



EVAM INDRAJIT: A STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

DR. SHAILAJ B. WADIKAR

Professor of English
SLLCS, S R T M University, Nanded
(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Sircar's early plays such as Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas, Trigsha Shatabdi and Pagala Ghoda display his exceptional strength as an avant-garde playwright. The plays explore man's consciousness towards his existential responsibilities, his profound sense of guilt for turning away from them and leading an alienated life. Sircar thinks that the social relevance of a play, for a sincere writer, is quite automatic.

In *Evam Indrajit* Sircar successfully tried to give the banality of everyday life a dramatic garb. The exploration of the theatrical quality of everyday life, the assigning of different roles to the same character were new experiences for the Indian theatre which often dealt with traditional characterization. The play left the audience disturbed and spell-bound with its central issue: that the problem in the contemporary life is not to live or to die but to endure. That is why the play has ended with a message that to be among the living is to be living.

Writing about Badal Sircar's Evam Indrajit is like going on a sentimental journey; a nostalgic foray into the recent past of the Indian theatre; an encounter with the bitter sweet memories of a struggling sensibility trying to strike roots in a barren land; because, after all, it is only in relation to Indian theatre history that Evam Indrajit really makes its presence felt.
(Dubey i)

The play *Evam Indrajit* is a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama. Indrajit, the central character in the play, becomes the spokesman of the young generation of the 1960s since, in him, the contemporary youths discover all their aspirations, compromises as well as the sense of hopelessness and futility which ultimately result in the feeling of anguish and depression. Rustom Bharucha has linked this play to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. (Bharucha 133) For Satyadev Dubey, *Evam Indrajit* is about the residue of the middle class, "Who



have failed to adjust, align and ceased to aspire and also those who are enmeshed in the day-to-day struggle for survival.”(Dubey ii)

Indrajit has withdrawn himself from the conventional society. He is angry, serious, frustrated, iconoclastic young man who represents the predicament of the middle class alienated man in an amoral, soulless society. The life portrayed here is absurd illogical, and irrational. The protagonist believes firmly that human life starts and ends in nothingness. So, he is confused with the questions: “Why should one carry on? What is there beyond the path?” The answer to these questions is given by the Writer who performs the role similar to that of a commentator.

Walk on. Be on the road! We are the cursed spirits of Sisyphus. We have to push the rock to the top— even if it just rolls down.” (59)

However, the more the Writer ties him (Indrajit) up in a plot with the chains of Acts, the more he escapes saying—“it isn’t real.” According to K. Venkata Reddy, “The play is a theatrically effective and crystallized projection of the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations, growing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class.” (Reddy 58-59)

The play starts with the Writer in the search of a theme to write a play. He is not able to write for the simple reason that he has ‘nothing to write about.’ However, Manasi encourages him to write a play. The Writer suddenly turns towards the audience and calls out to four late-comers and asks them to come on to the stage. As the four give their names as Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal, he does not accept the name of the fourth, Nirmal. So, he says: “No, it can’t be. You must have another name.” (4)

Nirmal ultimately confesses that he is actually Indrajit, the name of the mythical rebel, Meghnad, Ravana’s son, who defeated Indra, the Indian zeus. He called himself Nirmal because “he was scared of unrest, one invites unrest by breaking the norm.” (5) “From this point in the play, the Writer takes over like a ubiquitous and omniscient presence, probing the lives of Amal, Vimal, Kamal, and Indrajit.” (Dubey iii)

The play comprises three acts. They depict the three major phases of the lives of Amal, Vimal, and Kamal. The first act portrays their education, hobbies, pastimes and other things that characterize their college life. The second act describes their settlement with job and marriage. Their aspirations and/or ambitions get fulfilled in the third act: Amal gets a promotion as a manager in the ABC Company, Vimal buys a plot and builds a house there, and Kamal starts business to earn more money.

Indrajit is in love with Manasi and wants to marry her. But they cannot become the life-companion since she is his cousin on mother’s side. He remains always conscious that he is Indrajit and different from his other companions. He wants to visit London for he believes



that this visit will liberate him from the humdrum existence and banality of life. He is a rebel who wants to change the society drastically. Quite proudly, he tells Manasi: “If I hadn’t tasted the fruit of knowledge, I could have gone on living in this paradise of your blessed society of rules. Now I can only batter my head against the wall.” (23) To change his way of life, he goes on changing the places of his job from Calcutta to Bhopal, Bhopal to Bombay, Jullunder, Meerut and Udaypur. Manasi follows the taboo of society and does not accept his proposal for marriage. She settles in Calcutta as a school teacher. However, they are in touch with each other by writing letters and meeting once a year in Calcutta. He visits London but remains unsuccessful to change his life. After his return, he marries another Manasi and enjoys himself in his marital life. He becomes one of the middle class men who are contented with their normal do-to-day life. He tells Manasi about his family: “My wife looks after the house. I work in the office. My wife goes to a film. I go with her. My wife goes to her parents’ house. I eat in the restaurant; She comes back. I go marketing.” (54) Quite unconsciously, he falls into the whirlwind of banal life that he has tried hard to shun. His marital life gives him a sad realization that he is not different from others. He illustrates his disillusionment to Manasi: “So long as I couldn’t accept my ordinariness. I dreamt. Now I accept itManasi don’t call me Indrajit. I am Nirmal. Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal.” (58-59) He calmly listens to the Writer’s existential philosophy: “Walk. Be on the road! For us, there is only the road. We shall walk....We are the cursed spirits of Sisyphus. (59)

The play *Evam Indrajit*, thus, conveys the central doctrine of existentialist philosophy: “Existence precedes essence.” (Asolkar 18) K. Venkata Reddy, Veena Noble Dass and Eakambaram are all agreed in calling *Evam Indrajit* an absurd play. Eakambaram views it as an Indian version of *Waiting for Godot*. (Babu 95) The character of Indrajit represents the angry young man belonging to the “lost generation” frustrated with the contemporary life and unable to do anything against its banality. The play ends with his realization that he is not different from others and life remains the same whether one is abroad or in India.

The play *Evam Indrajit* centres round the eponymous character Indrajit. He refuses to accept society as it is and desperately tries to search the right path to follow. Amal, Vimal, Kamal, Nirmal and Indrajit are prototypical characters. The first four are delineated as caught in the web of meaningless, self-centered, and uneventful existence and, therefore, accept everything as it comes without raising a question. Indrajit is somewhat exceptional, since he wants to rebel against senseless obedience and conformity. But in his brave encounter with the bitter realities of life, he becomes exhausted and somewhat frustrated. “At the end of the play, however, he emerges as an undaunted individual. Unable to discover an ideological solution to the problems, Indrajit chooses the road rather than the destination.” (Sarkar xv)

Indrajit is the representative of the urban middle-class that considers itself as the backbone of the country. The play makes these middle-class spectators introspective and renders them to



feel guilty for opting for stability, aspiring for culture and believing in a national identity. The play is hailed as a 'mile stone' as it reflects a modern voice of protest, an-anti-heroic mode, and a concern for realism that were all novel in the 1960s in Indian theatre.

Indrajit is unhappy, with the life around and is therefore, critical in his attitude towards life. He is reluctant to follow the norms of bourgeois culture. He wants to change the life but fails in his attempt. Feeling too much frustrated and dejected, he unsuccessfully attempts to commit suicide. This sense of self-destruction, of senseless wastage in the urban society, and a protest against it are the themes of the play.

The play is absurd in nature. K. Venkata Reddy states "...*Evam Indrajit*... was spontaneously received by the theatrical community in Bengal which discovered in the protagonist of the play, Indrajit, all their dreams and compromises and moments of hopelessness and futility. The play makes the point that "nothing worth mentioning ever happens," (41) the kind of feeling we get when we witness a typical 'absurd' play like...Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*." (Reddy 58)

The play-goers greet the play very profoundly, since it dramatizes the contemporary problems, they are facing—a significant social tension, the failure of man to solve his problems, his incapacity to adjust himself with the fast-changing materialistic society. In Indrajit's revolt against the norms of society, they have explored the realities of their circumstances. Satyadev Dubey rightly points out: The yearnings and dissatisfaction of an adolescent Indrajit or his insistence on an existence beyond geography are feelings that the educated middle class mind has known often. His love for Manasi, the taboo attached to it, his wanting to break the taboo and failing to accomplish the tasks he sets before himself, his anger at the state of affairs and his total inability to do anything are again common experiences in India....He finds our mean little world ridiculous.....Then comes a stage when he realizes that even the fulfillment of his love would not have provided the answer. A visit to London proves disappointing. He contemplates suicide as an act of faith, but finds himself incapable of the act. (Dubey iii-iv)

Indrajit's marriage with another Manasi indicates his adjustment and compromise with life. The earlier Manasi is still his friend. He narrates his marital life to her which is similar to the lives of the middle class people in society. To quote Satyadev Dubey again:

Indrajit finds himself at parallel railway tracks on either side—tracks with an illusory meeting point...the train does not come on these tracks any more....He does not believe in his dreams any more, but he has now come to the bitter awareness that they were just dreams dreamt by a person who thought that he had the potential but in fact is a very ordinary person—he is Nirmal. (Dubey iv-v)



The Writer is persuaded by Manasi to write a play only about those who at that moment are sitting in the auditorium. However, he finds himself unable to write since he realizes that life is too chaotic and fragmentary to cohere into a dramatic mould and too mechanical to have any meaning. His agony is the agony of the artist who is deeply aware of the sterility and horror of life.” “Badal Sircar, like T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, offers no hope. The protagonist of the play ultimately meets with only despair, the key-note which is struck at the beginning itself.” (Reddy 59)

In the initial stages, the Writer, actually grows hopeful of having found a hero for his play since Indrajit appears to him quite different from his fellow-companions Amal, Kamal and Vimal. He rejects to follow the beaten track of the middle class people in society. The Writer conceives him to be a perfect protagonist of his play and sincerely strives to explore something meaningful in his life as it grows through his college days, his youthful love for a girl and his revolt against the whole set of social and moral convention. Amal, Vimal, and Kamal willingly become the cogs in the wheels and consequently, being with the current, flourish materially. Being different from them, Indrajit isolates himself from the norms of society and rejected the pleasures and happiness that the world offers him and further resists becoming a cog in the wheel as long as he can. But in his life, he cannot follow the dictum “rest not till the goal is achieved” and he cannot keep himself lingering behind, for he believes: “There is always a room on the top”. In his desperate, frantic efforts to find meaning of existence he gets exhausted. Ultimately, he plods homewards his weary way since to toss from side to side on the sleepless bed, now becomes impossible for him. His failure in committing suicide makes him realize the harsh, undeniable reality of life: that being a tiny particle of this vast cosmos, he has to continue his painful journey on the endless road. He “is quick to see the Sisyphus analogy and the play ends with an assertion that goes beyond logic and reaches out to us like a cry for help from a drowning man with a sense of the essential and inescapable sadness of life.” (Dubey v) Indrajit, like Beckett’s Godot, is an eternal question mark.” (Reddy 62) But Beckett ends his play at “waiting” while Sircar is determined to continue “searching”.

The play is open-ended. The audience leaves the theatre not with a calm, pacified mind but with a disturbed mind. So, towards the end of the play is the beginning of the audience’s consciousness. And continuation of the same theme is found in Sircar’s succeeding play *Procession*. “Khoka is Indrajit’s alter ego and the Old Man is almost a ‘replica’ of the ‘Writer’. Indrajit and the Writer of *Evam* continue to be on the road even in *Procession*.” Moreover, what the Writer says: “Its end is its beginning” (59), proves prophetic since its ‘end’ has found a new beginning for it in one of the subsequent plays *Procession*. (Bhattacharjee 126-27)



Similarly, it is observed that the characteristic attitude of Indrajit is found in majority of central characters in Sircar's plays. They appear to be caught in the web of enigmatic questions. They do not turn away from the problems. However, till the end, they remain undecided about the course of action they have to take. That is why Indrajit listens to the advice of the Writer to "be on the road"; Kumar of *Sarkas* finally concentrates on his research, and Sharad of *Baki Itihas* gives up his thought of committing suicide after hearing the news of his promotion to the post of an assistant professor.

The play *Evam Indrajit* resembles an absurd play even in its use of language. The dialogues in the play are repetitive and cynical. "Thus, the theme, the technique, and the language of *Evam Indrajit* link it with Absurd Drama....The protagonist...searches for meaning in his life but finds, as in Sartre's *No Exit*, that there is no escape from ordinary life. Even when one is sincerely to be an Indrajit, one has got to end up as Nirmal....It is not for nothing that it has been said that *Evam Indrajit* is *Waiting for Godot* in Indian Theatre." (Reddy 64)

WORKS CITED

1. Asolkar, Sharad. "Asitwawad ani Sartre." *Yugwani*, edited by Sharad Kolarkar, May 1980.
2. Babu, Manchi Sarat. "Physical Deformity." *Indian Drama Today: Study in the Theme of Cultural Deformity*. Prestige, 1997.
3. Bharucha, Rustom. *Rehearsals of Revolution: The Political Theatre of Bengal*. Seagull, 1983.
4. Bhattacharjee, Shampa. *Badal Sircar's Street Plays: A Thematic Study*. An M. Phil Dissertation, submitted to Kaktiya University, Warangal. 1994.
5. Dubey, Satyadev. Introduction. *Three Modern Indian Plays: Tughlaq, Evam Indrajit, Silence! The Court is in Session*, translated by Girish Karnad and Priya Adarkar, OUP, 1989.
6. Reddy, K. Venkata. "Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* as an Absurd Play." *New Directions in Indian Drama*, edited by Sudhakar Pandey and Freya Barua, Prestige, 1994.
7. Sarkar, Subhendu. Introduction. *Two Plays: Indian History Made Easy, Life of Bagala*, by Badal Sircar, OUP, 2010.

(N. B. All textual quotations are from *Three Modern Indian Plays*. OUP, 1989.)