CHAPTER - II

EXISTENTIAL

IMPERATIVES
Evam Indrajit a theatrical outcrop of all the approaches, trends, feelings, and undefined annoyances troubling the heart of the learned urban middle class. The rationally alive urban middle class considers itself as the vertebrae of the country. Their so-called middle class values have been overvalued and yet their authentic and deeper values have always been assaulted by those who swear by trendy Marxist canons. The middle classes have been made to feel culpable for opting for stability, aspiring for customs and believing in a national identity. Evam Indrajit is in some way about the remnants; the remnants are those who have failed to regulate, line up, and stopped to aspire, and also those who are entangled in the day to day struggle for existence.

When Badal Sircar was asked in an interview whether he considered Evam Indrajit as a political play or an existential play; he said that he never considered the play as a political play, and he did not know the philosophy of existentialism. Natesan Sharda Iyer Says:

Badal Sircar is against the theatre being a commodity for sale to the audience resulting in the detachment between the player and the spectator. He has always argued in favour of spectators being an integral part of the theatre...
to him theatre is a live wire and its strength lies in direct communication.¹

The play demonstrates the emptiness and ineffectiveness of a pseudo-modern existence. It is often recognized as a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama. According to Satyadev Dubey, with the first performance of Evam Indrajit, the theatre practitioners all over India became aware of a major talent and a major play in Indian drama.

*Evam Indrajit* is essentially about an emptiness of modern life as 'life' in the modern criteria becomes a repeated response where originality is the real casualty. The play keeps on rumbling that our survival is a futile speck of dust. The theme of identity crisis is developed through the dreams, anguish, and disappointment of the central character Indrajit in the play. Writer, a character in the play is the narrator-cum-philosopher who involves himself in the play and successfully attempts to create a plot as the play goes on.

The play opens with Writer's predicament who painfully struggles to write a play in vain. Not having witnessed life at the principal basic realities, he is motivated to write only about those who belong to the middle class society. He goes on writing with no contentment to himself and tears off whatever he writes. At last he gets
motivation from the girl named Manasi, literally, the creation of the mind. Manasi is the Indian complement of Jung’s anima, an individual serving as a baton to the communal consciousness. Following the advice of Manasi he suddenly turns towards the audience and calls out to four latecomers and asks them to come on to the stage. On his asking they give their names as Amal Kumar Bose, Vimal Kumar Ghosh, Kamal Kumar Sen, and Nirmal Kumar. Writer does not admit the name of the fourth as he feels the fourth is hiding his identity. He shouts suddenly and asks the fourth to tell his original name. On the Writer’s persistence, Nirmal Kumar finally reveals his identity as Indrajit Ray and his age is thirty-five.

WRITER : ... What’s your name?
FOURTH : Indrajit Ray.
WRITER : Then why did you call yourself Nirmal?
INDRAJIT : I was scared.
WRITER : Scared? Of what?
INDRAJIT : Scared of unrest. One invites unrest by breaking the norm.
WRITER : Have you always called yourself Nirmal?
INDRAJIT : No, but I do now.

WRITER : Why?

INDRAJIT : I'm older now. Age is afraid of joy, of happiness. It only wants comfort, peace. Now Indrajit only wants the comfort of a dark, cloudy sky.

WRITER : How old are you?

INDRAJIT : A hundred. May be two hundred. I don't know. According to the Matriculation Certificate, thirty-five. (199) *

Indrajit finds himself an eccentric in the prevailing system. He wants to revolt against the system and break the taboos. Not having been able to do all this he is persuaded towards suicidal thinking.

Writer tells that he is planning to write a social play about the live experiences of all the four members, Amal wishes good luck to Writer. Vimal advises Writer to make Indrajit the hero and the remaining three the soldiers in the play. Writer himself introduces the fictitious heroine of the play and names her Manasi. Immediately Writer asks Indrajit to narrate his tale. When Indrajit feels difficulty in starting the tale, Writer tells Indrajit to narrate the story of the
relationship he has with Manasi. Indrajit introduces the girl as his cousin and tells him that her name is not Manasi. When Writer asks Indrajit whether the girl is a friend or something else, Indrajit reveals that she is a good friend to him and he feels happy after talking to her. The scene changes to a public park where Indrajit and Manasi are sitting on the green grass. The conversation between the two starts with the rules and regulations made by the society. Indrajit perceives the social rules as something absurd. When Manasi tells him that girls have to go by the rules, but boys don't have to, Indrajit tells her that she is worshipping the rope that ties her. He longs to bring down all the ramparts between them. He is an envoy of the contemporary youth who want to marginalize all limitations and distinctions.

**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)

When Manasi asks Indrajit about his anger against rules, referring to the biblical myth of the ‘Tree of Knowledge’, he replies: “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.” (216) At the end of their conversation about the rules, Indrajit considers himself as an ordinary boy in the society and expresses his thought of marrying Manasi saying: “There should be no problem if an ordinary boy marries an ordinary girl.” (218)

The scene then changes to an office where Amal, Vimal, Kamal, and Indrajit are eagerly waiting for the interview call. They are well-dressed and serious. Suddenly a bell rings and Amal gets up and goes in. He greets the invisible interviewers on the chairs. He then sits on the chair in front with their permission and starts answering questions
silently. Meanwhile, outside the chamber Vimal, Kamal, and Indrajit are seen waiting eagerly for their call. The Indian concept of punctuality is criticized next when Kamal says, "They asked us to come at eleven. And the burra sahib turned up at twelve to interview us." (219) When Kamal asks Indrajit about the number of interviews he attended so far, Indrajit replies that he had attended five. After sometime Writer too joins them as an interviewee. When Kamal asks Writer the reason for coming late to the interview, he says that he had attended an interview in the morning in some other office and so he became late for the present one. Writer then goes on telling Indrajit about the importance of a job in his life and describes the hard crisis in which he is.

**WRITER** : ... when two interviews clash like this, I can't sleep nights. You don't know how much I need a job.

**INDRAJIT** : (smiles) We all need one.

**WRITER** : That's true enough. Generally everyone needs a job. But I need it particularly badly. The fact is - I have hired a flat - borrowed some money for it. After all one doesn't get a flat with all conveniences easily. This one is not a beauty -
but at least it has an independent water closet.

INDRAJIT : I'm sorry – I don’t follow you.

WRITER : the point is – I have got married without my father’s permission. If I don’t get a job this month, I’ll lose the flat. You understand, don’t you? How long can one keep a flat on borrowed money? (221)

In Act II, Writer and Indrajit come together after seven years. When Writer asks Indrajit where he had been all those years; in Bhopal or somewhere else, Indrajit replies that at first he was in Bhopal but after a year he travelled to Bombay, Jullunder, Meerut, and then Udaipur as his job was transferable. When Indrajit asks the Writer about Amal, Vimal, and Kamal, Writer replies that they all are well, got jobs, got married and owned houses. After learning that Indrajit is not yet married, Writer asks Indrajit about Manasi. Indrajit replies that Manasi is also well, she also got the job, only the pen-paper friendship is going on between them, and they meet once a year in Calcutta. When the Writer asks Indrajit, “Aren’t you two getting married?” (231), Indrajit replies that they don’t have such thoughts in their mind.
Indrajit further tells about the conversation between him and Manasi in the past:

MANASI : Don’t force me, please. Give me some more time.

INDRAJIT : Time – time – time! I have been waiting for six months now.

MANASI : What am I to do? I don’t have courage.

INDRAJIT : It’s not a question of courage. Do you want to say ‘Yes’?

MANASI : Not everything is achieved by mere wanting...

INDRAJIT : I don’t know about ‘everything’. But marriage, yes.

MANASI : Men can do...

INDRAJIT : I know – I know – Men can do what they like – but not women. Women can think, accept and ask for more time.

....

MANASI : .... I’ve thought about it a lot. Life isn’t a game of dolls. (232)

According to K. V. Surendran,
The society does not want a man to marry a woman of his choice and it also has different rules earmarked for men and women... The society it seems is especially unkind to the problems of women for which it has its own separate yardsticks.¹

The scene changes to a public park again where Indrajit and Manasi are sitting on the green grass. Indrajit tells Manasi that it is his last meet with her as he is going abroad very soon. When Manasi tries her best to change Indrajit's decision of going abroad, Indrajit reveals Manasi the reason saying that he is tired and exhausted in the present world. However, Indrajit upholds his disgusting tone and anger throughout his conversation with Manasi as the mythical character Meghnad who remains an arrogant radical in the *Ramayana*.

**MANASI** : Would you settle down if we got married?

**INDRAJIT** : I don’t know. I can’t decide anything now. I could once.

**MANASI** : Do you often feel angry with me?

**INDRAJIT** : Not any more. Who knows what marriage would do to us. Perhaps even our friendship would die.
MANASI : Perhaps there will be another type of friendship – something deeper, more meaningful...

INDRAJIT : I don’t know, Manasi, I don’t know anything. I’ve thought a lot. Argued a lot. But I can’t find an answer. I’m tired now. I just feel tired – exhausted. I just do what I feel like doing at the moment.

(237)

This feeling of frustration and exhaustion of Indrajit is evocative of the unhappiness and gloominess of the educated people, who, in spite of their creative mind and repulsive mood, are forced to yield to their circumstances.

As the Act III begins, Amal, Kamal, and Vimal are seen playing cards. Writer then comes to them saying that he had received a letter from Indrajit the previous day. They ask Writer to read the letter as they too want to know what he had written. Writer reads the letter whereas the three go on playing cards silently.

WRITER : Calcutta, London. Everything goes round and round like a wheel. Still it’s not a proper wheel, it’s spiral. And that precisely is the tragedy –
the tragedy of knowing. I catch something. And just when I understand it, it suddenly ends and I throw it away. Then again I grab at something else. Still the hope for a sudden, unexpected, wonderful happening doesn’t die. One continues to feel that this isn’t all. Some time something must happen to fill the world with a dazzling light, throwing the past into obscurity. What a silly dream. The sleep ends— but not the hangover of the dream. (239)

Indrajit then comes in and stands beside the Writer. He becomes a bit idealistic in his approach to life. Indrajit’s intense annoyance leads him to philosophical thinking. He says,

INDRAJIT : Whatever I wished 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 size it. It’s pathetic. Just a dream. The past and present are two ends of a single rope. They are apart because the dream is alive.
Otherwise the future could easily be broken down and thrown into the arms of the past. The past instead of remaining a wait for the vague, smoky future could be turned into a well-defined point — death!

....

.... Dying! That is the greatest happiness. Who knows how many became happy by dying... I shall have to die like that one day. Then why not now?

....

One needs faith to live. Faith in God, faith in fortune, faith in man, faith in work, faith in revolution, faith in oneself — faith in love. Tell me — which of them is alive in me today? (239-240)

Living is an art which necessitates halt of faith in God and everyone and Indrajit accentuates upon the need for faith. He is certainly right to institute the need and significance of belief in life. But having lost all belief in worldly things he himself has become one
“who sees life realistically and dreams about it romantically.” (241)

When Manasi asks Writer about the progress of his play, Writer discussing the mental situation of Indrajit says,

WRITER : How can I? Indrajit isn’t coming back. He has written three letters in three years. Every time, the same old thing.

... 

About going round and round and round and not dying. Those arrogant dreams going round in the head are not dying.

... 

No. It is not possible. The more I tie him up in a plot the more he escapes; says it isn’t real. The more lines I write for him, the more he stands outside them. Says they are not real. Oh! He knows too much – altogether too much. (241)

As soon as Manasi leaves the stage, Indrajit comes in reciting some tuneless song. Seeing indrajit Writer asks about his present living. Indrajit replies that he is now residing in Calcutta and working in some
office. When Writer asks him about marriage, he replies that he
married a woman whose name is Manasi. When Writer doesn’t agree
with his response, Indrajit clears it to him telling a philosophy of life.

INDRAJIT : That’s what usually happens. Manasis come and go. One can get
married to only one of them. The others come and go. Manasi’s sister
Manasi. Manasi’s friend Manasi. Manasi’s daughter Manasi.

WRITER : Like Amal, Vimal and Kamal?

INDRAJIT : Yes, like Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit. (242-243)

Indrajit then introduces Manasi as his wife to Writer and to Manasi the
Writer as his old friend. When Indrajit’s wife leaves the stage, Writer
drags Indrajit aside and asks about Manasi with whom he made
friendship earlier. Indrajit reveals that she is in Hazaribagh and he
occasionally meets her. When Writer asks him where they meet and
what they talk about, he replies saying, “In that park. Under that tree.
....The same things as usual. About me and her.” (244)

Talking to Manasi, Indrajit reveals his mental state that he is
tired and frustrated and no more wants to walk on the roads of
unhappiness as there is no chance of escape in life. When Manasi tries
to inspire Indrajit in all the possible ways by citing the successful lives of Amal, Vimal, and Kamal as examples, Indrajit in slow and soft voice says,

INDRAJIT : Manasi, they are happy. They have something to look forward to. A hope – an ambition – a dream

MANASI

INDRAJIT : No.

MANASI : Didn’t you ever have one?

INDRAJIT : Oh yes, I had. I was myself. I had accepted that I had to do something. Didn’t know what, but something unusual, important, unprecedented. I used to dream then of coming up like a shooting star shattering the sky into shivers coming up filling the sky with light from one corner to another coming up and up until the fire in one burnt down to ashes and only a momentary flame remained in the sky ... (248-249)

Indrajit then tells Manasi that so long as he couldn’t accept his ordinariness, he dreamt but now he accepts it. Considering himself an
ordinary man in the society, Indrajit finally shakes off his name and calls himself 'Nirmal Kumar Ray'. When Writer urges Indrajit that he can't finish the play if he changes his name according to his choice, Indrajit replies,

INDRAJIT : What's the point of finishing it? It won't ever get completed. Its end is its beginning...

... 

It's your job to write. So write away. What have I to do with it? I am Nirmal. (249)

As unable to think how to deal with the situation, Writer too considers himself as an ordinary man.

WRITER : ... I am ordinary man too – common! Yet I am not Nirmal. You and I can't be Nirmals.

INDRAJIT : Then how shall we live?

WRITER : Walk! Be on the road! For us there is only the road. We shall walk. I know nothing to write about – still I shall have to write. You have nothing to say – still you will have to talk.... We are the cursed spirits
The play ends with Writer, Manasi, and Indrajit chanting together the endlessness of the stream of life:

And hence
There's no end.
There's no hope
Of fulfillment
By the holy shrine
At journey's end.
Forget the questions
Forget the grief,
And have faith
In the road —
The endless road.
No shrine for us
No God for us
But the road,
The endless road. (250)

Through his play, Sircar effectively describes the predicament of modern man who finds himself trapped in a situation from which he
has no escape. According to Hindu mythology, it is something like a ‘chakravyuham’ in which he finds himself trapped. Indrajit tries very hard to be an exception to the rule but ultimately finds that he can have no existence without being part of the existing system. He tries to be different from the others. Like the mythical rebel Meghnad, Indrajit stands against the whole communal setup and system, and courageously opposes the rules and taboos. He actually represents the dejected and frustrated young men who, in spite of their high educational qualification, and middle class status in society, move here and there in search of some reputable position. Referring to the Bible, Indrajit grasps the mythical fruit of knowledge accountable for all discontent in human beings. K. Nirupa Rani says:

The Indian mind is always fond of attributing the finer thing of national culture and even the cruder things to a hoary past, to the days of the Gods. The central character of the play ‘Indrajit’ has all the qualities that one can easily identify in the mythical Indrajit. Indrajit here figures as a true representative of the author’s own age, an arrogant, adventurous spiteful man, a dangerous combination who realizes at the age of thirty-five....
REFERENCES

