

**SOCIO-POLITICAL STUDY AND MARXIST IDEOLOGY IN BADAL
SIRCAR'S *BEYOND THE LAND OF HATTAMALA***

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Abstract

Socio- political discourse has always a vital role in creative arts, literary writings, and starts from the theory of Plato and continues even now in the various theories of the contemporary time. Similarly, the idea of ideal society has been also practiced for long time in literary writings. In the modern age, after the Russian Revolution (October, 1917), several debates are started by the theoreticians, artists and literary men. Marxism is one of them. It is concerned with social, political and philosophical matters. It is against the capitalist theory, state and its mode of production either material or cultural. It tries to develop the classless society based on equality.

The play *Beyond the land of Hattamala* by Badal Sircar, contains the story about two thieves of the contemporary society, who reach in a strange imaginary and ideal society, where people live without 'money', a basic means of capitalist and bourgeois system. The play is full of socio-political and economical issues, and abolishes the individual, capitalist and bourgeois interest. This strange society is based on the common system of Marxist ideology where people use resources according to their need and requirement. There is no space for greed, a necessary element in capitalist state or society. Market, money, shops and other apparatus of capitalist system, and suppressive system like police and jail have no place in this society. In this proposed paper, researcher will try to explore and analyse the socio-political debate in this play within the frame of Marxist ideology.

Keywords:- Socio-political, Russian Revolution, economical issues, ideology.

Socio-political discourse has been always an integral part of creative arts, literary writings and philosophical studies. It starts from the theory of Plato (429-347 B.C. E) and continues even now in the various theories of the contemporary period. Plato advocates the social responsibilities and political needs of the writers, and when he saw their deviation he prefers philosophers over them. Plato “bans poets from the ideal state under the impression, the effect of their products on the citizens would be unhealthy”, and “judges poetry in terms of morality” and “expects morality”. Although Aristotle contradicts him but he “sets out to demonstrate how poetry has a moralizing effect”. (Rajnath: 8, 13, 2) Literary writings have an ethics, social responsibility and political nature from earlier times and it is reflected in the *Iliad* the *Odyssey* of Homer and *The Aeneid* of Vergil, in this sense.

The idea, of ideal society has been practiced for long time in the philosophical and literary writings, and it has been conceived since Plato’s *Republic*. Abrams writes, “The utopia can be distinguished from literary representation of imaginary places which, either because they are inordinately superior to the present world or manifest exaggerated version of some of its unsavory aspects, serve primarily as a vehicles for *satire* on contemporary human life and society.” (328)

In Renaissance, the discourse of humanism starts which “sets up the ideal of completely rounded or ‘universal’ man, developed in all his faculties and skills, physical, intellectual and artistic. He is especially but is capable also as athlete, philosopher, artist conventionalist and man of society”. (Abrams: 265) Due to the impact of humanism, man becomes the centre of universe and all writings either philosophical or literary start to have him in the centre. Latter, eighteenth century starts with enlightenment. Reason, wit and enlightenment have dominant position in this age and Man’s roll has been criticised. W.J. Long throws light on the tendencies of this period. He writes that, ‘the prevalence of satire, resulting from the unfortunate union of politics with literature’. (261)

It is well known that the Romantics are influenced from the French Revolution (1789) and asserts the idea of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. W. J. Long states “it intensely interesting to note how literature at first reflected the political turmoil of the age.” (372) In this period, imaginative and innovative ideas have their concrete ground, and the doctrine; liberty, equality, fraternity and socio-political debate. Again, in Victorian age, reason and ethics dominated the literature. It starts from the influence of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) and also from the rapid scientific and economic growth in society. Abrams writes, “it was a time of rapid and wrenching economic and social change that had no parallel in earlier history.” (328) Creative people and literary figures have represented the socio-economic and political trends and debates of this period in their writings.

In the modern age, having the noteworthy Russian Revolution (October, 1917) of human civilisation, several debates start which have been raised by the theoreticians, artists and literary men. Marxism is significant here. Ramon Sheldon quotes significant basic idea of Marxism in which Marx says that “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point is to change it.” (23) Since, according to Plato, literary person or artist has a moral and social responsibility which is significant for all time, so the above line of the Marx is very important in creative writing. Artist and literary people have this idea in their creative writing in every age.

In every society economy has major role and according to Marxist vision it plays a major part to produce philosophy and creative writing, as Frederick Engels writes that, “the development of politics, philosophy,

religion, literature and art depends on the development of economy.”
(Marx; 1981, 68)¹

Marxism is basically concerned with social, political and philosophical matters. It covers all areas of human life. It is against the capitalist theory, state and its mode of production either material or cultural. In this theory, it is believed that capital determinates everything and this system must be changed. The change is termed as revolution in Marxist ideology. This revolution is demanded in every field of society and human life as in state, culture, life, power and class etc. It tries to develop the classless society based on equality. This theory focuses on the class-struggle and social reality, and social reality should be clearly depicted in the literary text and creative arts. This ideology believes that writers and artists should be committed to the proletariat, and the art or literature should be progressive in its approach. It should educate the society in progressive and modern way. According to Terry Eagleton, Literature is the part of superstructure but it does not symbolise indifferently the economic base of society. (29) And so, Marxist approach of seeing or reading literature depends on the socio-economic and socio-political perception. Again B. Krilov States:

According to Marx and Engels, theme, base, development and the social role of art can be understood only through the analysis of complete sociological method..... in this way art is a form of social consciousness and thus the conclusion is that the reason of its change must be searched in the social existence of human beings. (Marx; 1981, 22)

Hence, the art and literature raise various socio-political and economical debates, conflicts, questions to make it better and democratic. All these elements and features are expressed well in the play *Beyond the land of Hattamala* by Badal Sircar, an eminent figure in Indian drama. He says in an interview, “My philosophy is to write plays on socio-political conditions, use theatre to publicise those conditions, aspire towards social change.”(Kundu: 5) He shows the commitment for the socio-political change in the society. He believes that theatre is “a tool for the social change.” And, he says that “there are recklessness/ follies in the society and this must be changed” (Bhaumik: 27) It is clear that he strongly believes in the social change, or in Marxian approach, he is a revolutionary playwright who desires to change the society and the system through his plays. Memorising his party-time days, Sircar says in an interview that “at that stage I could not believe that theatre can be as effective as politics.” And further he says “like everyone else I too have political views. There are those who want to maintain status quo to achieve their own ends. I want change.” (Kundu: 4)

Being a firm believer in political theatre and for the depiction of socio-political themes in his plays, Sircar produces people’s theatre which is known as “Third Theatre”. The concept of ‘Third Theatre’ is influenced by the ‘Poor Theatre’ of Jerzy Grotowski. “Third Theatre” is free from the conventions of proscenium theatre and needs the active participation of audience in its form of street theatre, an excellent medium for conveying political message. Sircar’s theatre is the theatre of marginalised, the theatre for revolution, and free theatre for everyone who wants to watch and wants to be the part of it. He further says, “my philosophy is to write on socio-political conditions, aspire towards social change.” (Kundu: 5)

Beyond the Land of Hattamala originally *Hattamalar Oporey* (1977) contains the story about two thieves of the same contemporary society with the existence of feudal system as Jamindar and peasant like Dukhram Bagdi, lacking enough materials to survive. Escaping from

¹ All the translation of the quoted text from Hindi to English has been done by the writer of the chapter.

their pursuers, Kenaram and Becharam, the thieves jump into a river, and reach in a strange society. Manna writes “This society is the Marxist’s ‘futuristic’ modern socialism.” Samik Bandyopadhyaya writes “in Sircar’s *Hattamalar Oparey*, the thieves are converted to the ethos of other country and join in the celebrating chorus at the end.” (Sircar: ix)

In this play, Sircar depicts his socio-political and economic outlook with the creation of an ideal land, beyond our real society full of disparities. He appears as if he is watching the possibility of this imaginary land or society in the existing world. He throws light on hopes for the possibility to change the society, the need is only to transform one’s own mind-set as Kenaram and Becharam change their approach in this play. In the play, Kena and Becha cross a river to reach the new land (society) different from their own realistic, feudal and unequal society. This river is a gap between two societies. The river has not so simple meaning here; it symbolises a ‘long time’ to cross. The struggle, which both thieves face to cross the river, is a struggle of transition period when a society moves in next phase, and where culture and system change to some extent. After having crossed the waves of the river, both Kena and Becha reach a strange land where people live without ‘money’; a necessary tool of capitalist and bourgeois system, but they live according to their needs, cooperation, and sharing. In the beginning Kena and Becha are afraid of ‘cops’ and ‘police’ because they are thieves, but this society has no sign of ‘police’ or any other similar system. As Kena asks one person of this strange society about the ‘Policemen’ and ‘Jail’.

KENA: Hey brother! Can you tell me where the police station is?

THREE: Police station? I don’t think. I know any place called the police station. (*to four*) do you?

FOUR: Nope.

And further:

KENA: Drat! ok, can you tell me where the prison is? The jail? You know like dungeon?

THREE: Luncheon? You want to eat? Just go to straight and take first turn left and you’ll find eatery. (Sircar: 10-11)

The people of this society are unaware of the system of jail and police station, and when they are asked about these things they tell the address of eating house which functions differently. That means, in an eating house a person gets food and satisfaction while in prison he is tortured. But, the thieves do not realize this and Kena calls these people ‘idiots’ and Becha also does not find this society suitable. They also use tricks to befool the locals but there is no meaning of any tricks in this new society. As, when they drink coconut water without money, they try the trick but find that there is no sense of ‘money’ in this society. Kena tries to bargain coconut:

KENA: Shut up. How much is a green coconut, old mother?

FIVE: (*laughing*) what do you mean ‘how much’? as much as you can drink. (9)

Further when Becha is perplexed to think that what they would pay for coconut Kena says that they will pay next day. It is clear that there is no importance of ‘money’ or ‘cash’ in this new land.

KENA: Never mind, old mother. We’re coming back again this way tomorrow, and we’ll give it to you then.”

FIVE: Give what?

BECHA: The cash.

FIVE: What’s cash? (9)

It becomes more obvious when “Five” says, “Hash? Or did they “sash” or “ash”? God knows!” (9) These people think the money as the round ornament of silver or paper with pictures. Both thieves are caught up red-handed, trying to steal dishes from eating house, by the local people. They are asked if they can eat food, then why they want to steal dishes.

THREE: What would you do with the dishes?

KENA: Sell them.

TWO: What does ‘sell’ mean?

BECHA: We’d give them to someone in return for money.

FOUR: Money? Those round discs?

THREE: Or those picture papers?

In this strange society people, are unaware of ‘money’, only heard about it. This society seems more advanced; this is why they preserve it in the museum as if it is archive. Kena says that “they haven’t invented money yet” and Becha calls them “terribly backward”. But on the contrary, the locals of this new land think that both belong to the fairyland of Grandma, which is a thing of past. While, Becha perceives it like a garden, and he says:

BECHA: Dada, see. This is not farm land, and it isn’t jungle. It is like a huge, lovely garden. (7)

He is amazed to see this developed land and he says:

BECHA: God! What huge houses, gardens, fountains, tarred roads! It’s all sparkling new. Where are we, Dada, Calcutta? (10)

But Kena rejects. Surely this is a different land with different social system. May be it has socialist pattern of the system based on the community sense where no one is owner and no one is customer or worker. In eating house Kena and Becha come to know this fact.

KENA: Oh, yes, here- well- is the shop yours?

ONE: Shop?

KENA: Yes, the eating house. Whose is it?

ONE: It’s everyone’s. Belongs to anyone who eats here. (13)

Peter Barry sates, “the aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange” (156) And Sircar has tried to create such classless society where these Marxist elements are present. In the eating house anyone can get food after registering his or her name without paying anything. This is a public house.

KENA: Don’t people give anything for the food they eat? They just go away after their meals?

ONE: What else should they do? They just come here to eat.

THREE: What should they give?

KENA: Then how do you manage?

ONE: Manage what?

BECHA: How do you live? Eat? Fill your stomachs?

ONE: Oh. I eat here.

KENA: And your family? Your wife and children?

ONE: The children eat at school. My wife works at the library in Shiulitala, so she eats there. At night we all come here to eat. (23)

Even, the people of this land suggest both Kena and Becha to get clothing from the cloth store without paying anything. Similarly there is concept of public library where anybody can obtain things after registering one’s name. All this compel both thieves to ask,

KENA: Do you get everything free here? Suppose I want a gold ring?

BECHA: Yeah, or a watch, or gold links?

TWO: If you want an ordinary watch, you can get it at the fancy goods store.

THREE: If you want gold stuff- things to deck up with- you'll have to go to the Central Library. Sign and take what you want. (26)

This library has everything which people use in their lives as books, pictures, tinker, maps, embroidered quilts, dolls and other precious things as 'jewellery'. These people manufacture all these things in their own country, and do not possess anything made of other country. Here, Sircar seems to attack on the free market of globalisation in our contemporary time. Apart from this, in this land or society 'books' are very important stuff. It implies that the people of this society are fond of learning. The people prefer flower ornament over the silver or gold jewellery.

SIX: Oh no. Who want silver and gold when you can get lovely fresh flower ornaments? A couple of old fashioned women borrow them sometimes or sometimes people borrow them for fun. Mostly they are just displayed on the selves. (29)

This society functions on the basis of commun system, and where money, market and shop have no place. It is basically co-operative society. Whoever needs, he can get whatever he needs. One cannot collect anything without need. People of this strange land are unaware of market, shop and capital.

BECHA: See the fruitseller? The one whose shop is in the market?

ONE: Seller?

TWO: Market?

FOUR: Shop?

KENA: Yes, yes, shop. Like you have this hotel, a food shop.

ONE: But this is an eating house.

BECHA: That's what I meant. You sell food here, don't you?

ONE: Sell? (23)

After sometime, the young Becharam tries to adjust in this new society. He transforms himself with new ideas and thoughts. He starts to consider the rules and regulations of this society, but the old Kenaram does not want to leave his old approach and ideas. He, has strong desire for gold and money, tries to steal the gold from the 'Library', while Becha prevents him. And, treatment of both thieves in this society is very interesting; as Kena is caught up during his effort of stealing jewellery from the Library but he is not beaten because the system of this society is very different. He is not punished, but is enquired in kind and polite language with humanistic approach. Perhaps, if they behave with Kena in general approach, he reacts on them but it is their behaviour that makes Kena silent and later both transform their (Kena and Becha) heart. Even the people of fairyland appreciate their (Kena and Becha) skill of making 'hole' in a 'brick wall'. Doctor says:

DOCTOR: I'm quite serious. You should be proud of doing something well. I was thinking of learning this wonderful skill from you. Will you teach me? (35)

The people appreciate Kena for his skill, and express desire to learn. It shows their interest in learning new things. It is their approach to transform the people of bad habits. And, when both thieves decide to join the new society, they have problem of job because they do not know any other work "except how to use jemmy", but the people do not force Kena and Becha to

do work according to them. It is up to both to decide their job, which shows the democratic spirit of this society. Doctor again says:

DOCTOR: Well, tomorrow morning the builder will come to repair the hole. You can learn masonry if you want. Or why don't you look around a couple of days, or even a couple of months? Time enough to decide what you'd like to do. (37)

Kena chooses the occupation of a builder and Becha becomes a gardener and both join the new land, new system of this society. In the end of the play, they join chorus and sing a song based on the principles of this society.

Badal Sircar says it is "one of my most favourite plays" (Kundu: 5) he is interested in idealising the society. He further says, "But we should make it possible. A dream should be created in at least one play to show where I want to reach." (Kundu: 5) Here, Sircar creates an ideal, community oriented and democratic system. In the end of the play, Doctor explains the rules of this society. He says, "Man has to work. He works and through hard work he wheedles treasures from Mother Earth- bread and salt, rice and oil, clothes and shoes, houses, books and pens. Since all of us work together, can't we?" (36) He explains the importance of work to both thieves, and clears their confusion that everything is free in this system.

DOCTOR: No it isn't really free, we all work to the best our abilities. That's why we get everything we need. If we didn't work, you'd get nothing. (37)

Here, Sircar develops such a society in this play for which George Lucacs, "proposed that each great work of literature creates 'its own world', which is unique and seemingly distinct from 'everyday reality'". (Abrams: 149) Sircar successfully creates the unique, classless and cooperative society where every individual has equal respect and equal chance in every field. This is full of socio-political and economical questions and, abolishes the individual, capitalist and bourgeois interest. It appears that the play is influenced from *The Communist Manifesto* in which Marx and Engels writes, "Private ownership will also have to be abolished in its stead there will be common use of all the instruments of production and the distinction of all products by common agreement or so called community of goods." (1971, 79)

Obviously, the society of this strange land beyond 'Hattamala' is an advanced society with new, innovative and democratic values. The people of this society realise that both Kena and Becha come from the retrogressive society called 'Hattamala', a thing of past. Here present dominates on the past as Marx and Engels states, "In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present, in communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person dependent and has no individuality." (1971, 47)

In *Beyond the Land of Hattamala*, nobody is dependent on capital or any other power, and has one's own individuality. In this society, humanity is privileged over the material things and nobody is running after the collection of the capital. This society is based on the common system of Marxist ideology where people use resources according to their need and requirement. There is no space for greed, a necessary element of capitalist state or society. Market, money, shops and other apparatus of capitalist system, and suppressive system like police and jail have no place in this society. It is also found that there is radical change in the thought process of Kena and Becha after passing some time in this commune society based on equality. In this society, every individual respects one's own individuality and there is no exploitation. Hence the researcher concludes that in the play Sircar has expressed his socio-political viewpoint as Terry

Eagleton writes, “political approaches must be expressed within the text through the dramatic situation” (57)

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