

Negotiating Identity And Social Conflict In The Plays Of Vijay Tendulkar And Badal Sircar

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Abstract: Most people think that Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar are the two most famous people in contemporary Indian theater. With a focus on themes of social struggle and identity negotiation, this article presents an analysis of a selection of their plays. This article aims to examine these strategies in order to explore how repressive social structures define, constrain, and evaluate a person's ability to become and/or self-identify. The study will devote equal time and energy to examining the plays of Sircar and Tendulkar. The middle class feels alienated and goes through a self-crisis because Sircar utilizes non-linear and absurdist theater to achieve this. In contrast, Tendulkar often has his plays center on themes of institutional insidiousness, moral evasion, and the excesses of patriarchy. By zeroing attention on certain subjects, he achieves this. Through the suffering of three middle-class Indian women, the existentialism-feminism-based textual analysis shows how individuals struggle against societal norms. It also shows how Sircar tried to reimagine the ludicrous in its whole. The research primarily focuses on oppressive social structures and the controversial subject of identity within the setting of post-colonial India. Identity as a contentious factor is the primary subject of the research.

Keywords: *Identity, Social Conflict, Indian Theatre, Patriarchy, Existentialism, Gender, Alienation*

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1. Introduction

As a major medium for conveying the ways in which Indian social and political discourse is always evolving, Indian drama serves as a window into the ways in which ideas of self and society are manipulated and misused. After independence, a lot of writing especially in plays shifted its focus from mythology and history to contemporary issues like social alienation, moral and philosophical divisions, and the plight of the middle class and women (Prasad, Amar Nath, 2006, pp. 241). Here, the criticism of the social situation of the dismemberment of a social framework that is still stifling and repressive is deservedly offered by the works of Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar, two of the most famous and socially aware dramatists of all time. Some playwrights, like Badal Sircar, ground their works firmly on Existentialism and the realities faced by the Indian middle class (Devi, A. Gowsalya, 2025, pp. 2206–2214). Problems of identity, boredom, emotional emptiness, and estrangement are at the heart of the plays *Pagla Ghoda* and *Evam Indrajit*. It is depicted in *Evam Indrajit* that the Indian middle class

goes through this cycle of despair and being stuck in one spot day after day. This male-dominated sense of desolation in *Pagla Ghoda* stands in for patriarchy in society and the fact that men define and control the majority of interactions (Giri, Dipak, 2018). Sircar stays away from over the top action sequences in his minimalistic approach to drama. On the contrary, he permits the theatrical presentation of the internal self's social battle via the utilization of profound psychological traits (Adhav, Sunil Parasram, 2021). Vijay Tendulkar delves into societal injustice, power dynamics, and gender-based violence in a way that is distinct from the majority of Indian theater practitioners (Wadikar, Shailaja B., 2008). Through a staged trial of a woman who is publicly humiliated and penalized for her allegedly "immoral" decisions by an ethically void crowd, Tendulkar reveals the moral collapse of society in *Silence! The Court is In Session*. Sakharam Binder's depiction of unchecked patriarchal oppression is similarly unsettling and reminiscent of *Sodom*; the moral vacuum is used to justify exploitation and the subordination of personal

autonomy crosses the line into irresponsibility (Das, Pinaki Ranjan, 2021). In her plays, Tendulkar explores the contradictory ways in which the societal frameworks of family, marriage, law, and morality eradicate a woman's identity while simultaneously enslaving her (Moni, Sujatha, 2006).

2. Background of the Study

Over seventy years have passed since we revolutionized Indian Modern Theatre. Considerations of social reality, psychological difficulties, and political critiques followed the rise of playwrights (Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava, 2025). As a reflection of postcolonial Indian culture, these mythical and symbolic thinkers shifted their attention to socially engaged experimental forms after colonization. Playwright Vijay Tendulkar is widely regarded as a pivotal figure in Marathi theater, and he was also an influential figure in the development of modern Indian theater alongside Badal Theer (Nikam, Madhukar Janrao, 2012). Through *Silence*, *Sakharam Binder*, and *The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar explored the social and political systems, as well as power and social structures, as well as the moral and political conflicts within society (Shafiq, Farha Deeba, 2013). Badal Sircar, like Sircar, was an early avant-garde politically aware theatre creator in India and a pioneering figure in Bengali theater. He plays a significant role in the evolution of both the *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda*, and he is also linked to the Third Theatre's growth. The Third Theatre was a reaction to the commercial proscenium that sought to create politically engaged and socially accessible forms of theater. *Pagla Ghoda* and *Evam Indrajit* A lot of personal and societal anxiety about living in India after independence comes up in Sircar's plays (Ahmad, Farhan, 2018, pp. 10).

3. Statement of the Problem

The works of authors from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds seldom undergo comparative analysis when it comes to the exploration of identity and socio-cultural tensions, despite the abundance of critical attention paid to individual Indian theater practitioners. Examples of such comparative examination include Tendulkar's works and a selection of plays by Sircar. Issues of individuality, patriarchy, existential crisis, and the breakdown of societal norms are central to their work. Both *Pagla Ghoda* and *Evam Indrajit* face the existential crisis that contemporary people face, as well as the intrapersonal struggle that arises from living in a modern society. *Keep quiet!* Both *Sakharam Binder* and *The Court Is In Session* dramatize the outward signs of the existential crisis that contemporary people experience. The plays by Tendulkar and Sircar chosen

for this anthology attempt to tackle issues of social identity and intra-group strife. The difficulty is in integrating the several texts' points of view in order to characterize, in light of modern socio-cultural practices, the portrayal of societal struggle and personal identity in Indian theater.

4. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To examine manifestations of identity crisis in *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda*.
2. To explore social conflict and gender oppression in *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence! The Court Is in Session*.

5. Scope and Limitation

Silence! The Court Is in Session (Tendulkar), *Sakharam Binder* (Sircar), *Evam Indrajit* (Sircar), and *Pagla Ghoda* (Sircar) are the subjects of this investigation. The works' themes and characters are examined via a critical lens, with an emphasis on the ways in which they address questions of social conflict and identity. Among the many potential theoretical perspectives on each play performance theory, postcolonial theory, feminist critique, etc. the research centers on one. Here, literary and socio-dramatic approaches are front and center. Although audience studies, production/directing interpretations, and performance histories are/should be of significant relevance, they are not included in this research.

6. Significance of the Study

This study is the first of its kind to go into the field of modern Indian theater research; it does so by comparing the work of prominent playwrights from different regions and languages in India and analyzing how they use identity and social and political struggle as dramatic devices. Comparing and contrasting Sircar and Tendulkar on the basis of their geographical differences and dramatic approaches reveals shared themes of neo-patriarchy, existential angst, and the oppressive social and political context in which individuals negotiate their identities. Postcolonial studies, cultural criticism, theatre studies, social critique of dissociation in Indian theater, and the social order after independence are the domains in which this research finds itself. Dramatic narratives and social critique are also relevant. For the multidisciplinary fields of literary studies, performance studies, and social criticism, it is also a foundational text.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study examines the relationship between identity and social conflict in Vijay Tendulkar's and Badal Sircar's tragedies via an interdisciplinary lens that includes existentialism, feminist theory, and social

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conflict theory. Modern Indian theater is complicated on many levels, and this method helps to illuminate those levels, including emotional, cognitive, social, and ideological.

Existentialist theory: is an essential component for understanding Badal Sircar's plays, particularly *Pagla Ghoda* and *Evam Indrajit*. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were influential in the development of existentialism, which addresses themes of absurdity, alienation, and the individual's search for meaning within a conformist society. Many of Sircar's characters suffer from emotional monotony, disconnection, and identity issues; these traits mirror the existential plight of the middle class in modern India.

Feminist theory: Keep your attention on Vijay Tendulkar. Analysis by Sakharam Binder and *The Court is now in session*. By dissecting patriarchal systems, feminist critique reveals their underlying power structures and the ways in which they oppress the powerless, the socially and morally oppressed, and the subjugated. Marriage, morality, and the law are dominating institutions that control and subjugate women's nature, as Tendulkar demonstrates.

The class struggle, power imbalance, and ideological conflicts shown by both writers can be better understood through the lens of conflict social theory. Individual identities are shaped, limited, and/or promoted by social systems, according to this view.

8. Methodology

Focusing on the ways in which identity and social conflict are portrayed in the plays of Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar, this research employs a qualitative interpretative technique grounded in cultural and literary studies. The study topic of drama's themes, characters, and socio-cultural critique is best addressed using a qualitative approach.

Research Design:

Research methods used in the study include both descriptive and analytical approaches. Criticizing the socioeconomic realities of post-independence Indian society reflected in the plays, it thematizes and methodically presents issues of identity, alienation, gender politics, and social conflict. Given the conversational nature of Tendulkar and Sircar's works, the analysis finds similarities and differences in the theatrical approaches they take to societal concerns.

Selection of Texts:

The primary corpus consists of four plays:

- *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda* by Badal Sircar

- *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* by Vijay Tendulkar

In the scholarly discussion of modern Indian theater, these plays stand out for their portrayal of societal hypocrisy, patriarchal politics, moral quandaries, and identity crises. In order to preserve the text's integrity, the editions that were chosen are well-respected academic standards.

Sources of Data:

- **Primary sources:** The dramatic texts of the four selected plays.
- **Secondary sources:** Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, critical essays, interviews of the playwrights, theatre reviews, and other online academic sources. These sources give the perspectives (historical, theoretical, and critical) that are necessary to provide a contextual interpretation.

Method of Analysis:

Language, storyline, symbolism, character interaction, and dramatic tactics are all tracked and analyzed via extensive textual analysis in this work. The texts have been analyzed through the lens of thematic analysis in order to identify commonalities and contrasts between Sircar's absurdist and existentialist themes and Tendulkar's socially combative realist ones.

Theoretical Tools:

The existentialist, feminist, and socio-cultural schools of thought are all brought together in this research. It presents a varied and interdisciplinary view of identity negotiation and conflict. Each play benefits from having these theoretical foundations to ground it in its own history and ideology.

Ethical Considerations:

Interpretations are based entirely on data and pertinent critical debate, and all sources utilized in the study are appropriately cited. None of the data has been manipulated or fabricated.

9. Analysis and Discussion

9.1 Badal Sircar and Identity Negotiation

As an artist grappling with the challenge of being unique in a morally bankrupt, antagonistically mechanistic culture, Badal Sircar has made significant contributions to contemporary Indian theater. The fears of the newly formed urban middle class and the dilemma of negotiating one's identity as a result of social, economic, and psychological pressures are mostly captured by Sircar in his writings from the era immediately following independence. Plays by Sircar such as *Pagla Ghoda* and *Evam Indrajit* depict "fractured selves" and "dispersed" social beings as well

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as the subtle but constant battles that exist in the social spheres of daily life.

The protagonist of Evam Indrajit, Indrajit, is an outcast who faces pressure to conform from the social awareness that surrounds him. He is different from Amal, Vimal, and Kamal, whose lives are dull and predictable. They are all emblematic of the middle class that our culture has built and enclosed around the four pillars of schooling, employment, marriage, and the subsequent stalemate of life. Thus, Indrajit's breaking of this social cycle represents an identity crisis that stems from existential dissatisfaction rather than societal pressures. Individualism has been broken in Shankar Sircar's Evam Indrajit by societal processes and institutions. Systems and structures are unable to shatter individuality, as he shows through repeating sequences and nonlinear patterns. The viewer experiences existential discomfort through an internal and psychological transaction of identity in these introspective and repetitious situations. It is clear from the play's text that existentialism had an impact on Sircar, particularly its concepts on the absurdity of societal constructions and the individual.

Despite its stylistic and tonal differences, Pagla Ghoda likewise questions identity, focusing on gender and societal roles. The plot of the play develops as four male characters converse at the viewing of a young woman's suicide burial. As they reflect on the past, the spectator learns how each guy had a role in the woman's emotional exploitation. Here, negotiating one's identity is a socially created and relational process. Power, emotional distance, and social respectability are the means by which the masculine characters identify themselves; in contrast, the female characters experience fragmentation and silencing of her own identity. Sircar reveals how patriarchal views legitimize emotional abuse, demeaning women to the point where masculine apathy shapes and destroys their identities.

Both Pagla Ghoda and Evam Indrajit criticize social structures that fail to take into account the true self. In Pagla Ghoda, the problem arises from the structuring of relationships between individuals, namely patriarchal ones, while in Evam Indrajit, it is the impersonal societal routines that cause the conflict. Sircar does not provide any kind of salvation or conclusion; rather, he calls attention to the more unpleasant truths of participation and the friction between social institutions that lead to emptiness and moral quandaries. In his self-theatre, the divided self is not everlasting nor autonomous; rather, it is shaped by the repressive social institutions that cause it. This state leads to a moral vacuum.

9.2 Vijay Tendulkar and Social Conflict

In his regular works, Vijay Tendulkar is renowned for unflinchingly addressing societal concerns. In his plays, he challenges the hypocrisy of power brokers, examines marital and familial persecution, and challenges the judicial system. Without Sound! Tendulkar shows societal strife in The Court is in Session and Sakharam Binder as a real thing impacted by sexism, classism, and totalitarian rule, rather than an abstract concept.

Without Sound! In The Court is in Session, a group of amateur actors depict societal tension via the format of a mock trial. The society's collective savagery against a free woman is exposed as a horrific public humiliation of Miss Leela Benare unfolds from a simple practice session. Tendulkar demonstrates how limiting social structures are via the analogy of a courtroom. Morality is enforced selectively. This disinterest extends beyond the individual. Rather than committing a crime, Benare is punished for upending the social order surrounding femininity, sexuality, and motherhood. The apparently liberal and educated male cast members encircle her, revealing the complex, classic patriarchal social hierarchy. Social order, according to Tendulkar, is nothing more than the moral restraint and public shame that men use to exert their dominance.

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Tendulkar explores the social struggle in further depth by zeroing in on issues of social power and the exploitation of women within the male-dominated social structure. By eschewing marriage in favor of domestic arrangements, our protagonist Sakharam has complete social power over the women who are socially outcast by other males. Social hypocrisy is something Sakharam fights against, however the patriarchy he says he hates is exactly what his social practice supports. Violent social practices lead to armed confrontations. An morally responsible individual's social conduct gives rise to this violent struggle. Tendulkar makes Sakharam a complex social figure with conflicting moral stances. The purpose of this social ambiguity in Sakharam is to make the audience feel uneasy about issues such as social violence, misconceptions surrounding social consent, and the uncertainty of social authority. This complex character in Sakharam demonstrates to the audience how social tensions arise from both the traditional inflexibility of society and the progressive ideals that individuals like Sakharam pursue and utilize to rationalize their social dominance.

Tendulkar demonstrates in both plays how the morals of the middle class are conflicting with themselves. Here, the social conflict arises from the contrast between the ideals (i.e., freedom, fairness, reason, etc.) and the reality of social exclusion and control. The confrontations are intensified by the use of confrontational drama, sophisticated character constructs, psychological depth, and cutting dialogues. The most crucial thing is that Tendulkar doesn't give the spectators a way out. Instead, he gets people to think about how they've helped keep the repressive social system in place.

9.3 Comparative Analysis

This section offers a comparative analysis of Badal Sircar's and Vijay Tendulkar's chosen plays, looking at how the writers handle themes of social conflict and identity through contrasting dramatic techniques, sociocultural contexts, and thematic interests and strategies. Despite sharing a foundation in the reality of India after independence, the two writers use different ways to depicting identity and conflicts on social and psychological levels. Both *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda*, written by Sircar, center on themes of identity and its existential and psychological aspects. As reflections of middle-class-ness, his characters appear to be nomadic nomads mired in emotional stasis and repetitive cycles of inner struggles. As a result of the collective social communication and moral indifference, the characters in Sircar's narratives feel

emotionally and psychologically trapped and disconnected from their society. This leads to social conflicts that are supposedly created by a total absence of tensions. Identity in these stories is already nebulous, elusive, and prone to change in a society that does not restrict its members. The dread of social conflict and nonconformity only makes things worse.

In contrast, Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Sakharam Binder* foreground socially constructed identities, particularly those shaped by patriarchy, power, and moral hypocrisy. In his universe lit by conflict, family, marriage, law, and morality, social strife is externalized and interpersonal domination is asserted. Identity is suppressed, especially female identity, and judged and controlled, which brings to the surface the power asymmetries in the Indian social formation.

Table 9.1: Comparative Analysis of Identity and Social Conflict in Sircar and Tendulkar

Parameters	Badal Sircar (<i>Evam Indrajit</i> , <i>Pagla Ghoda</i>)	Vijay Tendulkar (<i>Silence! The Court is in Session</i> , <i>Sakharam Binder</i>)
Nature of Identity	Existential, psychological, fluid	Socially constructed, gendered, institutional
Source of Conflict	Inner alienation, emotional stagnation, conformity	Patriarchy, moral policing, power and authority
Focus of Drama	Individual consciousness and introspection	Social structures and interpersonal domination
Representation of Society	Abstract, symbolic, middle-class monotony	Realistic, confrontational, morally hypocritical
Treatment of Women	Indirect, reflective, emotionally mediated	Central, explicit, oppressive and judgmental
Dramatic Technique	Absurdism, minimalism, non-linear narration	Realism, satire, aggressive dialogue

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Resolution of Conflict	Open-ended, unresolved	Exposes injustice without offering moral closure
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While navigating the tension between individuality and societal responsibility, the table outlines the aesthetic and ideological distinctions between Sircar and Tendulkar. Regarding Sircar's dramaturgy, the internal collapse of identity is what loss of identity means in this situation. So, losing one's identity is a battle because as one's identity collapses, the meaning that was once that identity also collapses, and as a result, the individual experiences emotional paralysis. This kind of social conflict doesn't exist on a tangible, institutional level; instead, it dissolves into the unconscious. Consequently, Sircar's plays finally reach a more contemplative and philosophical level, making them accessible to absurdism. Tendulkar, on the other hand, represents gender as a societal control of power, namely within the female gender. The plays of Tendulkar, in contrast to those of Sircar, depict enormous societal failures and conflicts. The norms of morality, the conventions of daily life that serve to establish social order (such as marriage), and the pervasive and often violent social disputes Law enforcement officers and male defendants also contribute to the criminalization of women in society. The social order's negative and aggressive violence stands in stark contrast to its ambiguity. Here, social order and disputes are mostly focused on the law. Here, law and violence are ingrained components of society's established hierarchy.

9.4 Findings

Identity and social strife are interconnected and essential themes in contemporary Indian theater, as this research shows via an examination of individual pieces by Sircar and Tendulkar. Both playwrights make a significant contribution by showing how social arrangement, power relations, and dominant cultural ideologies shape people's sense of identity rather than viewing it as a fixed, unchanging fact.

An important issue in Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* was the urban middle class's struggle with self-identity. Many people identify with the protagonist Indrajit because he represents a class that is mired in a rut caused by their conformist social life and employment. He embodies the generation's sense of alienation that followed independence as they lived in metropolitan areas and saw their aspirations marginalized by societal constraints. The patriarchal social conditioning wheel and the absence of feeling are both shown in Pavlo

Ghoda as means by which masculine identity is constructed. The disintegration, estrangement, and ludicrousness of the socioeconomic system are reflected in Sircar's plays.

In contrast, the findings from Vijay Tendulkar's plays highlight identity formation through overt social conflict, particularly rooted in patriarchy, moral hypocrisy, and power imbalance. *Silence! The Court is in Session* shows systematic disregard for female identities and the erasure and reconstruction of such identities through patriarchal social structures. The trial run of *Miss Benare* reveals the violent nature of social judgment wherein the control of women's agency through the enforcement of morality is exercised. Social conflict is, thus, beyond the interpersonal. It is structural, reconstituting the relationships of power through the lens of social conflict.

Binder is illustrative of yet another nuanced expression of masculine identity based on dominance and control, similar to *Sakharam*. While *Sakharam*'s rejection of conventional marital procedures challenges societal norms, his sexist treatment of women only serves to reinforce patriarchal authority. Social unrest is shown as a direct result of individual desires, societal expectations, and the moral conundrum, which the play highlights as being at odds with one another.

This case study highlights how Tendulkar uses societal institutions like family, marriage, law, and morality to externalize his internalized conflict and existential alienation, in contrast to Sircar's approach. Still, the two playwrights encounter each other at a point where they are both criticizing the middle class and dramatizing the tyranny of the emotionally oppressed and structurally unequal. Here we see how contemporary Indian play stands as a social and cultural force that questions the established norms and practices of its day.

10. Conclusion

This research examines the ways in which Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar, two playwrights, deal with issues of societal conflict and individual identity. They show how different social and cultural systems place an individual's identity in context. Despite their stylistic and methodological differences, the study reveals that both playwrights ground their examination of social strife in the duality of the personal and the communal. The Southern *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda* create a theater of the ridiculous, whereas Sircar's theatre shows absurdity, and *Silence The moral hypocrisy of Sakharam Binder* is on full display in Tendulkar's *Court*, where the breakdown of social order within the power matrix particularly at the

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intersection of gender and power is being discussed. The social order depicted in Tendulkar's plays is a web of oppressive institutions that stifle individual expression, particularly among women. These institutions include the family, marriage, the law, and mortality. There is enough proof of the social realities in post-independence India in the fact that Sircar and Tendulkar's works coexist. The research emphasizes how their play sheds insight on the contemporary struggles in India about power, social justice, and identity.

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