

## Psychological Struggle in Badal Sircar's *Life of Bagala*

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### Abstract

The role of Badal Sircar in Indian Literature is a worth remembering. He took the Indian Theatre to the next level with his Third Theatre. He wrote plays for the reformation of Indian society. He was a strong proponent for the oppressed and underprivileged sections of the Indian society that most of his plays put stress on the problems faced by the individuals socially, religiously, politically etc. He was a very cautious playwright that he focused on the events taking place around him. His plays are a strong representation of the predicament of modern men who are going through the difficult times in their lives due to numerous socio-political factors, both physically and psychologically. The only play written by Sircar where the pure humour of the early period and the serious message of the Third Theatre phase combine is *Life of Bagala*. Sircar creates a character named Bagala who shows disinterest regarding his own name and surname. He was made fun of for bearing such an odd name right from his childhood. It leads him to the thought of committing suicide. But with the help of Old Man he comes to know the importance of life and throws out his pessimistic views in order to live happily.

**Keywords:** Third Theatre, Society, Hardships, Psychoanalysis, Sociological factors

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*Life of Bagala* is a message oriented play written for the youth of Kolkata. It is originally written and produced under the title *Bagalacharitmanas* in 1998. Be it the pang of a broken heart or failure in exams, modern youth find it difficult to cope with their problems. Unable to find solutions to their problems, youth below the age of thirty are committing suicides. Troy Johnson examines:

“Alienation appears as an early symptom of fear and confusion, resulting from stress. This is often accompanied by dramatic

changes in behavior patterns. Indian youth begin to visualize thoughts of powerlessness over his or her environment. Events seem insurmountable, and individuals feel alone. These feelings often overshadow all others and quickly lead to a feeling of hopelessness.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Sircar, adolescence is filled with many changes and is a vulnerable time for youth. There are great changes in physical characteristics, changes in the way they think, changes in expectations placed on them, increasing responsibilities, and the move toward greater independence often lead to great emotional anxiety. Depression is the leading cause of suicidal thinking in youth. When youth experience little or no control in the important events of their lives, they may see themselves negatively. This negative thinking makes it difficult for the youth to face the stresses in their lives, and combined with poor problem-solving skills this can lead to feelings of depression and hopelessness. To give a solution for this, Sircar created an imaginary character named Bagalacharan, simply Bagala and describes his life with the problems of youth.

The play begins with two stage managers who come on the stage from its two corners by making a gesture of blowing imaginary trumpets. They then stop blowing and request the hero to enter the scene. After realizing the hero's absence, they at last go in to the audience in search of hero. Then a simple-looking ordinary man with a long face comes from the audience murmuring “impossible! Impossible! Living in this way...” (53) \* After finding him, the two stage managers repeat the gesture of blowing imaginary trumpets once again. The sound irritates the hero and makes him cover his ears with his hands. Hero exclaims that the sound is making him lose control over his mind.

HERO : Seems I'm losing my mind. All of a sudden – close to my ears, *tarara tarara* – as if someone's blowing trumpet. Since childhood... (54)

He then reveals his identity and shows his disinterest regarding his name and surname to the audience. He further accuses his parents for assigning such an odd name to him and feels pity of himself describing his childhood.

- HERO : Bagalacharan! Parents calling their son by this name... What to say! Particularly if their surname's Batabyal!
- S. M. 1&2 : Bagalacharan Batabyal.
- BAGALA : Bagalachar-an Bata-byal! Rather than hanging this name round its neck they should've tied a 10 kg stone and thrown the child into the Ganges!... My parents vanished in a bus accident when I was a child. Else I ... Else I ... Else what would've I done? What could have I done? Those giving me hell since childhood were always there, alive and kicking ... (54)

He continues portraying various instances of his past life where he was made fun of by others on his odd name. The scene initially changes to Bagala's childhood showing him as a school boy where his fellow students tease him in many ways. They pull his hair, try to trip him up, and then at last poke jokes on him.

- BOYS : Baga! Baga! Hey Baga, have you seen a Bog? Seen a Bog, Sri Bagala? Bagalssaran Batabyal! No. No. Ballbat! Ballbat Batball Ballbat Batball. O Bogu, are you hurt? How can we resist tripping up seeing such bog-like legs? Isn't there a district in Bangladesh called Bagura? Is our Baguya's house in Bagura? (*Sing*) Baga cries fallen in a trap! (54)

Stage Manager 2 enters the scene and tells the audience that after the death of Bagala's parents, Bagala was moved to live at his maternal uncle's house. Bagala interrupts him and describes to the audience the miserable life he lived at his uncle's house. From his childhood he lived with his uncle and aunt not as a member of their family but as one worse than a servant. He says that they never loved him. Instead they hated him considering him a burden in their family. He further reveals that he was greatly tortured by his aunt and uncle even for silly reasons. He describes how his aunt and uncle used to scold him every time

when he fails to obey their order. Later, Stage Manager 1 enters the scene and tells the audience that by hook and crook their hero at last became a commerce graduate and started searching for a job. When Stage Manager 1 describes the bachelor life of his hero, Bagala interrupts him telling the audience that he received many interview call letters but he could not succeed in any of them. In a slow voice he reveals the reason for not getting a job. He says that his odd name is the root of all misfortunes and so he was thrown out by the interviewers every time he attended the interview.

- INTERVIEWER 1 : Most unsmart.
- INTERVIEWER 2 : Doesn't utter a single word. Got terrific result-s. A first-class honours degree Yet...
- INTERVIEWER 1 : The name's Most unsmart too – Bagalacharan Batabyal. With that name and that personality, his relationship with the colleague-s ... Forget it. Got to call five more before lunch. (*Raises voice*) Next! (60)

Sircar successfully employs the two stage managers in the play who not only demonstrate the scene to audience but also add the comic flavour to the play. According to Maurice Winternitz, “This Sutradhara or stage-manager, according to our dramas, as also according to the *Natyasastra* must be a highly cultured man. He should be capable of winning applause of the public not only in music and in the art of stage-technique, but should have command over language...”<sup>2</sup> In the play, the two stage managers comment on the incidents of the play, help the plot move forward by linking different episodes, and directly address the audience. Their conversation sometimes makes the audience laugh at them.

Bagala's life takes a great turn. Getting frustrated from the tortures of his uncle and aunt, Bagala successfully escapes from the house unaware of the fact that very soon this escape is going to bring a great change in his life. In a great dilemma where to go, he at last catches a crowded bus. After some time he gets off the bus at the outskirts of the city. Then a long soliloquy follows where Bagala describes his present condition. Unable to decide what to do, he at last decides to commit suicide. Initially he plans to hang himself with a rope but as he hasn't enough money to buy a rope, he quits from the plan. Later he thinks of many ways to commit suicide but in each plan he finds an obstacle. Finally he strongly fixes his

plan to attempt suicide at the railway tracks. Various plans for his suicide create a comic flavour and make the audience laugh at him.

Bagala at last goes towards the railway tracks. Then an old man enters the scene from the other side of the tracks. Standing at a place he strikes the lighter. But there's no cigarette in his mouth. Then he starts talking to an invisible image. He first talks about the philosophy of death saying that getting old means getting closure to the graveyard. He further says that the death ratio of the old is greater than the younger ones. The words he speaks makes the audience understand that the old man is giving courage and assurance to some invisible image. After hearing the sound of a train from a long distance, Bagala puts his head on the railway tracks to commit suicide. The old man who is watching all the activities of Bagala, very soon orders his invisible partner to pick him up from the tracks. Before his head crushed under the train, an invisible hand pulls Bagala away from the tracks. When the old man asks Bagala the reason of his attempt, he replies that his odd name is the root cause for all. He further starts describing his condition at his maternal uncle's house to the Old man. After hearing the flash back of Bagala, Old Man invites him to dinner at his home which is near the railway tracks. When Bagala hesitates to come, he advances taking a dazed Bagala with him. After walking some distance Bagala asks Old Man about the invisible hand that pulled him away from the tracks. Old Man reveals that the invisible image is 'Nilpari' who nurses him like a mother, daughter, and sometimes like a granddaughter. After having food, they both sit for a while in the living room. When Bagala praises about the delicious supper, Old Man says that the whole credit goes to Nilpari who is so efficient in everything. Bagala in anxiety asks Old Man to introduce her. But Old man diverts the topic by abusing him showing his mental illness.

Later, Old Man reveals Nilpari's identity which gives a great shock to Bagala. He says that Nilpari is not a human being but a spirit. The Old Man gives a lighter to Bagala and orders him to strike it. After several attempts Bagala at last succeeds in striking the lighter. He suddenly jumps up and retreats when he sees a gracious lady dressed in blue on her knees in front of Bagala asking him to order something that he needs. Old man then introduces her to Bagala saying, "This is Nila. I mean Nilpari. Now you can see her. Can listen to her. I can't. Don't worry. Give orders!" (79) Unable to speak a single word, Bagala humbly makes a gesture to say that it would be better if Nilpari goes away. Understanding the gestures made by Bagala, Old Man then describes him the whole process of calling Nila and sending Nila away. He further demonstrates Bagala how to strike the lighter. Following the orders of Old

Man, Bagala with a lighter in hand observes and tries to learn but fails. But after several attempts he at last succeeds in the process. Old Man then says Bagala to call Nila and ask her to make his bed to sleep. But Bagala hesitates saying that he doesn't want to trouble Nila as it's a simple process. In response to Bagala's hesitation, Old Man says that Nila never feels it as a trouble as she is a spirit.

OLD MAN : Phew! Give it to me. (Takes the lighter) Listen. Nila won't have 'trouble' making the bed, won't have 'trouble' cooking as well. It's all done by magic. Haven't I told you – Nila is Nilpari?

BAGALA : You ... are you Aladdin?

OLD MAN : (*laughs*) No. But this lamp's the same stuff. Like Aladdin, I too found it in the street.

BAGALA : Lamp.

OLD MAN : It's all the same. Keeping with the times, the lamp's become a lighter... (82)

Not finding an alternate measure to motivate Bagala, Old Man suddenly orders Bagala in a harsh tone to call Nila by striking the lighter and give an order to bring last Sunday's paper. Unable to escape from the situation, by behaving in a strange manner Bagala at last calls Nila who appears and sits on her knees in front of him urging for the order. Bagala then orders Nila to bring the three most popular newspapers. Within a couple of seconds, three newspapers, rolled and tied with rubber bands, drop into the arena. After scrutinizing the whole paper, Old Man finds some commission based sales jobs which he feels suitable for Bagala and orders him to go ahead. But Bagala shows his disinterest towards the idea of Old Man saying that he has to attend an interview next Friday. He further exclaims that he can't attend the interview because the interview call letter is left behind at his maternal uncle's house. Old Man motivates Bagala to take the help of Nila in getting back his interview call letter from the house of his maternal uncle. This time Bagala follows the order without hesitating and starts describing the address to Nila in a doubtful manner.

Next, Old Man asks Bagala to rehearse the interview scene which he is going to attend next Friday. He further says that in the trial scene of interview he would play the role

of an interviewer and orders Bagala to play the role of the interviewee. He concludes saying that in the trial at any point of time if he feels that he needs help, he can take it from Nila without any hesitation. After observing Bagala's dull performance in the rehearsal, Old Man scolds Bagala saying that he wouldn't get a job until he leaves his inner fear. Getting frustrated, Old Man at last seeks Nila's help for the remedial measures that can be taken against Bagala's mentality. Nila then reveals the reason for Bagala's odd mentality to Old Man. She says that it is mainly due to his uncle and aunt's rough treatment and cruel orders since childhood. Bagala became sensitive especially regarding his name. It is because of all the poking fun at him since childhood he became a pessimist by nature. She further reveals the only possible remedial measure to Old Man. Old Man then advises Bagala to go to his uncle's home back and tell them that he is not going to live with them anymore. When Bagala exclaims that it is highly impossible for him to go and face his uncle and aunt, Old Man advises him to write a letter. Nila supplies Bagala a pen and a paper. Thinking for a while, Bagala at last picks up the pen provided by Nila and writes the whole matter as suggested by Old Man. Later, the letter being put in the envelope, Bagala along with Nila leaves for his uncle's house. Now the Stage Manager 3 and the Stage Manager 4 enter the scene and describe to the audience that Bagala has become a bit more courageous when compared to his days in the past. When Bagala reveals the entire story to Old Man, he feels very happy and admires him for his achievement. Bagala further says to Old Man that he had now gained enough courage to face any obstacle in life. In a conversation that follows between Bagala and Old Man, we come to know about Bagala's strong mental condition which he developed himself. The play ends with Bagala leaving a message to the youth of Kolkata.

BAGALA : No magic! No magic! Everything's to be done  
with one's own strength! With one's own hand!  
I'll tell everyone!

...

Magic doesn't help a real attempt

Come with brooms, running

Clean the filth by sweeping

Sloth, coward, idler – all

Brooms in your hands, have a ball. (107-110)

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