



## **PAGLA GHODA: PREDICAMENT OF WOMEN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The play Pagla Ghoda is about the life of human beings; the life which consists of such events and incidents as loving, not loving, staying together, making departure, the suffering, joy, sorrow, complex human relationships, and so on. The playwright, here, seems to analyse as well as determine the value and meaning of life. It is a play about a woman in male-dominated Indian society. It depicts the various phases in her life: her childhood, her growing years, her various relationships, her getting apart from that relationships, and her death.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Pagla Ghoda* written in 1967, is the only play of Sircar which totally deals with women question. He was about to leave Africa. His mind was pre-occupied with mixed feelings of nervousness for leaving Africa after several years of stay and eagerness for returning to motherland. It is during this emotional turmoil, sensitive phase, that he starts writing *Pagla Ghoda*.

Describing his mental state while writing this play, Sircar states: “Malti, Milli, Lachmi are living people for me now, I can see them in front of me. Have I ever really seen them as separate individuals? But little bits of them were there in all those others— Malti, Milli, Lachmi, and the women without name, who is all three of them in one. Himadri, Shashi, Satkari, Kartik— have I seen them? No. Are they coming through as men, as individual

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persons? Probably not. There's no need. I am not writing this play with the purpose of creating characters. Then what is my purpose? No purpose. No facts. No theory is being provoked here... Still I'm writing. And being able to **drown** in the process of writing, I feel as if I'm writing what is known to me. I know all this." And a month later, after completing the play, he writes: "*Pagla Ghoda* will remain one of my most favourite plays. I was totally immersed in it while writing it"( Sircar; Qtd. in Anjum 74)

In this play, Sircar has used surreal elements on a large scale. The setting of the play is a cremation ground at night. While waiting for the cremation of the corpse of a young woman who has killed herself, the four men entertain themselves by playing cards and drinking liquor. As the night advances, they share their love-stories which indirectly throw light on their guilt-consciousness. Actually, it is the spirit of the young, nameless girl that stimulates and also persuades them to tell their stories. In between, she laments over the total lack of any passion or love in her life. It is this emotional sterility, a barrenness that ultimately led her to commit suicide.

Shashi is a middle-class gentleman. He loves Malti who is supposed to be marrying his childhood friend Pradip. She genuinely requests him to marry her further telling him the fact sincerely that she cannot marry a person whom she does not love. Shashi can neither go against the current nor can break his friendship. Even her showing him of the evidence of physical abuse, Pradip has given her for narrating the fact that she is in love with Shashi and therefore, hate him (Pradip). To the arguments raised by Malti, Shashi remains helpless: 'You reject me just for this— for Pradip?...Just because you will lose face with him?'' His friendship, the older relationship between the two men— the brotherhood is more important for him than his love. He tries to console her saying: "Not with Pradip Malti. Myself. I will lose respect for myself. If I lose to myself like this and marry you, I will never be able to be happy myself and neither will I be able make you happy."

He not only refuses to marry Malti but compels her to marry Pradip saying, the thought that he came between her and his best friend will be preoccupied in his mind and will perturb him forever. Unable to change his point of view and to remove his ego, his self-esteem she gives up the relationship and returns to her hellish abode just to end herself. Contemplating on the situation, Shashi comes to the conclusion that not Malti's cruel husband but he himself is responsible for her death. He lives with the guilt and remorse. Sircar here denounces our high sounding moral stance that is totally hollow and hypocritical.

Himadri and Milli fell in love with each other. He is the youngest of the four men and used to work as a tutor to the Milli's brother. Class-consciousness remains the greatest barrier in their love matter, the culmination of which is marriage. Milli hails from a wealthy, Westernised

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family. ‘Tennis, swimming, driving, party-picnics’ is her life. He cannot accept her with her positive and negative traits. Instead, he remains highly critical of her habit of drinking. These cultural differences resulted from their distinct classes keep him away from committing fully to her. Her pleading and assuring that she will try her best to change herself as per his expectation, come to nothing. He leaves her once and forever even resigning the duty as a tutor. Broken-hearted, she meets a tragic accident for driving a car too fast under the influence of liquor. The love story again ends with the feeling of guilt and remorse.

Satu is a road-Romeo one amongst them— entertaining the friends with liquor, always ready with gross and daring comments. He is a contractor by profession. Possessing a natural lust to enjoy life, he neglects socio-cultural norms and dictates and therefore, has remained a bachelor. He boasts, “Why bother getting married when I can get the benefits without it?” He looks quite rough and tough in his appearance, way of talking and behaving which he makes no attempt to disguise. He also unveils his love-story to his friends.

Lachmi is the woman he rescued from enslavement. Now, she is in love with him and wants nothing better than serve and look after him. But he finds her a job and sends her to perform her duty. However, she comes to him for protection one night, clearly terrified, and pleads him to take her in. But he refuses telling her that he cannot possibly have her live with him being scared of ‘what people will say’ and sends her back.

“Is it fear of commitment that holds him back or fear of scandal? The next time he sees her, she is a corpse. She has died destitute, sick, alone. He is left with question— was it wrong to rescue her in the first place and raise her expectations? Was it wrong to entrust her to others? Again, guilt and responsibility, and the failure to love.” (Qtd. in Anjum 206)

The last one among the four is Kartik. He is a chemist, a compounder by profession. Early in the play, he shares an anecdote about a man who spent his whole life loving someone from her childhood to grown-up age. It was a one-sided love that remained undeclared. Later it is observed that the devoted lover is no one but Kartik himself, and the unnamed girl who is being cremated is his so-called beloved. Once she declares to Kartik her longing for death as she had nothing to live for. Being ignorant of Kartik’s love, she thinks that she neither loved nor is loved by anybody. So, there is no reason to continue such type of barren life. Shaken, he extracts a promise from her that she will wait for a week. However, within the week, he comes across the news of her suicide by strangling herself.

Kartik has lost his chance at love as well as that of making her feel to be loved. She dies without a satisfaction that someone was genuinely in love with her. This fact might have been proved an oasis for her to continue life. Kartik’s inability to express his passion of love may

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be either due to his inner weakness or the social restraints he himself had imposed on himself becomes the cause of their tragedy.

The plot of the play revolves round four men, who have gathered at the funeral of an unknown young woman who has killed herself for the cause of love. The play focuses on man-woman relationships and highlights the subjugation of women in a patriarchal system. It skilfully explores the relationships of men and women from four different socio-economic segments of society. Here, the playwright, quite obliquely suggests that regardless of education and background, men are the same, that is, quite rough and indifferent in their handling of passion, love, and women.

Like *Evam Indrajit*, *Baki Itihas*, *Shesh Nei*, this play also criticises middle class man's inability to break out society's norms and dare to take an anti-establishment stance, an emotional risk. The locale depicted is the middle class one and all the four women are emotionally honest and true to themselves, possessing a natural lust for life and also the courage to devote their life for the cause of love. Although the characters belong to the different strata of society, none of these characters emerge as multi-dimensional, neither the woman nor the men. On the other hand, all of them appear rather flat, one-dimensional. Sircar, like in many other plays, here remained fiercely critical for the Bengali middle class man's skin-defence tendency. Anjum Katyal's statement in this regard goes thus: "The play sets out to make a point—that Bengali middle-class men are social and emotional cowards, forever ruled by the fear of 'what others will think', and given no calculation rather than passion; and that as a result they do not have the capacity to truly love, since love demands passion, that one lose oneself in something much bigger than oneself." (Qtd. in Anjum 74)

The play is melodramatic in nature. Its theme is derived from a popular Bengali rhyme. *Pagla ghoda*, that is, a wild or mad horse signifies a force out of control, unpredictable and terrible in its untamed beauty. This force, which can shake one's existence, is repeatedly used by the spirit of the dead woman which shows her craze for the passion of love. All the women characters in the play symbolised by the image of *Pagla Ghoda* stand exact opposite to the careful, cautious men characters who do not dare to go against the current and take a risk in fear of social disapproval.

*Pagla Ghoda* throws light on Sircar's progressive, leftist ideology. It fiercely criticises the so-called cultured society where women are always taken for granted. All the four male characters in the play are the upholders of the conventional, exploitative social order following its norms and traditions, allowing themselves to be dictated by it. They are portrayed as severely calculating in their relationship at the cost of their hearts and desires. That is why they are ready to sacrifice the woman they love rather than to take a risk that may



cause scandal and outrage or result in creating turmoil in their life and ultimately result in losing their reputation.

It is observed that all the women in this play, in the matter of love remain bold, courageous, sincere, and devoted while all the four men appear hypocrite, coward and insincere. That is why all of them have betrayed women in their lives. These women are the perfect images of true love offering themselves unconditionally, daring to love without any reservation and ready to face the calamities and the ultimate consequences in the way as well. Each of them sacrifices her life for the noble cause of love. Contrary to it, the men are portrayed as idiosyncratic individuals with their distinct characters sharing stories and experiences, teasing each other, playing cards and drinking together, that is also at the cremation of the corpse of a young woman who faces a tragic death.

Malti, Milli, and Lachmi, although belong to different locale could be interchangeable. They are the witnesses of womankind's endless suffering in the male-dominated society. All of them die for the cause of love. Milli is somewhat distinct from the other three in the sense that she shows a hint of boldness in the way of living life and in facing death also. The overwhelming impression created in the play "is that love, and a relationship with a man, is the only thing that gives value to a woman's life. She is incomplete, empty, of no value, unless a man ascribes her value by claiming her... In this play women are modern enough to aspire to romantic love, and to express their desire to their men, but they remained defined by what the men are not— they are indicative of a lack in the male." (Qtd. in Anjum 208)

While speaking about the female characters in the play Sibaji Bandyopadhyay states: "Sircar's treatment of women is a repetition of a very old paradigm which is part and parcel of Bengal's modernity. The entire scheme of modernity of Bengal was articulated through the figure of the woman. So, the woman is in most cases a kind of storehouse of various desires— an empty signifier." (Bandyopadhyay; Qtd. in Anjum 208)

The character of the fourth woman— who remains unnamed— is distinct a little bit from the other in the sense that she remains present throughout the play. It is she who constantly persuades the four men to tell the stories of their life and compels them revisiting their memories, making them introspective and leaving them with the sense of guilt. Her constant invoking of the *Pagla ghoda* metaphor, that is, the wild horse of untamed passion, shows her unfulfilled desire of love. It is only after death, she comes to know that someone was in genuine love with her. She meets the *Pagla ghoda* in the journey from where no return is possible.



Throughout the play, there is a powerful plea for women, that is, to treat them as human beings. Although their depiction is one-dimensional as the pathetic, suffering figure, they leave the spectators disturbed. Sircar has provided a commentary on many burning issues in the life of women. The institution of marriage is attacked which, in many cases gives men license to mistreat women. It is also observed that financial dependency is responsible for the exploitation of women to a large extent. To conclude the discussion in the words of G.J.V. Prasad: "In *Pagla Ghoda*, you don't have a play about what men do to men, which is vintage Sircar, but what men do to women. Thus, it has a unique place in Sircar's oeuvre." (Prasad; Qtd. in Anjum 208)

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