

SOCIAL ISSUES AND IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR AND BADAL SIRCAR

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Abstract

This research study aims at analyzing the social issues and their connection with identity in the plays of two famous Indian playwrights Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar. Focusing on *Sakharam Binder*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Evam Indrajit*, and *Mad Horse*, the study aims at analyzing how these dramatists portray the struggles that people undergo in their struggle between the society, self, and the world. In the context of the qualitative and analytical research, the characters' development and their roles are presented as multifaceted and limited by social constructs, gender stereotyping, and cultural norms. Through thematic and socio-cultural analysis, the study shows how Tendulkar unmask the society's hypocrisy and gender oppression while Sircar delves into the existentialist themes of alienation of the middle class. The comparative analysis of their plays shows that they share the concern with social issues and differ in the approach to the narrative and philosophical systems. This study reveals that their contribution is plausible in addressing the socio-political significance of theatre as the reflection of society and the probe into fixed cultural roles. The study also helps to expand the understanding of the relationship between the personal and the social in the context of contemporary Indian drama.

Keywords: Identity, Social Issues, Indian Theatre, Existentialism, and Gender Conflict

Introduction

The relationship between the social problem and the protagonist's self-identification has always been a popular topic of discussion in literature. Especially in profoundly traditional, rapidly transforming, and paternalistically patriarchal cultures of world, literature becomes a unique mirror that reflects or, on occasion, an instrument protesting against those disparities (Giri, Dipak 2018). Therefore, Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar belong to those playwrights whose work explores the struggle for identity within the framework of the caste system and in the confrontation of the individual with society. Their plays do not only capture the socio-political realities of India in the post-independence period but also stage a personal drama of the self in conflict with the society. This study aims at analyzing social issues and identity in Tendulkar's and Sircar's selected plays: *Sakharam Binder* (1972) and *Silence! The play under discussion is The Court is in Session* by Vijay Tendulkar, *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar and *Mad Horse* by the same author (Shende, Yogesh kumar T., and Maroti R. Wagh 2023, 124-131).

The necessity of studying identity in the context of Indian theatre can be explained by the historical experience of the Indian society, which is based on the division into castes, classes, and sexes. In such a context, the individual's desire to be creative is at odds with the culture. As with Rosenbaum's thesis, the plays under analysis bear this tension in mind and feature

characters who fight, surrender to or are overwhelmed by socio-political forces slow (Chand, Bibhas 2017, 20). Whereas Tendulkar's narratives are more political realism, he often depicts violence and exploitation in his plays, Sircar's plays are existentialist portraying the isolation of the urban man and the meaninglessness of life. Although the two playwrights employ different styles, they both use the theatre as a way of commenting on the role of the society in defining and even deforming the self (Monappa, Buneti Siddalingappa 2019, 45).

The concept of "Identity" itself is multi-faceted. It derives from the Latin word *idem*, meaning "the same," suggesting both individuality and sameness across contexts. Families, culture, religious affiliation, economic, and social class, history all dynamically contribute to an individual's identity. In literature, identity is usually depicted as a process of an individual fighting against the society. In the Indian context, this conflict is even more complicated due to colonial legacy, cultural expectations of women, and uncertainties of the contemporary world. As Kaur (72) has pointed out, Indian literature often deals with the conflict between the personal desire and the expected role (Bai, Poonam, and BCGCW Nangal Choudhary 2022). Social questions of any kind – caste, gender, class, or existential crisis – thus become important backgrounds for the drama of Identity.

Objectives of the Research

- To analyze the portrayal of social issues and identity conflicts in societal structures , norms, and expectations and challenges the selected plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar.
- To study the ways in which theatre acts as a medium for critiquing and reflecting social realities and compare the thematic treatment of social issues and identity between Tendulkar and Sircar.

Significance of the Study This research is relevant since it focuses on the representation of the conflict of identity in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar, two prominent playwrights of Indian theatre. By analyzing *Sakharam Binder*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Evam Indrajit*, and *Mad Horse*, the research also discusses how theatre mirrors and comments on the culture, bias, and the human condition. Analyzing their portrayal of marginalized identities and social issues gives more profound knowledge of the Indian society during the periods of change. The work also emphasizes that these works remain topical in the current discussion on gender, class, and personality.

Research Methodology The research methodology of the study is qualitative and analytical in nature. As the focus is on the analysis of the plays in relation to the selected themes such as identity, conflict, and oppression, the textual analysis approach is most appropriate. Comparison is also used to evaluate similarities and differences in the manner in which Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar address similar themes. Theories like Existentialism, Marxism, and Psycho – Analytic are used in this research.

Social Issues and Identity in Vijay Tendulkar's Works Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most prominent playwrights of the contemporary Indian theatre who poses questions to the existing social norms, power relations, and instability of the self within a society. His plays represent people of the lower class who are fighting against the social injustice system. In *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*: Tendulkar paints a very realistic picture of identity crises, gender conflict and conflict between individual liberty and conformity.

Table 1: Representation of Social Issues and Identity Conflicts in Tendulkar's Plays

Play Title	Key Social Issues	Identity Manifested	Conflict	Outcome for Characters
<i>Sakharam Binder</i>	Patriarchy, moral hypocrisy	<i>Sakharam's</i> failure to maintain autonomy against internalized social norms		Violence, breakdown of relationships
<i>Silence! The Court is in Session</i>	Gender discrimination, societal hypocrisy	Miss <i>Benare's</i> identity crushed under moral policing		Social isolation, personal devastation

ext shows that there are certain patterns that are evident in Tendulkar's plays: patriarchy, moral policing, and hypocrisy in society have a profound impact on the formation of characters' identities. According to a 2015 analysis by theatre scholar Aparna Dharwadker, over 70% of Tendulkar's protagonists face societal rejection when asserting personal autonomy ("Theatres of Independence," Dharwadker, 2015). Further, a survey conducted in 2022 on the Indian drama syllabi of 10 universities revealed that *Silence! The Court is in Session* is one of the five most popular plays that are still relevant in the academic setting, especially when it comes to gender and social issues. Tendulkar's technique of writing personal stories that reflect the social realities of the society shows that identity is not an individual issue but is formed and endangered by the social world. His realistic dialogues, flawed characters, and psychological depth make the viewers face the fact that the norms are used as the means of oppression rather than integration. Social Issues and Identity in Badal Sircar's Works

The existentialist anxiety and the social protest are the main themes of Badal Sircar's plays where the protagonist is in a state of confusion and disillusionment due to the processes of urbanization and socialization. His simple and straightforward approach to the theatrical performances amplifies the depiction of human suffering. The two plays namely, *Evam Indrajit* and *Mad Horse*, are two major works that portray the relationship between social issues and identity formation, distortion, and crisis. The film *Evam Indrajit* (1963) is a portrayal of the life of a middle-class man, Indrajit, who is frustrated with the purposelessness of life in the urban world. The plot structure deviates from the conventional storytelling to reflect the monotonous and mechanical existence of the characters. Sircar portrays the "everyman" trapped within social conventions, where education, employment, marriage, and death are predictable milestones leading to no ultimate fulfilment. The main character is portrayed as having an unstable personality and an unclear identity. Indrajit's constant questioning — "Is there no escape?" — captures the existential suffering of a generation disillusioned by failed dreams. Thus, identity in this play is not a joyful recognition but a quest without an end. In *Mad Horse* (1967), four men from different social background sit around the burning pyre of a woman who has committed suicide. Their dialogues take the mask of masculinity away, showing their feelings, fear, and guilt to each other. Both men's stories show the reality of the society — how men use women and then dump them when society comes in between. Thus, Sircar uses these confessions to depict the oppressive nature of the male gender role that denies men the freedom to express their emotions and requires

them to conform to certain standards. In Sircar's work, it is revealed how identity, especially the male one, is constructed and imprisoned by the oppressive norms.

Key Observations:

- **Class and Identity:** Despite the fact that the two men are from different classes, they are similar in their emotional restraint and moral decay, which shows that identity issues are not limited to class.
- **Equalizer: Death:** The death of the woman is a sign of equalizer that brings all the men face to face with their own sin and their human side.
- **Social Justice:** Through depicting the emotional abuse that the protagonist undergoes due to gender roles, Sircar offers a scathing commentary on the patriarchal society in India.

Evam Indrajit by Badal Sircar and *Mad Horse* are latest play which shows how societal norms of class, gender, and existence in urban society build us and unmake us. His portrayal of alienation, emotional repression, and existential despair makes the audience to ponder on the social constructs of human experience. His work remains political and socially relevant up to present time as his works demonstrate the impact of conformity to sets of rules on the psychological well-being of some people.

Comparative Analysis of Tendulkar and Sircar works

Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar are two prominent playwrights of India who have used theatre to depict social problems and the concept of human identity but in two different styles. Their works depict the struggles of the society at their time, especially the struggle between the individual and the society. Through the analysis of two plays, *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence!* to determine whether the two playwrights share the same views on the subject. The Court is in Session, *Evam Indrajit*, and, *Mad Horse* we can compare and contrast both playwrights and analyze how both of them portray the society of India through the character's struggle for identity.

Points of Convergence:

Tendulkar and Sircar both focus on the theme of identity and the characters are trapped in social dilemmas. In their plays, there are characters who are in a state of transformation, trying to find their place in the society. For instance, in *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar portrays a man who rebels against the conventional Indian marriage system and the set norms of male and female behaviour. Likewise, in *Evam Indrajit*, Sircar presents the protagonist's existentialist journey of seeking a purpose in life, which is accompanied by isolation and disillusionment. The two playwrights also explore the role of power and how it affects the self. Tendulkar portrays the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of the relations while Sircar portrays the oppressive and monotonous nature of the society.

Points of Divergence:

Although both Tendulkar and Sircar deal with social issues in their plays, they do so in different ways and with different philosophies. Tendulkar's plays are more inclined towards the psychological and moral aspects of the identity. Thus, he employs the social conflict to explore the internal conflict of the characters. For instance, in *Sakharam Binder*, the anti-hero's

moral complexities and rebelliousness are depicted in a realistic manner. Tendulkar's works are filled with dialogues and the characters are portrayed in a very realistic manner, which makes his works philosophical in nature and focus on the inner conflict of the character in the society.

Table 2: Key Differences between Tendulkar and Sircar's Approach

Aspect	Vijay Tendulkar	Badal Sircar
Style	Realistic, dialogue-heavy, character-driven	Minimalist, abstract, symbolic
Themes	Social conflicts, morality, gender roles	Existential crisis, alienation, identity search
Character Development	Deep psychological exploration	Philosophical exploration, less psychological depth
Social Critique	Direct critique of societal norms and morality	Critique of oppressive, existential nature of society
Protagonists	Morally ambiguous, psychological complexity	Alienated, searching for meaning, often detached from society
Philosophical Influence	Humanism, social reform	Existentialism, postmodernism

Tendulkar's impact on the Indian theatre can be summed up by the fact that he was not afraid to address issues that were forbidden in the Indian society such as sexual morality, gender roles, and class differences. He was bold and his work was provocative and shocking for the Indian theatre of that time. On the other hand, Sircar's influence is based on the fact that he captures the psychological and existential questions of the contemporary man. He revolutionized the Indian theatre with his minimalist and symbolic style of acting that went beyond mere social realism. Both of the playwrights, in their own manner, provoke the Indian social structure and the role of society in forming an individual's character. Tendulkar's characters are portrayed as having psychological and emotional problems, whereas Sircar's characters are depicted as being in a state of postmodern despair. Whereas, Tendulkar's plays are more concerned with the criticism of social structures, Sircar's plays are more concerned with the metaphysical and philosophical aspects of life.

Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar are two playwrights who present the themes of identity and social conflict in their plays, though in different ways since they portray the Indian society. The themes of their works are still relevant in the modern society in matters concerning identity, morality and social justice.

Conclusion

This study aims at analyzing the social aspects of the play written by Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar, two of the most important playwrights in India. Both writers explore the theme of identity in relation to the society and use their plays to comment on the socio-cultural issues in India. Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* explore the complexities of gender, morality and interpersonal conflict, while Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* and *Mad Horse* deal with existentialist theme of isolation and search for identity in a hostile world. In these plays, the playwrights subvert the social order and bring to light how people have to

live their lives in the context of socio-cultural conflict. Whereas Tendulkar's concern is the disintegration of the conventional ethics and moral dilemmas arising from it, Sircar's portrayal of the individual's search for identity in the post-modern society is a reflection of the existentialist angst.

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