

EVAM INDRAJIT

by Badal Sircar

(PART-5)

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Evam Indrajit is a three-act play by Indian dramatist and theatre director Badal Sircar, first translated in 1975. It was the first play which was performed by Sircar's 'Shatabdi' group. It was because of the performance of this group, Badal Sircar came to be known as a 'barefoot playwright'. *Evam Indrajit* is an abstract, absurdist play with a central theme of the monotony of a mechanical existence. It explores the writing process and the search for inspiration and something exciting to motivate creation. It was Sircar's first drama after a string of comedies, and remains one of his most enduring works, especially outside of his native India.

As Sircar investigates into the problems of middle-class society, he reflects the existential attitude of modern life through contemporary situations. This play catches the attention of almost all concerned in the society. It displays the passion, ambition and frustration of the youth. The characters in it feel quite happy, consoled and relieved while moving on to their way. In the play, Manasi is a woman character and Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit are young youths who keep changing their roles, language and dresses, etc. with the progress of the play.

The play is a tragicomedy, inventive and contemporary in spirit. Sircar's focus is on the meaninglessness of existence, filled with a sense of concerned guilt and responsibility, in maladjusted persons who belong to the urban middle class, in a world which is full of violence and inhumanity. The play not only demonstrates the external world but also the internal world of psyche into his play, making people share a new and innovative experience. It displays a true picture of the contemporary society, the meaninglessness and pointlessness of modern life. It is clearly observed that all the conventional traditions of drama are given up

in these plays. In the opening of the play, a writer is seen on the stage, scribbling something on the papers, sitting with his back to the audience.

Evam Indrajit is the story of a character, named as Writer, who struggles a lot to write a play but all in vain. Being unable to write something meaningful, he gets frustrated and angry. He himself admits that, though he tries to write a play yet he is not aware of the downtrodden – the labourers in the mines and the fields, the snake charmers and the fishermen. At this juncture, he is introduced to a woman named Manasi, who asks him to select the characters for his play from the people he knows. She suggests him to write about those people who are sitting in the audience and who appears to be quite undramatic. Now the Writer, getting inspired by the suggestion of this lady, calls out four late coming youths from the audience to come on the stage and asks their names. In response to his question, they give their names as Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal. Listening to them, Writer gets perturbed and yells at the fourth one and challenges him that his name can be anything but Nirmal. Finally, the fourth man is compelled to expose the reality and confesses that his real name is Indrajit. He does so not to invite disturbance by breaking the set rules of the society.

As against Indrajit, the characters like Amal, Vimal and Kamal are seen to be entirely different in their approach towards life. They represent the mass getting themselves satisfied only with their worldly comforts and never wishing to bring any change in their fixed routine. Such people are counted as the intellectuals of the society as they are knowledgeable about science, arts and worldly affairs. Their only aim of life is to achieve as many comforts as they can, as it provides them with a higher social status. They keep on doing all this without making a single attempt to think of the significance of their existence. As their existence is meaningless, they may be regarded as dead.

The very first scene does also suggest the same idea, when the Writer inquires Indrajit about his existence, whether he is dead. At this, Indrajit replies that he is not sure about it. Here a point to be noted is that the Writer does not ask Amal, Vimal and Kamal the same question, which means that he already considers them dead. At this point an interaction is seen, between the Writer and the audience and it is just on this interaction that the structure of this concise and significant play of Sircar is built. This technique used by Sircar has been profoundly admired and acknowledged as a useful device for the dramatist's interaction with the audience.

The structure of this play comprises various interviews of the four male characters Amal, Vimal, Kamal, Indrajit and the female character Manasi taken by Writer. The other female character in the play is the Auntie, who is a typical elderly woman, understanding nothing about Writer's attempts of writing something meaningful and, thus, represents the mass who is unable to realize what Sircar is writing about.

With the help of the character of Writer, Badal Sircar in this play, attempts to demonstrate the life of the middle-class people and focuses on the middle class set of values which is rendered absurd. The very title of the play, *Evam Indrajit (meaning And Indrajit)* suggests that the identity of Indrajit is not 'only Indrajit' but 'and Indrajit' and is presented being associated to the society and not being independently associated to his own existence. This play presents the hollow and futile picture of the pseudo-modern existence. Today with the progress of science, we are living in a world which demands success from every individual. Man, being a social animal, has been completely lost to its requirements and, in this way, he has lost his own individuality. Having been on such a stage in place of defining society, man is defined by society itself. Now man is bound with endless problems and frustration.

Through the illogical, incoherent and cyclical plot of the play, Sircar aptly reflects the mechanical, humdrum and monotonous nature of the present way of life. The humdrum existence of the contemporary society is presented with the help of repetitive dialogues and phrases. The whole structure of the play well suggests the same idea. The cyclic routine of the society goes on in which the characters change but the events remain the same. As in the starting of the play, Auntie is seen asking Writer to stop writing and then comes Manasi later in the play asking Writer to do the same. It is quite strange and awkward to Auntie seeing Writer writing, by avoiding basic biological functions. The writer has a different philosophy by which he prefers having a purpose in life to paying attention on the basic biological functions.

In the present scientific age, the attitude of the so-called modern man is seen to be quite rough, rude, scientific and logical with the lack of fine feelings and emotions. Quite contrary to it, there is seen a character named Indrajit in the play whose approach towards life is

entirely different from such pseudo-modern people. He is seen making several attempts – protesting against the oppression, injustice, exploitation and hypocrisy of the society. The corruption prevalent in the society is seen in an instance of the play when Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit have to face an interview, despite knowing the fact that the interviewers have already selected their candidates, and the whole process of interviewing is just a sham. It shows that talent and merits do not hold any importance in the current society where only money, power and influence matter.

The character of Indrajit is chosen by Writer as the hero of his play. There is a scope of relationship between Indrajit and Manasi. Indrajit's love relationship with Manasi cannot be considered to be appropriate in a middle-class society of India. As she was his cousin, so it becomes a case of taboo. A daring attitude is demonstrated by Indrajit to protest against the rigid norms of society, but he does not find the same kind of co-operation from the side of Manasi. In the starting phase of the play, we find Indrajit being possessed with a romantic spirit, as he looks being interested in a world which is beyond geography but inch by inch, he is seen becoming disillusioned. Though he gets to London, ultimately, he has to come back to the same place to accept the same existing system. Abiding by the existing social system he marries a girl and leads a toiling meaningless life. Still it is his sheer consciousness of the world in which he is living, and his independent existence in the callous social system which is a point of great concern. Indrajit represents a modern man, who is afraid of going beyond the existing system and so he assumes a name 'Nirmal' to go to the same order.

Though, Indrajit gets perturbed and scared of being exposed yet he is proud of his superior knowledge of existence. It is observed when he speaks out to Manasi: "If I hadn't tested the fruit of knowledge I could have gone on living in this paradise of your blessed society of rules." Gradually, he realizes the futility of this knowledge as it does not provide him with any kind of complacency. Indrajit now finds only a big wheel which moves round and round and along with this he feels himself too moving in the same motion. Being tired of such a rotation he seeks an escape to foreign land.

There is evidently seen a closeness between the consciousness of Indrajit and that of Writer. Both of them consider past and present to be two ends of the same rope. Indrajit is different from Writer merely in one sense that his dream is still alive. If there had existed no dream, the future could have been collapsed and reduced to the past, and then this past would not

have awaited the abstract future but been culminated to death. Writer finds it difficult to write a play about a person looking at life in a realistic way and dreaming about it in a romantic way. He says “The more I tie him up in a plot the more he escapes... The more lines I write for him, the more he stands outside them.”

Therefore, insignificance, meaninglessness and lack of traditional values are well evident in the play. The plot of the play itself is illogical and incoherent. Meaningless human associations are reflected through the use of inadequate language in the play. Word-play and playfulness of language is seen at several places. The deliberate elliptic dialogues present the fragmented and meaningless activities of the pseudo-modern man being tangled in materialistic competition and gains. Sircar has beautifully used the technique of writing a play within the play, known as meta-theatrical technique, when in the play Writer is seen endeavouring to write a play and choosing or searching the perfect hero for his play. All the external conflicts of the characters present the internal conflicts at depth in the play, projecting psychological realism. There is no static characterization as the characters interchange their roles, and Writer becomes the boss as well as the peon in the office.

Though the play *Evam Indrajit* is seen to be an expression of despair yet the dreams of Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit project a ray of hope. The linguistic devices used in the play, and the dialogues of the characters, attract a wide-ranging audience and readers. The characters represent the common men of the society suffering from a lot of external and internal conflicts. Out of all these factors, the play *Evam Indrajit* is found to be unconventional. The play is contemporaneous, inventive and replete with absurdist elements. The characters of the play are seen raising a voice against man's existential crisis, his absurdity, death-wish, unemployment and anarchy prevalent in the society. Life is to be lived with full enthusiasm, zeal and zest, in place of being relegated to death. So, the desire for death is rejected in the play along with some other negative forces as cruelty, brutality, hypocrisy and foolishness, etc. The language of the play is ironical mixed with lyrical tone and touch.

Myth is also evident in the play in the instance of the name ‘Indrajit’ as in the *Ramayana* Indrajit was the name of Ravana's son who was later known as Meghnad. He used the covering of clouds to hide his identity and the same was done in the play by Indrajit who adopted a fake name as Nirmal to hide his identity.

The playwright has written this play mainly keeping in mind the element of existentialism. The play is quite relevant to the post-modern state of India as it is the projection of ambitions, desires, frustrations and anguish of the youth of this time. Humanity is given prominence in the play and to think of taking a suicidal step is entirely objected. The message conveyed through the play suggests life to be beautiful, truthful, loveable, likeable and livable. In this way, death obviously goes undesirable.

Sircar seems to be quite positive in his approach towards life. Through the play he wants to draw the attention of the people towards the evils present in the society, and wishes them to be eradicated, and welcomes a glorious future. Sircar belongs to that generation which was the first to come of age after independence in India. Therefore, the very initial post-colonial Indian period, with a drastic change, was replete with several social crises and evils which are highlighted in this play. Sircar uses a dramatic trick lest his play should lapse into a sequential reflection of humdrum events. He places Writer and Indrajit sitting by each other. At the time, when Writer is reading the letter, Indrajit is silent and the moment Writer stops, Indrajit starts speaking. Writer's reading of the letter and Indrajit's speech go on in continuation.

The conclusion of the play, suggests that the present life system is fixed and it goes on the same way as everybody follows it. Still, there are a few who make an attempt to come out of this mechanical routine and think of an entirely new and dynamic system, without being afraid of getting rejected from the so-called established system. Such kind of people are represented in the play by the characters as Writer and Indrajit, having a vision of a new system, despite the existence of the prevalent one. Now the point of significance to be noted here is not this whether they are accepted or rejected but they take an initiative without being bothered of the result.

In the age of globalization at present, the condition of the modern man of sixties as presented in the play may less relate to the condition of the youth of twenty-first century India, but the psychological conflicts of the characters in the play do relate to those of the contemporary men. The main focus of the play is also on the point of existentialism to brood over the significance and meaning of one's existence. Though, materialistically, the twenty-first

century's youth may be in a better condition from the youth of sixties, existentially, the same question is lying for them which was felt there in the play by Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit regarding the need of their running blindly after material gains, without being aware of the meaning of their existence.