit from the juvenile to something more suited for an adult audience. To take up the former point first, the plot of the novel is systematically unfolded through a series of events. Sircar omitted many of them, such as all those narrated in the subplot of the story. Next, he converted the idea of an idyllic children's utopia into an indictment of the economic chains that restrain and limit men from enjoying their innate humanity.

About his adaptation, Badal Sircar said in the "Mukhbondho" (Preface)

to the published version of his play that he did not have the opportunity of reading of the whole novel since he had read only some parts of the serialized version when it was being published in the children magazine *Sandesh*. "I got hold of a few numbers of *Sandesh* in which the novel was being serially published. I could not get a few numbers in the middle and was unable to read the entire concluding part," (my trans.; 376)⁶ he wrote. In other words, Sircar was motivated by not the whole novel but by only some of its parts. Actually, whatever he had read of it had been enough to stimulate his dramatic imagination, and so *Hattamalar Opore* is no slavish imitation of the original *Hattamalar Deshe* but in essence quite an independent composition like many other adaptations before or since. *Hattamalar Opore* was first performed by Satabdi in 1977, and Sircar is on record as having observed that:

It works equally well in the 'anganmancha' or the open air, in towns and in villages, with adults equally with children. The subject is the ultimate desired and envisioned form of society where each will work according to his ability and will receive according to his needs, thereby rendering the use of money unnecessary. (qtd. in Katyal, 93)⁷

In an interview published in *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on 13 August 2005, Sircar himself confessed that *Hattamalar Opore* was one of his favorite compositions. When asked about the theme of the play, he candidly admitted that it embodied the Marxist ideal of "From everybody according to his ability; to everybody according to his need" (qtd. in Kundu, 172)⁸. Accepting the contention that an egalitarian society was no more than a Utopian dream, he emphasized the fact that it was vital to have a dream in order to achieve progress. As he put it, a line from a song of an old musical comedy had been running through his mind when he wrote his play, the line being "You have to have a dream for the dream to come true."⁹

***Sagina Mahato* (1970)**

Badal Sircar's play *Sagina Mahato*, initially performed in the proscenium format in 1970 and subsequently staged as an Open Theatre production around eighty times, was adapted from Gour Kishore Ghosh's story of the same name. Ghosh's text is about a tribal man, a tea garden worker who is an unsophisticated, unrestrained, physically strong and

humanistically inclined man whose exertions on behalf of his fellow tea-garden workers draws the attention of the local leaders of a leftist political party. The members of this party who are all middle class bourgeois individuals interested in strengthening their hold over the tea-garden workers, realize that getting Sagina to join their party may be advantageous to them. So they gradually begin to induct Sagina into their fold and to shape him in their own activist mould. The result is that the simple and popular leader in his own community is slowly transformed into a cog in a larger party machinery. In the process, Sagina gradually loses his own identity as he rises in power and status and begins to become alienated from the members of his own community and social class. The people of his community see in his new self all the traits of the bourgeois class, and the story ends with Sagina being assaulted by all those he had initially fought for and then had shamelessly deserted in the interest of living a more comfortable and pleasurable life as a political leader. The narrator of the story who describes himself as “a comrade from Kolkata”, recounts at the conclusion how he and a few others had discovered Sagina lying senseless and injured after having been beaten up by his own people. The novel concludes with the narrator finally recording Sagina’s pained confession:

They beat me up. They beat me up badly. But they did right. I betrayed them, I have come to understand everything. But, comrade, I fell into a trap. I did not realize it then. Yes, I only enjoyed myself in the name of doing good for the working people, labourers, the mazdoos. I danced like a monkey. I regret what I did. (my trans.; 253)¹⁰

And still it goes on to note that “These were Sagina’s last words. The next morning his mutilated body was found near the railway track in the Sukna forest. His body lay face down beside the train lines. Some say he was murdered. Some say he had committed suicide.”¹¹

Being an eponymous story, Gour Kishore Ghosh’s tale is at bottom a text that foregrounds the psychology and personality of a naive individual. Ideologically however it works on two different levels. The story of an unsophisticated innocent man being led astray and being corrupted by the agents of the bourgeois class is an indictment of the typical self-serving hypocrisy of the (Bengali) middle class. But there is also an element of sharp political satire in the story in so far as the tale it tells is of a party organization that utilizes for its own ends the talents and abilities of a

tribal man possessing natural leadership instincts. Ghosh's fiction thus highlights the tragedy of the corruption of an ingenue who is caught up in a web of temptation and self-deceit cast around him by people who wish to use him for their own political ends.

It is possible to speculate that it is this final aspect of the story that moved Sircar to adapt the text. The critic Darshan Chowdhury has in fact implied as such. But given the fact that Sircar's next adaptation - that of Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus* – was also centered on a single and singular hero, it seems probable that Sircar was also interested in examining the complexities of the individual psychology of men who almost coincidentally turned into mass leaders. In any case, the general public opinion in the early 1970s when Sircar's *Sagina Mahato* was being performed regularly, was that Sircar had written a political play. Many members of the two major leftist political parties of the time, viz. the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) felt that Sircar had joined Gour Kishore Ghosh in pillorying the political strategies of organizations like theirs. And there can be little doubt that the opening of Sircar's play does suggest just such a possibility. But it would perhaps be better to examine Sircar's deviations from the original story first.

Gour Kishore Ghosh's story opens with the 'confession' of its narrator, a party-man who has travelled to Darjeeling, a town high up on the foothills of the Himalayas, in a third class train compartment to visit a local man named Sagina Mahato. He comes across Sagina in a local bazaar, engaged in violently defending the honor of a woman who is being publicly assaulted and disrobed by her own husband. This opening scene is entirely missing in the dramatization. Sircar's play instead opens with a zoned setting, different stage spaces representing a company office, a Party Office, and a labourers' area respectively. The opening dialogues are exchanged between Jatin who is working in the Party Office and another Party member named Anup. Replying to the latter's query about a report submitted by a third Party member, Kazimo, Anup speaks discouraging the potentiality of Sagina Mahato as an agent who can be used to spread the Communist ideology in the minds of the local working classes. Nevertheless, the Party sends an activist to train and indoctrinate Sagina, and later, even employs a woman-worker, Bisakha, to mould Sagina into the image they have designed for him. The result is the transformation of the man Sagina into a suit-wearing labour welfare officer who gradually loses the trust and confidence of his admirers and own devoted followers.

However, while following this broad outline of Ghosh's story so far, Sircar deviates from the conclusion of the story in a significant way. In the adaptation, Sagina does not die but rises up bruised and bloodied telling his acolytes that he had realized his past errors. Saying that the older hypocritical labour officer Sagina was a man no longer alive, he begins to speak of a new beginning, the fresh raising of a workers' union and the rise of a purer Sagina shriven of the sins of his past. Thus did Sircar change the orientation of the original story. While he retained much of Gour Kishore Ghosh's trenchant criticism of a Party organization that insidiously used the charisma of Sagina to further its own political agenda of capturing power, Sircar's innate idealism shows the heroism of a man who while faltering temporarily, refuses to lose his commitment to the cause of the common, exploited and suffering labourers of whom he is a part.

Roopkathar Kelenkari (1975)

In 1975 Badal Sircar turned to adapting another Bengali story for the stage. This was Premendra Mitra's story *Roopkathar Kelenkari* which had been originally published in 1974. "Roopkatha" in Bengali means a fairy tale, while "Kelenkari" means a scam or scandal. But neither the original tale nor Badal Sircar's adaptation is a conventional fairytale. This is of course suggested by the use of the word "Kelenkari" in the context of a 'fairy tale.' In fact, both Premendra Mitra's composition and Sircar's conversion of the text into a dramatic form is a kind of allegorization of certain economic motivations generally associated with trade and capitalism. In its general shape, Sircar's adaptation follows the contours of the original story. Under the guise of a fairy tale like narrative of a monster demanding everyday a plump human being to satisfy its hunger, Mitra and Sircar both indicted the acquisitive tendencies of men.

In his adaptation however Sircar retains the thematic frame of the story while altering many of its details. In the first place he quite significantly particularizes the names of fairy tale kingdoms that have been troubled by monsters. In the play there are seven kingdoms which are given the names Subarnapur (Golden Land), Rajatnagar (Shining Line Land), Rajya (Kingdom of Pearls), Hirakdeep (Land of Diamonds), Pannadesh (Emerald Land) and Manikyadham (Land of Jewels). Retaining the detail of a brave prince named Brojokumar coming to these kingdoms and slaying the monsters which had terrorized the people, Sircar follows Mitra in indicating

that no one had ever come across any of the bodies of the monsters that had been ostensibly killed by the prince. As in the story, it is also indicated in the play that Brojokumar is given half-share in the kingdom he has rid of the monster and substantial amounts of gold and silver in lieu of the princesses whose hands had been offered him in marriage. Only, when Brojokumar declares that he wishes to marry the princess of Tamrapuri, the last kingdom he rids of its monster, a scandal breaks out. The widely circulated newspaper 'Tepantar' insinuates in a series of editorials that the prince's accomplishments are all a hoax since no one has ever seen the bodies of the many monsters slain by the prince. The daily 'Tepantar' had at one time trumpeted the glorious successes of the prince, even as now it questions whether the prince was a fraud. All over the kingdom people are divided over Brojokumar's accomplishments till the prince himself calls upon the king and demands a public trial.

In the original story, the prince admits that he had never killed any monster but in the same breath demands that he be allowed to produce two witnesses before the court. Badal Sircar follows this closely in his own play in which, as in the story, the first witness is the monster itself. Described as an old, tidily dressed, clean shaven and toothless monster in the story and as nondescript by Badal Sircar in the stage direction in his play, the monster starts crying loudly before everyone, and it confesses that it had threatened to eat up human beings partly because this is what his forefathers had always done and partly because he had become old, but mainly because he had been lured into terrorizing people by a man. This man who is forced to appear as a witness by the prince turns out to be the proprietor of the 'Tepantar' newspaper. It is revealed that he had devised both the story of devouring monsters and of a savior prince so that more and more copies of his newspaper would be sold. The issue highlighted here is thus of the press inventing and sensationalizing false news in order to make profits. It is suggested that the newspaper owner is a completely unscrupulous member of the capitalist class. However there are significant alterations from the original story that are brought in by Badal Sircar. In the original story the name of the businessman-owner of the newspaper is said to be "Laxman Das Jhunjhunia", a name typical of the Marwari business community. In Sircar's play however, the name given is 'Kuber Ram Phatkabazaria', the appellation devoid of a community identity and implying instead a speculative investor in shares and stocks ("Phatkabazar."). Again, where in the original the merchant boasts before

the King's minister that he produces films in which mythologies are altered and distorted on his orders, in the play Sircar makes the main claim that he not only founds political parties but also foments revolutions, even as he builds theatres and even constructs temples - all endeavors apparently intended to make a profit. However, the most significant departure that Sircar made from the original is in the conclusion of the fantasy. In Premendra Mitra's text, the businessman says that everything runs on money, and the story ends with the King's Minister apparently agreeing with the businessman on this. In Sircar's adaptation, however, Kuber Ram is sentenced to exile from fairyland, a decision which he welcomes. He declares that he will move away from the fairytale land and settle down in Bengal (Badal Sircar's own state) where there are fortunes to be made by dealing in essential commodities like rice, oil and baby food, equally as by the setting up of shops and road-side stalls. Sircar also adds that the journalist who wrote the stories for the newspaper on the instructions of Kuber Ram decides to follow the latter to Bengal for there is no future in fair and truthful journalism. Finally, Sircar also adds a happy ending with Brojokumar being pardoned by the King because his daughter the princess (who has apparently fallen in love with Brojokumar) will not allow him to do anything else but to forgive the prince, and the monster is bestowed a pension by the prince after his retirement from monster-hood.

The ambiguous ending of Premendra Mitra's story which reads "'Calm down, calm down, what are you saying', said the Minister. 'You shouldn't be saying all these things in public'", (my trans.; 18)¹² is given a more direct expression in Sircar's play. Kuber Ram Phatabazaria represents the class of capitalist businessmen who brook no calls of conscience in their inhuman drive for profit. Hence he defends all that he had done by saying that he had been instrumental in creating the wealth of the prince Brojokumar, and had done all this in exchange of only a small commission. And when towards the end the prince says that it was his conscience that had prompted him to confess everything, Kuber Ram announces that he is not acquainted with anyone - or anything - called a conscience.

It will be evident from this that in all probability what attracted Badal Sircar's attention to Premendra Mitra's tale was its theme of unscrupulous money-making. Unlike the story however, Sircar's play does not follow a linear and sequential pattern of storytelling. The play instead opens with the entry of the journalist-paper seller hawking copies of the newspaper *Dainik Tepantor* (*Daily Tepantor*). Four members of the Chorus buy copies

of the paper and start reading out the headlines about the success of the Prince Brojakumar in freeing the land of the scourge of the monsters. Thus is the relevant pre-history of the story communicated to the audience. Apart from this, there is also some incidental satire introduced through the paper-man's complaint that no one bothers to read newspaper editorials, but this is also a dramatic device in that it is used by Sircar as a ploy for the paper-seller to read out aloud the editorial which casts doubt on the Prince's achievements. In the performance of the play in the Open Theatre format in Kolkata's Curzon Park, Sircar also introduced an element of stylization with the actors wearing placards designating their roles as King, Minister, etc.

Padma Nadir Majhi (1978)

Manik Bandyopadhyay's Bengali novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* is about the life of poor fishermen who eke out a precarious livelihood by fishing in the capricious waters of the river Padma (now in Bangladesh) was adapted into a powerful theatrical expression by Badal Sircar in 1990. In an interview (in Bengali) with the drama theorist Samik Bandyopadhyay, Sircar gave a detailed description of the mode of his dramatic adaptation:

...I liked Manik Bandyopadhyay's novel immensely. I began thinking that if a reading of the novel could be organized, then many more people would enjoy it just as much I did upon reading it. Initially however I had no plans to dramatize the novel, for I felt that dramatization would mean a reduction of the text into a series of dialogues. In that case what would happen to the beautiful descriptions and the other elements in the novel? Hence, I didn't want to turn the fiction into a play, for doing this would have meant distorting the character of the original. In this case, my inspiration came from my adaptation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as *Gondi*. There I did not use Brecht's songs as songs but had transformed them into a kind of free poetry. The singers of the lines did not sit in one corner but had acted too. In other words, one actor had performed as a character and then turned into a singing choric commentator. The same actor then joined the other actors on stage to create a human set embodying a door or a river and so on on stage. So, we had some experience of theatrically projecting a written script outside itself. Taking courage from this, I wrote out a

kind of summary of *Padma Nadir Majhi* retaining some of the descriptive lines from the original as well as the lines of dialogues just as Manik-babu had written them. As in my *Bhoma*, I wrote out the words preceding them with a colon but without designating who was going to speak them.

I also broke up and divided the descriptive lines, with one actor saying one line, and a second actor yet another. In other words, I did not merely write out the novelist's prose without any change. This became my own dramatic form. This was not true dramatization but the presentation of the novel in a theatrical way. (my trans.; 78-79)¹³

These words of Sircar are significant for a number of reasons. In the first place, they throw light on what may possibly be described as Badal Sircar's philosophy of adaptation. As he indicates here, he was not interested in merely giving a dramatic shape or form to a prose work of fiction but was more concerned about creating a theatrical representation out of the original text. Breaking free from the traditional practice of ascribing different dialogues to different characters, roles which would then be acted out by different actors, Sircar aimed at a more fluid mode of performance in which the actors would not be restricted to the performance of fixed roles but allowed to play multiple ones and to take on more than one function on stage. Theatrical performance superseding individual acting thus became for Sircar a matter of paramount importance.

However, in so far as *Padma Nadir Majhi* is concerned, there is yet another aspect to its adaptation that requires some attention. This is the ideological content of the novel which may have been the reason of both Sircar's liking of the novel and his subsequent decision to adapt it in dramatic form. The novel is about the problems faced by a small community of fishermen who struggle to make a living by catching fish in the river Padma. There are three main fishermen in the novel, the first two being Kuber and Ganesh who are poverty-stricken working-class people, and the third being Dhananjay who is the owner of the nets and the boat used by all three to catch fish. All of them spend cold nights on the river together to catch fish which they sell at a wholesale fish market early in the morning the following day. Dhananjay as the owner of the boat and the nets keeps a half share of all the fish caught, with the other half divided amongst Kuber and Ganesh. Kuber has a wife who is lame, the result of an untreated wound, an infant son and a daughter for whom he manages to find a

husband. At the end of the novel, Kuber is suspected of a theft which he did not commit and is almost forced to migrate to an inhospitable island named Moynadeep which is situated in the middle of the river.

Badal Sircar's adaptation of the novel starts with an exclamation uttered by Kuber with different choric voices mentioning the place (a boat on the middle of the river Padma), the time (night, in the middle of the monsoons, the season for hilsa fish catching), and the identity of the character (Dhananjoy the owner of the boat and the nets, Kuber the fisherman, etc.) Fragments of dialogues from the original text were retained by Sircar, such as Kuber's request that he be allowed to rest for a while, a request curtly rejected by Dhananjoy. Also in keeping with the information given by the narrator in the novel, a choric voice in the play announces that since Dhananjoy was the owner of the boat and the nets, he was entitled to one half of the catch, the other half falling to Kuber and Ganesh's share. The play also illustrates through action what the novel indicates, that the real hard work is done by Kuber and Ganesh while Dhananjoy only steers the boat. The conclusion of the play follows the ending of the novel closely with Kuber agreeing to go over and settle down in Moynadeep on being assured that his wife and his son will join him there later. Sircar also retains a sentence uttered by Kuber to the effect that if he went to jail once, that would not be the only time, for it was inevitable due to the nature of things that he would be imprisoned time and time over again. The last words in the play spoken by the chorus however are not to be found in the novel, and are Sircar's own: "Hossain's enormous boat is dark; the Padma river is dark; Moynadeep is dark, dark, dark, dark." This stress on darkness is of course expressive of Sircar's own realization of sympathy and concern for the misery and suffering of the voiceless poor and the unfortunate fishermen who have to wrest a living from the river.

Nagini Kanyar Kahini (1982)

Badal Sircar drew upon the resources of the literature in his own mother tongue, Bengali, again in 1982 when he adapted a novel entitled *Nagini Kanyar Kahini*. Written by the novelist Tara Shankar Bandopadhyaya, this novel had been published first in 1951, i.e. twenty-one years before Badal Sircar adapted it. What may have influenced Sircar's selection of this novel was Bandopadhyaya's focus on the vanishing lifestyle of a tribal community living on the margins of civilized society in riverine Bengal. Bandopadhyaya himself said that his work was largely imaginative

even though he had drawn upon the mythical story of the snake Goddess Manasa and the legend of female snakes giving off the odour of a flower supposedly found irresistible by male snakes during the onset of the monsoon season. Featured centrally in both the novel as well as in the adapted dramatic version is a community of snakecharmers and snake dancers, men and women who eke out a precarious living by performing in villages all over Bengal. The gradual disappearance of the rites and rituals, and even of the livelihood of these people is well represented by Sircar in the concluding lines of his text, which in English translation read as follows:

The tale of Sathali is over. The story of the Snake-Woman is over. They are spread all over India like a handful of seeds scattered on the banks of Sathali. At some places they have bloomed like stars of pain. It is not always that we notice them, but even if they are cut down, uprooted and destroyed over and over again, these weeds do not die. They live on under our feet by rooting themselves in the earth. A new generation comes forth, with new suffering, starvation, agony, new beliefs, new customs, new loves, new joys and sorrows. Through this process perhaps one day they will no longer be described as weeds. They will be acknowledged as legitimate fruit. It is in this hope that the story of these primitive people, the story of the Serpent-Woman, has been presented. There is no telling whether this is of any real value¹⁴

Badal Sircar's *Nagini Kanyar Kahini* was conceptualized for presentation in an open theatre mode. Sircar himself said that it entailed the encapsulation of the mode and the sentiment of the original novel not through the means of dialogization alone but through a process of a dramatic enactment and a representation in which the audience became a co-participant. The actors thus acted not only within the parameters of a small performing space but also utilized spaces and passages in and around the seated audience. In a few productions even light was used creatively to evoke a special ambience. The play was first performed on 6 August 1982 in the Sindhu Bhavan open theatre space, and the production involved the active participation of the members of two other theatre groups, Ritam and Pathosena, apart from those of the Satabdi group.

This paper has analysed and commented upon the transformation by

Badal Sircar of fictional work into dramatic form either for off proscenium or conventional performance mode. I have tried to show the various techniques and perspectives used by Badal Sircar to transform a long English novel *Spartacus* (1972) by Howard Fast, a popular Bengali novel for children written by the authors Premendra Mitra and Leela Majumder, Gour Kishore Ghosh's story *Sagina Mahato*, Premendra Mitra's story *Roopkathar Kelenkari* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's Bengali novel Padma Nadir Majhi giving us great insight into the process of transgeneric and translanguing adaptation.

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