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Socio- Cultural transformation in the play of Badal Sircar's Evam Indrajit

¹ G. Kiran Kumar Reddy & ²P.Nagarjuna

¹Head of the English Department, RGM CET – Nandyal , Kurnool District – Andhra Pradesh

²Degree Lecturer in English, CSTS GOVT COLLEGE, Jangareddygudem, West Godhavari Dist,

¹kiran.mokshita@gmail.com, ²nagarjunarenu@gmail.com

Abstract

Badal Sircar was one of the poignant writers in Indian English Drama. Sircar created Third theatre. He was contemporary to Mohan Rakesh as well as Girish Karnad. His plays were full of truths, which existed in India. He portrayed his characters as realistic in his own plays. Sircar's play Evam Indrajit emphasized on the agony of youth. Indrajit, manasi were central characters in this play. The play, Evam Indrajit picturized about the lives of middle class. It highlighted various issues like job, marriage, unemployment, stichomythic elements and Individual life. Scores of Indian street Theatre fans gathered and paid obeisance to the plays of sircar. His fame was an everlasting one in the Indian Drama.

Full Chapter

Evam Indrajit was first produced in Bengali in Calcutta in September 1965. In English Girish Karnad's translated play was staged by Madras players in madras in 1970. As Satyadev Dubey rightly remarks that "theatre practitioners all over India become aware of a major talent and major play. The play provided for them the shock of their recognition. It was about the Indian reality as he knew it, it was theatrically effective and crystallized."¹ Evam Indrajit became an expression of the modern Indian situation. It has perhaps lost its sheen in a globalized age. With youngsters who are fortified in many ways than their ancestors were. It is about the urban youth of the sixties then. In 1960s period there were no jobs in India. Youth craved for jobs. They struggled for livelihood. Badal Sircar did not merely scribble about the coming of age of four friends, he actually wrote about the vagaries of existence itself. It is a quality which makes the play a true classic, eternal in scope and magnitude. Kamal, Amal, Vimal, Evam Indrajit are all after protagonists of the twenty-first century. Evam Indrajit states on the one hand traces the story of four friends. Their trials and trivials from 18 to 35 living in urban middle class India. It also highlights the struggle of a writer who wants to write play about these four friends ².

Through the story of these friends the play shows all the prevalent attitudes. Vague feelings and undefined frustrations gnawing the hearts of the educated urban middleclass. The universal theme of the play is even in more relevant in today's time and age. The theme of search for greatness in mediocrity and following ones dreams without conforming to the rules, touches every one's hearts. Badal Sircar's plays deal with the theme of the political as well as structure. The critics treated them as serious political plays and not humorous parodies of life situations. Badal sircar was against an expensive theatre production. So he always minimized the cost on the sets. Apart from conveying political and social messages through his plays in a subtle and aesthetic manner, he had another principle he thinks that theatre belongs to the actor.

Each actor in the play had a dual role to play, one as the specific character and one as the representative of the class that he belonged to what was the significance of the play? What was Sircar trying to portray in his play? The times when he wrote the play were the sixties. At that time there was a worldwide angst among the young generate especially the students about their educational curriculum job opportunities and the kind of life they were expected to live.

"In 1960s student revolt emerged in paris and also the student uprising in Tiananmen Square. The routines and the resultant frustration of the younger people's agonies where highlighted in this play. Younger people were confused and disoriented"³. According to the census of 1961, the population of Calcutta 2,92,12,891 of them about two and half percent are graduates. They are known by different names. They are the middle income group, although within that group there is enough disparity of income. They are the intellectuals, although if they really relied on their intellect they would die of starvation. They are educated minority, if a degree is indeed a mark of education. They are the elite, because they are well aware of their difference from the rest. They are Amal, Vimal, Kamal, and Indrajit ⁴. Amal, Vimal and Kamal form the background for this. They follow the routine life for granted and try to overcome their joylessness by being busy of performing the things that their civilized life demands. But Indrajit, resembles the mythical character, the son of Ravana. He defeats Indra, the Hindu Zeus, who is a rebel. He feels boredom with routine and mundane life. He, therefore, can not find any joy in it and wants to be different in order to overcome his joylessness. As the play begins, writer searches for a theme to write a play but finds none. Manasi is a heroine in this play. She advises him to write about four middle class people who come late, so he invites them onto the stage. He asks for their names. They are Amal, Vimal, kamal and Indrajit. Auntie approaches him and ask him to have his meal. He refuses to have. This play consists three acts. Three acts portray the three major stages of the lives of Amal, Vimal and Kamal. The first act deals with their studies, examinations, hobbies, pastimes and other things that characterize their college life. They get jobs and marry in the second act. In the third act we find that they have various ambitions in their life and achieve them in the third act. Amal gets a promotion as a manager in ABC company, Vimal, purchases a plot and builds a house there, and Kamal involves in business to earn more money. Indrajit loves Manasi, she is his first cousin on his mother's side and he wants to marry Manasi. It is a taboo society won't accept it. Indrajit wants to

visit London he believes that it will liberate him from the banality of life. His awareness of the ennui of life which Amal, Vimal, Kamal lack makes him rebellious and restless.

He tells in a haughty manner, to Manasi : “If I hadn’t tasted the fruit of knowledge I could have gone on living this paradise of your blessed society of rules. Now I can batter my head against the wall”⁵.

He changes his job from Calcutta to Bhopal. Then he gets a transferable job and goes to Bombay, Jullunder, Merrut and Udaypur. Manasi doesn’t accept to marry him against the taboo. She becomes a school teacher in Calcutta. He visits London but this does not change his life in any way. Then he marries another Manasi and leads marital life. He narrates about his family to Manasi. My wife looks after the house. I would in the Office. My wife goes to a film, I go with her. My wife goes to her parents house. I eat in a restaurant. She come back. I go marketing. Thus he falls into the whirlpool. Of banal life that he has striven hard to shun. He realizes at last that he is not different from others.

Evam Indrajit captures the spatial patterns of the anonymous existence. Patterned in the routine everyday life in a more coherent manner. The rapid movement of the wheel which images the routine flattens the distinction between the beginning and the end and perpetuates a sense of deadness. The routine recognizes no distinctions between people but tends to repeat and produces multi reflections of the same profile and the same situation.

Significantly, nothing concrete is allowed to develop in the Indrajit- Manasi relationship or in any aspect of life. What determines existence is the present concrete desire “I just do what I feel like doing at the moment”, says Indrajit having struggled in vain to emerge from this barren existence⁶.

Since nothing on this stage supposes engagement or development, the play is an endless succession of isolated notes of similar texture. The deep abyss that creeps in between in the only means of distinguishing the two instants. Every note is a new present and repeats the static pattern of the preceding instant. The phases of educations, job, and marriage are phases through which all the characters move, asserting the single significance man: Frustration, pain, eternity the circularity of being. Sircar enables us to perceive, this by projecting each of these in space. Take for example, the routine activities at the college and the office routine. Both these instants are similar in their implication of a dehumanized space. Each of these instants are separate snapshots of essentially the same phenomena. The content of the notes serve only a vacuum fillers. The questions and answers at the college, at the college, as the frantic activity in the office give one the sense of a self-perpetuated noise to avoid the silence of the abyss.

In the contemporary Indian theatre, Sircar is the First to turn, akin to colonialism of the colonial. As an urban writer, Sircar admitted that he wrote his earlier play for the urban middle class and catered to their western tastes. In Sircar the growth from a modernist outlook to a perspective that ignore socially-oriented is most natural.

All of Sircar’s earlier works are modernist both in content and form. His later works, however, while retaining the sophistication of form have embodied a different version of reality, a truly democratic one, in the sense that it is more public, more social and closer to the needs of a democratic form. Sircar’s *Bhoma* and *Spartacus* are outstanding examples of his later works. Both in *Evam Indrajit* and *Baki-ithihas* which on a very superficial level are a comment on society, the criticism of society is rendered humorous. But somehow Sircar’s attempt to reject it and reach a metaphysical level is not very successful. This is because Sircar is too preoccupied with the society and the routine consolation it offers, despite the metaphysical concerns that he attempts to thematize. While the form is moulded to the modernist requirements, thematically Sircar seems incapable of rendering metaphysical statement. All that he says seems pointless, and quite incongruent, with the concerns of a routine existence which is predominant in his plays.

In India, the higher castes of the Hinduism practice the inhuman convention of un-touchability as alienation dehumanizes people. Indrajit’s predicament arises out of his awareness which is alienated from his bodily wisdom writer also faces the plight. Veena Noble Das observes: “His agony is the agony of the artist Who is deeply aware of the sterility and horror that is life”⁷ (49) satyadev Dubey, commenting on the elite of India in general and those of Bengal in particular, points out:

“The intellectually alive urban middleclass regards itself as the back bone of the country. Their so called middle class values have been glorified and yet their genuine and deeper values have always been attacked by fashionable Marxist dogmas. The middle class have been made to feel guilty for opting for stability, aspiring for culture and believing in a national identity. In Bengal, the contradiction was resolved at a certain level with the middle classes aligning themselves with the left forces”⁸.

“The play is a memorable presentation of the woefully restricted and hopelessly conventional – ridden life of the educated urban middle class in modern India. The tragedy of this class, Sircar seems to say, is two-fold: first, of most of its representatives are blissfully unaware of the stifling narrowness of their way of life, and secondly if one of them like Indrajit, the protagonist of the play does so, and tries to find a way out of his predicament, he only realizes in the end that he is too weak for the task and that “there is no escape”, for, we are the cursed spirits of Sisiphus.

Evam Indrajit is an experimental play where nothing much happens in the way of conventional dramatic action: and yet, the tragic plight of a whole society is laid bare through symbolic action and character⁹.

In the beginning of the play *Evam Indrajit*, the writer makes it obvious that as he does not know the life of “the suffering masses”, he turns to the “undramatic material” of the urban middleclass. Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit, and then he states: ‘I am ... amal, Vimal and Indrajit (6). The stage darkens slowly and a chorus of voices whispers the names of these characters. As Amal, Vimal, and Kamal merge in, Indrajit merges in the writer. The technique is very much like the strategy of Samuel Beckett in presentation of Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*.

Indrajit, like his mythical namesake who defeated Indra, the highest of the Hindu gods, is a rebel. He is frustrated even while in college : “I’m tired of being a student sometimes I just want to runawaySomeplace, you know, somewhere for way”¹⁰(10). He has had enough of the gossip about “Cricket, Cinema, physics, Politics and Literature”, but the examinations and his mother prevent him from such a departure.

He is terribly angry against rules because of what happens in society-the case of Leela, a friend, who was thrown off by her in-laws after the death of her husband, the incident of his cashing away a boy of seven in the bus stop who with a child his arms tries to earn money by polishing shoes. Indrajit declares “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”11(23). The point seems to be that all this anger against social ills calls for political commitment and social action.

In act Two, Indrajit and the writer meet after an interval of seven years. From the job in Calcutta Indrajit moved to a job in Bhopal, and then a transferable job to Bombay, Jallundr, Meerut, Udaipur. In a flash back Manasi is shown declining Indrajit’s offer of marriage, for a man’s marriage to the first cousin on mother’s side is a taboo. Now she teaches at a school in Calcutta, and they write to each other, and meet once a year in Calcutta. All their meetings and partings, all their love talk, all the anger and reconciliation of Indrajit with Manasi did not culminate in their marriage. Just before his departure to London in search of job, he tells Manasi that he has lost faith. I don’t know what improvement means. There’s no question of improvement... I don’t know anything. I’ve thought a lot. Argued a lot. But can’t find answer. I’m tired now12(45).

In the third act Indrajit returns from London and he has got what he had wished for, but he is still frustrated. He tells the writer: “What ever I wishes to have, I have got. But there is no sense of achievement in it-that is the bitter truth. It is stupid to hope that more will come and one will sprout more hands to seize it. It’s pathetic just a dream”13 (48-49).

Then Indrajit meets his old Manasi and when she asks him about his family, he tells her: “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 parent’s house. I eat in a restaurant. She comes back. I go marketing (54). The monotony of life is so oppressive that he feels like a man walling between the rails of the railways line and though they seem to meet in a point far away they never meet. Indrajit is fired, but he has to move on between the rails of life as there is no escape.

The writer asks fundamental questions about man’s life on the earth: “who are we? Why are we here?”14 (34-35) when Auntie suggests he should get married to solve these problems, he starts reciting the poem that satirises conformity to the social code:

Why should you always sleep in the night?

Why should always try to be right?

Why should you live? Why should you die?

Everybody does it! That’s why, that’s why, that’s why (35-36).

Echoing Eliot’s famous line in “Seeneey Agonistes”, he deflates marriage: “Birth, marriage, death! Birth, then marriage, and then death”, and he tells of having read an old, beautiful story of how a prince and princess “after a lot of to do” get married and “lived happily ever after. They lived so happily that there was no more story to tell”15 (36).

Towards the end the writer tells Indrajit that he cannot escape from the pain of life, he cannot even become Nirmal for “you are not looking for promotion-or building a house-or developing a business Scheme” like Amal, Vimal and Kamal. “For us there is only the road - so walk on. We are the cursed spirits of Sisiphus”16 (59). The play ends with no hope, no faith, no God, but only the endless road of life.

Unfortunately, our dramatist Badal Sircar has missed the opportunity of presenting the Indian reality. Instead, his portrait has turned into a satire of the educated section of our society. It is only in the presentation of Amal, Vimal and Kamal that the satiric intention is clear, while in the portraits of Indrajit and the-writer, Badal Sircar is seriously exploring the Indian reality as he knows it. And what he does repeatedly and with great enjoyment is a deflation of all social institutions like the family, the office, and all human relationships. There is nothing in the play, no attitude, no implication, no suggestion whatsoever to indicate what the educated should be. Even Indrajit limits itself to present a minority of the Indian people, and further, its presentation lacks authenticity 17.

In *Evam* Indrajit Sircar eliminates even the feeble consolation of a role. He does not allow us the differentness of these roles. Instead he strips the garb of the role and gives us multiple reflection of the emptiness within. The play is an infinity of the reflection of this “nothing “. In the typical pirandellian fashion, Sircar Creates different levels of truth, relating to a single experience, by confusing the dramatic and the non-dramatic, the fictive with the real. But these obvious differences only serve as mirrors to each other as they release a single truth: that of the anonymous self.

The self in this play is fixed in a condition from which it cannot initiative progress. The day to day existence ruthlessly dissolves individual differences and draws everyone into its consuming dreariness. That is why Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit, can fuse, one into another without the least effort. The self is an echo of an echo, a reflection of vast emptiness. The human gesture is deprived of any significance, as an impersonal quality spreads over existence. The roll number becomes the only indication of the individual. As Sypher observes: “The individual life is not so real as the individual’s life. These large numbers are constants, the persons involved are in variables. And we depend, if we can, on the constants”18.

It is an interesting that as the anonymous reveals itself in the patterns of everyday existence, the crowd becomes the most significant unit. The unquestioning acceptance of the crowd a raises from a total unawareness of the situation in which it finds itself. Irrelevancies rule life, as the meaninglessness of routine takes over. The absurdity of this routine is revealed by the disjointed fragments of experience which merge in the ruthless drive of everyday existence. The various phases in college, the auntie coming in with the food, and writers own attempts to write remain unrelated and patchy, although they are aspects of the same continuous stream of routine activities.

As Camus observes: “At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass position, you can not hear him but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive. The discomfort in the face of man’s own inhumanity, the in calculable tumble before the image of what we are, this “nausea”, as the writer to today calls it is also the absurd”19.

Sircar strengths this impression when he point out in his stage directions that there is a hint of the puppet show in the movement of the actors. In the office routine, the dull rhythm of the routine is increased to a pitch where we notice only the movements of the hands and legs as the servant moves back and forth. This pace is increased and we soon see that this physical movement stops, and the movement is now indicated by the sound, as the officers call the servant one after the other, gradually merging into one voice: Hareesh Hareesh Hareesh Hareesh”.

Yet awareness of this anonymity revealed in the every day existence does not in any way provide the writer, or Indrajit, any escape from its paralyzing condition. The drama that they visualize in their dream quickly lapses into the non-dramatic : “oh no! The light never came. The sley didn’t burn. I could not leave the solid earth”.²⁰

Yet, the absurd man, as Camus says will not commit suicide, even as he lives without a future, without hope and without illusion. Yes, “we must live” says the writer to Indrajit, even after the knowledge of the absurdity. They are men condemned to live. For, he is the protagonist enlightened by the fact that he is “one among a million”. The Lie in my life is lie in the lives of the millions”, and thus justifies his existence by reverting to the age-old cliché of everybody does it.

Sircar’s plays too are similarly circular for the repetitive routine is deprived of any significance despite the speed with which it moves. In *Evam Indrajit*, Sircar uses the flash technique of the film and breaks with the chronological sequencing of traditional drama. In fact, the play almost overwhelms the spectator with broken images and fast movement in keeping with the movie screen. Sircar also dismantles the traditional partition between the auditorium and the stage drawing attention to the theatricality of the action, in the pirandellian fashion. It is through this confusion that he reveals the irrational. The repetitive pattern of the routine life is made significant not by miming a life like development but through the simultaneous project of several slides which show glimpses of life. What emerges consistently in each of them, however an over is worked enthusiasm over the essentially trivial. The distortion in life, is in other words, presented on stage in its starkness as distortion and shocks the perceiving consciousness. The stylization which comes of the increased pace and the lack of meaningful links clarify this distortion making it obvious to the spectator.

The dialogue in the play is repetitive, cynical and stichomythic in nature as in the plays of Samuel Beckett. The writer raises fundamental question regarding the life of characters and about the life in general. He is more than chorus. Sircar seems to be messing the Indian reality. He seems to believe that the intellectual is cut off from his spiritual moorings. Badal Sircar hopes to create a social consciousness through his plays. It is an attempt to have a change in the society. We find in him a new thought of making the people to aware about the generation problems. He inspires people to change.

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