

CONFRONTATION



CHAPTER II

CONFRONTATION

The play is the thing,
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

- Shakespeare's Hamlet.

The power of theatre to affect the psyche of the spectators is best illustrated through the above quoted words of Hamlet. The eponymous hero has deftly used the 'Mouse trap', a play within a play, to catch the conscience of king Claudius. Badal Sircar, a vibrant theatre enthusiast intensely strives to raise the conscience of the human race to liberate itself from its claustrophobic condition and complacent slumber. So, theatre is a social commitment and not a means of entertainment to Sircar.

What D.H.Lawrence says in the context of the modern novel can be extended to the modern Indian drama as well, the business of which is, “to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment” (126). In an interview Sircar replies, “Social relevance, I believe is automatic with every writer, I mean if he is sincere. Everyman, not only a writer feels he belongs to a society, whatever that society is. And his relations with and responsibilities to that society automatically come out in his writings” (AvivGosh 2).

The recklessness and maladies of the contemporary society have a massive impact on Sircar. As a result, he projects the sickness of the society, maladjustment and enigma of people and their inescapable condition through his plays. As a committed playwright, he feels morally bound to awaken his fellow human beings to the prevailing conditions of their existence. Being a playwright

and theatre personality, he builds awareness by raising the conscience of his readers/audience through his theatre.

When Sircar began his career in the late fifties he wrote domestic comedies and Science fiction fantasies. Growing up among the halcyon days of Bengali professional stage, Sircar was disinclined to visit the public theatres even for a single evening. During the first phase of his career as a dramatist, Sircar disliked proscenium theatre because it catered to the needs of the urban dwellers. However he presented his plays through that because that was the only type of theatre available to playwrights. The conspicuous feature about his early presentations was that he did not produce any serious plays, for playwriting came as an escape valve, a pastime for Sircar. Samik Bandyopadhyay describes Sircar and his friends as “a serious group of people who did not take theatre seriously” (Bharucha 133) because, at this stage Sircar wrote only to amuse his friends in a club called Chakra.

Not many are aware of Sircar’s Christian lineage, as he did not profess any religion. His father, Mahendralal Sircar was a history professor at the Scottish church college, Calcutta. His grandmother Virginia Mary Nandy, a famous physician of her time had a good collection of western literature. His mother Sarala Mona Sircar, introduced him to that. His exposure to western literature from early childhood was appealing to the imaginative and intellectual discernment of Sircar. Shaw was an instant favourite with him. He was irresistibly drawn towards Moliere, Sheridan and Eugene O’Neill.

Sircar had an insatiable thirst for reading dramas. Envisioning the scenes and actions in his mind's eye, he had an exhilarating experience. He loved listening to

radio plays, for it kindled his creative imagination further. When the actual performances were witnessed, he was a little disappointed because the display was not as appealing and effective as the reading. Such exposures sharpened his theatrical sensibility. The plays written at the beginning of his career were light, frothy comedies like Ram Shyam Jadu, Boro Pishima, Abu Hasan, Solution X, and Shanibar. These early comedies of the first phase however revealed Sircar's uncanny ear for catching the rhythm of everyday speech, just like J.M.Synge, who absorbed the poetry in the native rhythm of speech of the Aran Islanders.

Factors like the non-availability of a theatre for the common people or the proletariat, the lack of Arnoldian high seriousness among playwrights to stir the conscience of the world to weed out social evils or to make people live as desirable citizens made him explore the viability of drama to live up to the expectation of the watchers. Sircar's confrontation with the proscenium stage continued in the second phase too. But this time he dealt with plays of serious content. His visit to London and Nigeria awakened the dormant dramatist in him. He produced a large number of original plays of different categories like farce, nonsense, comedies, and existentialist plays. "Plays flowed from his pen as though they were long bottled up" ("Badal Sircar – Off stage" 2). The remarkable plays of this period were, Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas, Sesh Nei, Tringsha Satabdi, and Pagla Ghora. Commenting on the welcome change brought about by the aforesaid plays, Tara Chanda remarks: "His involvement with the stage is complete. Sircar has contributed his full mite to improve and develop the Modern Indian theatre, stage literature as well as dramaturgy" (54).

As Vijay Tendulkar said, that watching a lot of bad plays gave him the concept of the right structure and texture to his plays, Sircar having read a good deal of

dramatic literature was not attracted in the least by the then available grandiloquent, mawkish performances. The dramatic presentations of his time were not up to the imaginative and intellectual perception of Sircar. He is certainly a playwright with a different perspective. So, he focused the attention of the audience not on the mediocre personal problems of individual life, like the complexities of love or familial issues nevertheless projected the failures and dissatisfactions of individuals arising out of their conflicts with the society. In this connection what Sircar comments is appropriate: "My plays are never naturalistic. Invariably too, they deal with a human situation or problem, I realized long ago that I was not cut out to be a novelist. Writers can analyze individual human beings from a point of detachment. I haven't looked at life that way" ("Badal Sircar – Off stage" 2).

The pen is mightier than the sword, for it brings about silent revolutions. Similarly, theatre is the vehicle which transmits the ideals, observations and suggestions of the dramatist about the society for a collective mass, to look back, redress and create a better life style for the present and the future. Here the medium, the structure of the theatre is very essential, for without the successful functioning of which no socially relevant theatrical productivity is possible. Sircar felt that the proscenium stage was inadequate for his purpose. However, he did his best even within the 'peep box' set up.

The proscenium theatre is basically meant for the urban elites. The physicality of the theatre is that it has a large hall with rows of seats for the spectators, which face the same direction. It completely separates the audience from the actors who are on the stage, a raised platform. When action begins, the spectators are plunged in darkness and all the light, action, speech and sound are found only on the stage

which in turn creates an illusion of an enclosed image. Action is completely monopolized by the actors and only a passive role is given to the spectators. It is denoted as a 'peep box', since it is a room where "the fourth wall" is missing and the audience peep through it. The actors also act out unmindful of the presence of the audience. The bond between the actors and the audience is only skin deep. There is no intimate relationship between the actors and the audience. For all the above reasons, the following comment of Rani Dharkar, "Proscenium stage reduces plays to the two dimensionality of a framed picture" (113), becomes a truism.

This kind of theatre is also known as the naturalistic theatre, where the performers and spectators assemble and stay together for a particular span of time and the play is performed through a story with audio-visual effects. The story is translated into theatre language among a number of inter-related people, the characters through interaction or dialogue. Perfect illusions are created with regard to the relationship between the physical stage area and the various fictional locales. Hence, the acting area is not merely a stage, but different places of action at different times. Acts and scene divisions and various stage settings serve this purpose.

The aim of naturalistic theatre is to create an illusion of reality in the minds of the spectators, so that they identify themselves with the characters and show empathy in their lives. Therefore, a make-believe world is created, exploiting the willing suspension of disbelief of the audience. Just like the traditional European theatre reality is intended as something inevitable to which people must reconcile. Such a theatre induced emotional participation and effected the catharsis through terror and pity leading to calm of mind by spending all passion. Here the appeal is

made to the “hypnotized mass” who are deprived of thought process. Like Brecht, Sircar felt that this theatre though offered ‘a slice of life’ actually falsified reality.

In the proscenium theatre the performer loses his identify and becomes the character. The actor’s original personality is absolutely submerged in the fictional figure. Keenly observing the performances of the actor, Brecht aptly criticizes “He did not play Lear; he was Lear”, (Pfister 23) and ultimately, the unreal becomes the real. This sort of faking is effectively established through the use of costumes, make-up, bearing, movement, gesture, facial expression and mannerism. All these are copied and pasted like a mask on the personae of the performer and culminate in the creation of an illusion of reality. “The stage lights play an important role in making the fake look like the real” says Sircar (Changing 17). Just like the magicians, the ‘illusionists’ always prefer the proscenium stage, but Sircar, like Brecht, is not an illusionist. The illusionists illuded their audience but Sircar aroused them.

The spectators are kept at arm’s length and their presence is simply ignored in the proscenium arch. Sircar has been performing plays in the same venue for many years without any change. As drama is living material and subject to change, the forces of change have been working within Sircar intensively. Since he was disenchanted with proscenium structures, the living art of drama egged him to hunt for distinctness. With increasing involvement in theatre, his idea of a new theatre also began to branch out and grow steadily.

The literary career of many great writers have commenced with mediocre productions only. The greatness of an artist rests on the gradual evolution that takes place in them and results in the creation of scholarly, genuine, classic magnum opus. Even the master playwright Shakespeare is no exception. Sircar

too had his early stage but his mind is bent on exploring new avenues to utilize theatre in the service of mankind.

Theatre performance is a 'yajna', a sacred ritual and a serious mission for Sircar and not a mere plaything. On that account Sircar sets his heart on presenting the bare, irreconcilable, contemporaneous reality through his plays. The contemporariness of the issues dealt with have a meaning for the audience of all times. He wants to arouse his audience either intellectually or intuitively to greater conscious participation. So he intensifies the impact of the performance by all possible and unexpected means. His choice of themes, characterization, and technical devices help him achieve his end.

Sircar's clairvoyance has instructed him that proscenium structure will not suffice his plays which aim at conscientization. So, when Indian dramatists were writing conventional plays with definite plot, dynamic characters and complex story lines, Sircar revolutionized the structure and style of drama by defying conventional rules of dramatic action, motivation and language. Like the works of the Precursors of the Romantic Movement, Sircar's Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas and Sesh Nei belong to the transitional period in Sircar's career. They contain elements of both the proscenium and the Third Theatre. These plays serve as a bridge through which he has moved from the proscenium to the 'free theatre', or his 'third theatre'.

Theatre should not be a mere imitation of the brighter side of life or a display of a colourful pageantry alone, but should bring to light the darker side of life too. The aforesaid plays voice out the multifarious problems and infirmities of both man and society. As Jain opines, "Badal Sircar has succeeded in transmitting some of the Pirandellian uncertainties of human existence and value structures to the

Indian scene. His plays explore the uncertainties and the incompleteness of the processes of life as well as of history” (33). Accordingly, the plays deal primarily with human condition, man’s inhumanity to man, his vicarious guilt and existential responsibility. Evam Indrajit, a seminal play, presents the theme of existential angst wherein fear, frustration, despair, isolation, and anxiety are the pivotally important experiences of modern Indian educated middle class youth. This existential crisis exposed in Evam Indrajit shapes up as man's awareness of guilt in Baki Itihas, which deftly portrays oppression, guilt and responsibility. The guilt complex, proclaimed in Baki Itihas, in this play leads to the affirmation of human irresponsibility as the cause for the pathogenic condition of the world in Sesh Nei. Sircar’s adroit handling and blending of such themes reflect not only his concern for the welfare of humanity, but also his theatrical sensibility.

Drama became a medium of protest against various social oppressions with Bijan Bhattacharya and his Marxist followers in Bengal. Sircar’s plays added a new dimension to this aspect by enabling the audience to share a new experience not only of the external world but also of the internal world of psyche. His celebrated play Evam Indrajit has brought existential angst into Bengali theatre with a sense of immediacy. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English defines existential angst as a “feeling of anxiety, guilt or remorse especially about the state of the world” (42). The writer’s feeling of anxiety about the state of the world forms the kernel of most of his plays. These plays deal with contemporary situations and social problems which project the ‘death-in-life’ nature of modern life. Evam Indrajit in particular is concerned with the utter meaninglessness of existence which leads to a state of ‘metaphysical anguish’, which is embedded in the Bengali middle class psyche. What distinguishes the

Bengali middle class psyche from that of others is their direct link and alignment with the leftist parties which strongly condemn the middle class values, their priority to stability, aspiration for culture and faith in national identity. At the same time, in other parts of the country, the middle classes were opting for either armed forces or administrative services.

Critically acclaimed as a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama, Evam Indrajit created a favourable response and reception from the educated middle class throughout India. It is the fiery hatred of the common place and the mundane, the agony of failures, "the stacking of disappointments in an ever growing pile, the slow but reluctant submission to the grinding wheels of routine, the war between intellectual aspirations and material limitations, all leading to the final query – why should one live, or continue to write poetry, or fall in love?" (Banerjee 4). On seeing its performance, the Bengali middle class and the theatre practitioners all over India were jolted with a shock of recognition. Satyadev Dubey opined that this play "was about the Indian reality as they knew it, it was a theatrically effective and crystalized projection of all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations gnawing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class", (Three Modern Indian plays n.p) for the audience identified themselves with the eponymous hero Indrajit.

In a nutshell, the play is about the predicament of modern man, effectively delineated through half a dozen characters namely, Amal, Vimal, Kamal, Indrajit, Manasi and the Writer. The play unfolds at two levels. On the one hand it deals with the Writer's [a character in the play] dilemma of creativity. On the other hand, the play discusses the boredom and monotony of life as experienced by the

urban middle class youth and exemplified through the characters of Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit.

At the first level, the quotidian experience of a creative artist is unveiled. The Writer is unable to write anything because he is a conscientious artist who is aware of the sterility and horror of life. He finds that modern life is too chaotic and fragmentary to have any meaning. He sees only squalor around him. He meets with simply 'undramatic material' in his life everyday. The emptiness and dejection of man presented here is equal in tempo and essence, as echoed in T.S.Eliot's "The Wasteland": "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish?" (19-20).

The Writer, a character in the play is unable to write because of the dearth of ideas, limited knowledge, or paucity of exposure and experience. His plight is similar to that of the protagonist Indrajit. The Writer regrets, "I know nothing about the toiling peasants. Nothing about the coal miners.... There is no beauty in the people around me, no splendour, no substance. Only the undramatic material – Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit" (Evam 6). His dissociation with the working class disables him to project in his plays their drudgery. Being an urbanite, he has been a constant witness to the monotonous and stale urban life. Having no experience of the primitive and basic reality of life, he can write only about those who are sitting in the auditorium. By bringing to light such features, the Writer points out the infertility of the age which lacks lustre in providing good material for writers to mirror life in their works and make their audience grasp the meaninglessness of their existence.

Manasi is a source of inspiration to the Writer. On her suggestion, he calls out to four late comers, Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal, the middle class youth who

cannot adjust with the existing system. They are, according to Dubey, “ the residue ... who have failed to adjust, align, and ceased to aspire, and also those who are enmeshed in the day to day struggle for survival” (Three Modern Indian plays n.p). When the play begins, the four youngsters are college students. Then the story moves through their lives, on to the real world. Amal, Vimal and Kamal function as cogs in the wheel and soon drift into their humdrum existence. Without the ability or desire to question anything, they accept life as it comes. They eventually get lost in the mediocrity of the middle class – good jobs, marriage, and children – a contented life; but devoid of any purpose in their lives. The monotony of their lives is made theatrically captivating and the audience sympathize with their existence.

Unlike the other three, Indrajit aspires for a life harnessed to definite worries and troubles as he is burdened with the knowledge of the seamier side of life. He also questions the existing system of society and looks for meaning in vain. When the Writer objects to his name being Nirmal, he reveals that his real name is Indrajit. It makes the reader/audience associate his character with the mythical rebel, Meghnad who defeated Indra, the Indian Zeus. The Writer believes that his Indrajit is also a rebel, who will provide a good subject for his play and focuses his attention on him. Indrajit revolts against the rule of society which is partial to women. He objects to the way women are treated in the society. When Manasi says that girls have to abide by the rules of the society, his reaction is, “Girls have to! How often have I heard you say that about girls! Girls must follow the rules. Men can do what they like, but women must be obedient” (21). He hates rules saying that there is no point in worshipping the rope that binds a person. To the

dismay of the Writer, his rebel-hero faces the existential dilemma, arising out of his knowledge of the futility of life and turns out to be an ordinary Nirmal.

The Writer perceives Indrajit unsuitable for his play, for he lacks commitment. Moreover he is too elusive to be contained in the structural framework of the play because he questions the very base of reality. Manasi persuades the Writer telling that Indrajit is a good subject, though he is a realist with romantic dreams. But Indrajit himself accepts his ordinariness, "So long as I couldn't accept my ordinariness I dreamt. Now I accept it" (58-59). Indrajit is a dreamer of excellence like the "Nightingales" of Robert Bridges who sing, "As Night is withdrawn, /From these sweet springing meads and bursting boughs of May,/[we] Dream, while the innumerable choir of day/welcome the dawn" (Green, 162). He thought that he was different from the unthinking average and had the potential to do something "unusual, important and unprecedented" but "the light never came" and the sky did not burn". Consequently, he could not come up "like a shooting star shattering the sky into shivers" (58). Only the Writer retrieves him from his dejection and infuses courage and confidence in him to rise above from the ordinary.

At another level the play deals with existential angst and the predicament of man in the Indian milieu. The twentieth century is the best of times and also the worst of times. Rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization has given birth to new problems like craving for money, name, fame and the subsequent dehumanization. These problems have intensely affected public morality and created a feeling of anxiety and unrest. The rise of scientific spirit and rationalism has led to a questioning of the so far accepted social beliefs, conventions and traditions. The post-war reaction has generated religious scepticism, general

disillusionment, frustration and loss of hope. The post-war age, has thus become an age of irresponsibility.

All the characteristics of the post-war modern world are found in Indian writings too with specific Indian contexts. The mood of despair and faithlessness is common among the people and they cannot escape from this social condition. The play Evam Indrajit is basically about the inane of modern life. Life here becomes a “rehearsed response” where novelty is the real casualty. It expands the frustrations and the intellectual aspirations of the “urban Intelligentsia”. As a sensitive intellect, who cannot withstand the cumbersome routine, Indrajit feels like running away from the world itself. He would have run away but for his mother and examinations. Indrajit’s imagination craves to escape, “somewhere far away. I don’t know what’ll be there – jungle probably, or desert, or iceberg.... strange people.... a world outside geography” (10). Indrajit, a romantic, is disconsolate with the state of affairs of the world and like Keats, wants to escape to the “fairy lands forlorn”. As pointed out by Nila Das, when Tagore’s Chandra in The Cycle of the Spring heard the call of the Life Beyond, he left behind the humdrum world in search of the ‘invisible light’ (133). Unlike Chandra’s, Indrajit’s wish is only superfluous lacking inner call. Hence, he longs for a larger life as a momentary fancy. So, he returns to remain adjusted to the dead routine, with voices singing in his ears that all these mean habituality.

Indrajit considers his existence as a “pointless particle of dust” (Evam 5). He is also aware of the fact that his anger at the society is incoherent, pointless and impotent. When he saw a boy of about seven with a sibling on his waist, pestering him to get his shoes polished, he was mad with fury and about to thrash the boy. He is helpless at the poverty of the boy and accuses the strange society.

The play is even designated as the Waiting for Godot of Indian theatre for its theme of circularity and for “the vague hope for deliverance from human condition of consciousness”. Consciousness is always caught in the middle of things for it cannot hark back to its origin or foresee its end in death. Badal Sircar uses an appropriate metaphor to suggest this dilemma by showing Indrajit who is existentially conscious as walking between the rails of the railway track. He says thoughtfully, “It is a straight line. I look back – the iron rails meet in a point far away. I look ahead – the same two iron rails meet in a point far away.... what is behind is ahead. There is no distance between the past and the future. What is there in the past is in the future as well” (55). Through this image past and future are treated as the two ends of the same rope and the fact, that meaninglessness or changelessness is the order of the day, is affirmed.

Indrajit who has been searching for some significance in his life finds none as in Sartre’s No Exit and realizes that there is no escape from mundane existence. As nothing meaningful or significant happens in the play it is considered an absurd play. Absurd does not mean that it is unrealistic. The realism of Evam Indrajit, is a psychological realism which explores the human sub-conscious in depth rather than delineating the outward appearance of human existence. So the play gives the same feeling of watching Beckett’s Waiting for Godot or Ionesco’s Amedee. Indrajit like Beckett’s Godot is an eternal question mark.

Indrajit loves Manasi but there is a taboo attached to his love, as she is his first cousin from his mother’s side. He feels happy in the company of Manasi but the social law does not permit him to marry her. So he is disillusioned. His disillusionment is presented as follows: “There is just a large wheel going round and round. And we go round with it” (18). Life is a large wheel and man gets

along with it unquestioningly. Only a few like Indrajit try to be different from the common lot. In fact education makes a person aware of the evils around him.

Making an allusion to the Biblical myth of the Tree of knowledge, Indrajit says, "If I hadn't tasted the fruit of knowledge I could have gone on living in this paradise of your blessed society of rules" (23). He tells Manasi that since he is extraordinary he cannot accept the rules. Despite the social taboo he wants to marry her, though Manasi herself does not approve of it. The Writer who gets a glimpse of their problem knows pretty well that nothing is going to happen in the world whether they get married or not. "They can get married. Then the same round again. They may not get married. Again the same round. One-two-three-four-three-two-one. It's all a question of going round and round. The answer is a circle – a zero" (25). These words of the Writer echo the futility and absurdity of man's life.

Though it is clear that life has nothing significant to offer but dullness, there is a common tendency in all human beings to tread the same path, a dreary round of meaningless routine. Indrajit and Manasi sit on the same grass, in the same park and talk more and more but the same words are repeated again and again. Life seems a monotonous circle of meaningless existence to Indrajit and the Writer. The monotony of the office scene is well-matched with the wheel of life described earlier. It is all 'hello', 'yes', 'order', 'invoice' and 'delivery'. "After the files, tea. Then files. Then snacks. Then files. Then tea. Then files. Then tram – bus, train. There are bigger offices where even more important business is transacted. There files – then tea – then files – then lunch – then files – then coffee – then files and then office transport, taxi, car" (32).

The monotony is due to lack of genuine interest or enthusiasm in life. It is reminiscent of the words of Jimmy Porter, about the boredom and flatness experienced by him in *Look Back in Anger*: "God, How I hate Sundays! It's always so depressing, always the same..." (15). The monotony and boredom experienced by the characters of *Sircar* is owing to the following factors: Their ideas and impulses, their desires and feelings seem to be under a blight. They cannot think clearly, feel deeply or act decisively. Their lives find their potentialities unfulfilled. The emptiness of life presented here is identical with the ideas of Eliot in "The Hollow Men", where he says that between the pure essence of the spirit and its manifestation in human life, there seems to be an impassable barrier, a corrupting shadow as follows:

Between the idea
 And the reality
 Between the motion
 And the act
 Falls the shadow. (72)



Indrajit is very well aware of the fact that there is no question of improvement in his situation. He is tired and exhausted. The Writer also shares the same predicament. He thinks that there is no point in flinging arguments in the wild winds and being reasonable. Amal, Vimal and Kamal are also disgusted at the confused state of affairs of the country. They wish to build up a self-sufficient, self-supporting society dismantling the capitalist system. Suddenly they are over-awed by their personal problems and express their concern about their promotion, living quarters, business and family and forget their concern for society. As Dubey observes, Evam Indrajit is "the only play which accommodates and expresses

practically all the major concerns, aspirations and problems of the new, rootless urban generation and invests it with deep autumnal sadness” (Prasad 63).

Indrajit still hopes for a “sudden unexpected, wonderful happening.... “(48) and is on the move. The letter from Indrajit which is read out by the Writer shows that Indrajit is not happy or contented despite his visit to various places including London. “Calcutta, Bhopal, Bombay London. Everything goes round and round like a wheel. Still it is not a proper wheel, it’s a spiral. And that precisely is the tragedy – the tragedy of knowing” (48). He has attained whatever he wished for like education, job, good salary, opportunity to visit prominent places, but without any sense of achievement in it. He is conscious of the futility of human existence and yet continues to dream and get disillusioned. His anger at the society and his inability to do anything significant further complicates his disillusionment.

As Dubey rightly points out, Indrajit’s “failure to fulfil his love makes him see his own existence through the wrong end of the microscope. He finds our mean little world ridiculous”. (Three Modern Indian Plays n.p). He reminds one and all of the ephemeral nature of human existence by telling that the whole world will become just a heap of ashes by the wrong operation of a button. Indrajit grows philosophical and wonders whether life would remain just a game of dolls. This reverberates the famous lines of Shakespeare, “As flies to wanton boys, are we to th’ Gods; / They kill us for their sport” (King Lear 35-36). The growing helplessness of man in the cosmos is brought forth here.

Indrajit believes that even his fulfillment of love would not have given meaning to his life. He tells Manasi that the friendship that exists now between them may be lost if they get married. Life is so unpredictable. His visit to London, a decent job, good salary and secured life do not bring equanimity to him. His frustrations

lead him to contemplate suicide but he lacks the courage to perform the act. His degeneration is complete now and he has become another Amal, Vimal and Kamal in all senses. He has become one among the ordinary, the common lot. He has married somebody other than Manasi. His wife looks after the house and he works in the office. Whenever she goes to her parent's house, he eats in the restaurant. When she comes back he goes out with her. He realizes that he cannot escape from the routine rituals in the web of married life.

Even after all these, he has no sense of gratification in his life. Indrajit's disillusionment, despair and a sense of alienation are common experiences of the sensitive, educated middle class youth. They share the yearnings, dissatisfactions and also Indrajit's insistence on an existence beyond geography. Indrajit's ungratified love for Manasi, his first cousin on his mother's side, owing to which a taboo is attached, his wish to revolt against the social system and failure to accomplish it, his subsequent anger against the society and his own inability to do anything cause great anxiety and hopelessness. The playwright thus projects the vagaries of existence itself and for this quality the play is called a true classic, eternal in scope and magnitude.

As George Herbert says, God bestowed all the gifts to man except 'Rest' with "repining restlessness". "Let him be rich and weary, that at least, /If goodness lead him not, yet weariness/May toss him to my breast". (171). But as a true representative of the homo-sapiens, Indrajit has hoodwinked even God's expectation by being a non-believer who is doomed to remain unfulfilled. So he prefers death which will bring release from his ennui. According to Indrajit, "one needs faith to live. Faith in God, faith in revolution, faith in oneself – faith in love". He asks Manasi, "Tell me – which of them is alive in me today?" (49) The

above words of Indrajit express his angst ridden mind aptly. Loss of hope or faithlessness is the worst of all ills and Indrajit's words resound Mathew Arnold's lament over the Victorian loss of faith in "Dover Beach":

Ah love let us be true
 To one another, for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor peace, nor help for pain
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
 Where ignorant armies clash by night (9).

The same idea gets expressed in "Scholar Gypsy" too. Man should cling to his God or religion to overcome spiritual sterility, concludes T.S.Eliot in The Wasteland. Badal Sircar also makes a suggestion to keep his faith alive at least in something to get rid of existential angst, though not exactly in God or religion.

Evam Indrajit scrutinizes the existential dilemmas of the educated Indian middle class who are inextricably caught between the bourgeois contentment with jobs and a secure future and desire to come out of a mundane existence. In the words of Preeti Bhatt, the play "foregrounds the painful awareness of the futility of human endeavour and prudence through the confrontation between reason and the inexplicable silence of the cosmos" (214). Therefore the readers/audience are sensitized to metaphysical questions about the nature of human existence.

Indrajit who is frustrated at the monotony of life remains inactive and at one stage he realizes that Amal, Vimal and Kamal are also disillusioned but they have something to look forward to, a hope, an ambition and a dream. Indrajit has

wanted to perform something novel, significant and unprecedented but his wish remains only an unrealized dream. So, he accepts his ordinariness as he is not extra-ordinary and refuses to accept being called Indrajit. He tells Manasi, “don’t call me Indrajit. I am Nirmal, Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal” (59). The Writer, for the first time, looks askance at the statement of Indrajit. He is not materialistic like Amal, Vimal and Kamal who look for promotion or building a house or developing a business scheme. So he asserts in a firm voice, “you and I can’t be Nirmals” and adds, “Walk! Be on the road! For us there is only the road... We are the cursed spirits of Sisyphus. We have to push the rock to the top – even if it just rolls down” (59). The Writer brings about redemption through a sort of conscientization to Indrajit to face life boldly. The Bhagavad Gita itself is a ‘hymn before action’ to restore Arjuna from his dilemma. Just like Lord Krishna, who instructed Arjuna in the battlefield to do his duty without any expectation of the reward, the play ends with a note of hope, revitalizing Indrajit, rejuvenating him with the idea that life is an eternal journey, on an endless road.

The central concern of “The Myth of Sisyphus” is what Camus calls ‘the absurd’. Camus, in his essay claims that there is a fundamental conflict between what we want from the universe and what we get in the universe. Indrajit also feels dejected on account of this. He has entertained a romantic dream but life granted him only the stark reality. If life has no meaning it does not mean that life is not worth living. If that were the case, people would have no option but to make a leap of faith or to commit suicide. But Camus is interested in pursuing a third possibility that is we can accept and live in a world devoid of meaning or purpose. This third option is pointed out through the ending of the play. Facing the absurd does not entail suicide, on the contrary, it allows man to live life to its fullest.

Though the play lends itself to various levels of thematic interpretation, the ultimate aim of the playwright is to shock the audience out of their complacency and bring them face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation. As K.Venkata Reddy claims, the play “is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its absurdity, and to bear it with dignity – nobly and responsibly” (“Evam” 65).

Sircar offers a solution to the alienation, disillusionment and despair of modern Indrajits through the Sisyphean analogy. The ending is declarative of human condition as well as hope for living. Though the play dramatizes the meaningless existence of the middle-class, it is actually a “sardonic comment” on the tedium and sameness of life. The words of Nila Das stating that life’s course from home to school, to college and then to the world is “an endless process of growthless growth” (137), are corresponding to the mentality of Indrajit, an isolate and his anguish, malaise and fixity. According to Moutushi Chakravartee, “The ritualistic emphasis on monotony and disillusionment deftly indicates the need for a social change. The play therefore becomes an instrument of change and the product of change itself” (“Disillusionment” 67).

Disillusionment is not always enervating. Sircar emphasizes the Sisyphean effort of putting the rock upwards even though it falls down time and again. Like Tennyson’s Ulysses, he asks the modern Indrajits “To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield”, for the flesh may be weak but the spirit is indomitable. Like Swami Vivekananda he asks his fellow human beings “to awake, arise and stop not” even after the goal is reached and to breathe meaning into the absurd condition of life by their philanthropic actions.

The play offers two possible solutions to the question, why should one live? Life in the modern scenario is ill-ridden, degenerate and offers no hope. Despite such a condemned condition, humanity should thrive. The positive answer is denoted by the ending 'condemned to live' in *Evam Indrajit*. The negative answer to the same question is suicide. Sircar's next play *Baki Itihas* takes up this possibility of escape from the above 'condemnation'.

Whatever happens one should hold on to the main rope of life – hope or faith, but Indrajit miserably fails in this regard, so that he faces the consequence of disillusionment and despair in life. Sharad, the protagonist in *Baki Itihas*, on the other hand, is shocked and jolted by the revelation of 'that other history of the world'. Just like a historical novel which encounters, examines, exposes and challenges the actual day to day problems, *Baki Itihas* challenges the existence of man in the present war-ridden scenario. The play deals with oppression, guilt and responsibility, "associative and collective guilt of man's inhumanity to man throughout history...." (Raha *Bengali Theatre* 80).

Like *Evam Indrajit*, *Baki Itihas*, is also unconventional on a different plane, for the playwright gives three different versions of a story but with the same ending. Only the protagonist and his wife appear in all the three versions. The other characters remain changing. The play is best described as an exercise in psycho-analysis. A head line in a newspaper stimulates a thought experiment between a learned couple. "What begins as an intellectual exercise, soon morphs into a stifling commentary on mankind's selfish complacent existence and on his darkest thoughts – the kind that drives him to write those pages of human history that were best left unwritten!" ("Baaki Itihas").

The play opens with a couple, Sharad, a college professor and Vasanti, a writer, who look into the newspaper. Their attention is drawn to a news item that describes the suicide of a person. They identify the dead person to be a slightly known acquaintance, Seetanath. They try to guess the cause of the suicide which is analysed from three different dimensions that formulate the plot of the play simultaneously revealing the playwright's concern for life. According to Vasanti, 'bankruptcy' and 'ruination' are the causes of his suicide. Sharad's version is a complicated one which projects Seetanath as afflicted with 'Lolita fixation'. He is a neurotic with a sense of vicarious guilt at raping a little girl, Parvathi. He keeps it a secret even from his wife. He develops a similar fixation for a ten year old girl Gowri, the grand daughter of Vidhi Babu, the Chairman of his school. As a penance for his past deed and a prevention of its repetition in the future, he commits suicide.

The third version of the story offered by the ghost of Seetanath is a stunning revelation to Sharad. He commits suicide due to guilt complex only, but for an unforeseen reason. He unrolled an album of pictures showing human cruelty from primitive days to Hiroshima. He shows a picture from the Mahabharata – Bhima drinking Dushadana's blood, slaves are shown manning heavy oars, Joan of Arc is shown being burnt alive, "Slaves, naked and starved, are shackled in steel chains", Seetanath continues:

That is the wheel of torture, used for the atonement of crimes.... That is an ordinary soldier of the First World War.... Hitler's concentration camp.... Now the picture of the Second World War.... Pearl Harbour, London's blitzkrieg, Burma and – Yes, you recognized it. Hiroshima! (27)

Sharad encounters the bleak vision of “the history of mankind”, which is denoted as ‘that remaining history’ or ‘that other history’. After identifying himself as an agent of an inhuman tradition he begins to brood over the absurdity of his existence, without expiation. Through such scenes Badal Sircar condemns the materialistic civilized world because of his genuine faith in the integrity of primitive values. His focal point here is the evils arising out of man’s materialistic hankering in the global canvass.

The material success leads man nowhere as in Evam Indrajit, rather it leads only to further wars and oppressions, which are the outcome of the love of power. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts the rulers absolutely and the innocent people become the victims of war because they remain silent spectators who are powerless to stop the war.

Antonin Artaud devised his Theatre of Cruelty to disturb the audience, to force them to realize, and not to escape. According to him, “Art should not be a shadow of reality, but should strive as far as possible to be that reality itself to bring real passions and sufferings out of the shadows” (Chambers 42). The unveiling of the other side of that reality is a similar revelation. Sircar is content if only his plays disturb the conscience of his readers/audience. Often he reminds his spectators that they are responsible for the present condition of the world they live in.

There are two sides for the history of mankind. On the one hand life continues with its conventional, humdrum, drab routine with day to day concerns, without regard for the bigger problems of the society and the world. The other side of history is full of "riots and wars and Hitler and Hiroshima" (Banerjee 5). Sharad is bewildered by the exposure. He asks desperately what he can do about it.

Seetanath in a bitter tone answers, “No.... No one can do anything about it.

Cruelty, torture, murder, killing will go on – done by man to another man. And still he will not himself be able to do anything against it” (30).

The readers/audience are baffled like Sharad by the above picture and ruminate over the contemporary situation. Injustice done to man by man has not stopped or reduced. On the contrary it continues on a larger scale with magnified violence. Man’s readiness to respond to war is being criticized by Sir Herbert vehemently as follows:

The problem of our age is not a problem of conscience or commitment – of why people choose to die in wars for or against communism or fascism.

The problem is rather why people who have no personal convictions of any kind allow themselves to suffer for indefinite or undefined causes, drifting life shoals of fish into invisible nets. The problem is mass-suffering, mute and absurd.... (Read vii).

This criticism is applicable not only to war but also to other injustices and devastations done to mankind.

Seetanath hates life of such a sort in which he shares human guilt, yet he does nothing to expiate it. He lacks the moral sustenance to live with his awareness and so ends his life. Sumanta Banerjee rightly points out that Seetanath’s “attitude is born of pessimism about humanity, of the belief that tyranny is eternal” (4). The depiction of human cruelty with increasing intensity reaches a crescendo and asphyxiates Sharad. Seetanath claims that human cruelty is the other side of man’s history. With bewilderment, Sharad retorts saying, “This is the history of death”. Seetanath smilingly questions, “Can life have any relevance without death? (27) Though Seetanath enjoys a jubilant personal life, the knowledge of the darker side of history generates a guilt complex and denies meaning to life as in the case of

Indrajit. In his life “all the past, present and future had fused into one single hopeless subsistence” (30) and becomes the real cause of his suicide.

Sharad, a hyper-sensitive being, identifies himself with Seetanath and experiences vicarious guilt for not having done anything to improve the society or cure the society of its maladies – the tyrannies, oppressions, the world wars and the tragedy of Hiroshimas – and attempts suicide, but his friend Vasudev’s intervention with the news of his promotion as assistant Professor makes him physically alive. However he is destined to suffer the agony of living, sharing the burden of the knowledge of the other history. The plight of Sharad has become similar to the suffering of the people of Canterbury in T.S.Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral, as the Chorus say: “Yet we have gone on living, / Living and partly living”, (Part-I L 167-168).

Sumanta Banerjee is of the opinion, “what in Ebong Indrajit was an intellectual’s observation, from a distance, of the vacuity of existence becomes in Baki Itihas self- condemnation for the inability to fill this vacuity with meaning” (5). It is apprehended that Sircar accepts human fallibility in Evam Indrajit but he demands responsibility in his subsequent plays. It is true owing to the fact that Sharad’s knowledge of the other history leads to the guilt born of the acceptance of human tyranny. The photo-album illustrates the history of increasing cruelty from the primitive time to the atom bomb traumatization, depicting the progress of man on the scale of cruelty. This cruel knowledge leaves the peace loving middle-class man, a shattered mortal. He is at a loss, searching for security in the midst of annihilation and admits his responsibility for the crimes of humanity. But it does not lead to any action for change from his addiction to routine life. Sircar stops

with raising the conscience of the lookers on, leaving the subsequent relevant action in the hands of the individuals themselves.

Sircar wrote the third act first and incorporated the first and second acts of the play to serve as a curtain raiser to the unexpected, shocking revelation of the history of oppression and cruelty. In the first act according to Vasanti's version insolvency and disrepair of financial condition are the causes wherein the conflict arises due to the priority given to financial security by Seetanath's wife, Kanak who has hailed from a poverty-stricken home. She is incapable of distinguishing between the security offered by the material world and the sustained soul-stirring company offered by her husband. She deserts her husband stating 'bankruptcy and ruination' as the causes. Seetanath pathetically asks:

SEETANATH. Kanak, is the land, house, money the only thing in
your life? Am I nothing at all?

KANAK. You were everything to me, my whole life, land, house – it was
you who gave them to me. And finally it was you who destroyed them
too....

No in my life even you don't exist now. Through lies, cheating, you have
destroyed yourself (17).

The irony lies wherein the husband never reveals that it is only for her fallen father's sake, who she believes to be dead that he became bankrupt. The pinnacle of the sorrow of Seetanath is that when Kanak says that all these would not have happened if only her father was alive.

According to Kanak necessity knows no laws and she says that she is going her "Akka's way", which implies that she will also become a concubine and go to

Nikhil, a friend of Seetanath. Seetanath is baffled whereas Kanak with utter disillusionment says, “There is nothing right, nothing proper in this world. No hopes, no dreams – only cold, brutal need?”(17) and walks out. She does not want material comforts or sophisticated life but only the barest minimum, the basic needs for existence – “secure and stable existence”. Kanak deserted Seetanath because, the “maddening poverty” was following her like a shadow and it became an obsession from which she tried to extricate herself by hook or crook. Unlike Rama in Vijay Tendulkar’s Vultures, who smelling something fishy about her husband’s business, ardently volunteers to support the male chauvinist husband telling, “we’ll make a feast of crumbs.... I’ll slave hard as you want” (251), Kanak who lacks genuine love leaves Seetanath, a loving husband for loss of wealth. Seetanath commits suicide not because of bankruptcy but because of desertion of his wife, for not only does he love her so dearly but also for the fear of stigma attached with her act.

The second act, which unfolds Sharad’s version, is much more complicated. It presents man as one who always wears a gossamer veil of innocence, hiding his ugliness. Seetanath who has a Lolita fixation is ready to expel Ashok, a student from school for reading Nabokov’s novel Lolita which is, “totally unnatural, ugly, hideously perverse” according to him (21). It proves that he must be a victim of some severe mental blow. In a moment of heightened agitation he gives vent to his suppressed inner feelings to his friend, Vijay. He considers himself responsible for the tragedy of Parvathi, Banwarilal’s ten or eleven year old daughter at Chambalgad. Had he not slapped her to repress his unnatural libido she would not

have run into the forest and fallen a prey to the perverted dacoits. He considers his attraction for the girl as perversion thus:

Day and night that ugly, poisonous virus grew in my body –
 Like some horrendous germ it spread through my system –
 Multiplying in thousands, millions, each moment. (24)

Though he struggled against it with all his might and will, he could not surmount it. As the incident proved to be the death knell for Parvathi's happiness and childhood innocence, his conscience was burdened with guilt and a sense of responsibility for the happenings.

Once again the monster in Seetanath begins to reappear. He has a similar fixation for Gowri, the grand daughter of the Chairman of his school, Vidhi Babu. He has been fervently trying to keep that bestial impulse under his thumb. Seetanath, a sensitive, self-probing person loses confidence over his self-control and contemplates suicide: "I could not punish that devil for so long. But I will hang him today"(26). His troubled conscience will find solace only in death: "His wounded mind is filled with an inexplicable euphoria of deep peace and infinitely pleasurable anticipation of release" (26). By hanging one monster the problem will not be solved. So, the intention of the writer is to bring to the notice of the masses that such cruel and inhuman acts happen in reality. Suicide is certainly not a solution to the problem. The playwright focuses the individual's troubled, split and guilty conscience through this end. Though suicidal attempt recurs in some serious plays like Evam Indrajit and Baki Itihas, Sircar actually denies the solution of self-destruction to his maladjusted characters.

The first and second acts of the play present the ordinary, common or fantastic causes for a suicide. But what is in store in the third act, the real cause is an astounding heavy blow to the conscience of all those who read or watch the play. Sircar questions the role of the middle class in times of unrest, genocide and holocaust through history and demands retribution and shocks the audience by presenting the unexpected. He has proved that he thinks globally and acts locally, by making his audience awe-struck with a feeling of guilt.

The major idea that is common to Sircar's plays according to G.J.V.Prasad "is to bring his audiences to confront the truths of their lives, to explore the value of human lives and social relationships in a world that is hostile and constantly fashioned to confound the individual"(64). This statement is an exactitude as far as Sesh Nei is concerned. It is true that Sircar's theatre is about human relationship. The play questions the role and responsibility of the middle class for the injustices prevailing in the world.

"What the author had aimed at in Sesh Nei was to bring together in one play the themes of his three earlier plays Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas and Teeshwin Shatabdi (The Thirtieth Century) and coalesce them into one new play", said K.Raha ("On Translating Sesh Nei" 8). Sircar squeezes the essence of the three plays and concentrates on building one character, Sumanta, the writer. He shares the intellect, sensitivity, helplessness and sympathy of Indrajit for the underdogs of the society. Just like Sharad he too feels guilty about his inactivity and realizes his responsibility in shaping the attitude of the middle class society. The trial motif relates him with the play Teeshwin Satabdi where the hero arranges a trial for the tragedy of Hiroshima, later accuses himself too. But in Sesh Nei Sumanta is the accused. The play opens 'in medias res' where Sumanta is doused with felicitations

for achieving success as a writer. He confides to his companion Sumati that he anticipates some flaw in his character which signals impending doom. When alone, in a sort of reverie he is confronted by an unnamed diabolic figure, 'The man' who commands him to attend his own trial kafkaesquely, refusing to explain the charges against him. Finally Sumanta is brought to the dock through hypnosis.

Sumanta finds himself inextricably involved in an unexpected trial. Many figures from the past and present appear and accuse him of various 'crimes' of his past deeds, which are not at all crimes from any common man's point of view. His mother condemns him for his selfishness and cynicism as he does not care for her. His former girl friend Manika accuses him of breach of faith, his friend Prasanta says that he betrayed the party for his pursuit of self-interests, his professor complains that he has deprived the sciences by abandoning his quest for knowledge, his former employer accuses him for having denied him the opportunity to use his brilliance for the benefit of his firm. Even Sumanta's companion, his strongest ally in the play is somewhat disconcerted when he asserts that "nothing is more precious" than the self within him. Sumanta's counter arguments explain his actions "in a court where there is no judge and before a prosecutor who swoops upon even the most innocuous evidence to condemn him" (Banerjee 6).

Sumanta explains that by asserting his independence, he would have caused wounds on his personal acquaintances but he cannot be held responsible for it. While justifying his statement he considers even his mother's love as possessive and paralysing: "In the name of protection you built a wall, shut the whole world out and made your son a stunted weakling" (12). He feels that his life is a dreary suffocating routine. Only through Prasanta he learns that the trouble is not his

alone “the fault lay elsewhere, it lay in the social structure, in society itself. And that society could be changed, it had to be changed. That was the only way, that would be the only reason for living” (14). With great ideals and enthusiasm, he has volunteered to serve, reconstruct, and save the society through politics but to his dismay the leaders of his party have not contributed to fulfil his dreams of an ideal society. So he has left the party too. His intense desire to serve and uplift the society turns him to willingly sacrifice all his personal joys. Since he has a feeling that marriage may be a great obstacle in this unselfish venture, he has not married Manika, a lady close to his heart.

All the charges against Sumanta extend the motif of guilt and responsibility. So far he has never thought himself guilty but his conscience is disturbed now. During his introspection, five anonymous figures emerge from the troubled psyche of Sumanta, just like the ghost of Seetanath which appears in Act III of Baki Itihas. It forms the most unsettling section of the trial. These figures accuse Sumanta of his negligence of social duties which get exemplified in his acts of neglecting the beggar in the street, the unemployed worker, the victim of a communal riot and the survivor of an atomic explosion. Sumanta answers that he cannot be held responsible for their sufferings. They are in no way related to him. They are outside his set of laws. Yet the humaneness in him torments him so much that he can neither accept the injustice, the cruelty and debasement he sees around him nor ignore them. With this disturbed psychological condition he is not clear whether he is guilty or not guilty. He says, “Milord my reasoning is leaving me, the paths are getting lost, I can’t see clearly.... On one side is my own law and on the other all these lawless nightmares. The earlier laws have all become pointless and mixed up. Milord, I do not know if I am guilty or not guilty” (26-27).

After Sumanta's self-examination and defence, there is no judge to pronounce the final verdict. It is an implication that not only Sumanta but "we are all the accused". This statement can be regarded as the leitmotif of Sircar's oeuvre. Sumanta's averment [pointing at the audience], "I am the accused; you are the accused. You, You, You – all of you are the accused" – we are all the accused" (27) is the truth. So the final verdict is that the trial will go on forever and there is no end to such problems and the best solution lies only in the hands of man.

Badal Sircar's plays sensitize the readers and the audience to metaphysical questions about the nature of human existence. They are unconventional as against the traditional Indian drama which shunned unhappy endings. In ancient dramas "search for the meaning of life and death, of human destiny, of man's burden and responsibility were not regarded as themes for the dramatic literature" (Kale 49). But Sircar used only such themes in his modern plays to suit the need of the hour though he continued performance in the proscenium theatre halls until he established his third theatre.

Though the accusations are against Sumanta, in reality they are against the whole humanity for its lapses of values and negligence of concern for fellow-human beings. Sircar whips mercilessly at the perfunctory, insensitive, indiscreet attitude of man towards his society. At the end of the trial Sumanta is accused of being guilty on the grounds of man's inhumanity to man. Sumanta's explorations of the limits of his responsibility are genuine, but being a part and parcel of the social establishment, he is also responsible for the various ills of the society. He is the judge pronouncing sentence on himself as well as the accused who accepts his responsibility. Humanity constantly encounters innumerable threats. All human

beings are responsible for the existing woeful condition. Therefore every individual has a greater share of responsibility in executing a desirable change.

The closure of any narrative is either open ended or a closed one. The critic Sumanta Banerjee is of the opinion that Sircar does not present any definite solution to the maladies found in individual and social relations, especially in the plays discussed so far. He points out a logical, inadequacy in Baki Itihas, and Sesh Nei thus: "Though Sircar piles up evidence in support of human responsibility for social evils, he cannot provide stronger justification for the heroes to continue the old way of life" (4). Veena Noble Dass justifies it as follows: "A life long nagging reminder of guilt can be the only consolation for the Indrajits, Sharadindus and Sumantas who are too sensitive and individualistic to choose any path of action to put an end to Hiroshimas" (Experiment and Innovation 68). Apart from this the three plays bring to the limelight man's predicament, his helplessness to extricate himself from the web which he has created. At the same time Sircar never forgets to sensitize his readers/audience to their flaws of disregard for fellow human beings and selfishness which are the causes of the prevailing stalemate.

While Vijay Tendulkar harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings, Badal Sircar makes the society, especially the middle class feel guilty for being indifferent towards man and his problems. Sircar raises the question, who is responsible for this condition? The answer is definitely man himself. As a famous adage avers, "As you sow, so you reap", man reaps the consequences of his selfishness and complacency. Just as the American Dream of the 1930's has become a myth which dehumanized man and society, the loss of moral, cultural, and spiritual values lead man to face the present

day traumas. To create awakening, Sircar takes his audience on a guilt trip through his theatre.

Sircar's themes are located in struggle against inertia of complacency and ignorance offering awareness. After the awakening the change is expected on the recognition of individual level first, before a collective response. Everyone must have a sense of responsibility in one's journey of life just like Robert Frost who says: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep,/ But I have promises to keep/ And miles to go before I sleep/ And miles to go before I sleep" (406). If everyone is fully aware of, and executes one's responsibility it will automatically lead to social responsibility.

The dramatists have a license to manipulate their characters for particular ends. According to Vijay Tendulkar, creating a character is in itself a complicated process since it has to work through multiple contexts, get into the character's socio-psychological constructs and should be exemplified through language (Collected plays xx – xxi). In general character discharges the meaning of the play through conflict or "friction and reaction". Realistic characterization is successful when it suggests, like the iceberg, a depth not visible on the surface (J.L.Styan). A dramatist who works with human nature is surely interested in character delineation, but Sircar is concerned with the relationship between the individual and the society. Consequently his characters are individuals as well as types. As Martin Cobin opines, "the identification of role types that dominate individual personality differences is part of Asian theatre aesthetics" (Enact n.p.).

The protagonists of the plays Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas and Sesh Nei, Indrajit, Sharad and Sumanta respectively are both individuals and types representing the middle class urban intelligentsia. The dramatist has brilliantly maintained a

thematic continuity among the three plays under perusal, endowed his central characters with similar attitudes, and prompted them to undertake similar actions. So, they are, in fact three-in-one, “prototypes” – representatives of modern men. Therefore, their existential conflict, guilt and responsibility become the reality of everyman’s life. Sircar, the founding father of modern drama, makes his readers/audience think, prompting them to be introspective.

Indrajit, Sharad and Sumanta are typical educated urban middle-class intellectuals. They are uncommon and extra-ordinarily sensitive and quick enough to perceive the discordant notes around them and like an arrow from a bow realize their role and responsibility. They think a lot but act less like Hamlet. These are some of their common traits. Indrajit likes to escape from the world somewhere out side geography. Though it is not possible in reality he breaks away from the play and goes to London. When Manasi suggests that Indrajit is a good material to work within his play, the Writer expresses his helplessness by stating, “The more I tie him up in a plot, the more he escapes; says it isn’t real” (50). Similarly Sumanta and Sumati search for the self of Sumanta. Sumanta finally realizes himself in poetry but Sumati is unable to find him. Like the Writer in Indrajit she vociferates: “There’s no reason why I shouldn’t – yet at some point on the way I lose track of him – I cannot get hold of something in him” (15).

Unlike the mythical conqueror, Meghnad, Indrajit is tired and lost at the end. He becomes a rebel-victim. Indrajit can be called an anti-hero because he lacks the gumption to wrestle with the challenges of life. Chris Baldick elaborates that an anti-hero is an important figure in the Theatre of the Absurd. He defines the term anti-hero as “a central character in a dramatic or narrative work who lacks the

qualities of nobility and magnanimity expected of traditional heroes and heroines in romances and epics” (11).

In act I Indrajit is found angry at the social system. He hates the prejudiced rules of the society against women and the marginalized lot, just like a rebel but very soon he realizes that his anger is “a pointless anger. It’s blind. Powerless. It only beats its head against the wall” (23). Indrajit aspires for “freedom and self-definition” but ends up with self-realization by understanding the futility of human endeavour with a sense of guilt. As Hassan elaborates, “The sad history of the anti-hero is nothing more than the history of man’s changing awareness of himself”(66).

Sumanta in Sesh Nei is also a rebel-victim. He questions his mother’s love which checkmates him from realizing his innate potentials. When Manika charges him telling that he has cheated her in the name of love he says, “what you wanted was a home – you wanted to take me out of one cage and put me into another. And I wanted you to join me in the job of breaking those cages” (14). These words of Sumanta bring out his innate desire to reform the society for which he rebels against the existing conventions. He hopes to bring about a revolution in the society through politics. But he is deceived by the selfishness of the political leaders and his dream dies “in the embryo itself”. The condition of these rebel-victims reminds one of the words of Ihab Hassan in “Radical Innocence”, “the rebel denies without saying no to life, the victim succumbs without saying yes to oppression. Both acts are in a sense, identical: they affirm the human against the non-human” (Avery 3).

The actions or inactions of these characters contribute to a great extent to the theme of absurdity, meaninglessness and circularity of life. Like Indrajit, who

finds life eventless and wails that his existence is insignificant, Sumanta considers life boring, inane and pointlessly suffocating. His words, “the same dreary routine day after day – the same pointless suffocating round of home, college, college, home – oh, the constricting dullness of it all” (Sesh Nei 14), prove this.

Seetanath of the third version, the cause of whose suicide is being probed in Baki Itihas, is the alter-ego of Sharad, the protagonist. He reveals the remaining history through a photo-album. In the beginning Sharad is rebellious and does not accept these, but after being exposed to the history of riots and wars, torture, cruelty and murder he is stupefied. He admits his guilt, his inability and helplessness to do anything to set them right. Knowledge of human suffering leads him to guilt complex, yet his inability to atone for the sin induces him to commit suicide. The ghost of Seetanath goads Sharad saying, “Why didn’t you commit suicide, Sharad?” (Baki 30). Sharad succumbs like a victim to the wish of Seetanath and tries to commit suicide unsuccessfully because unlike Indrajit or Sumanta, he still has a concern for his material growth, name and fame. His suicide is stopped by the intervention of Vasudev, his friend, who brings the happy tidings of his promotion as Assistant Professor.

The concept of this anti-hero as rebel-victim is enigmatic in nature. According to Ihab Hassan, man attempts to overcome the challenges of his negative experience by assuming the role of the anti-hero, the rebel-victim. The anti-hero always bears the essential qualities of Prometheus and Sisyphus – “the eternal rebel and the eternal victim” (Bhatt 73). In the opinion of Preeti Bhatt, “Human beings are a victim of an indecipherable supreme power, and are trapped in the cycle of life, which is beyond their control. They can only revolt against the social order, against the norms established in society, and their defeat is predestined”

(214). This defeat is the victory of the protagonist of any existential drama or novel.

Sircar has drawn upon the Western philosophy more than the Indian philosophy because of the colonial impact – which in turn brought industrialization and modernization. The plays caught the pulse of the audience and enhanced the reputation of Sircar as a playwright, to unbelievable heights. The three plays Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas and Sesh Nei are stylistically similar and have unifying leitmotif and characters. According to Sumanta Banerjee, “The frame work within which this act of synthesis is made possible is a strong sense of the frustrations of intellectual aspirations, the failure to get involved and the resultant feeling of guilt” (Enact 3) experienced by the protagonists. The protagonists are put to trial and they come out with self discovery. The self-dissection of the heroes creates discomfort among the readers or the audience the purpose for which Sircar left his job of a town planner and became full time theatre activist.

Despite the similarities, certain prominent features distinguish the heroes from one another. Indrajit and Sumanta sail in the same boat with equivalent characteristic features like philosophical bent of mind, hatred of monotony, and the awareness of the futility of life. But Sharad lags behind these two in the above matters. He is slow to realize the futility of life. For instance, when the Writer asks the reason for hiding his real name Indrajit and calling himself Nirmal, Indrajit replies that it is due to fear of unrest. When he has been a rebel he is Indrajit. Now he has become old and wants only comfort and peace. The fighting spirit in him is gone. The conversation between the Writer and Indrajit reveals the philosophical nature of Indrajit:

WRITER. How old are you?

INDRAJIT. A hundred. May be two hundred. I don't know. According to the Matriculation Certificate, thirty-five. (Evam 5).

Sumanta too is philosophical. He realizes himself in poetry and becomes a poet. He thinks that he is at a fixed point at journey's end but the realization has dawned on him that life is an endless journey as he says, "yet I think the road in front stretches endless" (Sesh Nei 9). But Sharad is neither too philosophical as Indrajit who has no inclination to live or materially succeed nor has he the fierce denigration of family, name and fame like Sumanta. He is jolted by the revelation of that other history by Seetanath, and unable to bear the prick of conscience tries suicide but finds a reason to live telling, "Yes, Vasudev, I will have to be mad. For my job – my promotion.... There is no other way for me to live" (Baki 31).

Apart from the protagonists themselves, their relationship with the other characters in the plays, exemplify their roles by comparisons and contrasts. There is a remarkable antithesis between the two trios, Indrajit, Manasi and the Writer and Amal, Kamal and Vimal in Evam Indrajit. This polarity is due to their contrasting aspirations: "The former group represents a search for truth and a desire for spiritual, moral fulfilment while the latter a quest for material success. Indrajit's pain and frustration is intensified for he observes with surprise the smugness of Amal, Kamal and Vimal and causes self- doubt in him" (Bhatt 212).

The Writer, a character in the play who can be identified with the author of the play, is the alter-ego of Indrajit but he is more mature and practical than Indrajit. The Writer and Indrajit have the capacity to perceive and vivisection themselves and question the futility of their existence. Unlike Amal, Vimal and Kamal – a trio, Indrajit, the Writer and Manasi – another trio have a different perception of life. They are uncommon. Indrajit is a rebel, an isolate and a non-conformist. The

Writer is a punctilious and veracious artist. Manasi literally means the creation of the mind and an Indian counterpart of Jung's anima an entity serving as a pointer to the collective consciousness, according to Satyadev Dubey. Two types of Manasis emerge in the play. One is the 'Manas' or mind of the Writer and the other as a character. The one represents the personified thoughts of the Writer and the other appears as the girl friend of Indrajit. She upholds the values of life, a source of inspiration to the Writer, a confidence breeding companion to Indrajit, though conventional, yet extra-ordinary like Indrajit and the Writer.

Manasi along with the Writer puts Indrajit on the right track when his train of thoughts of life derail:

INDRAJIT. I'm tired.

MANASI. You will have to go on.

INDRAJIT. But why? Why? Why? The same old road ... I walk and walk and Walk. Keep on walking. And yet is there no escape?

MANASI. No there is no escape.

WRITER. No there's no 'scape.... (Evam 55).

The Writer finds something common among them. When Indrajit asks how to live in the world of anguish he says, "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. Manasi has nothing to live for – She will have to live.... We are the cursed spirits of Sisyphus. We have to push the rock to the top – even if it just rolls down" (Evam 59). It is this absurdist existential feature of the play that created a landmark in the history of Indian theatre. As Shanta Gokhle rightly points out, "In this world, idealists and poets had

to put all their efforts into simply keeping to their path, into ensuring that they didn't go under" (Gokhle 2).

The trio Amal, Vimal and Kamal serve as a foil to the character of Indrajit, who is different from the common lot. Shanta Gokhle alludes to the fact that the educated urban middle class youth are "the carbon copies" of Amal, Vimal and Kamal for they highlight the middle class values which are rendered absurd. They are well informed and indulge in witty conversations. Their knowledge is only superficial as they do not realize the senselessness of life. They continue to talk about Capitalist system and Fascism but are worried only about their promotion, living quarters, business prospects etc., and refuse to come out of their cocoon existence and thus represent the majority of Indian middle class. These characters are flat and there is no progression. They are rendered lifeless and insensitive. Though they are intellectuals they represent the mass who never like to be disturbed from the enjoyment of their comforts. "As they are never aware of their meaningless existence, they may be considered dead" (103), says Santwana Haldar. He further compares them to the crowd in Eliot's The Wasteland: "Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many"(61 – 63). Unlike the crowd in Eliot, Amal, Vimal, and Kamal are full of energy and vigour, but like them they are also spiritually dead.

Amal, Vimal and Kamal who represent the majority can be equated with the hollowmen of T.S.Eliot, who say:

We are the hollowmen

We are the stuffed men leaning together

Head piece filled will straw

Head piece filled will straw, Alas! ("Hollowmen" 1-4)

From a spiritual point of view there are three types of people: Those who are the realized souls like the saints and rishis, those who aspire for spiritual knowledge and experience, and those who are submerged in the quagmire of worldly comforts, unmindful of spiritual growth. Amal, Vimal and Kamal represent the third category. They experience spiritual void. The inspiration of religion will certainly lift the 'hollow men' to a higher state. Until and unless such a miracle occurs, they are doomed to emptiness and frustrations. If Eliot advocates religion as a saviour of humanity, Sircar believes in humanism that is collective human endeavour to rectify the problems of individuals and the society. He advocates a sort of self-reliance combined with concern for his fellow beings.

Sircar found that he could not effectively or adequately convey what he wanted to, through a story with characters having definite identities. As he wanted to project the problems of urban middle class people, a specific story with individual characters would not suit his subject. Therefore to him, prototypes rather than individual characters are suitable to express the multiple problems of existence. So he created four prototypes in Evam Indrajit – Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit. Of the four, Indrajit is different from the other three.

The character of Indrajit is measured in comparison with that of Amal, Vimal and Kamal whose lives move from "School to College to job to marriage to family squabbles to finding safe corners for offsprings", (Paul 40) which conjures up the vision of a dull, monotonous future. Indrajit is "serious, cynical, angry and iconoclastic – the odd-ball in the pack, who in his youth strikes a different note from the other three and yet is ultimately forced by social compulsion to play the same tune – like so many radicals who settle down to placid lives after their youth"

(Paul 40) Indrajit thus represents the intellectual aspirations and dilemmas of the urban middle class youth of the 1960s.

Indrajit's vision of life is broadened in Baki Itihas and Sesh Nei where the protagonists Sharad and Sumanta, the middle-aged, urbanized intellectuals wrestle with their guilt of not doing anything concrete for the under privileged section of the society. They lament the loss of a role befitting them in society. Sharad, shocked by the revelation of that other history of oppressions and man's inhumanity to man, contemplates suicide. Sumanta, a non-conformist accepts his culpability and accountability.

Indrajit is always introspective, an introvert, an everyman figure who is prone to disillusionment. Mario Relich comments: "Life seems futile and he [Indrajit] chafes at this inability to do anything to change society for the better. The character of the Writer is even more intriguing, for he conjures up Indrajit and his dilemmas in a highly self-conscious, modernistic manner" (79). Indrajit is identified with the Writer, his alter-ego, for his contemplative nature.

Similarly in Baki Itihas, Sharad associates himself with Seetanath, his alter-ego. In the third act Sharad encounters the dead Seetanath. The phantom of death which intrudes into the domestic framework of the play is later identified as the "private self" or "innerself" of Sharad. Their confrontation becomes traumatic to Sharad because of the knowledge of the history of man's cruelty to man. His private self taunts him to commit suicide. With great exhaustion of all his energy, he turns to Seetanath and asks him to go: "You can go now, Sharad"(30). Instead of addressing him as Seetanath, he calls him Sharad and Seetanath reminds him, "I am Seetanath!" (30). Here Sharad's identity with Seetanath is complete.

The character of Sharad in Baki Itihas emerges from a different perspective. The third version of the play is enacted from the sub-conscious or semi-conscious layer of the mind of Sharad, where he identifies himself with Seetanath. An amplification of this can be seen in his act of attempting suicide. He is unable to bear the burden of human suffering and injustice, torture, cruelty and murder as exposed by Seetanath. After the revelation Sharad says, "I had a horrible dream.... A horrible, useless, meaningless dream. A frightening nightmare" (31), about his experience.

The identity crisis manifests differently in Sesh Nei. Sumanta's conscience appears in the form of Ananda. It brings to the fore front five aspects of life which have a deep rooted image in the mind of Sumanta. They have symbolic dimensions. Each one represents the different types of aberrations to be found in the society. They are, the man who sleeps on the pavement, a factory worker, a victim of communal riots, a witness of Hiroshima, poetry which is dying, loss of spirituality. They demand exposure through the writings of Sumanta, the poet. Sumanta who has been searching for his real self finally finds it in Ananda. It reveals the sensitivity, humaneness and disturbed conscience of Sumanta. This reminds the readers of Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. In this work, the characters go in search of playwrights and directors asking for portrayal and sabotage the theatres. But Sircar's characters emerge from the fine feelings of compassion in the heart of Sumanta, as personifications.

The portrayal attempted presents the conflict in the mind of Sumanta about the existing problems in the society and his negligence to set them right. Though the projection is unconventional, the wish of the playwright is education of the masses by raising their conscience.

In the Sixties Sircar hit the headlines of news as an avant-garde dramatist of the first grade with his existential exploration of alienation and human psyche in Evam Indrajit. Indrajit considers himself a misfit who does not belong to his society. As he cannot get along with the norms and conditions of the society, he feels frustrated and remains an isolate. The character of Indrajit illustrates the permanent plight of individuals to identify themselves with the hostile modern world. The world has become so unfriendly and unlivable that everyone tries to keep a safe distance from the others. But this detached attitude widens the gap between man and his society, leading to unhealthy atmosphere.

The Writer in the play is Indrajit's alter-ego and performs many functions ranging from introducing, commenting on scenes and characters, summing up, raising basic questions regarding the life of characters, about life in general to participating in the action of the play. His choric presence as a commentator makes him more than a chorus. Moutushi Chakravartee observes that the Writer is "Greek chorus, Indian Sutradhar and the Shakespearean fool rolled into one" ("Evam" 40). He is also identified as the mouth piece of the author.

As Eakambaram aptly puts it, "Ever since Pirandello used the convention of the Author to figure as a character in the play and showed six characters in search of him, the device has become the stock-in-trade of all those playwrights who wish to break up the illusion of the theatre of empathy, and create the effect of alienation and lead the audience in the direction of thought" (15), Sircar has created the Writer in the same fashion. The Writer is a non-conformist. He satisfies conformity to social codes by reciting a poem:

Why should you always sleep in the night?

Why should you always try to be right?

Why should you live? Why should you die?

Everybody does it! That's why, that's why. (35-36)

When Auntie asks him to get married, he deflates marriage saying, "Yes!

Marriage! Birth, marriage and death! Birth then marriage and then death. (36)

These lines remind one of Eliot's "Sweeney Agonists".

K. Venkata Reddy is of the opinion that the story of Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit is the story of the Writer himself, as the good angel and the evil angel are but two aspects of Faustus himself in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. He also makes another comparison: "Just as the four Tempters in Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral are but four aspects of Beckett himself, Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit are but four aspects of the Writer himself" (Evam Indrajit as an absurd play 65). The Writer also takes up various roles in the play as an invigilator in an examination, peon Hareesh as well as the boss in the office.

All the characters perform various roles in the play except Indrajit. This leads to the conjecture that his role is not mixed up but he can be considered as an individual apart from being a type. Though the play is about 'growthless growth', there is a gradual progression, rather change, in the character of Indrajit. In the first Act he is a rebel. In the second act he has lost some of his vitality and realizes that human existence is trivial. In the third act, he is disheartened and believes that death will relieve him from all troubles and frustrations. In this respect, Indrajit can be called a round character and all the other characters remain flat including the Writer and Manasi along with Amal, Kamal and Vimal. All these characters remain the same from the beginning till the end. But the Writer and Manasi are more practical and mature in their out look of life than Indrajit.

Accordingly, the characters and their situations are metaphors for the human condition in which the modern man is destined to live. Antonin Artaud also holds a similar opinion about human condition that even the most revolutionary man is responsible for the "asphyxiating atmosphere" in which he lives without possible escape or recourse.

Sumanta in Sesh Nei is a prototype of a middle class man whose different aspects of consciousness and outlook of life are sincerely depicted. He is exceptional like Indrajit and at his wit's end to know where he belongs. K.Raha "On translating Sesh Nei" observes that the archetypal hero of Badal Sircar has two main traits in his character. They are: "One, his keen sensibility and awareness of the universal, his constantly apprehended sense of pain, maladjustment and guilt. And two, his inability to rise above or out of his class, his lack of strength and courage to act, to resolve and not just feel and think about the dilemmas he faces" (8). It is well said not only of Sumanta but of all the three protagonists. The conflict both internal and external experienced by them confirms the fact that man is at war with himself and his society.

Gasgoine in Twentieth Century Drama quotes the words of Sartre: "Each man is a blank slate on which he will, by his actions come to define his own being" (152). Likewise, Sumanta's actions, whether conscious or inadvertent, result in defining his character. He sacrifices his love for Manika to change the society by joining politics. But, Manika's education is hindered by his enraged mother, when she learns of his affair with the girl. So, Manika becomes only an attendant instead of a teacher, and has to marry a drunkard and therefore, her life becomes miserable. Life thus is a chain of events in which one error leads to many errors – a vicious circle. Accordingly, Sumanta, the prototype of Badal Sircar, becomes responsible

not only for his life but also for that of his acquaintances in society. Sircar believes in the dictum "character is destiny". Like Shakespeare's great solitary figures who prepare their downfall by their flaws, the protagonists of Sircar are also victims of their own actions or inactions. The playwright implants the idea that individual responsibility has to be realized to enable collective action possible in redressing the problems of man.

Sumanta is extra-ordinary like Indrajit. His needs are certainly of a higher level. He has no aspiration for money. He is promoted to a job with great prospects. But the job does not attract him because it entails him to adopt certain cheap means to entertain prospective clients at bars, hotels and night clubs. He does not like the way of the world in minting money. So he goes to the extent of getting himself sacked and tells the Manager, Srivastava while quitting his office, "you corrupt your employees to their bones with money – that is your method, your way of working"(18). He cannot belong to such a system and finally becomes a poet. Sumanta's expectation of correctness in his political party and his disregard for wealth present a striking similarity with his creator, Sircar and this characterization has autobiographical undertones.

Sumanta searches for his real self and ferrets that out in writing poetry. He turns a blind eye even to name and fame. When he receives honours and felicitations as a great writer, he asks Sumati, "Did I write for all this?" (9). Sumanta wants to live in the real sense of the word with commitment. He expects perfection and correctness in all his dealings. He has no greed for money. He is really obedient to his mother, faithful to his girl friend, sincere to the party with social concerns and ideals, dedicated to his job with genuine interest and above all wants a salary befitting his work nothing more, nothing less. Sumanta's self-

analysis makes him have cognizance of his relationship with the society and share his responsibility for the debased condition of the society.

Sumanta who is forced into self-analysis defends himself against his accusers who have merely looked on him as their own reflections and deprive him of any identity of his own. His verbal defence attempts to mould his real self, but the real self does not emerge through the rationalization and explanation of his deeds. The search for self leads to the question of his identity. The chaos in his identity is equal to a similar chaos of identity in the court. "Everything is going topsy-turvy. Who is the accused? Who is the witness? The jury? The judge? Everything is mixed up" (27) says, the plaintiff. Sumanta becomes a victim only by accident, not by conscious will, because it is only a conscious choice that paves the way for the making of the self. So the self is something made and not something that exists in its static condition. In Sartrean terms: "there is no human nature.... Man simply is. not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills...." (28). Not capable of executing what he wishes, Sumanta can only justify his nameless existence and give himself up to the trial that will never end.

The characters of Badal Sircar thus represent the mortal millions who live alone, lovelessly, aimlessly, and hopelessly. This emphasizes the Arnoldian proclamation "we mortal millions live alone" (Dwivedi 76). But they continue living and love to live in a loveless world. Like Beckett's characters Vladimir and Estragon, Badal Sircar's characters also learn the lessons of self-consciousness and self-comments from their existence and hopefully wait for something.

One may feel that the 'woman question' is out of question in the select plays of Badal Sircar. It is owing to the fact that Sircar transgresses feminism and embraces humanism, his concern being the welfare of humanity. However as a

punctilious writer, he objects to the laws that bind women and the society that ill-treats women. His anger is exposed through the character of Indrajit. Indrajit angrily quotes an incident where the in-laws of Leela, a widow, threw her out after extracting everything from her, when her husband died of tuberculosis: "they kept her at home for a few days. Took all the Provident Fund and Insurance money that they could get. Took her ornaments and threw her out" (22). Both Sircar and Indrajit are 'angry youngmen', who are angry at the sight of cruelty inflicted on a fellow human being.

At the same time he has treated women as intellectual companions to the protagonists. The women like Manasi and Sumati in lead roles actually keep life going smoothly by their affirmation of faith in life. Their moral support emboldens the protagonists Indrajit and Sumanta to realize that life is worth living.

The study of characters reveals Sircar's attempt at dramatizing the psychological conflicts of a class of people consequent upon some external forces. The characters are both individuals and types. They are unable to pronounce their problems as they only feel and suffer but do not enunciate. It does not mean that there is no action involved. The suffering itself is action as "action is suffering and suffering is action" (L 209) in Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral.

A dramatist's emphasis on action may either be internal or external or both, depending on the nature of the theme. Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot is a challenge to the entire concept of action in the sense, that the characters get nowhere. At best they move in a small circle and end where they began. The end of the play substantiates this:

VLADIMIR. Well. Shall we go?

ESTRAGON. Yes, let's go (2.94).

But they do not move and the curtain comes down. In Evam Indrajit, Indrajit lives more in thought than in action. Hamlet-like he finds himself a prisoner of indecision. In such writers like Sircar, Beckett and Eliot, the isolation from action is achieved through waiting and suffering.

The dilemmas of the age and the multi-dimensional isolation of man are expressed by Auden in his poem "May with its Light Behaving". Human beings fail to rise to the occasion simply because, they having taken the forbidden apple, remain victims of guilt and self-love. Here love fails in its mission of enabling the human will to recover the strength for meaningful action and consequently they remain involved in "the common wish for death" (Srivastava 98). The same idea is mirrored in the dilemma and guilt of Indrajit and Sharad. In this way the pathos of human predicament is being witnessed.

Once conscientized, Sharad, an individual becomes aware of his vicarious guilt and realizes that his existence without doing anything for the well-being of the society is meaningless. His dejection is converted into hope of existence through the fulfilment of materialistic pursuits like promotion or memory of good things as in Pagla Ghora. The individual, thus engrossed in worldly existence and buffeted by the joys and sorrows, is not able to see beyond the daily grind.

As Paramahansa Yogananda illuminates, "only the shallow man loses responsiveness, to the woes of others' lives, as he sinks into narrow suffering of his own." But "the one who practises a scalpel self-dissection will know an expansion of universal pity" (45) like the saints of every age who feel compassion for the sorrows of the world. Such an illumination is attempted by Sircar's manipulation of characters.

Taking into account, technical virtuosity and aesthetic orientations, Martin Cobin calls Indian theatre an amalgamation of Asian quality and Western influences (Enact n.p). Theatre, an instrument for developing the minds of the spectators, is exploited by the dramatists to suit their words to action and actions to words. In this process, multifarious techniques like the use of lights, music, dance, time, space, masks and so on are employed to convey the message of the writer. Apart from these external ingredients, there are some elements which are an integral part of the play itself. They are exemplified through the language and style of the playwrights, indicating contrasts, parallels, metaphors, images, symbols and certain other dramatic devices both conventional and unconventional. Though Sircar, time and again has stressed that to him the content and not the form matters, he has found a brilliant form which best expresses the nature of the material he has in his hand.

Badal Sircar is a versatile genius whose dramatic artistry raises theatre performance into an unforgettable experience. He finds a fresh mode of expression to fulfil the demands of modern taste in lieu of which, many unconventional devices are used. Sircar's employment of such techniques has hybridized this form. According to Moutushi Chakravartee "this hybridization is an experiment with novelty representing simultaneously a change in socio-cultural ethos" (66). Evam Indrajit opens with the Writer sitting on a chair, showing his back to the audience. Another unconventional device is that the Writer chooses four characters Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit from among the audience. This is an

inversion of situation found in Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author, where the characters go after the writer. It breaks the illusion of a play and makes the audience confront reality.

Indrajit's name brings to mind the mythical agitator in the Ramayana, Meghnad, who defeated Indra. The character of Indrajit is an inversion of the myth. The mythical Indrajit defeated Indra and achieved victory but Sircar's Indrajit is a failure. He is defeated in the sad drama of life though not for a wrong cause. Indrajit tells Manasi, "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 burnt down to ashes and only in one a momentary flame remained in the sky" (58). But Indrajit's dream fails wretchedly leaving him crestfallen. He tells Manasi that "the light never came. The sky didn't burn. I could not leave the solid earth" (58).

By departing from conventional dramatic elements the play reflects absurdist traits in construction and approach through innovative characterization, plot and setting. The traditional elements of drama like crisis, climax and denouement are replaced by elements such as chorus, poetry, music, stylized actions through mime and gesture and these create a marvellous theatrical effect. For instance, Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit attend an interview. "A bell rings. Amal gets up and goes in. He greets the invisible interviewers on the chairs. Sits on the chair in front with their permission. Answers questions silently" (26). In the meantime the others sit outside on benches and discuss and criticize whatever that happens in the interviews. After some time "Kamal goes out. Then Amal, Vimal and Kamal

come in and act as the silent interviewers. Amal rings the bell and Indrajit goes in. The entire interview is mimed" (28) instructs Sircar in the stage direction.

Some European and American playwrights during the 1950s and 60s wrote plays expressing metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human existence. These plays depicted the unpredictability, senselessness and unstable condition of human life. Following the tradition of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Albert Camus, and Edward Albee, Sircar wrote his glorious play Evam Indrajit. The despair at the sight of the world and the loss of any ideology to depend on triggered the creativity of Sircar and he projects the pessimistic vision of humanity struggling in vain to find meaning in an inherently orderless, unreasonable universe through a handful of characters.

Role-playing is a device which shatters the dramatic illusion of attributing identity to a character. This device does not allow characters to be self-defining and leads to problems in identity, as characters overlap and elude distinctive traits. The character, the Writer in the play takes up the roles of an invigilator, peon Hareesh and the boss in the office. His ubiquitous presence makes him a choric character, performing the function of chorus too. Manasi is the name given to the Writer's inspirer, Indrajit's cousin whom he loves, the wives of Indrajit, Amal, Vimal, and Kamal. Indrajit marries someone other than his girl friend Manasi and says, "That is 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" (52).

Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit also perform various roles as students, college professors, candidates appearing for an interview, interviewers, and office staff. In

the stage direction at the beginning of the play itself Sircar has clarified that the character Auntie could be 'mother', 'elder sister' or anyone who is a caring elderly person. Preeti Bhatt's observation that, "Sircar's deliberate intermingling of identities foregrounds the absurdist contention that in a universe that is indifferent to human needs and suffering, the idea of the significance of Man is a myth" (208) is remarkable in this connection. Sircar employs such a device to make his audience/readers realize that the problems are not pertaining to a distinct individual but are common to humanity so that they can think with their hearts and feel with their brains about sharing the responsibility.

Not only the theme and characterization of Evam Indrajit assert the absurd condition of man but the speech patterns also epitomize its place in the realm of absurd theatre with its "stichomythic, repetitive and cynical dialogue" (Reddy Evam as an absurd play 63). The following dialogue between the Writer and Indrajit illustrates the point:

WRITER. Where were you born?

INDRAJIT. In Calcutta.

WRITER. Education?

INDRAJIT. In Calcutta.

WRITER. Work?

INDRAJIT. In Calcutta.

WRITER. Marriage?

INDRAJIT. In Calcutta.

WRITER. Death?

INDRAJIT. Not dead yet.

WRITER. Are you sure?

INDRAJIT. (After a long pause) No. I'm not sure. (5)

The final reply of Indrajit quoted in the example points to another device, pauses employed by Sircar. Vijay Tendulkar rightly observes about the use of pauses: "A pause at the right place in a dialogue can do the work of a hundred words. It can take the audience beyond the words and make them 'feel' a situation" (xxxvii). Sircar's use of pauses speaks hundreds of words.

Taking up the function of absurd dialogue, it is worth quoting the words of Preeti Bhatt: "Absurdist plays express their distrust of language as a means of communication. Words fail to convey the essence of human experience, not being able to deliver beneath its surface. The theatre of the Absurd drew attention of the people of the need to go beyond everyday speech, to communicate effectively." (200). There are long exchanges of ideas among Amal, Vimal and Kamal about the condition of the country. What begins as meaningful dialogue ends with dispassionate statements and phrases about their personal problems:

AMAL. Our country has become the home of anarchy and corruption

VIMAL. Our government can't be trusted to do anything.

KAMAL. Power corrupts....

AMAL. Politics is dirty

.....

VIMAL. The living quarters are terrible.

KAMAL. Business is bad.

AMAL. My family is bad.

VIMAL. My son failed again.

KAMAL. My father has died. (47)

Again in Act II Amal, Vimal and Kamal are chatting only words without meaning or coherence and Indrajit points out that in the modern way of life it has become a custom to talk so. The humdrum existence of Amal, Vimal, Kamal is made theatrically captivating:

VIMAL. Imperialism, Fascism, Marxism.

KAMAL. Economics, Politics, Sociology.

AMAL. Quotations, tender, statement.

VIMAL. Report, minutes, budget. (53)

There is a pattern in the dialogue. The characters speak in the same order, one after the other. It also adds to the monotony. They utter words mechanically without comprehending the essence in them. The unthinking, unemotional exchange of incongruous expressions of the aforementioned trio, suggests the increasing isolation and emotional hollowness of man.

In a naturalistic theatre, various background settings are created corresponding to the change in the scene of action. But in the play Evam Indrajit, exceptionally concrete stage images are dissociated from the normal milieu of naturalistic theatre. For instance in Act I the stage scene of an examination hall also serves as a background for another scene, a public park, where Indrajit and Manasi are seen. Sircar creates this setting by asking the audience as follows: "Imagine that these chairs aren't here. Forget this bench. There's green grass here. That's a tree...." (20). These techniques draw "the attention of the audience to the make shift world

on the stage, and force them to be constantly conscious of its artificiality" (Bhatt 208-209).

Devices like imagery, symbolism, metaphor, irony and so on or embellishments integrated in the structure of the play which get exemplified through Sircar's adept use of language. The reiteration of the wheel imagery exposes the circularity of life as well as the play, in theme, structure, and language. Indrajit observes: "There is just a large wheel going round and round. And we go round and round with it."(18). The Writer later modifies this imagery:

Every thing goes round and round, like a wheel. Still it's not a proper wheel, it's a 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. (48)

The conventional wheel of fortune brings about change for better or worse. Unlike the wheel of fortune, here the earth metaphorically is a giant Ferris wheel that goes on and on denoting the eternal cycle of life. The Writer's vision of life in its eternal cycle illuminates that generation after generation the unchanging rhythm of life continues with its drabness as follows: "Amal retires. His son Amal takes up a job.... Kamal is dead. His son Kamal takes up a job. And Indrajit. And Indrajit's son Indrajit....There on the pavement near him is a woman.... Her husband died of T.B.... More atoms, many more atoms mix and mingle and make up the Ferris wheel of this giant earth that goes round and roundthe century goes on"(29).

The monotonous as well as futile circle of existence is identified in Baki Itihas and Evam Indrajit. In Baki Itihas, Sharad and Seetanath of the third version discuss their personal lives including their childhood, education, employment and marriage. When Seetanath shares his anecdotes, Sharad is astonished to note the identical happenings, because Seetanath's narrations seem to reflect the features of his own personal life. For instance, after completing M.A., Seetanath, the alter-ego of Sharad, finds a job and feels gratified partially. His marriage with Kanak, a school teacher, breaths new meaning into his life. Life continues for eleven years as follows: "Lover Kanak, wife Kanak.... Rows of benches, students, Kanak, college, Kanak, lectures, Kanak. New meaning to life – new reason to live. Countless students, limitless minutes, hours, days, months, years. In the vast sea of meaningless existence, the only meaning – Kanak" (29). Such an unbroken monotonous cycle of life creates a void of meaning. The realization of his meaningless existence for nearly eleven years taunts him and nullifies the meaning brought by Kanak too. That is how life continues for the vast majority of humanity.

Ebrahim Alkazi, a renowned theatre director to whom working for theatre is not an exhausting but exhilarating experience asserts that "there is little dynamism in rectangular indoor picture frame theaters, unless you know how to use lighting, and space in front of the cyclorama" (Ramnarayan 5). Accordingly, Sircar exploits the use of lights to his purpose acutely. The function of light is two fold. It is used either to reveal or conceal. The Writer calls Amal, Vimal, Kamal, and Indrajit on the stage. The stage which is kept dark, lights up slowly and reveals them, standing like statues staring at the rear wall of the auditorium. Change of scene

is shown not by changing the background alone but often by plunging the stage in darkness and the subsequent scene is revealed with bright focus light on the prominent character.

When the characters bring forth prominent ideas, the importance is further enhanced with a bright light on them. For instance, as Manasi asserts the positive nature of life, saying, "I may be a germ, but still I seek, seek without shame. The audacious assertion of life claims immortality in its brief spark" (41), she is illumined with a shower of focus light. In Act two the Writer, Indrajit, and Manasi discuss the ephemeral nature of life. After Manasi's assertion of life, light goes off hiding all the three. When it comes back only the Writer is highlighted. The fading out of light helps the other characters quit the stage.

The light serves a symbolic function at the end of the play. The Writer compares himself, Indrajit, and Manasi to the cursed spirits of Sisyphus who have to continue life though it is meaningless. They intone together:

.....

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. (60)

"The stage gets dark – except for a single ray of light which lights them up" (60). The symbolic function of light is exemplary as it denotes their acceptance of the absurdity of life, their faith in future and also in themselves. A ray of hope is revealed through a single ray of light.

In Baki Itihas, fading out and brightening up of light is used to indicate the ending of Sharad and Vasanti's dialogue. It indicates the beginning of Vasanti's version of the play in Act I and the commencing of Sharad's version of the play in Act II. In the third version (Act III) the light has a distinctive function when Seetanath's ghost appears. The stage is not completely dark. It is lit with a dim blue light. Seetanath appears gradually and moves from the kitchen which is immersed in darkness to the stage, where a little more light is thrown on him. Again light serves a symbolic function when Sharad decides to commit suicide, the light goes off as he unplugs the table lamp. But as soon as his decision of suicide is interrupted by the arrival of Vasudev, who brings the glad news of Sharad's promotion, he plugs in the wire and light comes. Sharad exclaims: "You-you-saved me! Wonderful!" (31)

In the conventional sense, chorus is yet another dramatic device represented by a group of actors who comment on the action of the play. In this play a chorus of voices is only heard. It is an off-stage device. It is represented by music, which is not only inter-changeable with a chorus of voices but also assists in shifting time and space. The Writer is a choric character and commentator whose ubiquitous presence pervades the entire play.

Badal Sircar's brilliant use of dramatic techniques is highly commendable. Eakambaram appreciates the technical exuberance of Evam Indrajit thus:

Techniques like fusing characters and developing a central consciousness, lighting up and fading out scenes and characters, devising a circular plot, creating a dramatic language that is marked by repetition, rapidity, quick exchange, stichomythic lines, exploiting comic techniques like farce, caricature by miming and tableau are brilliantly adapted by Badal Sircar.(21)

Baki Itihas is a fascinating play for it juxtaposes domestic discord and bleak vision of history. The first two acts deal with conflicting problems encountered by individuals. The fictionalized versions of a couple Sharad and Vasanti about the suicide of Seetanath unfold as the first two acts. Like a play within the play, two different versions are enacted in the first two acts. According to the first act, Vasanti's version, the mind boggling menace of poverty disturbs the character of Kanak. It seems that the words of Bernard Shaw in his preface to Major Barbara, "the greatest of our evils, and the worst of our crimes is poverty, and that our first duty, to which every other consideration should be sacrificed is not to be poor"(8) is misunderstood by Kanak, the wife of Seetanath, who has hailed from a poor family, that she decides "not to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (Hamlet, III, I, 56) by being with Seetanath and ultimately deserts him. It does not mean that she is in "the spiraling mania for affluence" (The Day in Shadow 87) but in her desire to satisfy the crude, brutal, basic needs she has forgotten the values of faith, genuine love and fellow-feeling. Her act of desertion brings to one's mind immediately Ibsen's Nora, but in reality she is identical with Helmer in ignoring the genuine affection of her better half. The character delineation of Kanak thus mystifies and shatters the concept of ideal womanhood, especially in India. Zero

conscience and priority of basic needs are the frightening and faith-shattering compromises in the case of Kanak.

Rustom Bharucha holds that the idea of dramatizing a number of versions of the same story in Baki Itihas is probably due to the inspiration of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. While Vasanti's version of the suicide is interpreted in a sensational manner, Sharad's version is "more derivative of Ibsen's psychological drama" (Bharucha 138). It unveils the mysterious behaviour of Seetanath in the second act. According to Sharad, Seetanath, is a victim of some severe mental disorder. He is in the cast of an abnormal character suffering from Lolita fixation, who has not committed any sin. Apart from this fatal flaw he is a perfect human being. He identifies himself with the dacoit who had despoiled Parvathi, the daughter of Banwarilal at Chambalgad. He suffers owing to vicarious guilt. The guilt consciousness torments him and he fears that the terrible tragedy might happen to the little girl Gauri, to whom he is gravitated. Seetanath is mentally sick and fears loss of self-control. Vijay, his friend and well-wisher, emphatically states: "But, Seetanath, you know that you were not that dacoit. And will never, in your whole life, be one or anything resembling one!" (25). Seentanath is a split personality. Looking at the picture of Parvathi he says, "I could not punish that devil for so long. But I will hang him today" and then taking the photo album he says, "I couldn't save Parvati, but Gauri, there is no danger to you. You will be safe. Your uncle will hang that monster" (26). His identity with the dacoit is complete and with a strong sense of resentment, he castigates and punishes himself by hanging, as he lacks self-confidence.

On the surface level both versions seem to deal with the latent abnormalities found in some human beings but at a deeper level, they portray man's ineptitude to

disencumber himself from such vagaries. Given a religious interpretation to the characters Kanak and Seetanath, who represent the aberrations of humanity, the context acquires a wider appeal, for it advocates the ill-effects of attachment as shown in The Bhagavad Gita on Shankhya yoga:

While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, from such attachment lust develops and from lust anger arises. (2.62)

From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion Bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, Intelligence is lost and when intelligence is lost one falls Down again into the material pool. (2.63)

Here the characters are contrived to raise the spectators' consciousness above the level of ordinary life by realizing their own flaws.

Technically speaking, instead of a main plot and one or two sub-plots with different characters the writer has created three versions to a story, with a definite ending, from three different points of view as in a novel. The dramatic representation through action is achieved by Sircar's brilliant knack for dialogue. "Forum Three" comments praising Sircar's talent thus:

Within the classical proscenium realm, Badal Sircar has conjured original magic with his play, used highly intellectual logic of establishing and then deconstructing a narrative thread, created critical psychological moments and then disowned them and finally presented a challenge to the audience as to whether man should head for the ultimate decision of self-destruction. ("Baaki Itihaas")

Sesh Nei takes the spectators to the court where Sumanta faces a trial with typical court proceedings. A suitable setting for a kafkaesque trial is designed with least accessories. The twelve members of the jury are represented by twelve chairs. A high backed chair symbolizes the Judge and on the desk in front of the chair, wigs, gavel and law books are kept. The role of the judge is imaginatively played. Two docks, one for the witness and the other for the accused are placed. Fading out of light helps in the arrangement of the required setting. The play opens in 'medias res' when Sumanta enjoys a glorious position as a great poet and works backwards. Instead of flashback Sircar uses the trial and coalesces the past and the present. Sumanta is commanded by 'The Man', a diabolic figure, who turns out to be the chief prosecutor to attend his own trial.

It is interesting to note that hypnosis – "a traditional gateway to the unconscious" – is used as a device to bring about the trial of Sumanta. A train of witnesses follows to give evidence to the court. The intention behind such a trial is to elicit a confession from the conscience-racked accused, prompting him to utter a self-administered sentence. This sort of device also permits flash back or re-presentation of past events that throw light on Sumanta's present crisis (Banfield 127).

The fractured self of Sumanta is represented by Ananda. While Sumanta's conscience is fully awake, Ananda comes to the forefront. Five disturbing aspects of life ingrained in the psyche of Sumanta figure out as five figures. They emerge from different dark corners. All the five together say: "we exist. All of us exist in Sumanta" (24). These universal victims appear as the bastee dweller, the victim of communal riots, the nuclear dead, the dying muse of poetry and the loss of direction represented by the blind. They haunt Sumanta asking him to write about

them. He questions: "What can I do about things that happen else where all over the world?" (25). The fifth witness asks Sumanta to show him the way in the world where there is "no light, no way, no direction" (25) and not even God. The hungry sheep want spiritual direction as in Milton's "Lycidas" but there are only blind mouths and no good shepherd to lead them towards the spiritual path. All the five witnesses expect Sumanta to bear the cross willingly and take up the responsibility on his shoulders. The purpose behind the trial is to make Sumanta confess that he is the accused. Through Sumanta the entire mankind is held responsible, for the eternal enemy of man is man himself. Only man can set his world right and there is no possibility of the intervention of any *deus ex machina*.

The theatrical structure embraced by Sircar in Sesh Neji triggers the conscience of the central character Sumanta and thus allows him to dialogue with parts of his fractured self, responding to the allegations of the witnesses in the form of a trial.

Sircar's theatre form, in all the three plays discussed above, is linked to his notion that the message is more important than the aesthetic means by which it is conveyed. Hence, the dramatic devices inherent in the structure of the plays are not embellishments but serve the desired purpose.

Writers are torch-bearers to the society and a writer like Badal Sircar, "the never-say – die theatre man" (Gokhale 1) sweats to liberate humanity from its claustrophobic existence through conscientization. First he creates awareness in the minds of the audience/readers about their existing condition through the experience of quandary and disturbed conscience of Indrajit. Secondly he makes them feel guilty for the happenings, tyrannies around them through Sharad and finally he involves them in the confirmation of guilt and their responsibility, with Sumanta. Sircar has portrayed the three protagonists in such a way that a logical

connection evolves among them. Sircar's obsession with the dire need for change in social system becomes the connecting link.

Through the judicious blending of recurring themes and characters, Sircar rivets the attention of the audience to ingrain in their psyche the prevalent maladies and awakens their conscience for collective action. Sircar's life is inextricably interwoven with theatre and his confrontation with both culminates in sensitizing the masses to an awareness of their absurd condition, responsibility, and promotion of thought in the direction of ultimate action. Since "conscience is God's presence in man", Sircar, a conscientious playwright functions as a facilitator who helps his brethren to be clued in on their condition and social commitments.

Sircar's confrontation with the proscenium stage came to an end with Sesh Nei. His attitude towards theatre underwent a change from Tringsha Satabdi onwards. As Ella Dutta points out, "from the crisis of the individual, the sombre existentialism that coloured his plays till then, he explored with scathing irony the social, economic and historical forces which were creating crisis in our society" (132-133). This change in attitude has made him exert to find a fitting theatre and his search for the same commenced. The ensuing chapter, "Experimentation" explores the causes for the establishment of his Third Theatre and highlights the special features of it pertaining to the plays concerned.