

**Depiction Of ‘Self’ And ‘Other’ Dichotomy In Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit***

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**Abstract**

The play *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar produced in September, 1965 made the Indians aware about the extraordinary talent possessed by Badal Sircar. Through the play, Sircar wanted to portray the frustrations and anger developing within the minds of the educated youth belonging from the middle class families residing in Calcutta. The middle class people considered themselves to be the epitome of the nation’s development. The middle class has been continuously attacked by the people possessing Marxist dogmas. It is so because the middle class have always preferred for a culture, national identity and stability. The middle class residing in Bengal have been able to resolve this conflict by aligning themselves with the leftist front. However, in other parts of the country the middle class have taken a different standpoint by opting for armed forces or the administrative forces. To portray this feeling of alienation and loss of individual identity of the middle class people which ultimately led to the creation of an “other”, Sircar produced *Evam Indrajit*. This paper will attempt to portray how the “self” and “other” negotiates with each other in a society.

Key words: middle class,

Marxist, alienation, self, other

## 1.0 Introduction:

“Self” and “other” dichotomies are intertwined in the colonial and post-colonial world of India. This division has captured the mindset of the Indian’s in such a way that it has continuously led to communal clash and economic subjugation of the lower strata of people. To remove the evils of communal clash and economic subjugation after Independence, the concept of a composite Indian culture had taken birth. This led the Indians to compete with the West in each and every arena. Moreover, there was a continuous craving from the Indians to get rid of the hegemony of the West. It was really a matter of shame for the Indian’s that they were giving so much superiority to the West even after gaining Independence. In terms of drama too, the concept of a composite Indian culture arose after Independence. The dramatists from India who were earlier following the Western model of dramatic creation started looking at things around them. This concept also inspired Indian artists to compete with the best around them. There was a platitudinous slogan of seeking one’s roots in terms of drama. This led to a self-belief within the dramatists that they can imbibe raw materials from their own culture which also possesses a glorious past. Therefore, the “self” and “other” concepts which were dwelling in Indian society started entering into Indian theatre. The recognition for a strong individual “self” within the plays started playing into the mindsets of the Indian dramatists. The hammering of the “other” which in the colonial context was the West started beginning from this period onwards. Through the plays of Badal Sircar we can find this clash between the ‘self’ and ‘other’ to a great extent.

In order to understand the context of “self” and “other” dichotomy within Badal Sircar’s play *Evam Indrajit*, the “self” and “other” theories by Hegel, Jung, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault have been incorporated for reference. The concept of ‘other’ is originally attributed to Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 10) where he stated that ‘self’ is recognized by an

individual as that which is solely controlled by them both at cognitive, affective and psychomotor levels. The 'other', on the other hand, is uncontrolled by these factors. The complexity increases when the 'self' comes in contact with more than multiple 'others'. In this position the self tends to exert a force which causes the self to identify with or behave as an 'other'. Hegel mentioned in his seminal work that the consciousness of an 'other' is a necessary condition for the emergence of an individual self.

The play *Evam Indrajit* depicts the frustration and angst developing within the mindset of the youth of this generation. This angst is due to the continuous disappointment that the 'self' has received from the society around it. They are not able to stabilize their 'self' and are in the process of becoming an 'other'. The foundation of the theories by Hegel, Jung, Lacan will be useful in analyzing the two dimensional identities possessed by the characters within the play. Through these theories, the clash between the 'self' and 'other' within the innermost core of an individual will be depicted. The existential crisis in a society that leads to identity crisis of individuals will also be analyzed within the research paper.

## **2.0 Methodology:-**

The present study is based on analytical study and will be carried out by highlighting the dilemma of the 'self' and 'other' in Badal Sircar's play *Evam Indrajit*. The theoretical aspects of the problem is carried out on the backdrop of the notions of 'self' and 'other' as well as through secondary sources among which the play of Sircar is significant and is also based on library resources like reference books, scholarly journals and internet.

## **3.0 Objectives of the Study:-**

- i) To explore the dilemma of the 'self' in the characters of the play.
- ii) To analyze the identity and existential crisis faced by the characters of the play.

iii) To understand the impediments of the society that halts the progress of the 'self' as represented in the select play.

#### **4.0 Depiction of 'self' and 'other' dichotomy in Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*:-**

*Evam Indrajit* narrates the story of a playwright who struggles hard to write a play but is unable to do so. The playwright says that he cannot write a play because as an assiduous and honest person he feels that the modern life is too unstable which makes it very difficult for a writer to combine the elements existing within it. The writer is very delighted when he encounters the rebel Indrajit and strongly believes that it will help him in the construction of the play. However, later on he realizes that it is not Indrajit who is present, instead of him Nirmal is present which makes him utterly disappointed. Satyadev Dubey in the introduction to *Evam Indrajit: Three Modern Indian plays* states that "Evam Indrajit is in some ways about the residue; the residue consists of those who have failed to adjust, align and ceased to aspire, and also those who are enmeshed in the day-to-day struggle for survival." These individuals as stated by Satyadev Dubey are the "other" who is sidelined from the mainstream of society by the upper class people. Hegel's (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 8) stated that 'self' is recognized by an individual as that which is solely controlled by them both at cognitive, affective and psychomotor levels. The 'other' on the other hand is uncontrolled by these factors. The complexity increases when the 'self' comes in contact with more than multiple 'others'. In this position the self tends to exert a force which causes the self to identify with or behave as an 'other'. In the same work he also mentions that the consciousness of an 'other' is the very condition for the emergence of an individual self. Similarly, we can link *Evam Indrajit* to Hegel's 'self' and 'other' phenomenon. Here, the 'self' of the urban educated middle class people comes in direct contact with the oppression and suppression inflicted upon them by the upper class people. The force exerted by the 'self'

is the force of rebellion which the middle class people apply on the upper class people. This often leads to the creation of an 'other' who continuously fights to diminish the tagline of being an 'other'.

Hegel in (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 10) mentioned that 'self-consciousness' is a movement whereby consciousness steps out of it. In this process of movement of 'self-consciousness', 'self' and 'other' are both moments of it and also are dependent upon it. The self/other binary makes a person recognize that, an individual is separate physically and mentally. At that moment one understands that the separate person is not the "self", instead the individual is an "other" which is separate and cannot be controlled or comprehended physically or mentally. The same case happens with Indrajit and Nirmal within *Evam Indrajit*. The writer after realizing that the individual whom he was assuming to be Indrajit was not actually Indrajit, instead it was Nirmal, he starts considering Nirmal as an 'other'. He begins to understand that Nirmal is separate from Indrajit both physically and mentally.

When the Writer begins to construct his play, he becomes perplexed at times to find out that he is not able to pave out a proper direction for his play. In his frustration, he begins to tear up his manuscripts. His inspiration for the play is a woman whom he names as Manasi. Manasi means creation of the 'mind' and can be considered equivalent to Jung's concept of 'anima'. 'Anima' and 'animus' were two significant terminologies coined by Jung in (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 58) to identify the masculine and feminine characteristics contained within a female and male respectively. According to Jung, a woman contains some of the masculine characteristics which help her in thinking rationally. These masculine characteristics that are present within a female are known as 'animus'. On the other hand, a man contains some feminine characteristics which help him in governing his irrational thinking. These feminine

functions present within a male are known as 'anima'. The opposite characteristics present within both the male and female helps them in relating themselves as whole human beings to the world. The anima/animus is a major determiner of how we consider ourselves in the innermost chamber of our heart. The anima/animus within an individual helps one in constituting their 'self'. If the balance between the 'self' and 'other' is not equally proportionate within an individual, the 'self' of an individual begins to break down which leads to the formation of an 'other'. Since, the anima/animus has the image making capacity, an individual's 'self' also depends upon it. Therefore, the creation of the imaginary character of Manasi by the Writer also indicates the feminine characteristics contained within the Writer. The character of Manasi created from the core of the mind of the Writer indicates that he desires to think rationally. This rational thinking is necessary for him if he wants to give his play a right direction. He needs to put aside all the frustrations he has developed from the environment around him.

The reason for the frustration growing within the Writer is due to the lack of experience within him. He is unable to gather experience from his surroundings. He does not know about his own society and also about his own people. He can be termed as anti-social. Therefore, his source of material must be the people sitting in the auditorium. Generally, during the 1960's the middle class people were frequent visitors to theatre. Therefore, the Writer must take the middle class people as his source for the play. In doing so he misses in covering the important facts about his own society. However, the Writer finds the middle class people present in the auditorium not suitable as audience. The Auntie's continuous presence within the play reminds the Writer that he must not forget about his significant daily functions such as eating and sleeping. Sircar at the beginning of the play mentions to the reader that the auntie may also be called 'mother', 'elder sister' or anything else. She continuously goes on rebuking the Writer

because she cannot understand why he needs to write a play by forgetting his daily necessities. Her continuous homilies remind the Writer that there is no need of writing a play if one forgets about his own necessities and his own people. Her homilies which remind the Writer about his basic needs are:

AUNTIE : I just can't understand you!

[No response from the Writer.]

I'm asking you.... Are you coming in to eat or aren't you? You are the limit! I can't put up with this any longer.... (1-3).

The words of the auntie continuously remind the Writer that he needs to remember about his own 'self'. One can only write a good play if one is alert about his own surroundings. The 'self' feels secure only if it is aware about the society in which it is living. If one is not conscious about his own basic needs than how can that individual remain alert about the needs of the society. When the play progresses it can be noticed that the Auntie and Manasi begin to counterpoint each other.

*Evam Indrajit* is concerned with existential related issues found in the society and in this regard it is considered as an existential play. One significant aspect which the proponents of Theatre of Absurd want to assert is the cause and effect of lack of communication between human beings. Sircar through his characters in the play wants to assert that due to the lack of communication between individuals there has been a barrier created among the people in the society. Families have broken apart, the friendship bond has been weakened, and also men have become greedy to look for the hidden things concealed within the earth. Sircar decided to deal with absurd themes in his plays when he saw the socio-economic condition of Bengal in the 1960s and 1970s which was rather depressing and dark. The time period after the World War II was rather dark for Bengal

because various evil practices existed in the state such as black marketing, famine, communal riots, infiltration of refugees, post independence economic crisis and also division between the upper and the lower class which resulted in heated revolution.

So, from the above statement it can be said that Sircar through the characters of his play hopes to achieve a synthesis of absurdist philosophy and that of the Indian reality prevailing in the post and pre-independence Indian society. The characters in Sircar's plays feel that they have failed to communicate their feelings. Sircar's play *Evam Indrajit* exposes the dilemma of the Indians by bringing a synthesis of existentialism and Indian reality. It is a play which was first staged in the year 1965 and is about the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and frustrations which are starting to grip the Indians slowly and steadily. The play ends with both the characters Indrajit and the 'Writer' looking for their aim in life when they do not find anything significant in writing and living. The prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and frustrations which have increased in the minds of the Indians have led to a broken 'self'. This broken 'self' has led to the crushing of individual identity. This identity crisis has ultimately helped in the formation of an 'other' which is different from the 'self'. This 'other' is formed from the synthesis of existentialism and Indian reality.

Through his existential play, Sircar also wanted to focus on the fact that in an existential world, one's identity is not fixed. It has no stability and it is changed based on the situation. The Writer who was busy in constructing his play, mentioned to the four youths that the female character of his play will be named Manashi. He also referred that she had a good relationship with Indrajit and questioned him about his relationship with her. However, as soon as Indrajit started speaking it was found that the name of the girl was not Manashi. So, at once the identity of the girl changed as the narrator changed. Indrajit

mentioned that both he and the girl are cousins and also good friends and often shared their feelings with each other. At this moment, a conversation between Indrajit and the girl at a public park is mentioned where Indrajit mentions that he is eager to break the shackles of the rules and regulations laid down by the society. However, the girl mentions that only the women folk are required to follow the rules of the society. The male folk are never confined in those rules. In reply to this statement, Indrajit mentions that he is a representative from the modern youth, so he will not hesitate to break the unnecessary shackles of society.

Indrajit: Is there a rule that one has to abide by rules?

Manasi: What else can one do?

Indrajit: One can hate rules. Why should they be there at all?

Manasi: What would be the point of hating them?

Indrajit: What's the point of worshipping the rope that binds you?

Manasi: I'm not asking you to worship it.

Indrajit: But you are! If the rope is a rule and you accept it happily - that is worshipping it.

Manasi: What else would you do with it?

Indrajit: Perhaps – tear it into shreds. Bring down all these walls which surround us. (215)

The people in modern world communicated in a language which left no trace mark on the mindset of other individuals. Therefore, Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* can aptly be denoted as an absurd play because it depicted the existential crisis prevailing within a modern society. Moreover, the inability of language to communicate properly also lends this play an absurd touch. In the play, the theme of absurdity was taken to a new height by the twelve poems and one full song. These poems cannot be separated from the central theme of the poem. Though, the main motive of the writer was to create an individual who was able to display his strong 'self' by standing outside of the mundane lifestyle of society, but in actuality he was a failure in doing so. His main character Indrajit who often revealed that his name is Nirmal too, cannot move beyond the periphery of routine daily life. He often found disturbances from other people around him who continuously stood in opposition to his progression of 'self'. Critics have also noticed the inherent question arose by Badal Sircar within his plays. In the essay, "Disillusionment and Social Change: A Re-reading of Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*", Moutushi Chakravartee has mentioned about the monotonous life experienced by the modern individuals. Moreover, she has also tried to pluck out the inherent theme of meek surrender to this lifestyle by the 'self'. She believed that by doing so, we are putting our self in harm's way. She wrote:

"Our life is a ritual of gyration, whose significance eludes us and most of us do not even bother to question why we do what we do. Perhaps, one tries to follow the path of the least resistance" (65)

Chakravartee through this statement wanted to stress on the fact that by not putting resistance to the absorption of daily routine lives into one's life, one was allowing mundaneness into their life. This mundane life will ultimately hamper the

progression of the 'self'. It will not be eager to move towards a new direction by breaking the shackles of tradition, customs which has already engulfed the mindset of the individuals. The mundane and absurd life that the individuals of the post-war world have being encompassed within finds expression in the song within the play:

One-two-three-two-one-two-three

One-two-three-two-one-two-three

Four-five-six

Four-five-six-five-four-five-six

Four-five-six-five-four-five-six

Seven-eight-nine

Seven-eight-nine-eight-seven-

eight-nine

Seven-eight-nine-eight-

seven-eight-nine

Nine-eight-seven-

six-five-four-three-two-one (Act I, p. 205)

This song depicts the repetition of the same numbers again and again. Therefore, the song is unable to bring forward any emotions out of any individual. Similarly, in our lives too, we repeat the same actions and activities again and again. This repetition of activities made us lose the charm for the work that we do. The same nihilistic activities took place in the lives of the characters within the play such as Amal-Vimal-Kamal. The lack of anything new in their lives has made their life shatter into broken pieces. These broken pieces can only be joined by some eventful happenings which need to stand apart from the activities taking place in our daily life. The writer summarizes the song through this comment where he states that it is completely undramatic to create a play through the characters residing in this modern world.

The writer analyzes the song and acknowledges

the fact that it begins with the numeral 'one' and ends similarly with another numeral 'nine'. This point towards the fact that our life moves around in circular motion and we are engulfed in the process of repeating the same activities again and again.

### **5.0. Conclusion:**

The play *Evam Indrajit* was set in the postcolonial era where othering of a group of people was done to establish control over them. Similarly, in the play too, we find that opinions of modern educated youth like Amal-Vimal-Kamal and Indrajit are not considered important by the government. It is so because their opinions vary from the opinions of those who are in power. Therefore, even though they remain in a democratic society, they are deprived of their basic rights. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (95, 102) stressed on the fact that power is created artificially and exercised by the source which is generally the institution. He also mentioned that power is employed in a "net like organization" and individuals "circulated between its threads". So, in the postcolonial Indian society the net like organization is the government and the bureaucrats' working in its order. However, individuals like Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit had to circulate their lives based on the orders given by the government. This led them to possess a revolutionary attitude at times because there is no one who could listen to their sentiments.

Sircar in *Evam Indrajit* has brought forward the static life of individuals through the existential phenomenon. To express this nihilistic attitude of life, Sircar had taken help of some songs. These songs expose the repetition of the same activities in our day to day life. This repetition of the same activity has made our life boring. This repetition of activities in our day to day life helps us forget about the real truth that all of us have to face one day and that is of encountering death. The 'self' in such an environment where there is competition and tackling down of opponents all around

becomes essentially pessimistic. The denial of anything new to happen in our lives has made our life mundane. This mundaneness in turn has led to the hampering of the progression of the 'self'.

### **6.0 Findings:-**

1. Through *Evam Indrajit*, Sircar analyzed the frustrations and anger developing within the minds of the educated youth belonging from the middle class residing in Calcutta.

2. To understand the impediments of the feeling of alienation and loss of individual identity of the middle class people which ultimately led to the creation of an "other", Sircar produced *Evam Indrajit*.

3. The character of the playwright in the play cannot write a play because as an assiduous and honest person he feels that the modern life is too unstable which makes it very difficult for a writer to combine the elements existing within it.

4. The 'self' of the urban educated middle class people comes in direct contact with the oppression and suppression inflicted upon them by the upper class people.

5. The character of Manasi created from the core of the mind of the Writer indicates that he desires to think rationally.

6. The homilies of the auntie remind the Writer that there is no need of writing a play if one forgets about his own necessities and his own people.

7. Sircar through his characters in the play wants to assert that due to the lack of communication between individuals there has been a barrier created among the people in the society.

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