

## Representation Of Fantasy In Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*

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### Abstract

Badal Sircar is a twentieth-century Indian playwright, who is best known for his revolutionary plays. His plays are originally written in Bengali language and most of them are translated into English. Sircar's plays have discussed the themes of self-identity, alienation, and socio-political critique. His plays explore the prevalent attitudes, imprecise feelings, and undefined frustrations causing distress to the educated urban middle class and also expose the day-to-day struggle for survival, the meaninglessness of existence, and the decline of human values and emotions. Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* explores profound existential and socio-political themes, set against the backdrop of post-independence India. The present research paper highlights how Badal Sircar's play *Evam Indrajit* represents fantasy and how the main characters are in love with their thoughts. The play employs a non-linear structure and surreal imagery to reflect the fragmented psyche of its protagonist, Indrajit who grapples with identity and conformity. Sircar blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, creating a dream-like atmosphere that invites deep reflection. The character of the Writer acts as a meta-theatrical bridge, underscoring the power of imagination in transcending the limitations of reality. Fantasy in the play serves not merely as an escape but as a critical lens to examine societal expectations and individual struggles. The surreal settings and poetic dialogue enhance the play's emotional and intellectual resonance, engaging the audience in a dynamic theatrical experience. *Evam Indrajit* highlights its innovative departure from conventional theatre, with its enduring legacy inspiring future generations to explore imaginative storytelling. This article delves into the multifaceted representation of fantasy in the play analysing its significance in the narrative structure and its impact on the thematic exploration of identity, alienation, and socio-political issues. Sircar's work remains a testament to the transformative power of fantasy in theatre, affirming its relevance and timeless appeal.

**Keywords:** Fantasy, Imagery, Reality, Surrealism, Symbolism, Indian Drama, Indian Theatre.

### Introduction

Badal Sircar, is a Bengali playwright, film director, and critic. He is an eminent playwright in Indian theatre and is known for his innovative and thought-provoking works. His play *Evam Indrajit* is particularly notable for its representation of fantasy, which serves as a powerful tool to explore existential themes and the socio-political milieu of post-independence India. This research article delves into the multifaceted representation of fantasy in "Evam Indrajit," examining its significance and impact on the narrative and thematic structure of the play. Badal Sircar, an illustrious figure in Indian theatre, is celebrated for his groundbreaking contributions to modern drama. His play *Evam Indrajit* stands out as a seminal work that deftly incorporates elements of fantasy to address complex existential and socio-political themes. Written in the early 1960s, the play emerged during a period of significant cultural and political transformation in post-independence India. This era was characterized by a collective grappling with newfound freedom, the challenges of nation-building, and the disillusionment that often accompanied unmet aspirations.

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* is a seminal work in Indian theatre that leverages the power of fantasy to delve deeply into the complex themes of identity, alienation, and conformity. Through its use of surreal and dream-like elements, the play transcends the limitations of realistic storytelling, creating a rich and evocative narrative landscape that allows for a profound exploration of the human condition. *Evam Indrajit* continues to be a seminal work in the canon of Indian theatre, influencing subsequent generations of playwrights and theatre practitioners. Sircar's use of fantasy as a narrative and thematic device has inspired many to explore the possibilities of imaginative storytelling in theatre. The play's enduring relevance and impact are a testament to its innovative approach and its profound engagement with universal human concerns.

*Evam Indrajit* is a notable play for its innovative narrative techniques and its use of fantasy as a vehicle for deeper thematic exploration. Fantasy transcends mere escapism; it becomes a powerful tool that Sircar employs to critique societal norms, delve into the human psyche, and illuminate the struggles of individuals in a rapidly changing world. The play's structure, characterized by its non-linear progression and surreal imagery, reflects the fragmented and cyclical nature of human existence, mirroring the protagonist's inner turmoil. The protagonist, Indrajit, symbolizes the quintessential everyman, caught between the demands of society and his quest for individual identity. His journey through fantastical realms is not just a personal odyssey but also a commentary on the broader socio-political landscape of the time. The play's other characters – Amal, Bimal, Kamal, and the Writer – serve as allegorical figures, each representing different facets of human experience and societal expectations. Sircar's integration of fantasy is evident in the play's meta-theatrical elements,

symbolic characters, and surreal settings. The character of the Writer, who guides the narrative, exemplifies the interplay between reality and imagination, highlighting the role of the creator in shaping and reshaping human narratives. This self-reflexive approach not only enhances the fantastical atmosphere but also invites the audience to engage with the play on multiple levels, blending intellectual inquiry with emotional resonance.

This research article explores the multifaceted representation of fantasy in the play *Evam Indrajit* and also analyzes its significance in the narrative structure and its impact on the thematic exploration of identity, alienation, and socio-political critique. By examining the interplay between reality and imagination, the research aims to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in Sircar's work and highlight its enduring relevance in the canon of Indian theatre. Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* not only challenges traditional narrative forms but also provides a rich, imaginative landscape that encourages viewers to reflect on their own lives and societal roles. Through the lens of fantasy, Sircar engages with universal themes, making *Evam Indrajit* a timeless piece that continues to resonate with audiences and inspire critical thought and creative exploration.

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to explore fancy, imagination, and fantasy reflected in Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*. The specific objectives of this research are the Use of Fantasy as a Narrative Device is the integration of fantasy to create a non-linear narrative that disrupts traditional storytelling conventions. Sircar employs various techniques rooted in fantasy to challenge the audience's perception of time, space, and reality. This analysis will explore how these elements contribute to the play's unique narrative structure.

- To investigate the use of surreal imagery and symbolic characters is instrumental in crafting a dream-like atmosphere in literature and art. Surreal imagery, characterized by the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated or illogical elements, mirrors the disjointed nature of dreams.
- To Present familiar objects or settings in unfamiliar ways, surrealism disrupts conventional reality, inviting the audience into a realm where logic and reason give way to the whims of the subconscious.
- To highlight Fantasy serves as a powerful medium for exploring existential themes like identity, alienation, and conformity by providing a metaphorical canvas where authors and artists can examine these concepts in abstract and imaginative ways Identity refers to Fantasy often features protagonists grappling with questions of self-discovery and identity formation.
- To explore how Fantasy frequently depicts characters who feel estranged from society or disconnected from their surroundings. Conformity shows that Fantasy often challenges the status and critiques oppressive systems of conformity and control.
- To find how Fantasy provides a rich and expansive playground for delving into existential themes, offering creators and audiences alike the opportunity to explore the complexities of identity, alienation, and conformity through the lens of imagination and wonder.

### Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is to analyse a comprehensive examination of the play *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar, including its plot, characters, themes, and stylistic elements. Identification and interpretation of key fantastical elements within the play, such as dream sequences, surreal imagery, and symbolic characters. Exploration of the narrative structure and how fantasy is integrated into the overall storyline. Examination of the socio-political context in which the play was written and its influence on the representation of fantasy.

Representation of Fantasy Identification and analysis of various forms of fantasy present in this play including psychological fantasy, social fantasy, and existential fantasy, and Examination of how fantasy functions as a narrative device to explore themes of identity, alienation, and conformity within the play. Comparison with other works of literature or art that employ fantasy to similar ends, both within and outside of the Indian literary tradition.

### Review of Literature

Ramanathan. S (2020), in his article "The Angst of (Un) Knowing: A Postcolonial Reading of Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*" analyzes Badal Sircar as a modernist brings to fore the predicament of urban middle-class men their overconfidence, despite poor adaptative skills. Indrajit the central character in *Evam Indrajit* is the angry young man who fails to learn and adapt to the realities of life. His shattered dreams push him to nothingness and ultimately take the endless road.

Aditee Ranjan (2018), in the article "Search for Illusory Happiness in Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*," analyses how the play depicts a man's exhaustive quest for true happiness. The journey reveals that there is no escape from mundane existence and that bliss is an illusion. Happiness, being transitory, leads to an endless pursuit. Despite this, the pursuit of happiness provides the hope necessary for survival, giving individuals the strength to continue life's arduous journey. Consequently, Sircar concludes the play on an optimistic note.

Priyamvada Yaduvanshi (2020), in her article "Re-interpreting Myth and Identity in the Plays of Badal Sircar," describes myths as 'gemstones' woven into the fabric of culture, providing deeper meaning to societal norms and retaining their

relevance over time. She discusses how modern Indian playwrights, including Badal Sircar in "Evam Indrajit," have utilized these literary devices to demonstrate their continued significance in contemporary contexts. Badal Sircar is regarded as the 'Modern Architect of Indian Drama in English' and was significantly influenced by Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre.' He aimed to move theatre away from the traditional proscenium stage and make it accessible to the common man. His group, 'Shatabdi,' performed in streets, parks, and public places. Sircar combined folklore with professional performances through forms like 'nukkad natak' (street plays) and nature plays.

### Findings and Discussion:

Fantasy in theatre often entails the use of imaginative and supernatural elements that transcend the boundaries of the ordinary world. It allows playwrights to create a space where the constraints of reality are lifted, providing a canvas to explore abstract concepts and inner psychological landscapes. In *Evam Indrajit*, fantasy manifests in various forms, from the surreal settings to the symbolic characters, enabling Sircar to delve into themes of identity, alienation, and societal expectations.

In *Evam Indrajit* concentrates on fantasy elements and it is essential to contextualize the play within the historical and cultural backdrop of its creation. Written in the 1960s, a time when India was grappling with the realities of post-independence, Sircar's work reflects the disillusionment and existential crises faced by the youth. The period was marked by a struggle between traditional values and the burgeoning influence of Western ideologies, leading to a complex socio-cultural landscape. Sircar uses fantasy not merely as an escape but as a lens to critique and question the prevailing conditions. *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar first staged in 1963, is a seminal work in Indian theatre that uses fantasy as a narrative device to explore themes of identity, alienation, and conformity. Understanding the historical and cultural context of this period provides crucial insights into how and why Sircar employs fantasy in his play. The play employs a non-linear narrative structure that blends reality with fantasy, creating a dream-like atmosphere throughout the play. This structure is pivotal in establishing the thematic concerns of the play. The protagonist, Indrajit, oscillates between the mundane reality of everyday life and a fantastical realm where he grapples with his existential dilemmas. The use of fantasy allows Sircar to disrupt the linear progression of time, reflecting the fragmented and cyclical nature of the protagonist's inner turmoil.

In the play the characters are symbolic representations rather than realistic portrayals, contributing to the play's fantastical dimension. The names of the characters – Amal, Bimal, Kamal, and Indrajit – signify everyman figures, embodying the universal struggles of individuals in a conformist society. Indrajit, whose name means "conqueror of Indra" (the king of gods in Hindu mythology), represents the aspirational and rebellious spirit that seeks meaning beyond the ordinary. The interplay between these symbolic characters and their fantastical experiences underscores the thematic exploration of identity and conformity. Here, Indrajit mentioned that both he and the girl are cousins and also good friends and often share their feelings with each other. At this moment, a conversation between Indrajit and the girl at a public park is mentioned where Indrajit mentions that he is eager to break the shackles of the rules and regulations laid down by society. However, the girl mentions that only the women folk are required to follow the rules of the society. The male folk are never confined by those rules. In reply to this statement, Indrajit mentions that he is a representative of the modern youth, so he will not hesitate to break the unnecessary shackles of society. He says:

Indrajit: Is there a rule that one has to abide by rules?

Manasi: What else can one do?

Indrajit: One can hate rules. Why should they be there at all?

Manasi: What would be the point of hating them?

Indrajit: What's the point of worshipping the rope that binds you?

Manasi: I'm not asking you to worship it.

Indrajit: But you are! If the rope is a rule and you accept it happily-that is worshipping it.

Manasi: What else would you do with it?

Indrajit: Perhaps –tear it into shreds. Bring down all these walls which surround us. (*Evam Indrajit* 215)

Sircar enhances the fantasy element in *Evam Indrajit* and the meta-theatrical device blurs the line between fiction and reality, inviting the audience to engage with the existential questions posed by the characters. The Writer, a pivotal character in the play, acts as a bridge between the real world and the fantastical narrative, guiding the audience through the protagonist's journey. This self-reflexive structure allows Sircar to comment on the nature of storytelling and its role in shaping human consciousness.

Fantasy in *Evam Indrajit* serves as a vehicle for exploring existentialist themes, particularly the sense of alienation experienced by the protagonist. Indrajit's journey through fantastical landscapes reflects his quest for identity and meaning in a world that demands conformity. The surreal settings and symbolic encounters underscore his inner conflict and the absurdity of existence, echoing the philosophical tenets of existentialism. Sircar uses fantasy to critique the socio-political conditions of post-independence India. The play's fantastical elements highlight the disparity between the idealistic dreams of the nation and the harsh realities faced by its citizens. The cyclical nature of the narrative, with its recurring

themes of disillusionment and frustration, mirrors the stagnation and lack of progress in society. Through the lens of fantasy, Sircar exposes the futility of societal norms and the pressures to conform, advocating for individualism and self-discovery. The character of the Writer in *Evam Indrajit* is a significant conduit for the representation of fantasy. He embodies the creative force that shapes and reshapes the narrative, reflecting Sircar's role as a playwright. The Writer's interactions with the characters and his manipulation of the storyline illustrate the power of imagination and its ability to transcend the limitations of reality. This meta-theatrical element reinforces the play's thematic focus on the interplay between reality and fantasy.

Sircar's use of surreal imagery enhances the fantastical atmosphere of "Evam Indrajit." The dream-like sequences and abstract settings evoke a sense of otherworldliness, drawing the audience into the protagonist's psychological landscape. The surreal elements serve to externalize Indrajit's inner conflicts, creating a visual and emotional resonance that deepens the thematic impact of the play. The play's surreal settings further reinforce this theme. Common objects and environments are transformed into abstract spaces, symbolizing Indrajit's internal turmoil and his search for self. For instance, a mundane room may morph into a fantastical space with distorted dimensions, reflecting his sense of entrapment and confusion. Through these fantastical elements, Sircar externalizes Indrajit's internal struggles, making his quest for identity a tangible and visual experience for the audience.

There is no escape from the predicament of modern man. At the end of the play, Indrajit leaves his pursuit of happiness as he accepts the conventionalities of society. He prefers to be called Nirmal and conform to the dictates of the society. He says:

Indrajit: I didn't have it in me to do that. Never did. I just dreamt that I could, that's all. So long as I couldn't accept my ordinariness I dreamt. Now I accept it.

Manasi: Indrajit...

Indrajit: No, Manasi, don't call me Indrajit, please don't. I am Nirmal. Amal, Vimal, Kamal, and Nirmal. Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal... (*Evam Indrajit* 58-59)

He realizes that he is just like any other common man who is caught in the pursuit of worldly happiness and is unable to find the 'bliss' in life. The idea is applied to all educated modern middle-class youth, and not just to Indrajit. Lifelessness becomes a curse for the modern man who is helpless and finds no relief for sustenance. Both the characters, 'Indrajit' and 'Writer' remain in constant search for true happiness in life but cannot accomplish it till the end. The play ends on the note that there is no destination, only a road. The play is rich in symbolism and allegory, with fantasy serving as a conduit for these elements. The recurring motifs of masks, mirrors, and labyrinths symbolize the search for identity and the multifaceted nature of human existence. These symbols, interwoven with the fantastical narrative, provide layers of meaning that invite interpretation and reflection.

Sircar's poetic and fragmented dialogue mirrors the disjointed and surreal nature of the narrative. The characters often speak in abstract and metaphorical terms, reflecting their existential struggles and the fluid boundaries between reality and fantasy. The linguistic style enhances the play's dream-like atmosphere and reinforces its thematic concerns. The representation of fantasy in *Evam Indrajit* engages the audience on both an emotional and intellectual level. The fantastical elements evoke a sense of wonder and curiosity, drawing the audience into the protagonist's journey. At the same time, the play's existential themes and socio-political critique provoke reflection and critical thinking, encouraging the audience to question their own realities and societal norms. The fantastical aspects of the play contribute to its immersive theatrical experience. The surreal settings, symbolic characters, and meta-theatrical structure create a dynamic and engaging performance that captivates the audience. Sircar's innovative use of fantasy transforms the stage into a space of limitless possibilities, allowing for a rich and multifaceted exploration of the human experience.

The theme of identity is central to "Evam Indrajit," and fantasy plays a crucial role in its portrayal. The protagonist, Indrajit, experiences a profound identity crisis, struggling to find meaning and purpose in a conformist society. The fluidity of identity is depicted through fantastical elements, such as shifting names and roles. Indrajit's journey of self-discovery is marked by his adoption of different names—Amal, Vimal, and Kamal—before he settles on Indrajit. This metamorphosis signifies the protagonist's quest for a stable identity amidst societal pressures.

Fantasy allows for the representation of identity as a dynamic and evolving concept. In the surreal world of the play, characters embody various facets of Indrajit's psyche, symbolizing his internal conflicts and existential doubts. The characters he interacts with, such as Manasi, represent different aspects of his inner world, acting as mirrors that reflect his changing self-perception. These interactions are often depicted through dream-like sequences, where the boundaries between reality and imagination blur, highlighting the fluidity and complexity of identity.

In the essay, "Disillusionment and Social Change: A Re-reading of Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*, Moutushi Chakravartee mentions the monotonous life experienced by modern individuals. Moreover, she has also tried to pluck out the inherent theme of meek surrender to this lifestyle by the 'self'. She believed that by doing so, we are putting ourselves in harm's way. She wrote: "Our life is a ritual of gyration, whose significance eludes us and most of us do not even bother to question why we do what we do. Perhaps, one tries to follow the path of the least resistance" (65). Chakravartee through this statement wanted to stress the fact that by not putting resistance to the absorption of daily routine lives into one's life, one

was allowing mundaneness into their life. This mundane life will ultimately hamper the progression of the 'self'. It will not be eager to move towards a new direction by breaking the shackles of tradition, and customs which has already engulfed the mindset of the individuals.

Alienation is another key theme in "Evam Indrajit," and fantasy effectively portrays the protagonist's profound sense of disconnection from his environment and society. The surreal and disjointed narrative structure of the play mirrors Indrajit's feelings of alienation, creating a sense of dislocation that permeates the entire work. Fantasy amplifies this theme by presenting a world that feels both familiar and bizarre, underscoring the protagonist's estrangement from reality. The use of fantastical elements emphasizes the characters' isolation. Indrajit navigates through a world that often feels unreal and disconnected, highlighting his loneliness and existential despair. The dream-like sequences and surreal imagery serve to deepen the audience's understanding of Indrajit's alienation. For example, conversations with other characters may abruptly shift from coherent dialogues to nonsensical exchanges, reflecting the protagonist's inner confusion and his struggle to connect with others.

Fantasy also allows Sircar to explore the societal roots of alienation. The play's surreal scenarios often depict a society that is indifferent to individual suffering, reinforcing the protagonist's sense of isolation. Indrajit's experiences in these fantastical environments underscore his inability to find meaningful connections in a world that prioritizes conformity over individuality. The fantastical elements act as a critique of the dehumanizing effects of modern society, where individuals are often reduced to mere cogs in a bureaucratic machine. Conformity is a pervasive theme in "Evam Indrajit," and fantasy serves as a powerful tool to critique and challenge societal norms and expectations. Through its use of absurd and surreal elements, the play exposes the arbitrary nature of social conventions and the pressures to conform. The fantastical scenarios in the play highlight the absurdity and dehumanizing effects of rigid social expectations, creating a satirical commentary on the loss of individuality in the face of societal pressure. Fantasy in the play illustrates the conflict between individual desires and societal expectations. Indrajit's surreal experiences and interactions reflect his inner rebellion against a society that demands uniformity and suppresses personal freedom. For instance, the repetitive and meaningless routines depicted in the play symbolize the monotonous and oppressive nature of conformist society. These surreal depictions serve to critique the mindless adherence to social norms that stifle creativity and individuality. The characters' engagement with fantastical elements often symbolizes their subconscious resistance to conformity. Indrajit's interactions with other characters in surreal settings reveal his struggle to maintain his individuality in a conformist world. The fantastical elements in the play underscore the characters' internal conflicts, as they navigate the tension between their personal aspirations and societal pressures. This use of fantasy allows Sircar to explore the deeper psychological and existential dimensions of conformity, providing a nuanced and critical perspective on the impact of societal expectations on individual identity.

### Conclusion

Sircar's representation of fantasy is a testament to the playwright's innovative approach to modern Indian theatre. His strategic use of fantasy transcends mere escapism, serving instead as a profound narrative device that enriches the play's thematic and structural complexity. By examining the integration of fantasy within the play, we gain insights into Sircar's critique of societal norms, his exploration of existential dilemmas, and his commentary on the socio-political landscape of post-independence India. Fantasy in *Evam Indrajit* is intricately woven into the play's exploration of identity, alienation, and conformity. Indrajit's journey through surreal and fantastical realms symbolizes the universal quest for meaning in an often absurd and conformist society. The fantastical elements highlight the tension between individual aspirations and societal expectations, portraying Indrajit's struggle to carve out a distinct identity in a world that demands conformity. Sircar's use of fantasy to explore existential themes allows the audience to reflect on their own lives and societal roles, making the play a resonant and enduring piece of theatre. Sircar's non-linear narrative structure, enabled by the fantastical elements, challenges conventional storytelling. The fragmentation of time and space, the symbolic characters, and the play-within-a-play technique create a multi-layered narrative that blurs the lines between reality and fiction. This structure not only reflects the protagonist's inner turmoil but also engages the audience in a more active and interpretive role. The cyclical and repetitive nature of the plot underscores the continuous and often unresolvable nature of existential quests, enhancing the play's thematic depth and emotional impact.

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