

## Badal Sarkar's Absurd Play 'Pagla Ghoda' : A Review

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### Abstract:

'Pagla Ghoda' (1967) written by Badal Sarkar, is a representative play of the playwright. In this play, he explores the nature of human values, pain, emotions, and commitment. It serves as a clear example of how people navigate various events in life to overcome suffering and turmoil, ultimately striving to attain the ecstasy of life.

The play revolves around four individuals from different professions who, while conducting the funeral of a young girl, engage in drinking and sharing stories of their failed love. Neglecting the true essence of love and distancing themselves from the young girl, the inner turmoil of the human mind is poignantly portrayed.

Badal Sarkar skillfully encapsulates the history of an entire decade through the events of just one night. The play also sheds light on societal discrimination between men and women, which remains a dominant theme. Drawing inspiration from the Ramayana and various mythological traditions, the female characters embody the archetype of the Indian woman. Badal Sarkar highlights the oppression of women across the world, offering the audience a compelling and fair perspective on their struggles.

This play also reveals how the people of this middle class society are trapped in the trap of social norms and values and are forced to lead a miserable and helpless life sacrificing all their hopes and aspirations and sometimes they are forced to bow down to the pressure of society to maintain their respect in society. Badal Sarkar wants to present all those social problems of the time through this play and the contemporary cultural crisis, economic situation and political situation are also realistically presented to the readers.

Badal Sarkar has portrayed romantic love in 'Pagla Ghoda'. The female characters in the play, Malati, Lakshmi and Mili, each suffer from extreme depression due to the deprivation of their lovers, which leads the female characters to make a terrible decision about their lives. So the interpersonal conflict of each character in the play is revealed through the characters of Shashi and Malati, Himadri and Mili, Satu and Lakshmi. Through the symbol of burning the dead body in the crematorium, the playwright presents the inner conflict and pain of the characters to the reader. The playwright has cleverly used the name 'Pagla Ghoda' to reflect an absurd and restless human mind by creating contemporary social conditions, economic conditions and life after death in modern life and attitude.

**Keywords:** human values, discrimination, archetype, romantic love, depression, bizarre

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Main article:

'Pagla Ghoda' (1967) is one of the popular play of Badal Sarkar. This play has become a symbol of human values, pain, feelings and commitment of the playwright. He wrote the play in between January 20 and January 25, 1967, while living in Enugu City, Nigeria. The play 'Pagla Ghoda' was first staged in Delhi in 1969 and subsequently it was first performed in Kolkata in 1971 under the production of Bahurupi Natya Gosthi. Due to its immense popularity, 'Pagla Ghoda' had the distinction of being translated and

acted in many Indian languages at that time. This play is a clear example of how people face various events in life while getting rid of all the pain and turmoil of their life and getting ecstasy. This play is about the meaninglessness of life. So, Kartik felt that everything that people do in this life is a kind of mistake. At the beginning of the play, four people from different professions were conducting a girl's funeral as well as having some drinks, and they were each recounting the painful history of their failed love. They neglected the true love of life and pushed it away and highlighted the whims and unstable lives of the mind with young girls. There are three such female characters in the play 'Pagla Ghoda' and these three women have finally committed suicide.

In this play, Badal Sarkar has highlighted the history of a period of almost ten years through the story of just one night. The male characters are Kartik, Shashi, Satu and Himadri. On the other hand, Malati, Lakshmi and Mili are the female characters in the story. The playwright has basically portrayed a real picture of the patriarchal social system through this play. And in doing so, he has given priority to the traditional discrimination of men and women in this play. In addition, he deconstructs the myth of romantic love based on the Ramayana and various mythological traditions. He has also shaped the female characters of this plays as the embodiment of Indian women, and through the characters he has wanted to present to the reader a fair view of all the women of the world by identifying them as silent victims.

The play 'Pagla Ghoda' is basically a sweet love story. This love is an adventure in the life of a lover. But rejection in love in the lover's life, disappointment after the break-up- these issues have been adopted as a major refuge in this play. In addition, the mad horse is depicted as a symbol of love in this play; in this love attraction, the lover is ready to take all the risks of life in a happy mood. In modern Bengali poetry, such love has been compared to an uncontrolled mad horse. Love is the expression of a strong feeling of the lover's mind. But in intense love, the lover gets wilderness, which does not allow the lover to be bound in their control. On the other hand, to get the gift of true love, events such as adventurous to the lover also become inevitable in his life. Again, breaking the conventional rules of society by risking life, as well as feeling a tied tension between lovers is also considered as one of the aspects of true love. This love strengthens all kinds of mental and physical bonds-- it has been recognized as steady, sure and eternal in the eyes of society for ages. Badal Sarkar has highlighted the fundamental disparities in the lives of middle-class men and women as a reality of contemporary social life through this play.

'Pagla Ghoda' is a play of a particular social situation in the second half of the 20th century. If we look at the history of the world we found that there are class differences all over the world and middle class people of the society have always been the victims. These middle class people can never enjoy a luxurious life like the upper class people of the society. On the other hand, they do not have to suffer the bitterness and sorrow in the lives of the lower class people of the society. As a result, these middle-class people were always morally conscious. So they are trapped in the trap of social norms, human values and are forced to lead a miserable and helpless life. They sacrificing all their hopes and aspirations and in order to maintain their respect in society, they are sometimes forced to bow down to the pressure of society or are willing to commit suicide. Because they know that this is how the middle class people of the society have to live, this is the reality of their lives.

Literature has always been acknowledged as the mirror of society. Adopting the important aspects of protecting the existence of the people endangered by the horrific shock of World War-II, Badal Sarkar has presented various social problems, cultural crises, economic conditions and political situations in front of the audience in a realistic way through this play. In 'Pagla Ghoda', the playwright directly points the finger at the patriarchal attitude through the incident of rejecting love of the lovers. This can be seen while analyzing the relationship between Shashi and Malati in this play. Apart from this, Satu and Lakshmi's relationship in this play has also become hesitant to them due to the tension of society with their feelings for not agreeing with social rules. Again, the incident of rejecting Mili's intense love also reveals the identity of Himadri's timid mind. Again, the lack of courage among women like men has also been highlighted in this play. But even then, the intensity of Himadri and Mili's love gets the metaphor of mad horse in this play. The madness of the characters has always overtaken the logic and the stupidity of the

characters has become the main theme of the play. As a result, the technique, theme and language of the play 'Pagla Ghoda' have become complementary to each other as an absurd play.

The dead girl in this play once looked for true love in life. The girl said—

“The Girl: (Laughing) What am I? Who am I! What’s the story! Don’t you know? Don’t you know anyone? What am I? Who am I? What’s the story” <sup>1</sup> Kartik loved this girl since childhood. Once this girl came to him with a demand for love but he turned him down. This matter led the girl committed suicide. If a woman demands something from a man, she has to be disappointed in this way— this girl could not think so. Through this incident, the playwright wanted to express the marginality of women’s social intelligence. In society, only a man is considered as a human being and a woman wants to be seen only as a woman. But when this woman behaves as a man, the woman is asked to follow him—and as a result, she ultimately faces an existential crisis. In this play, Badal Sarkar has taken a sensitive attitude towards women who are fighting for life.

Again, the dead girl in the play says— “The Girl: The story? Who doesn’t have a story? Who doesn’t have a secret? You don’t have a story? Don’t you have secrets? Don’t bring out the stories! All Story of your life. You will see that all the stories are mixed together. Your story, our story—all – united...” <sup>2</sup> That is, in every moment of life, the female characters of this play had to go through a difficult struggle. Badal Sarkar has portrayed the lives of these fighting women with very simple sincerity in his play 'Pagla Ghoda'. Apart from this, he has tried to show in this play how the path of ambition has stopped among the contemporary urban people and endangered them. As a result, a simple belief about life is repeatedly raised in the play that man has only one life and his life is enveloped in a thick fog. Yet he has to walk forward and win the battle of life. There is sorrow and happiness in man’s life, but even in the midst of deep darkness, he has to awaken the light of hope – otherwise death will take over his life. Death is the denial of the existence of life.

'Pagla Ghoda' begins with a conversation between four men. These four men have come to cremate the body of a girl at the crematorium. They were busy in playing cards in a drinking room where the funeral of the dead girl was going on. Kartik, Shashi, Satu and Himadri were all discussing various stories of their lives at that time. On the other hand, the funeral of the dead girl was also going on. While discussing the mystery of the dead girl’s death, the dead girl suddenly appeared before them as a mysterious woman character. At that time, they all were discussing the death of Malati, Lakshmi and Mili. Satu told Himadri-- “If you say a wife is necessary to have children, then of course it is different. But I have never felt the slightest concern about progeny, what can I do?” <sup>3</sup>

Due to the patriarchal attitude of men, the life of every woman in this play has become a terrible and tragic. So the indomitable spirit of this dead girl made each of them think about their past lives. So in the context of Shashi’s wandering, the girl said--

“The Girl: Not legs, not legs—he got headache. Don’t know how much is inside the head, how many are spinning like a wheel of the drum. It is spinning wildly, it is not understood, and it is not recognizable, like a shadow—everything in the head is moving wildly...

Shashi : (In a clear pronunciation, talking to yourself) Malati.

The girl : Malati? Malati has died and become a ghost. Like me. Burnt to ashes, just like that (pointing finger on the back) --- in the fire, like me. ” <sup>4</sup>

Shashi, Satu, Kartik and Himadri once kept themselves engrossed in the story of the girl. Because the crematorium is good place for revealing the juicy story of life! So, Shashi unravels the knot of lost love stories from his past life. But he eventually repents when Kartik, Satu and Himadri ask him what he would have done if one of his close friends wanted to marry the bride he loved. Shashi had abandoned the bride he loved; she was later married to Pradeep. But after marriage, Pradeep beat Malati with a hot knife. Because he came to know that she was in love with Shashi. Later, Malati comes to meet Shashi to show the proofs of his friend’s cruelty. On the other hand, Shashi also couldn’t show the courage to accept Malati in

his life. As a result, distressed by an existential crisis, Malati committed suicide within a year. Malati's conversation with Shashi reflects the fact --

"Malati : (In a harsh voice) Yes, I will go. I knew you were going to tell me to leave. You can't let go of your victory.

[Shashi wanted to say something but Malati did not let him talk. He came forward with burning eyes to Shashi] Before I go, I'll just tell you why I was here. [ Malati starts to open the lower button of her shirt. ]

Shashi : (Stunned) What are you doing Malati ?

[All the lights on the stage went out. The girl's half-mad giggling smile only pierced the darkness. The lights in the room came on. Shashi is at the window as before. The girl was not there. ]" <sup>5</sup>

In this play, Himadri once pulled out the past of Kartik's life. Himadri is a teacher by profession. He once also fell in love with Milli while working as a private tutor of her brother. But later he left the job of teaching her brother because he could not properly understand the behavior of the upper class people of the society. Mili was shocked by this incident and she also committed suicide in a state of extreme depression. The conversation between Himadri and Mili reveals the depressed mental condition of Mili. Such as---

"Milli : (In a blank voice) You can't stand me at all.

Himadri : That's not Milli, You know it's not. I didn't make the mistake of trying...

Milli : Try? You've tried to make me look good. You want me to fit into your world. If I turn a hair here and there, you have driven me away—

Himadri: Milli!

Milli : You got rid of me like a dog. I have tried to go back to you like a dog---I have begged -- and yet you have not tried to understand my world in one drop.

Himadri : Didn't I?

Milli : You didn't tolerate, you didn't forgive. Why would you? You have never loved me?" <sup>6</sup>

Badal Sarkar has shown that Malati, Lakshmi and Mili in this play have suffered from extreme frustration in life due to the deprivation of their lovers. Because Shashi sacrificed Malati, Himadri rejected Mili and Satu abandoned Lakshmi. Some unexpected circumstances in the lives of the women of this play have dragged the female characters of this play to make a terrible decision about their lives. For example—

"Lakshmi: I'll leave you—if you die. And--you drove me away.

Satu : I don't see any special chances. I swear you're healthy, you won't die quickly. And what will I do if I drive you out?

Lakshmi : Bhulua! Bhulu Bhulu Bhulua!" <sup>7</sup>

These are so many bad things for which the people feel themselves responsible. So they committed suicide due to a deep mental crisis. An essential element of this play is conflict. The interpersonal conflict of the characters is expressed literally in this play. And the interpersonal conflict of the characters is revealed through the characters like Shashi-Malati, Himadri-Mili and Satu-Lakshmi. This play is like a symbolic play. The four men in front of us who have come together for a girl's funeral are familiar with each other. They were enjoying some of the free drinks they had received at the time, and one by one they were telling stories of the heartlessness of their lives. All of them were unraveling the knot of a story in their lives. Like as--

"The Girl : Yes, Malati. You went to burn Malati's body, don't you remember? You and that virtuous friend of yours – Pradeep or Deepak, what is the name?

Shashi : Pradeep.

The Girl : Yes, Pradeep. Quite a bad name. There were others who were all crematoriums. Don't remember?

Shashi : Pradeep! A devil!

The Girl: (Laughing) yes, that's right! The devil! Not the devil? That's why Malati...

Shashi : (Turning) Malati!

Malati : No. No no no--

Shashi : Listen Malati:

Malati : No, no...

Shashi : Listen, Malati! Listen! In addition—

Malaty : No, I can't! I can't!

Shashi : (On his words) There is no other way, Malati, there is no way!

Malati : I can't! Now I can't do anything!

Shashi : This is the only way, Malati, there is no other way.

Malati : I can't do it now! I can't--

Shashi : But Malati, if you don't marry Pradeep...

Malati : (Moaning) No, no, don't tell me! Don't tell me! He doesn't matter anymore --" <sup>8</sup>

Every character in 'Pagla Ghoda' has a world of their past memories – which are finally buried in this play. The symbol of mad horse is actually used in this play as a symbol of the eternal exploitation of the dead girl. And the word 'girl' is revealed to the readers in a general sense and in a prominent collective sense. The girl is the representative of all women in society who are forced to live in a distressed society where they are oppressed, humiliated, tortured and suffered. Here Badal Sarkar has painted a picture of Malati's misery as social problems. Lakshmi's tears reveal her deep relationship with the four men in the play. And through the symbol of burning the dead body of the girl in the crematorium, the playwright presents the inner conflict and pain of the characters in front of the readers. The characters of the play 'Pagla Ghoda' have so talked about the complete love story and relationship. Using the name 'Pagla Ghoda' very cleverly, the playwright has reflected a bizarre and restless human mind by creating contemporary social conditions, economic conditions and life after death in modern life and attitude.

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