

## **The Doctrine of Event: A Study in Alain Badiou**

Sandhya V.P.

*Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Calicut*

---

**Abstract:** The Aim of this paper is to examine the implications of Alain Badiou's notion of the 'Event'. The presentation will outline pivotal notion of the event, a new theory of change. Event refers to an occurrence in the life of Human Beings which opens a new horizon in life.

**Keywords:-** Alain Badiou, event, truth, being.

---

Date of Submission: 25-02-2020

Date of Acceptance: 12-03-2020

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Alain Badiou is undoubtedly one of the most important philosophers of the contemporary world. He is recognized to be one of the most original voices in contemporary European thought. This recognition is not merely due to his academic contributions as a Philosopher. This is also due to his interventions in the debates on various socio – political issues as a public intellectual. His writings touch upon almost all the areas of contemporary relevance, from Ethics to Mathematics, to science, psychoanalysis, Politics, art and literature

The concept of 'Event' has been an important object of Philosophical investigation from the early period to the Heidegger's thought. What is an event? According to the lexical definition, an event is a fact or phenomenon. But there are certain differences between the concepts facts and event. Generally event evokes anything that happens, an occurrence. But Badiou does not equate event to fact for phenomenon. According to him event is an epochal rupture of the symbolic order. His conception of ontology and his notion of event is quite different from that posited by object – oriented or materialist approach. His view is that an ontology that does not represent the nature of being but to unfold being as it inscribe it (Badiou, 2005)

#### **1. Content**

Badiou claims that being is tied fundamentally to events, and that being – in – the – world – a body's relationship to the present – changes only upon the chance occurrence of an event and its announcement by subjects faithful to it. According to him event is thus the initial spark for a new subjective process. It is a Radical break from the repetition of a present existence, an accepted situation of bodies and languages. According to him historical is what is not natural. "I will term historical what is thus determined as the opposite of the nature" (Badiou, 2005, 182). Nature is what is stable and normal. So historical is anti – natural, instable and abnormal.

Badiou's principal project is the theorization of the emergence of truths. But this theorization is through a process that begins with what he terms the event. Badiou argues that the event takes place in an unpredictable manner. According to him, in any given situation something is uncounted. Hence there is a void in any given state. The event is caused by what is absent in the given situation. In this sense event is a glimpse of the void inherent to any given state (Badiou, 2005)

Let us take an example given by Badiou himself. Consider the painterly practices in France around 1906 – 07. There are many schools within this field. One of the greatest artists, Pablo Picasso's paintings up to 1905 can be treated as elements of this situation. But in 1907, he produced a painting, that today is considered the precursor of Cubism: *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*. This painting was totally different from the painterly practices of that period. In this painting Picasso abandoned all conventional form and representation of traditional art. The work illustrates five nude female in a brothel, a street in Barcelona. He used distortion of female figure and geometric patterns in his work. This is an innovative path which challenges the expectation that paintings will provide idealized portrayal of female beauty. He kept this painting in his studio for several years after its completion due to the mostly negative attitudes of people. The first exhibition of this *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* was in 1916. at the time of that exhibition the painting was considered as immoral. After the creation of this painting Picasso had always referred to it as *Le Bordel d'Alger* (the Brothel of Avignon). After a few years, Andre Salmon renamed it *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* to reduce its horrible and shocking effect on society. Badiou says this particular painting horrified everyone, even Picasso's close friend Barque 'by its ugliness and intensity'. This is an event, according to Badiou. Its Occurrence can no way be

inferred from the situation. All the twentieth century movements in painting took place within the aftermath of this event.

According to Badiou, event paves the way for change, a complete transformation of the given situation. That is the power of the event. In the movement of their taking place, event cause their situations to bend. As we have seen in the example of Picasso, the event of Les Demoiselles d' Avignon transformed the entire situation. However the event itself is not enough. Events require the recognition of their eventual status by individuals. Badiou says the individuals who experience the events in such a way as to be affected by their appearance become the events subjects. In the earlier example, Barque, who was completely horrified by the event of Les Demoiselles d' Avignon, Joint Picasso and for the next several years enacted something called Cubism. In other words, Barque has become event's subjects.

Hence it might be stated that an event is a threat for the given situation. It is completely unpredictable and it presents newness. Let us try to make this concept more clear. An event is the unpredictable result of chance and chance alone. That is an event may emerge only a product of chance. There is no process to create an event intentionally. An event discloses newness through pure chance. The chance – based newness involves the reality of another world. To put it in a different way, event always demonstrate that there is beyond of what already is. Event is what unveils one of the infinite probabilities. But all the disruptive changes in the world are not events. "Not everything moves in red" was a popular slogan that Badiou and his colleagues used in France. In fact this phrase shows the fundamental feature of event in Badiou's theorization. Badiou states "Not everything that changes is an event" (Badiou, 2003 Page.129).

For Badiou, the event takes place only in specific domains. They occur according to certain conditions. These conditions are capable of producing truth. There for these are 'truth procedures', according to him. There are four such domains: art, love, science and Politics. In other words these are four great conditions of Philosophy. These are the only four fields in which a pure subjective commitment is possible, according to him. He argued that Philosophy has such can generate no truths but these four domains provide the conditions that enable the events to spring forth. In each domain, the event- emancipation, invention, creation, the lovers' encounter – breaks into an established order of things. It makes possible what had formerly seemed to be impossible. It urges us to decide on a new way of being. Badiou gives as example the encounter of the French Revolution; the creation of Galilean physics etc. The dominant events of our time include Cohan's mathematical work; the cultural revolution in China; the Iranian revolution, the workers movement in Poland, the poetry of Paul Clean and so on.

Let us try to elaborate the four conditions or truth procedures that are love, politics, art and science. First we begin with the concept 'love' as a truth – procedure. What is love? Philosophers and writers have struggled with this question from early period. Plato's discussion on love initiated a way of thinking about love that simultaneously aesthetic and ascetic. Love, Plato claims, is fundamentally the love of beauty. Plato distinguished true love from Eros. According to him love is defined by a desire for ideal beauty that can never be gratified in physical form. In Badiou's opinion, one thing that Plato got right was to see love as an experience of truth. Badiou's position with respect to love is ultimately an idealistic one. Love as he defines it with reference to Plato, is a quest for truth. It suggests a new experience of truth about what it is to be two and not one.

Love, as Badiou defines is a committed relationship between two people. It begins with a random encounter. In love, two people decide to pursue a committed relationship and construct a joint perspective, a "two scene". According to Badiou it is a re- invention of life. Badiou says in 'In praise of love' "I believe that love is indeed what I called in my own Philosophical jargon a 'Truth procedure', that is an experience where by a certain kind of truth is constructed" (2012, 38).

Falling in love radically changes our perspective on life. For Badiou, love carries an inherent risk and it is a violation of the ego. Love requires the reinvention of our selves. It is a project of construction. Badiou argues that sex within a 'two scene' is an outcome of love. He rejects the skepticist view of love as a façade covering up the sexual desire which truly motivates us. To the contrary he sees sex as surrender when part of the re-invention of their world. Desire originates with love and is the expression of a declaration of love.

Love is an existential project. That is it concerns one's being-in-the-world. He also addresses the notion of the ethical dimension of love .his position on love differ from Levinas. Levinas who argued that we are social creatures so that our experience of the other creates an ethical demand. Badiou argues that our experience of the other is opaque, that it creates no demand. Badiou thinks that one of the essential features of love is an element of risk .for love is an event and every events contains risk and instability. In being And Event Badiou states that one of defining characters of an event is a radical lack of stability, for since an event is something entirely new.

### **Politics as a truth-procedure**

As a truth-procedure, politics represents the potential for collective action and revolutionary change and emancipation. Badiou illustrates French revolution as an example of political event. It is something that can be lived or experienced in the process of revolution. “Let the masses educate themselves in this great revolutionary movement, let them learn to distinguish between correct and incorrect ways of doing things”(Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 98.). Badiou posits a definition of politics . Politics as collective action, organized by certain principles ,that aims to unfold the consequences of a new possibility which is currently represented by the dominant order .This articulation of politics has crucial implications for the frame of possibility of the political subject in his thought. According to Badiou, a political event is the only event that is collective. It is slightly differ from the other three conditions of the event, art, science and love. The formation of political truth necessitates everyone’s participation. In other words, a political event intrinsically must imply collectivity; if not it cannot be named as a political event. But a political event is collective does not simply mean that peoples all together revolt against the states or the current scenarios. For him, collectivity is not a numerical concept (Badiou, *Metapolitics*). Its collectivity is something virtual. A Political event’s subjects do not necessarily indicate everyone’s participation. It may not practical or it may impossible .Yet a political event “provides the vehicle for a virtual summoning of all” (ibid .141). For him science, art, love are aristocratic truth procedures. A Political truth is intrinsic to everyone. If the space of politics is the space of collectivity, the political subject, then must be a collective subjectivity.

To make this point more clear, let us take Badiou’s celebrated example of St. Paul. His name was originally Saul. Saul was a Jew and a Roman citizen and he as for many years an ardent persecutor of Christians. The Christian movement had begun with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Saul was strongly against this. He worked for the Roman government. One day on his way to Damascus, he was struck by the thought that he himself as a Christian. That was the moment of realization for him and, from that moment onward he was no longer Saul, but, Paul, apostle of a Christ he had never met. A subject is born declaring the truth of an event he never witnessed. (The resurrection). His experience changed his viewpoint completely .After that St. Paul is considered to be the most important Person in the history of Christianity. He traveled around the Roman Empire for teaching others about Christianity. He played a significant role in the development of Christianity. He wrote thirteen books of the bible, called Pauline epistles. Today his epistles continue to be crucial in theology and Catholic traditions. For Badiou, St. Paul is the very type of the subject of a truth. And this subjectivation can happen to anyone and implies everyone.

Badiou reacts to an age dominated by cultural relativism by put forward the idea of universal truths. Against the partisans of philosophy’s demise Badiou argues that philosophy is possible and necessary .In the *Manifesto for Philosophy* ,Badiou rejects all affirmation concerning the ‘end of philosophy’ and instead declares that philosophy operates in terms of the concepts of truth ,event and subjectivity .He specifically rejects the two articulations that the ‘end of philosophy’ has taken in the contemporary discourses such as the Heideggerian version regarding the exhaustion of metaphysics and the positivist version that sees philosophy suspended by the developments in the natural sciences .Badiou responds to this situation by stressing a classical aspect of philosophy. He constitutes a new discourse by equating ontology and Mathematics

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Thus an event is a wholly genuine phenomenon which interrupts the flow of history. Every event act as a radical departure in the flow of history and as the creation of a distinct possibility. Badiou argued that basically human beings are merely biological animals. But one becomes an authentic human being through the adherence and very passionate fidelity to the event. Alain Badiou emphasize that Human Being’s true character is revealed in his subjectivity. It is through the mediation of the event that subjectivity can be induced. Only in the space of the event can man achieves his true progress. The Human Beings in the modern period thought of himself as in improvement from the early period. This is possible only through the eventual occurrences of the time and their respective subjects such as revolution in science, arts, politics etc.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1]. Badiou, Alain. *Being And Event*. Trans. Oliver Fetham. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- [2]. Badiou, Alain. *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Trans & Ed. Normal Madarasz and Albany. New York: Suny Press,1999.
- [3]. Badiou, Alain. *Infinite Thought*. Trans. Oliver Fetham & Justin Clements. New York : Continuum, 2003.
- [4]. Badiou, Alain. *Theory of the Subject*. Trans. Burno Bosteels. New York : Continuum, 2009.
- [5]. Badiou, Alain. *Metapolitics*. Trans. Jason Barker. New York : Verso, 2005.
- [6]. Badiou, Alain & Truong Nicolas. *In Praise of Love*. London, 2012
- [7]. Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. Johan Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. New York : Harper & Ros, 1927.