A Psychological Analysis of Protagonists in the Select Plays of Badal Sircar

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ABSTRACT

Literature and Psychology are two fascinating fields that study human soul. Literature depicts human behavior and psychology researches human behavior. Badal Sircar, a great dramatist of twentieth century explicates the inner psychological struggle of individuals in his plays, aiming to create awareness among common man about himself and his responsibility to society. Sircar elegantly portrays the adverse impact of the external factors on the protagonists who miserably fail to find harmony in their life and society. The paper attempts to analyse the psychological struggle of protagonists and illuminates the adverse influence of sociological factors on him. The paper concludes asserting that it is crucial that everyone in the society needs to understand the unavoidable circumstances, and either change the circumstance or adapt, in order to continue the journey called life.

KEY WORDS: LITERATURE, PSYCHOLOGY, BADAL SIRCAR, PSYCHOANALYSIS.

INTRODUCTION

Literature and Psychology are two fascinating fields that study human soul. Literature depicts human behaviour and psychology researches human behavior. A literary work is a product of a certain psychological condition and it benefits from psychology in terms of effectively presenting characters, expressing their moods, and bringing the reader into the psychological dimension of human reality. The analysis of a literary work in a psychological perspective brings to limelight the predicament of man.

Badal Sircar, The Theatre Man: Badal Sircar, a great dramatist of twentieth century explicates the inner psychological struggle of individuals in his plays, aiming to create awareness among common man about himself and his responsibility to society. Sircar elegantly portrays in his plays, *Evam Indrajit*, *That Other History*, *There is No End*, the adverse impact of the external factors on the protagonists who miserably fail to find harmony in their life and society.

Evam Indrajit: *Evam Indrajit* is an absurdist play that deals with the theme of the monotony of a mechanical existence. In this play, Sircar explores the problems of middle-class people, and reflects the angst ridden modern life through contemporary situations. It displays the passion, ambition and frustration of the youth. The play delineates the predicament of modern man through six characters namely, Amal, Vimal, Kamal, Indrajit, Manasi and a character named as Writer. The play unfolds with the Writer's dilemma of creativity on the one hand and the monotonous life led by the other characters Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit on the other hand. As a conscientious and honest artist, Writer is not able to write a play because he finds life too chaotic and fragmentary to cohere into a dramatic mould and too mechanical to have any meaning. His agony is similar to the agony of the artist who is deeply conscious of the barrenness and horror of life. As Venkata Reddy points out, "The protagonist of the play ultimately meets with only despair, the key-note which is struck at the beginning itself" (59). The play is an eloquent projection of the myriad fears, tears and frustrations of the educated and culturally elite bourgeoisie of the early 60s.

When the play starts, Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit are college students and the story moves through their lives, on to the real world. They have gone through the same education, been bred in the same environment, and work for a livelihood in the same urban world of white-collar employees. But Amal, Vimal and Kamal easily glide from one role to the other in life. They function as the cogs in

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the wheel and soon drift into the humdrum existence. Devoid of any purpose in their lives, they get lost in the mediocrity of the middle class – secured jobs, marriage, children, and property – a contented life. Unable or unwilling to question anything, they accept life as it comes and lead a monotonous life. But Indrajit wants to be different. Though he fits into the roles assigned to him in life, he strikes sometimes a discordant note as the English title of the play suggests he is not “Just Indrajit” but “And Indrajit”, the other Indrajit. This clearly portrays his psychological crisis, the resultant existential crisis and the angst.

Indrajit's predicament arises out of his awareness, which is alienated from practical wisdom. He tries to fight against the norms of the world, the society and the evils of society. But he is unable to adapt to the social norms or alter it, he is frustrated, and laughs at himself and states, “It's a pointless anger. It's blind. Powerless. It only beats its head against the wall”(23). The anxiety makes him an isolate. The central proposition of the existential theory dictates that existence precedes essence. Formulated by Jean Paul Satre, the twentieth century French Existentialist, the proposition states that human beings exist first and then define themselves and live their lives in whatever way they choose, which determines their essence as human beings. Accordingly, Indrajit values his life but the anguish of being aware has become an impossible burden besides his anger at the prevailing condition of the society and his inability to do anything significantly complicates his disillusionment.

That Other History: Sircar broadens the vision of life of Indrajit in the protagonists of his other plays where they escape from condemnation due to the guilt of failure to discharge their duties to the society. Sircar's next play *That Other History* is about the escape from condemnation. The play deals with oppression, guilt and responsibility, associative and collective guilt of man's inhumanity to man throughout history. Sharad, the protagonist of the play is shocked and jolted by the revelation of that other history of the world. The play encounters, examines, exposes and challenges the day-to-day problems and the existence of man in the present war ridden scenario.

The play comprises three versions of a story with the same ending and elaborates the two kinds of gestures towards life and death. The protagonist and his wife appear in all the three versions. The play opens with a middle class couple Sharad and Vasanthi. When the couple looks into the newspaper, their attention is drawn to a short news that covers the suicide of their distant acquaintance Seetanath. Vasanthi starts weaving a story based on this incident. Vasanthi's version explicates his personal unhappiness as the cause of Seetanath's suicide. In Sharad's version, it is the inner storm that creates the death of Seetanath. Sharad's version is a complicated one. He makes Seetanath a more complicated character, a neurotic afflicted with Lolita fixation. It is a psychiatric disorder in which an adult experience a sexual magnetism to prepubescent children. Seetanath,

besides his guilty conscience, experiences anxiety about the country's moral degradation.

The third version of the play is Sharad's encounter with Seetanath's ghost. The ghost reveals that he commits suicide due to guilt complex for an unforeseen reason. Seetanath's ghost takes Sharad to the understanding of human existence beyond his custom existence. Seetanath claims that human cruelty is the other side of man's history. According to Seetanath, mere living in this absurd world is an act of passivity: “They just quietly, unobtrusively, calmly stop living” (28). He opines that by leading monotonous and humdrum life, modern men unobtrusively cease to live. When Sharad has no valid reason for his living, Seetanath explains him that he is leading an inauthentic life dipped in the world of daily routine. Like Indrajit, Sharad too suffers because of the burden of knowing. Sharad is leading a monotonous absurd life and now the knowledge of absurdity results in angst. He too decides to end his life like Seetanath but the sudden arrival of his friend Vasudev with Sharad's job promotion rescues him from the anguished decision.

There Is No End: The play *There is No End* opens with the central character, Sumanta. He is a young man whose fame and success as a writer brought a multitude of fanatics to his house with garlands to fete his accomplishments and requests for autographs, pictures and interviews. Sumanta like Indrajit with the burden of knowledge has anger at the state of affairs in the society and his total inability to do anything results in, sense of pain, maladjustment and guilt. He says, “It looks like I have traversed an endless road. Sometimes it has happened I cannot drive that line out of my head.”(9). He confides to his companion Sumathi his feeling of uneasiness and anticipates that the flaw in his character must surely signal impending doom. His anxiety rises to the level that he laments that the road in front of him stretches endlessly. This feeling of anxiety and despair is the predicament of modern man.

Sumanta fears and states, “I am afraid. I have a feeling that there is some gap somewhere, some flaw”(9). When alone, Sumanta is confronted by an unnamed diabolic figure, called “The Man”. He, reluctant to state the charges against him, commands Sumanta to attend his own trial kafkaesquely. Sumanta feels isolated and perplexed and angst ridden that he attends an imaginary trial. Sumanta is brought to the dock by hypnosis. In the course of unexpected trial Sumanta's personal relationships are publicly exposed and scrutinized in a mock court. All his acquaintances of past and present accuse him of various crimes. The Man assumes the role of the chief prosecutor who acts rapidly even upon the most innocuous evidence to condemn him. The Man is actually Sumanta's conscience which pricks him from time to time.

Sumanta is not an individual. Badal Sircar amalgamates the qualities of Indrajit, Writer, Sharad, Seetanath and creates a character Sumanta in *There's No End*. Like Indrajit, Sumanta is an intellect, and an exceptional in

the modern materialistic society. Like Sharad, he feels guilty for his inactivity towards betterment of society. In this sense he is a prototype of middle class men. He searches for a role befitting him in society and laments as he is unable to find anything new or adapt to the existing one. He is a rebel victim like Indrajit. He questions the existing conventions in the society. He wishes to reform the present social set up. He resists the possessive love of his mother which would prevent him from fulfilling his innate desire of revolution. He sacrificed his sincere love for realising his dream of reformation of society through politics. But in the party he is deceived by the materialistic leaders who go behind fame and power. This sort of willing actions and the present inactions make his life futile and he considers life boring, inert and pointlessly suffocating. In the chaos, he searches for his self.

Existential Angst: The plays *Evam Indrajit*, *That Other History* and *There's No End* reveal that the theatre man with striking originality has portrayed the death-in-life attitude of contemporary man and their angst-ridden life. His concern was the pointlessness of existence compounded by a sense of associative guilt and responsibility in maladjusted persons. The study of the above plays reveals the inescapable situation of the modern man in conflict with himself and the society. The plays explore the uncertainties and incompleteness of life and depict the existential angst that contemporary man suffers. The anxiety concerning one's life due to fear, failures, frustrations, despair, and isolation form the core of these plays. The analysis reveals the crucial factors like existential dilemma of man, man's inhumanity to man, his vicarious guilt and existential responsibility which result in personal angst.

Evam Indrajit, a highly acclaimed play, is about the predicament of modern man which discusses the aspirations, failures, boredom and monotony of life experienced by the Bengali middle-class men. The inane of modern life created a feeling of anxiety and unrest. The realism depicted is the psychological realism which explores the human sub-conscious in depth. The middle-class man's inability to break out of society's chains and inability to take a risk is clearly portrayed in this. This inability of theirs to do anything worth mentioning causes great hopelessness and anxiety. Their innate desires, ideas and feelings remain unfulfilled as they are unable to think, feel and act decisively. They fail to adapt, adjust or change the contemporary state of affairs and are disgusted. The alienated intellectuals, though conscious of the futility of human existence, get disillusioned. They are rootless urban generation who are tired and exhausted because of their vain attempt in revolting against the society. Sircar, referring to the Sisyphian analogy, offers solution to the angst-ridden masses to imbue life with meaning by constructive actions to overcome absurdity.

The existential crisis of Indrajit develops into guilt complex in Sharad, the protagonist of the play *There's No End*. Sircar points out that the actions of man are

responsible for the contemporary woeful condition. The increasing cruelties of man from primitive time to the present day atomic devastations remain a source of despair for contemporary men. Though the protagonists realise their social responsibility to redress the evils, cruelties and injustices, they are passive and unable to do anything constructively. Their inactivity towards the injustices in the world denies meaning in their life and are personally angst-ridden. The guilt conscience affirms human irresponsibility and leads to the motif in the play *There's No End*. Sircar's intention is to kindle the spirits of man to self-analysis which will lead to self-realisation and self-affirmation. The self examination would cause discomfort but it would enlighten one to be conscientious and lead a meaningful life discharging one's duties.

Badal Sircar has skillfully maintained a thematic unity in the aforesaid three plays to espouse his social cause. Sircar clearly and cleverly portrays the indigenous circumstances to draw the attention of the common masses to the contemporary social malaise. All human beings have brought about the crisis and all suffer in one way or the other. Therefore, all can resolve it collectively. The protagonists of the three plays possess similar attitudes and experience similar gloominess. The unaccomplished intellectual aspirations, their failure to get involved and the resultant feeling of guilt are the essential synthesizing experiences of the protagonists. They are -prototypes- representatives of modern men.

Sircar opts prototypes rather than individuals, to effectively project the diverse problems of existence. The audience/readers identify themselves with the protagonists who are sensitive intellectuals, rebel victims and guilty of being inactive. The playwright is concerned with human values and committed to the uplift of the individual and the society, considering even the deep seated psychological implication of social conflict in an individual's life. Sircar prompts the common man to be introspective. The plays can be interpreted in such a way that the depiction of existential conflict, guilt and responsibility are to persuade the readers/audience to discover their potential and overcome their personal angst by faith or prayer or positive thoughts.

CONCLUSION

Existentialists like Kierkegaard, Camus and Sartre believe in living and fighting for life. Bringing life to their words, Sircar makes his readers/audience to understand that journey is more important than destination. A passionate desire for living, willingly shouldering the responsibility to change the things that can be changed and accepting whole heartedly the things that cannot be changed shall relieve man from his personal angst as trust matters a lot than doubts.

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