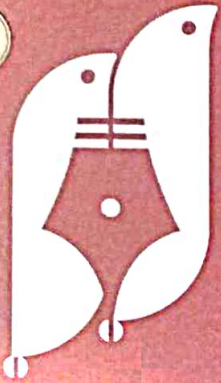


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ABSURDITY AND IDENTIFY CRISIS IN BADAL SIRCAR'S *EVAM INDRAJIT*

□ Mrs. L. Muthulakshmi*
Dr. M. P. Ganesan**

ABSTRACT

The term *Indian drama in English* refers to both plays written in English and plays written in other Indian regional languages and translated into English. Writing in English, the language of colonial rulers, has often been considered as politically unacceptable in independent India in a typical reactionary postcolonial situation. Rama Sharma points out: "Any play written in India in English has an inherent disadvantage in the sense that it is not very often staged. Stage worthiness being a basic test for a play.... most of the plays written in English do not fulfil this requirement" (IV).

Keywords : Absurd, Meaninglessness, Futility, disappointment

Badal Sircar, a trained engineer, began his dramatic career in the late 1950s with some domestic comedies and science fiction fantasies based on popular Hollywood films such as *Monkey Business*. He has written his plays to entertain his friends at a club called 'chakra,' which means serious group of people who did not take the theatre too seriously.

Evam Indrajit depicts the youth's passion, ambition and frustration quite accurately. It addresses the existential question as well as the urban youth of the 1960s. In the play, both characters, 'Indrajit' and 'Writer,' are constantly searching for their life's purpose and do not find anything worth living or writing about. Indrajit is an angry young man in the first act, a rebel who does not want to be controlled by the so-called norms of society, but as the play progresses, he succumbs to the pressures of the social system. Indrajit marries another girl and bears the weight of meaningless existence. Still, his awareness of the world in which he lives, as well as his independent existence in the callous social system, is a source of great concern. The play concludes with the

remark that there is no destination, only the road. One must maintain hope and make consistent efforts.

Badal Sircar projects the modern life-in-death attitude through contemporary situations and social problems. His dramatic career began with some comedies and culminated in 1965 with his celebrated work *Evam Indrajit*. Many of his plays are about a sense of utter meaninglessness in human existence. His main concern is the psyche of the Bengali middle class. Sircar's subsequent plays address various aspects of modern life, ranging from the man-woman relationship to social and political evils. The choice of middle-class people as characters in the drama, the revelation of hidden social and moral evils, an attempt to remove people's complacency and a change in dramatic technique are the main characteristics of Sircar's plays.

Sircar has also painted a realistic picture of modern society. The issues of population growth, unemployment, poverty and child labour are presented in an engaging manner. He has stylized society's ills. Badal Sircar's play *Evam Indrajit* is a watershed moment in Indian theatre

*(Reg No: MKU20PFOL9891) - Part time PhD Research Scholar in English, Sourashtra College, (Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University), Madurai, Tamil Nadu

**Assistant Professor - PG and Research Department of English, Sourashtra College, Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

history. Some European and American playwrights, such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Albert Pinter and Edward Albee, wrote plays in the 1950s and early 1960s that expressed metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human existence by focusing on the instability, meaninglessness and unpredictability of human life. "The term 'Absurd' denotes uncertainty of man's life. Sircar's characters struggle to gain something in life and try to find the meaning of life".

Evam Indrajit is a theatrical manifestation of all the approaches, trends, feelings and undefined annoyances that trouble the heart of the educated urban middle class. The rationally alive urban middle class sees itself as the country's vertebrae. Their so-called middle-class values have been overvalued, while those who follow trendy Marxist canons have always attacked their authentic and deeper values. The middle classes have been made to feel guilty for preferring stability, pursuing customs and believing in national identity.

Evam Indrajit is about the remnants in some ways; the remnants are those who have failed to regulate line up and stop aspiring, as well as those who are entangled in the day-to-day struggle for existence. When asked in an interview whether he has considered *Evam Indrajit* to be a political play or an existential play, Badal Sircar states that he has never considered the play to be a political play and was unaware of the philosophy of existentialism. According to Natesan Sharda Iyer,

Badal Sircar is against the theatre being a commodity for sale to the audience resulting in the detachment between the player and the spectator. He has always argued in favour of spectators being an integral part of the theatre... to him theatre is a live wire and its strength lies in direct communication. (287)

The play depicts the emptiness and futility of a pseudo-modern existence. *Evam Indrajit* is essentially about the emptiness of modern life, where 'life' in the modern criteria becomes a repeated response, with originality being the real casualty. The play continues to imply that our existence is a futile speck of dust. The central character Indrajit's dreams, anguish and disappointment in the play develop the theme of identity

crisis. The narrator-cum-philosopher and Writer, is a character in the play, who becomes involved in the play and successfully attempts to create a plot as the play progresses.

The play begins with Writer's predicament, in which he laboriously tries in vain to write a play. He is motivated to write only about those who belong to the middle class society because he has not witnessed life at its most basic levels. He continues to write without satisfaction and tears off whatever he writes. Finally, he is inspired by a girl named Manasi, who is literally the creation of the mind. Manasi is Jung's anima's Indian counterpart, an individual who serves as a baton to the collective consciousness. Following Manasi's advice, he abruptly turns towards the audience and calls out to four latecomers, asking them to join him on stage. They identify themselves as Amal Kumar Bose, Vimal Kumar Ghosh, Kamal Kumar Sen and Nirmal Kumar when he asks. Writer refuses to reveal the fourth's name because he believes that the fourth conceals his identity. He suddenly yells and asks the fourth to tell him his real name. Nirmal Kumar finally reveals his identity as Indrajit Ray and his age is thirty-five and thanks to the Writer's persistence.

Indrajit is considered an outlier. He wishes to challenge the system and break the taboos. He is persuaded to consider suicide because he is unable to complete all of these tasks. Amal wishes Writer's luck as he discusses his plans to write a social play based on the four members' real-life experiences. Vimal suggests that Writer makes Indrajit the hero of the play and the other three soldiers. The play's fictitious heroine, Manasi, is introduced by the author. Writer immediately asks Indrajit to tell his story. When Indrajit struggles to begin the story, Writer instructs him to tell the story of his relationship with Manasi. Indrajit introduces the girl as his cousin and informs him that she is not named Manasi. When Writer inquires whether the girl is a friend or not, Indrajit responds that she is a good friend to him and that he feels happy after speaking with her. The setting shifts to a public park, where Indrajit and Manasi sit on the green grass. The conversation of the two begins with the rules and regulations imposed by society. Indrajit

considers social rules to be absurd. When Manasi tells him that girls must follow the rules but boys do not, Indrajit says she worships the rope that binds her. He wishes to demolish all the ramparts between them.

When Manasi questions Indrajit about his rage against the rules, he responds that if he hasn't tasted the fruit of knowledge, he could have continued living in the paradise of this blessed society of rules. He can only hit his head against the wall then. At the end of their discussion about the rules, Indrajit describes himself as an ordinary boy in society and expresses his desire to marry Manasi, stating that it should be no problem if an ordinary boy marries an ordinary girl. The scene shifts to an office where Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit anxiously await the interview call. They're well-dressed and solemn. A bell rings and Amal gets up and walks in. He smiles at the invisible interviewers sitting in the chairs. He then sits in front of them on the chair and begins answering questions silently. Meanwhile, outside the chamber, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit are seen eagerly awaiting their summons. Next, Kamal criticizes the Indian concept of punctuality as: "They asked us to come at eleven. And the hurra sahib turned up at twelve to interview us" (219).

When Kamal inquires about the number of interviews Indrajit has attended, he responds that he has attended five. Writer eventually joins them as an interviewee. When Kamal questions Writer about his tardiness to the interview, he explains that he had an interview in the morning at another office and thus arrived late for the current one. The writer then continues to tell Indrajit about the importance of a job in his life and describes the difficult situation he is in:

WRITER: ... when two interviews clash like this, I can't sleep nights. You don't know how much I need a job.

INDRAJIT: (smiles) We all need one.

WRITER: That's true enough. Generally, everyone needs a job. But I need it particularly badly. The fact is - I have hired a flat - borrowed some money for it. After all, one doesn't get a flat with all conveniences easily. This one is not a beauty but at least it has an independent water closet.

INDRAJIT: I'm sorry - I don't follow you.
WRITER: the point is - I have got married without my father's permission. If I don't get a job this month, I'll lose the flat. You understand, don't you?
How long can one keep a flat on borrowed money?
(221)

After seven years, Writer and Indrajit reunite in Act II. When Writer asks Indrajit where he's been all those years; in Bhopal or elsewhere, Indrajit responds that he was in Bhopal at first, but after a year moved to Bombay, Jullunder, Meerut and then Udaipur because his job was transferable. When Indrajit inquires about Amal, Vimal and Kamal, the Writer responds that they are all well, have jobs, are married and own homes. Writer inquires about Manasi after learning that Indrajit is not yet married. Indrajit responds that Manasi is also fine, that she has a job, that their friendship is only on paper and that they meet once a year in Calcutta. K. V. Surendran points out: "The society does not want a man to marry a woman of his choice and it also has different rules earmarked for men and women... The society it seems is especially unkind to the problems of women for which it has its own separate yardsticks" (107).

The setting shifts back to a public park, where Indrajit and Manasi are sitting on the green grass. Indrajit informs Manasi that this is his final meeting with her before departing for abroad. When Manasi tries to persuade Indrajit to reconsider going abroad, Indrajit reveals the reason, saying that he is tired and exhausted in the current world.

Indrajit's frustration and exhaustion are evocative of the unhappiness and gloominess of educated people, who are forced to yield to their circumstances despite their creative mind and repulsive mood. Amal, Kamal and Vimal are seen playing cards as Act III begins. The writer then approaches them, claiming to have received a letter from Indrajit the day before. They request that Writer read the letter because they are curious about what he has written. The writer reads the letter while the three continue to play cards silently. Indrajit says:

Calcutta, London. Everything goes round and round like a wheel. Still it's not a proper wheel, it's spiral. And that precisely is the tragedy the tragedy

of knowing. I catch something. And just when I understand it, it suddenly ends and I throw it away. Then again I grab at something else. Still the hope for a sudden, unexpected, wonderful happening doesn't die. One continues to feel that this isn't all. Some time something must happen to fill the world with a dazzling light, throwing the past into obscurity. What a silly dream. The sleep ends-but not the hangover of the dream. (239)

Indrajit then enters and takes a seat beside the Writer. In his approach to life, he becomes a little idealistic. Indrajit's annoyance causes him to ponder over philosophical ideas. Indrajit then introduces Manasi to Writer as his wife and Writer to Manasi as an old friend. When Indrajit's wife exits the stage, Writer pulls him aside and inquires about Manasi, with whom he had previously formed a friendship. Indrajit reveals that she is in Hazaribagh and that he meets her on occasion. When Writer inquires as to where they meet and what they discuss, he replies: "In that park. Under that tree... The same things as usual. About me and her" (244).

Indrajit reveals to Manasi about his mental state, revealing that he is tired and frustrated and no longer wants to walk on the roads of unhappiness because there is no way out in life. When Manasi tries to motivate Indrajit by citing the successful lives of Amal, Vimal and Kamal as examples, Indrajit responds slowly and softly as below:

INDRAJIT: Manasi, they are happy. They have something to look forward to. A hope - an ambition - a dream

MANASI: You don't?

INDRAJIT: No.

MANASI: Didn't you ever have one? You don't?

INDRAJIT: Oh yes, I had. I was myself. I had accepted that I had to do something. Didn't know what, but something unusual, important, unprecedented. I used to dream then of coming up like a shooting star shattering the sky into shivers-coming up filling the sky with light from one corner to another-coming up and up until the fire in one burnt down to ashes and only a momentary flame remained in the sky... (248-249)

Indrajit tells Manasi that he has dreamed because he couldn't accept his ordinariness, but now he accepts it. Indrajit, who considers himself to be an ordinary man in society, finally shakes off his name and introduces himself as 'Nirmal Kumar Ray'. When Writer tells Indrajit that if he changes his name, he won't be able to finish the play, Sircar effectively describes the predicament of modern man who is trapped in a situation from which he has no way out. According to Hindu mythology, he is trapped in a 'chakravyuham'. Chakravyuham means:

The Chakravyūha or Padmavyūha was a very special formation (vyuha) and knowledge of how to penetrate it was limited to only a handful of warriors on the Pandavas' side, namely: Abhimanyu, Arjuna, Krishna and Pradyumna, of whom only Abhimanyu was present when the Kauravas used it on the battlefield. (Wikipedia)

Indrajit makes every effort to be an exception to the rule, but he eventually realizes that he cannot exist without being a part of the existing system. He tries to stand out from the crowd. Indrajit, like the mythical rebel Meghnad, stands against the entire communal setup and system and bravely opposes the rules and taboos. He actually represents the dejected and frustrated young men who, despite their high educational qualifications and middle-class social standing, move from place to place in search of some reputable job. K. Nirupa Rani points out:

The Indian mind is always fond of attributing the finer thing of national culture and even the cruder things to a hoary past, to the days of the Gods. The central character of the play 'Indrajit' has all the qualities that one can easily identify in the mythical Indrajit. Indrajit here figures as a true representative of the author's own age, an arrogant, adventurous spiteful man, a dangerous combination who realizes at the age of thirty-five. (287)

Sircar's characters are thrust into a world rife with corruption, unemployment and meaninglessness. They will always be alone and suffer from existential loneliness. It appears that the characters are born without their wishes and suffer from the world's temporariness, meaninglessness and pointlessness. They suffer from

existential agony as a result of the modern world's bureaucracy and corruption.

The play has brought him the worldwide fame as a dramatist. As it is already said, Indrajit, the writer searches in vain for a valid subject to write a play, but he could not find so. It is symbolic of nothingness in the play. In the upcoming chapter, the researcher has focused on the oppression, identity crisis, violence against the Santhal tribes during the colonial era. Sircar has reflected light on how the tribes have immensely suffered in the cruel clutches of the Britishers. *Stale News* is a play that remains quite different from *Evam Indrajit* in content. Sircar, with the help of his Third Theatre has used living newspaper technique to bring the victimized and ruined stories of Santhals in our county. B.Charanya observes Badal Sircar dramatic techniques thus: "the collage form, chorus, use of gestures, voices, living newspaper technique and brevity of dialogues are the important dramatic techniques" (88).

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