



Dramatic Technique of Badal Cirkar

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Abstract

Badal Sircar is a prominent figure in Indian theatre who brought revolution in Indian drama with his innovative techniques and bold artistic vision. Throughout his career, Carkar challenged established norms and pushed the boundaries of theatrical expression, leaving a lasting impression on the world of drama. This paper explores Carkar's groundbreaking contributions to theatre, particularly through his pioneering concept of the "Third Theatre." Rejecting elitism and artificiality, Carkar birthed this radical movement to empower marginalised communities and instigate social change. His plays, characterised by minimalism, audience participation, expressionist acting, fragmented narratives, and symbolic imagery, became powerful tools for social commentary and audience engagement. Through an examination of notable productions such as "Bhoma" and "Stale News," this paper will highlight how Carkar's works addressed pressing societal issues and sparked critical dialogue.

KEYWORDS: Badal Carkar, Third Theatre, Drama, Proscenium Theatre, Collage, Stale News

INTRODUCTION:

Badal Carkar (1920-2011) wasn't just a playwright or director, he was a revolutionary force who redefined the very essence of Indian theatre. As an urban planner by profession, his artistic expression mirrored the social upheavals of his time, particularly the Naxalite movement in 1970s Bengal. He rejected the elitism and artificiality of proscenium theatre, birthing the radical "Third Theatre" movement. This alternative theatre form broke free from traditional constraints, aiming to empower the marginalised and initiate a chain of social change.

He is known for his innovative and experimental theatre that aimed to create a more democratic and participatory form of theatre that was accessible to the masses. Third Theatre rejected grand sets and costumes, embracing simplicity and accessibility. Plays were performed in streets, marketplaces, and community spaces, dismantling the barrier between actors and audience. Carkar believed theatre should not merely entertain, but actively engage and provoke its spectators. He revolutionised audience participation, blurring the lines between performer and observer. This direct engagement fostered critical thinking and challenged societal norms.

Two of the notable Third Theatre productions are *Bhoma* and *Stale News*, each offering a unique exploration of societal themes. *Bhoma* draws inspiration from the true-life story of a peasant in Bengal's Sundarban district, symbolising the struggles of ordinary individuals. Similarly, *Stale News* provides a modernised account of a 19th-century tribal revolt, shedding light on historical injustices (Mitra, 2004). Carkar's plays, including *Evam Indrajit*, *Baki Itihas*, *Trisangha Satabdi*, and *Shesh Nei*, collectively known as the "Calcutta Quartet" are reflections of the major concerns, aspirations, and frustrations of the contemporary urban generation (Bhise, 2013).

Carkar recognized the universality of human emotions and sought to communicate them through powerful physical expression. His actors trained in mime, movement, and vocal techniques, transcending language barriers and resonating with diverse audiences. Instead of linear narratives, Carkar employed "collage" and "montage" techniques. Fragmented scenes, juxtaposed ideas, and episodic structures served as a kaleidoscope of social issues. This fragmented approach shattered complacency, urging viewers to piece together the larger picture and question the status quo. Symbolism and allegory also became potent tools in Carkar's works. These symbolic elements resonated with audiences, offering deeper interpretations and sparking conversation about the underlying injustices. Carkar's legacy extends far beyond the boundaries of Indian theatre. His revolutionary techniques have inspired playwrights and theatre practitioners worldwide, advocating for social justice and participatory art.

MINIMALISM AND ACCESSIBILITY

In stark contrast to the lavish sets and ornate costumes of proscenium theatre, Carkar embraced the power of "nothingness." Carkar's Third Theatre plays were performed in open spaces, without any elaborate sets, costumes, or props. He used simple objects, gestures, and sounds to create the theatrical effects. He also avoided using any specific language or dialect, and instead used a mixture of Bengali, Hindi, and English that could be understood by a wider audience. His minimalist approach relied on everyday objects, readily available materials, and simple costumes. Actors donned everyday clothing, transforming a shawl into a cloak or a chair into a throne (Mandal, 2022)..

This dismantled the financial barriers of traditional theatre, allowing performances in non-traditional spaces like streets, parks, or community centers. This made his plays accessible to a wider audience, particularly the marginalised communities he sought to empower. The lack of elaborate sets and costumes also stripped away distractions, forcing audiences to focus on the core message and the actors' performances. The audience, undistracted by elaborate scenery, is drawn into the character's struggle. Third Theatre also represents a dual effort: it aims to heighten the awareness of urban audiences regarding rural exploitation while simultaneously inspiring rural audiences to envision the potential for change within themselves and their communities (Trowsdale, 1997). Minimalism also created audience participation by inviting them to fill in the blanks. Without elaborate sets, the audience's imagination became part of the performance. By embracing minimalism, Carkar redefined accessibility and challenged the very notion of theatre. His plays transcended physical spaces and socio-economic barriers, becoming powerful tools for social commentary and audience empowerment. In his works, Carkar effectively captures the authentic agony experienced by the common man that resonates with audiences through his portrayal of their struggles and challenges (Deshmukh, 2015). Carkar aimed to bridge the divide between actors and spectators by rejecting artificiality in his productions (Pal, 2015).

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Carkar's radical approach went beyond minimalism. He shattered the fourth wall, the invisible barrier between actors and audience, and actively involved spectators in the performance. This wasn't mere passive witnessing; it was a call to action, a blurring of lines between performer and observer. Such direct engagement forced viewers to confront their own complicity and potential for action.

This audience participation wasn't limited to verbal interaction. Carkar employed various techniques to draw viewers into the performance. This transformed the audience from passive observers to active participants, deepening their understanding of the characters' struggles and the play's social commentary. Audience members might be invited to join in simple songs or mime actions, mirroring the characters' struggles and expressing their collective voice. This visceral engagement transcended intellectual understanding, fostering a deeper emotional connection to the social issues portrayed.

The impact of such audience participation was immense. It challenged the traditional power dynamics of theatre, where the audience passively consumes art. By actively involving them, Carkar empowered his viewers, transforming them from mere spectators into agents of change. This active participation fostered critical thinking, encouraged questioning of societal norms, and ignited a sense of collective responsibility. Audience participation broke down cultural and linguistic barriers. In plays where fragmented scenes and diverse characters painted a picture of global inequality, the universality of human emotions and experiences shone through. Even without understanding every spoken word, viewers could connect with the shared struggles and injustices portrayed through movement, gesture, and direct interaction. Carkar's use of audience participation wasn't a mere gimmick; it was a revolutionary act that redefined the very essence of theatre. By shattering the fourth wall and actively involving viewers, he transformed them from passive consumers into active participants, sparking dialogue, critical thinking, and a collective desire for social change.

EXPRESSIONIST ACTING

Carkar's theatre transcended the limitations of language barriers, reaching hearts and minds through the powerful language of the body. He championed expressionist acting, where physical movement, mime, and vocal techniques became the primary tools for conveying emotions and ideas. This visceral expression resonated deeply, bypassing the need for spoken language. It allowed Carkar's plays to transcend geographical and cultural barriers.

In the Third Theatre, the human body takes precedence as the primary medium for conveying the message of the play. To enhance the performer-spectator relationship and achieve greater flexibility, the seating arrangement varied for each production (Fatima, 2013). The expressive movements, the anguish in the actor's eyes, and the raw emotions conveyed through mime would resonate universally. These elements connected with the audience's shared human experiences, creating understanding and empathy despite language differences.

Expressionist acting offered a deeper level of emotional expression than words alone could convey. Carkar's actors trained extensively in mime, movement, and vocal techniques, crafting a distinct physical vocabulary. This allowed them to convey complex ideas and emotions with nuance and precision. This physical vocabulary painted a vivid picture, allowing the audience to grasp the character's plight without needing elaborate explanations.

The characters in Badal Carkar's plays often wear identical costumes and are not assigned specific names but are instead numbered, such as one, two, three, etc. This approach allows actors to portray multiple roles within a single play as required by the narrative (Charanya, 2018). Through his commitment to expressionist acting, Carkar proved that theatre can transcend the limitations of language. His actors spoke the universal language of the body, reaching hearts and minds across cultures and borders.

COLLAGE AND MONTAGE

Carkar's theatrical vision defied linear narratives and embraced the fragmentation of modern life. He employed collage and montage techniques, weaving together fragmented scenes, juxtapositions, and episodic structures to

present complex social issues in a way that challenged conventional thinking and provoked critical reflection. This fragmented approach offered a kaleidoscope of social issues, urging viewers to piece together the larger picture and question the status quo. It mirrored the fragmented nature of contemporary life, where information overload and competing narratives often dominate. By reflecting this fragmented reality, Carkar forced audiences to confront the complexity of social issues, moving away from simplistic explanations and easy solutions.

The use of collage and montage also created a sense of urgency and immediacy. This juxtaposition jolted the audience, forcing them to connect the dots and recognize the interconnectedness of social problems. These techniques also encouraged critical thinking and analysis. By presenting fragmented narratives and diverse perspectives, Carkar challenged audiences to actively engage in meaning-making. This juxtaposition invited viewers to question the systems of power, analyse the root causes of social injustices, and form their own interpretations. While *Stale News* can be seen as one of the most skillful using of collage, his *Evam Indrajit* becomes more about the Bengali middleclass though it uses elements of collage (Tamilarasi, 2019).

By shattering traditional narratives, Carkar's collage and montage techniques offered a powerful tool for social commentary and audience engagement. They challenged viewers to move beyond passive consumption and actively participate in the meaning-making process, fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the complex social realities around them.

SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY

Beyond minimalism and fragmented narratives, Carkar's theatre relied heavily on symbolism and allegory as well, creating layered messages that resonate with audiences on multiple levels. He employed evocative symbols and allegorical figures to represent complex societal problems and injustices, inviting viewers to engage in deeper interpretation and reflection. The ambiguity amplified its power, resonating with various forms of oppression faced by diverse audiences. It also transcended cultural and linguistic barriers. Universal images that are understood across cultures, resonated with the audience's desire for freedom and expression, regardless of their specific language or background.

Even the title "Evam Indrajit," translated as "And Indrajit" in English, signifies the connection between an individual and society (Shukla, 2015).

Symbolism allowed for multiple interpretations, encouraging critical thinking and active engagement. Open-ended images prompted viewers to consider different interpretations, sparking conversations and challenging simplistic solutions to complex issues. Allegory provided a powerful tool for social commentary. The allegorical representation of political corruption resonated with audiences, offered a critical lens to examine their own political realities and power dynamics. By employing symbolism and allegory, Carkar's theatre transcended the limitations of literal representation. He offered potent images and figures that sparked deeper interpretation, encouraged critical dialogue, and empowered audiences to confront social injustices. Carkar's comedies employ sarcastic commentaries and dialogues to illuminate the grim facets of reality (Rahaman, 2023).

In works like *Bhoma* and *Stale News*, identifiable characters take a backseat, allowing the narrative to focus on the collective experiences of faceless masses, the impoverished, and the working classes. While the resolution of these plays tends to be more optimistic compared to Carkar's earlier works, the overall tone remains somber. The world depicted in these productions is no longer perceived as meaningless and opaque but is instead portrayed as transparently brutal and unjust (Mitra, 2004).

In his *Stale News*, Carkar suggests that the separate recognition of certain regions by colonisers was a precautionary measure to suppress potential threats that could have ignited widespread unrest among the Indian population. Even after gaining independence, these regions have seen little tangible benefit beyond being designated as states. Carkar provides statistical evidence to highlight the inadequacy of seat reservations in academic and parliamentary spheres, which fails to ensure the upliftment of marginalised communities.

IMPACT AND LEGACY

Badal Carkar's impact on Indian theatre extends far beyond mere entertainment. He was a revolutionary, challenging conventions and sparking a movement that continues to resonate today. His unique "Third Theatre"

approach, built on minimalism, audience participation, expressionist acting, fragmented narratives, and symbolic imagery, redefined the very essence of theatre, not just in India but globally. Badal Carkar's Third Theatre approach pushes the boundaries of conventional storytelling, enabling him to uncover the hidden narratives of exploitation often overshadowed by colonialist and nationalist histories. By transcending the limitations of textual scripts, proscenium stages, and even cinema, Carkar breaks down psychological barriers and exposes the raw realities of society (Jha, 2013).

Carkar's minimalist approach challenged the elitism of proscenium theatre, making his plays accessible to diverse audiences. Performances in non-traditional spaces like streets and marketplaces brought theatre closer to the communities it sought to empower. This accessibility created a sense of ownership and engagement, transforming spectators into active participants. Carkar's employment of the chorus holds significant importance as well as it brings focus to the fragmented amalgamation of viewpoints and identities (Reddy, 2015).

By breaking the fourth wall and directly involving the audience in the performance audience members were invited to voice their opinions or participate in actions. This challenged passive consumption and ignited critical thinking, prompting viewers to question their own roles in society and injustices portrayed in the play. Carkar emphasised expressionist acting, where physical movement, mime, and vocal techniques conveyed emotions and ideas. The transcending of language barriers, allowing audiences to connect on a deeper level, regardless of their linguistic background. It also democratised the act of performance, requiring actors to hone their physical skills rather than rely solely on verbal prowess.

Carkar's use of fragmented narratives and collage techniques mirrored the complexities of contemporary life. Juxtaposed scenes, episodic structures, and news headlines presented social issues in a non-linear way, urging viewers to piece together the larger picture and engage in critical analysis. Through his plays, Carkar articulates and denounces the capitalist system, societal class divisions, the exploitation of the underprivileged, and the unequal distribution of

wealth and resources. He advocates for a classless society with equal access to resources and fair distribution of wealth and profits. He valued the Marxist vision and his plays were a clear reflection of his ideological standpoint (Vishwkarma & Singh, 2019).

In a world with growing inequalities, social injustices, and environmental challenges, Carkar's work remains strikingly relevant. His emphasis on audience participation, critical thinking, and challenging power structures resonates with contemporary audiences seeking meaningful engagement with theatre. His minimalist approach offers a blueprint for sustainable and accessible theatre, while his symbolic imagery continues to spark critical reflection and dialogue.

Badal Carkar's legacy isn't merely a collection of plays but a manifesto for a theatre deeply rooted in community, social justice, and audience empowerment. His radical techniques continue to inspire artists and audiences worldwide, reminding us that theatre can be a powerful tool for transformation, not just entertainment. As long as there are injustices to challenge and narratives to question, Carkar's theatre will continue to resonate, urging us to break down barriers, question the status quo, and actively participate in shaping a more just and equitable world.

CONCLUSION

Carkar's techniques weren't merely artistic choices because they were tools for social commentary, empowerment, and critical thinking. Carkar's theatre brought art to the people, engaged them actively, and challenged them to question the world around them. His impact stretches far beyond the dusty streets of Calcutta, inspiring playwrights and theatre movements worldwide. His emphasis on accessibility reminds us that art should serve communities, not just privileged few.

Badal Carkar's innovation, the 'Third Theatre,' disrupts the traditional norms of naturalistic theatre, challenging its portrayal of reality as an illusion (Mukherjee, 2016). His call for participation urges us to move beyond passive consumption and actively engage in shaping our realities. His techniques offer a blueprint for theatre that sparks critical dialogues, questions power structures, and empowers audiences to become agents of change.

His theatre isn't a relic of the past. It's a reminder that art can be a powerful catalyst for social transformation. As long as there are injustices to challenge and narratives to question, Carkar's voice, echoing through his radical techniques, will continue to inspire artists and audiences, reminding us that theatre can be more than entertainment and that it can be a force for change.

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