

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* : A Critical Perspective

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Abstract: An in-depth analysis of the Indian English post colonial drama show the influence of the multi-dimensional, cross-cultural and multi-colored elements in its structure and handling of dramatic technique. This richness in terms of the theatrical as well as structural aspects make the fact very clear that it is an outcome of not only one theatre tradition (Indian) but an amalgamation of both Indian traditional theatre and modern western theatre particularly from the playwrights such as Bertold Brecht, Jean Paul Satre, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter etc. Hence Indian English drama breaks a new ground by liberating itself from the certain dimension of conventional themes and their treatment, it has now shaped into a new structure and are available for the analysis under the light of contemporary literary theories from what it has been deprived earlier.

Keywords: multifaceted, cross-cultural, third theatre.

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The variety of contemporary Indian English drama is a product of a long traditional epoch of drama that India possesses, the merger of multiple regional languages and the influences of manifold theories and philosophies which have dominated the art of playwriting. The present scenario of Indian drama portrays a picture which reflects the fact that writers are endeavoring strenuously to innovate something rather than merely imitating the set pattern. The playwrights with the sense of modernity mingled with the inherited sense of tradition are now emphasizing the involvement of myth, history and philosophies which structures the theme of the

plays. And the innovative technique serves as an additional purpose by employing shifting temporal setting, masks, dream sequences etc.

Drama in India in its developing form could be best witnessed with advent of the innovative playwrights, who desperately craved for making drama free from orthodox representation as a form. These writers took the stage as a platform to empower all the constituents of a play- the actors, the audience, the stage, the theme and the most importantly the techniques. Many playwrights had made their appearance felt on the dramatic literary scenario of the post modern Indian stage. These names include Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Badal Sircar and Asif Curimbhoy.

Badal Sircar appeared on the surface of Indian theatre as a playwright who pioneered the concept of Third Theatre. Although he began his literary career as a theatre actor and then turned into the field of direction and script writing, his versatility was always visible to all. He is generally considered to be a dramatist who brought the concept of absurdity into Bengali theatre, but was only an imposed tag on his ability as an artist; it confined his multifaceted genius within the certain dimension.

The first play that made his appearance felt strongly on the stage was *Evam Indrajit* in 1963. It proved to be a land mark in the history of modern Indian theatre. This significant contribution of Sircar not only helped his own recognition to flourish, but also improved the level of Indian theatre too. The thematic concern of the play *Evam Inderejit* is “the loneliness of the post independence urban youth.” in Culcutta. Through this play he reflects the crisis of the complex situation of Indian middle-class people. Making the young generation the focal point in the play, Sircar depicted their passion as well as frustration in dealing with the imposed circumstances. While moving into the play in depth one comes across various characters, Manasi is a women character along with Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal (Indrajit). All these characters show the complexities of a modern life and the worthlessness of their existence.

One critic of Sircar’s play *Satyadev Dubey* praises the play in the following words:

With performance of Sircar’s Evam Indrajit in Bengali in Culcutta in September 1965, theatre practitioners all over India became aware of a major talent and a major play. The play provided for them the shock of recognition. It was about the Indian reality as they knew it; it was a

theatrically effective and crystallized projection of all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations growing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class.

When Sircar was once questioned about the play *Evam Indrajit* in an interview that whether he reckon the play as satire on the contemporary politics and its worthlessness, replied to this, that the play is not an attack on politics and he was not aware on the existential philosophy. Though he expressed his not being aware the absurdity and existentialism, the effect of absurdist philosophy is very much felt in his play *Evam Indrajit*. The play reflects the point of meaninglessness when we come across the line, “*nothing worth mentioning ever happens.*” (41).

The play portrays the very apt picture of the complex condition of the prevalent attitudes and undefined crisis, running through the veins of the middle class urban youth of Indian society. The play moves around a woman named, Manasi who appears as an inspiration in the life of a playwright, who is struggling strenuously to write a play. The play reflects the inner complexities of the writer who is finding it's tough to write a play due to the honesty and integrity of his personality. The play beautifully deals with the life of the writer who finds life to be much more fragmentary that is why its transformation into the dramatic form is not possible. He feels that the life is less natural and much more mechanical in the chaotic modern time and his attitude reflects the anxiety and agony of the artist who is a keen observer of the critical scenario of the modern world life. Throughout the play the protagonist is reflecting a journey that starts from the nothingness and ends up in nothingness- despair. This portrayal of hopelessness is a key note of the absurdist philosophy.

The play deals with the writer's life and his agony to write a play but the vague feeling and the undefined hopelessness restricts his creativity to enhance itself. He finds himself not able to write as he has nothing to write about. He expresses his agony in the initial part of the play, he says:

What shall I write? Who shall I write about? How many people do I know? And what do I know about them? I know nothing about the suffering masses. Nothing about the toiling peasants. Nothing about the sweating coal-miners. Nothing about the snake-charmers, the tribble chieftains, or the boatmen. There is no beauty in the people around me, no splendor no substance. Only the undramatic material. (6)

The expression of the writer reflects his sterile approach towards the life. He seems to have less knowledge and experience of basic reality of life. He is also finding those people about whom he wants to write, undramatic who are sitting in the auditorium. At this point of the play one can easily witness its closeness to the absurdist philosophy and existentialism.

The swift twist takes place in the play and out of a sudden the protagonist, writer invites four of persons from the audience named Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal but the writer was not agreed with the last name that is Nirmal. He says:

No. It can't be. You must have another name. You have to have. Tell me truly, what's your name? (4)

After the element out doubt rose up by the writer about the name of the fourth person Nirmal, he finally confesses to having shied away from his real name. He reveals the fact that his real name is not Nirmal but Indrajit, the name of the mythical rebel, Meghnad who defeated Indra. Nirmal says that he called himself Nirmal because he was “*scared of unrest. One invites unrest by breaking norms.*” (5)

Indrajit appears to be a totally different to the other characters in the story as Amal, Vimal and Kamal have an approach towards life that is considered to be an appreciable way to survive. Such kind of people are only concerned about their own status and comfort in life. They don't crave for the betterment of society or to bring in drastic change in the society. They are so much self-contained that they never peep into the crisis of the others. Sircar, while critically dealing with the absurdities of existence considers these people to be dead as they reflect the meaningless approach towards life. At the initial point of the play when the writer queries Indrajit about his being dead. Indrajit at this answered very absurdly as he says that he is in doubt whether he is dead or alive. The question that may come to the mind of any reader here is, why the writer is not keen to ask the similar question to the other characters. One of the reason that will come to the reader's cognition is that the writer have already reckoned them as no more alive. The part of interaction that took place here in the play shows the mastery of the handling of the technique of the dramatist. Such kind of innovative approach helps the Indian playwrights to re-structure the already set norms of dramatic technique. The play unfolds all the character's lives and psychologies with the help of the interactions that take place among them.

Sircar through the portrayal of such characters against the world which is full of inhumanity focuses on the worthlessness of human existence. With help of these characters Sircar defines a new aspect within the framework of the play, which he not only focuses on the outer world of the characters but also their internal conflicts are also portrayed in the play.

As an apt instance of post modern Indian drama *Evam Indrajit* depicts the dilemma of the middle class individual who is suffering for the sustainable survival. The very title could be taken into consideration to reflect the fact that, how an individual is trapped into the chaotic situation. The title, *Evam Indrajit* is read as 'And Indrajit' in English, this attachment of the conjunction 'And' shows the relation of an individual to the society. While analyzing the title one can also understand that this relationship of the individual with society is not a natural but an imposed attachment. Indrajit is shown in a relation with society this also reflects the fact that he hasn't got his individuality as human.

Sircar deliberately portrays the character like Indrajit to show the opposite nature of modern individual living in an age which is full of self-centered nature. In comparison to the other characters, Indrajit is shown very different. His approach towards life is entirely different from the pseudo-modern people. This is quite evident when he is seen resisting against the any part of exploitation. At one point of the play the prevalent corruption of the modern society becomes very much evident when all of them including Indrajit have to face an interview, though they all are aware of the fact that the recruitment process is all fake and the interviewers have already selected the candidate. This incident depicts the crisis of the youth of modern India where power matters more than the talent.

The play also emphasizes a very vital aspect of the orthodox Indian middle class society through the relationship of Indrajit and Manasi. Their relationship is not only questioned by the so called ethical society but at the same time they also question the orthodox nature of the society. Their relationship lack ethics as she is his cousin. Indrajit showed an anti-traditional way to resolve the issue but his daring resistance could not sustain longer as Manasi didn't want to interrupt the norms established by the society.

The portrayal Indrajit's character reflects the middle class individual trapped into the chaotic circumstances of the modern world. His assumes a name 'Nirmal' so the existing norms of the society would not be disturbed. His other name 'Indrajit' connects him with the

mythology. According to *Ramayana*, Indrajit was Ravan's son who used a covering of clouds to hide himself so that nobody can recognize him and this was the only reason why he was called Meghnad. Indrajit though didn't want to go against the established norms yet he has the sense of superior knowledge of existence. This becomes evident when he says to Manasi: "*If I hadn't tested the fruit of knowledge I could have gone on living in his paradise of your blessed society of rules* ." (23) This statement shows that Indrajit realizes the futility of his knowledge.

The end of the play questions the contemporary situation in which the modern individual's life is confined within a fixed dimension. The life appears to be more mechanical than natural. Sircar here through this play endeavours to suggest that even in such kind of situation there are people who can make an attempt to come out of such type of chaotic situation. The deliberate portrayal of characters like Indrajit and the Writer reflect the daring tendencies against the set norms of the society.

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