



The Trauma of Educated Youth in Badal Sircar's the *Life of Bagala*.

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Lord Kense in *Rural Poverty and Unemployment in India* defines unemployment as "People of any economy desiring work but not finding to their qualifications is called unemployment" (3). Poverty and unemployment are the major problems in a developing country like India. It is a serious issue and the number of unemployed persons increase as population explodes. There are many types of unemployment. First and foremost is over-population. Secondly, the system of our education is theoretical that makes young men fit nothing for any kind of service. Thirdly, though population is increasing, the industrial progress has not kept pace with it.

This paper focuses on Badal Sircar's theme of unemployment in the *Life of Bagala*. The protagonist Bagala suffers from the trauma of unemployment. Bagala stays in his maternal uncle's house without any job who suffer from psychic and brutal problems. He is an unemployed servant in his auntie's house where he does all household jobs. This could be seen in three places. When his aunt arrives to chide him for forgetting to buy fish from the fishmonger.

Bagala tells her that the fishmonger refused to sell him fish without scales. Secondly, his uncle comes in asking for the batteries to purchase. He excuses himself for not purchasing it as he has to go far away to Sambhuda's shop. Bagala asks his uncle to buy a bicycle for him to do household jobs. But his uncle never lend his ears to Bagala's wishes. During his leisure times his aunt asks him to educate his cousin. He curses his unfortunate lot since he is ill-treated by his guardians. This is the condition of the unemployed youths in India. The opportunities are denied to Bagala yet he get a first class in college.

The Stage Managers make their comments on how he burnt midnight oil to pass B.Com with flying colours. Though he attended several interviews, he never got a job. The sequence shifts to three interviewers questioning Bagala with irony and humour. Stammering, he is unable to respond to their questions. The sequence shifts to his uncle taunting him to get a job: "Somehow you'd grab a job...you'd be independent... though you've got nothing in these six months..." (61).

Seeing Bagala's worthless condition his uncle and aunt want Bagala to get married. His aunt enters, admonishing him to put on some decent dress since they are to going to his father-in-law's house. But, he refuses to marry. Their intention is to grab the dowry fifty thousand rupees. He tells them that he would pay back all that they had invested in his studies, when he gets a job.

UNCLE. He says no to this marriage. It's a great dishonor staying at father-in-law!

AUNT. Heard it a hundred times. I know even if it's not told. Job and shelter by father-in-law's favour hurts his pride. But being jobless, living off uncle and aunt isn't a problem! (61)

Bagala becomes a scapegoat at the hands of his uncle and aunt. Marriage becomes commercial, they just want to sell Bagala in the name of marriage. His uncle and aunt would get fifty thousand rupees as dowry. Unable to accept the marriage, he is affected by psychic disorder. (Exit UNCLE and AUNT. BAGALA *stands for a moment, then frets wildly dancing with clenched teeth. A subdued roar comprising many meaningless words comes out to him*) (62). Then the Stage Manager explains the state of Bagala: "This needs explanation. It is not hysteria. Our hero often resorts to manifesting his anger and suppressed wrath in this manner" (62). Bagala wants to stand on his own feet and he just escapes from his relative's house with all his money in his pocket. He drops coin by coin on the floor:

BAGALA. Three rupees seventy-five paise. Oh! Done shopping over the years. Had I put away some money! I'd been *honest!* What've I got out of *honesty?* Three rupees seventy-five paise! *Honesty?* Nonsense! I was afraid to steal. Afraid. Simply afraid! Afraid of Uncle, afraid of Aunt, afraid of Mantu, afraid of the class-mates, afraid of the teachers, afraid of the *Professor-s.* (62-3)

Bagala continues to speak of his fear ingrained in him, of all sorts of people such as the neighbourhood boys, the clerk at the college office, the guard at the college gate, traffic police, grocers, bus conductors, peons, cows, dogs, lizards, cockroaches and spiders. Despite his fear and miseries, he seems to be very honest.

The Stage Managers continue to make comments about his submissive nature and honesty. He has been a servant without wages and a private tutor to Mantu. He is to marry an ugly, quarrelsome and pampered woman, the only daughter of an executive officer of a business house. The big dowry would go to the pockets of his uncle and aunt. Bagala has no courage to oppose their orders. If he marries and stays with his father-in-law, he would be given a job. The only option left for him is to disappear. But he is afraid of his uncle sending the police after him to get hold of the fifty thousand rupees dowry. The Stage Managers get frustrated and leave while Bagala tells his aunt that his dhoti has been taken away by big rats.

His uncle and aunt search for him and also bribe the police officer with five hundred rupees. He runs away and the writer narrates the mental state of Bagala as: (*Wild movement, sound, dance and with it the chanting of 'bastard'. The cry of a jackel is heard*) (71).

BAGALA. (startled, in a frightened voice) God! What's that! Is it a jackal?

I'm done for! What if it chases me? (*Suddenly straightens up*)

Bastard jackel! (*Cry of jackel. Startles, then raises his voice*) Bastard

jackel! (*Cry of jackel at a distance*) Running away. It won't?

Chanting bastard is more powerful than chanting Rama.

(*Barking of dog. BAGALA again startles. Then gathers himself.*)

Bastard dog! (*Again barking*) But it's hydrophobia if it bites! It's

too horrific! (*jackel cries, dog barks*) so many jackels and dogs-

what's on the other side? Crematorium? It must be. (*Suddenly*

Stops) Crematorium? What does it mean? Pyre. Dead body.

Death—Death. Dea-th. Yes, it's the only way! (71)

Bagala thinks that death is the only solution to all his problems. He plans to commit suicide, firstly he tries to drink Potassium cyanide, secondly he tries to jump from the seven or ten-storeyed building, that too in the centre of the city and thirdly he tries to jump into the river Ganges. Finally, he hears the sound of the train coming nearer to him and plans to fall before it. Instantly an old man appears, talking to someone invisible. He talks all absurd things and blames corruption in society:

OLD MAN. Listen. I'm a man. And men must die... Have to part with you if I die... Again sobbing?...

We've been together for so long. Bound to feel bad. But when I die, you must fall in some able hands – got to settle it while I'm still alive... The country's full of thieves, swindlers, goons, frauds, black marketers and politicians – if you come into their hands, can you imagine what'll happen to the country? I was thinking of an honest person... Someone honest and decent yet poverty-stricken or in some difficulties... (73)

Bagala enters and walks on the rail tracks and puts his head down to end his life. The old man observes him and tells the invisible person to pick him up from the tracks. A chorus enters in the form of a train. The invisible hand pulls him away and holds his wrist as the old man comes forward. He wants to know who has pulled him out of the tracks.

OLD MAN. (*to the invisible partner*). Quick. Pick him up from the tracks!

(*Enter the CHORUS in the form of a train. Before BAGALA's head is crushed, an invisible hand pulls him away. The moving train goes past. The invisible hand now holds BAGALA's wrist. The OLD MAN has come forward.*) (73)

The old man saves Bagala out of danger and enquires the reason behind his suicide attempt. He says: "My entire life...uncle, aunt, father-in-law, mother-in-law... Why'd I marry? I'd not marry" (74). Bagala shares his miseries to him that his name itself a problem at first and people use to tease him as Bagalacharan Batabyal. Secondly, he does not like the marriage arrangement made by his uncle and aunt. Thirdly he doesn't have any job. After encountering Bagala's problem, the Old Man identifies that Bagala suffers from inferiority complex and questions him: "you got a *first-class* degree in B.Com, yet could not answer simple questions at the *interview*. Rather than facing life, you prefer escaping to a hole" (78).

The old man's question towards Bagala is the question to all unemployed youths' inability to answer in the interview. This is deliberately happened because of the inadequate improvements in our educational system where there is a lack of comprehending things and solving ability in an effective manner. Due to poor educational implements youths' suffer from the unemployment problem and this problem leads to suicide attempts of many educated youths in our Indian society.

After the advice to Bagala, the old man takes Bagala to his living room. To his utter surprise, Bagala finds dal, rice and fried pomfret fish served hot at that late night. The old man acknowledges that Nila has done all that so efficiently.

After the dinner, Bagala lowers his face feeling ashamed of his position and the Old Man tells him that he utterly needs Nila to transform him: "You're her able inheritor. That's why I leave Nila in your hands... I'm not trying to marry off Nila with you. Actually, it's not even possible. Because Nila isn't a human being" (78). Offering a lighter, the old man makes him strike it to ignite the lamp.

When he succeeds in striking the lighter after several attempts, he beholds a beautifully dressed gracious lady in blue in a dance-like movement, sitting on her knees. As Bagala jumps up in shock, Nila begs her master to order her. The old man introduces her as Nilpari whom he can see and listen to and give orders. He tells him that he can order her for whatever he wishes. When Bagala is totally confused, the old man tells him that it would take a bit of time to get used to her.

On his part, Bagala makes gestures to indicate that he wishes her to disappear. The old man tells him to strike the lighter. Since Bagala is unable to strike the lighter, the old man demonstrates. When Bagala succeeds, Nila disappears. The frustrated Old Man tells him: "You can't be let alone with this at the moment. An extended *training* is required. You stay here for some time. Learn – how to summon Nila, give orders, and send her back" (81).

When Bagala stammers with fear, he is told that Nila would cook food and do all household chores. The old man tells him that he could stay with him in the small place and sleep. He reprimands Bagala for attempting to commit suicide since he does not want to marry and stay at his father-in-law's. When he requests the old man about a job for him, he is told not to worry but to call Nila to make his bed to have a good night's rest. When he shows his reluctance to call Nila, the old man tells him that it is pure magic and the lamp is like that of Aladdin's magic lamp.

The Stage Managers comment on the hero who slept well on a bed brought by Nila till late afternoon the following day. When Bagala expresses his need to get a job, the old offers the lighter to him and asks him to call Nila. He is told to make a habit of calling Nila whenever he needs anything, considering her to be his girlfriend. The old man tells him to strike the lighter, but he is scared. The old man gets angry with Bagala and scornfully advises on his acceptance of everything in life without any courage to face the situation.

OLD MAN. I see. Never ordered anyone in your life. (BAGALA *shakes head*.) Never made a request as well? (*Shakes head again*.) Only followed what others ordered. (*This time BAGALA nods*.) That's where you were to marry and stay at father-in-law's following your uncle and aunt's order. (84)

When he picks up courage and strikes the lighter, Nila appears and sits in front of him asking for his bidding. He orders her to get three most popular newspapers of the previous Sunday. He reads classified ad-s. Being unhappy with all the ad-s, he refers to an interview letter left at his uncle's home. The old man tells him to give the address to Nila to go and fetch it. The old man gives him practice for the interview and instils confidence in him. He is given a trial to speak out with courage at the interview. Nila also prompts him how to speak properly. He prepares a mock interview for him where Bagala could not answer whatever the old man asks.

Old MAN. Qualification?

(BAGALA *is silent*.)

NILA. B.Com *honours first-class*. Say.

BAGALA. B.Com *honours*.

NILA. A *first-class*.

BAGALA. A *first...er...first-class*.

Old Man. Well! Got a *first class* degree. Was it by cheating?

(BAGALA *looks helplessly at NILA*.)

NILA. Never have I cheated in any exam, sir.

(BAGALA *makes a weak imitation of NILA's pose. He speaks in a weaker voice*.)

BAGALA. Never have I cheated in any exam, sir. (90)

The mock interview, however, lets Bagala go out with a drooping head. The old man calls him back and Nila keeps her gaze on him. The old man warns him that he would never get a job and suggests that Nila could get him all he longs for: "You can hide in a room and live your life comfortably without an employment. Do you want it that way?" (91). The old man wants to know why he doesn't want to marry and stay at the father-in-law's. He warns him that unless he comes out of his baseless fear, he would never get a job.

After the interview, Nila asks the old man what is the base of his fear. The old man says that it is because of the rough treatment given by his uncle and aunt. Moreover, he is highly sensitive about his name. The old man advises Bagala that he will take care of the interview and asks Bagala to write a letter about his whole expenses from childhood to till date. He also gives Bagala ten thousand rupees to give his uncle. The Next day Bagala goes to his uncle's house with guts and talks to him in return.

BAGALA. Bastard? Son of a bitch? I? It must be. Otherwise why'd I suffer smacking and spanking in your hands for all these years? Yes. You're right. I'm a

bastard. Son of a bitch. (*Being surprised* UNCLE and AUNT *listen to him. NILA is transfixed as well.*)
But no more of it. What I've written in that letter—I'm telling you. Listen. I've repaid by hard work.
If there's still something left, then ... take this! (106)

Bagala with his guts wants to stand on his own feet. He wants to go for the interview with the help of others. BAGALA. "Don't need it. Go all out myself! Go to stand on my own feet!" (107). Stage Managers enter and inform how Bagala is rewarded with a job. Bagala's story brings to surface how human will and determination can make one stand on his own feet to achieve his goal. In the beginning of the play Bagala mentions about his desire to blow trumpet from childhood, referring to his desire to bloom and mature as a normal child.

But the opportunity is denied to him due to accidental death of his parents, leading to a warped life at his uncle's home. Velmani's article "Brechtian Epic Theatre and Badal Sircar's Third Theatre" says: "Though educated by his uncle, he suffers humiliation, performing domestic chores and tutoring his nephew" (69). His inferiority complex continues to be established at school and college when he is looked down upon by the unmotivated teachers and professors.

The *Life of Bagala* is the transformation of cowardice into courageous Bagala. Bagala is not a revolutionary, however he needs some external stimulating force to come up in life. Sircar has not only talked about the problem of unemployment, but also discussed various issues which are considered as real dangers to our national security.

Bibliography.

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