Preface and Acknowledgements
Nissim Ezekiel (December 24, 1924-January 9, 2004) was a poet, playwright and art critic. He was considered the foremost Indian writer in English of his time. Any study pertaining to a critical assessment of his plays can be made, whether merely as a separate corpus of works, or in relation to his poetry, or in relation to other Indo-Anglian drama. This last has been briefly touched upon therefore this is an attempt to contribute to the field of Indian Drama in English. A brief but comprehensive account of the history and background of Indo-Anglian drama becomes relevant here in order to place Nissim Ezekiel as a playwright.

When we deliberate on the present scene of Indian writing in English in general and of Indian Drama in English in particular, we may not get great playwrighting comparable to the world’s greatest, but we are likely to get serious and interesting work. Indian English Drama dates from 1831, when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes* illustrative of the present state of Hindoo society in Calcutta. Owing to a lack of a firm dramatic tradition and local theatrical habitations early Indian English Drama failed to secure success and dramatic acknowledgement in comparison to foreign authors performances in English. In consequence to this, early Indian drama grew in Bengal and other parts of India as mostly in the form of closet drama. Only Sri
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Aurobindo Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyay produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writings.

As in the earlier period, there are a handful of playwrights who engaged themselves in sustained activity in the middle period (pre-independence) hence the contribution towards playwrighting was rather small. A.S. Panchapakesa Ayyar (1899-63), Thyagaraya Paramasive Kailasam (1885-1946) and Bharti Sarabhai (1912) made a few noteworthy attempts to nourish Indian Drama in English.

Unlike poetry and fiction, drama has not registered very notable gains during the post-independence period. An important reason for this might be that drama, being essentially a composite art, involving the playwright, the actors and the audience in a shared experience on the stage, has its own limitations of which the other literary forms are free. Post-independence drama, to an extent did benefit largely by the growing interest abroad in Indian English literature, and a number of plays by playwrights like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Girish Karnad, and Gurucharan Das were successfully staged in Europe and the united states of America. As a result of sensitive and serious efforts for promoting the performing arts institutes for the promotion of dramatics appeared in big cities. Drama departments were established in some Universities, national drama festival was started in Delhi by Sangeet Natak Akademi. But all these development supported regional language theatre, while most of Indian English plays suffered lack of opportunities to seek living theatres for staging plays.

It was in this phase of transition that Nissim Ezekiel started writing in English. Ezekiel established himself as a sensitive poet, a promising
playwright, academic critic, prose writer, editor of literary magazine and a devoted teacher. Ezekiel’s writing is an embodiment of the best of Indian civilization and tradition. An Indian Jew by birth, Nissim Ezekiel transcended all borders and spoke in the voice of love and sanity. He presented an insightful picture of life in his writing.

The present study proposes to analyze the plays of Nissim Ezekiel as an extension to his creative spirit that was expressed in his poetry and other works. Present research work entitled ‘Tradition and Modernity in the Plays of Nissim Ezekiel’ is an attempt to explore the aspects of tradition and modernity in Ezekiel’s plays through plots, settings, thematic concerns, characterization, language, devices, theatrical techniques and theories etc.

Keeping in views the limitations of critical material available on the plays, the present study tried to trace all the associated concerns and ideas. However, whatever existing materials the scholar could lay hands on, a thorough examination of the same has been conducted to make this study convincing.

This research work is an attempt to presents an analysis of the plays of Ezekiel which had been an unexplored area so far. The present research project aims at analyzing the fusion of tradition and modernity in the plays of Nissim Ezekiel.

This project is an effort to highlight the different aspects of Ezekiel’s published plays. The present thesis, nevertheless, is a statement on the growth and evolution of Indian English drama. It traces the history of Indian English drama through theory of Natyashastra and gives a brief account of the various dramatists and shaping of Nissim Ezekiel as a
modern playwright. It has chapters which focused on the traditional and modern elements in the plays of Nissim Ezekiel. The present work has based itself on theoretical ground where his aims and objectives get actually well served and justified in the forthcoming chapters. Beside, as it is apparent from the present study that it opens fresh evenness for contributing more in the field of drama.

It would be better if this research project be comprehended as an attempt of comparison between conventional and modern aspects in Indian English drama. Thus, the present thesis hopes to demonstrate the present context of human existence and modern theatrical techniques in the specific Indian references.

The trend of modernity and tradition has been explored in the five select major plays of Nissim Ezekiel i.e. *Nalini- A Comedy* (1969), *Marriage Poem-A Tragi-comedy* (1969), *The Sleepwalkers- An Indo-American farce* (1969), *Song of Deprivation- A Comic Morality in One Act for the Non-existent Underground Theatre in India* (1963), *Don’t Call it Suicide- A Tragedy* (1993). The lesser known plays; *Who Needs no Introduction* (1969), *The Wonders of Vivek* (1986), *A Family Failure* (1986) have been staged but do not fall under the purview of this study. There is a skilful use of ironical fantasy in these plays. Some important themes that he takes up are related to the city life, politics, loneliness, love, sexuality and similar human situations. As Moraes puts it, “*Ezekiel displayed a wry drily mischievous sense of humour and an eye that was observant and sympathetic at once.*” In comparison to his poetry, unfortunately enough critical and academic attention has not been paid to his plays so far. Present thesis is an attempt to study his plays at the level of both theme
and technique. This study may benefit from what Ezekiel himself said in an interview on research prospects in the area of Indian Drama in English.

“Research Workers in this area should know the odds. They should study the social and cultural context of the subject in addition to the texts. Once they begin doing that, they will come up with plenty of data and ideas, even if the actual body of relevant drama is small. They need, of course, a strong feeling for drama as theatre, the art of acting, stage-designing and so on. I can only advise them not to lose interest because of real or alleged paucity of plays.”

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