CHAPTER III

*The Sleepwalkers*: An Indo-American Farce and

*Marriage Poem*: A Fusion of the Eastern and Western Post-modernist Theatrical Techniques
The Sleepwalkers is an Indo-American farce satirizing the fascination of Indians for Americans. The play is a satire on Indian-American relationship. It is a one-act play based on the theme “Give us this day our daily American” (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 84). The play was first performed in 1985 by Theatre group. The play presents a subtle criticism of American and Indian society. The playwright presents before us the modern society which is extremely artificial. It is a farce aimed at arousing explosive laughter by employing crude means. The play begins with the chant:

“Give us this day our daily American”

Our American wheat
Our American sunshine
Our American air. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 84).

And ends at “Give us this day our daily American” (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 84). It will be quite pertinent to quote the line:

......sleepwalkers written in the style of Absurd Theatre and the plays of Jean Genet, in the use of masks to suggest stereotypes or hypocritical posing......(Iyer, 1985, 68).

The title of the play Sleepwalkers is ironical. The Indians are sleepwalkers in every sense of the word. American becomes substitute for bread, import substitutes. The title of the play is very apt because all the characters act like Sleepwalkers. They all sleepwalk around Mr. and Mrs.
Morris. They do not have their own sense, they just believe what the American couple say. They all sleepwalk around the couple. All want to impress the couple for their own advance they discuss about their work and profession to impress the couple. In every sense all the characters in the play are sleepwalkers. The play can be summed up in the words of Brahma Dutta Sharma, who says:

........ In his play Sleepwalkers Ezekiel ridicules Indians' love of foreign especially American goods and even ideas. Like the Christians, who pray to God, "God, give us our daily bread". The Indians in Ezekiel's play say. "God, give us our daily American". In other words Ezekiel means to say that for some Indians an American is a source of bread. The state of affairs deserves pity and since it is rooted in people's misperception of things, it deserves to be ridiculed too. Americans have become rich not because they have imported wealth but because, first, they are rich in their resources, especially the land, secondly, they have acquired sophistication in the fields of science and technology and thirdly, they succeed in selling their produce on very handsome prices. No doubt, one who has wares will look for a buyer, but in this case the American too is a seller rather than a buyer so here a group of sellers waiting for a buyer get only a seller and has to face consequently only disappointment. (Sharma,1995,106).

The plot of The Sleepwalkers is straightforward, simple and improbable. The Sleepwalkers is a one act farce which is tautly constructed. The plot has a beginning, middle and an end which moves further with the help of characters, events and actions. The play begins and ends on the same note. There are thirteen characters of which five are married couples and all the characters belong to literate class and eagerly wait for an American couple. The setting of the play is the drawing room, where all the action takes place.
Mr. Raman: “Give us thing day our daily American”

Mr. Kapur: Our American Education Advisor...... (*The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 84*).

The setting is the visual environment which suggests time and place and creates a proper mood or atmosphere for the reader or the spectators. It can be quoted in this regard:

.........Theatrical space is at its most complex in the sleepwalker, which features an ‘Airport back centre, drawing room in the foreground.’ (Anklesaria, 2008, 542).

The whole play revolves around different Indian characters and their wish to get benefit from an American couple. They all praise America and America couple. The playwright presents before us the realistic picture of different professions and the Indian mind-set and thinking giving importance to American people. The whole plot deals with the life of the common people. It moves from one point and end at the same point. It starts with the entrance of the American couple and ends at their departure. The play has one single incident i.e. coming of the American couple for the promotion of their magazine, who are welcomed by Indian guests who are shown to be in a mask. It is a ludicrous situation. The setting of the play is the drawing room of an urban Indian city, Bombay. All the guests meet at this particular place. Bombay, the mini-India of today, is a meeting place of east and west.

.........Once again, the drawing-room is the place where English India meets the world – the American as well as the other Indians once again, the drawing-room more so than in the other two plays, where it also has redeeming features is a
space of futility, pretence and deceit........... (Anklesaria, 2008,547).

In the play, the drawing room serves a different purpose; it becomes the meeting place of American and Indian. The playwright creates an atmosphere of the English society but the reactions of the Indian characters are typically Indian. It will be apt to quote in this context:

.......The drawing room covers slightly different spaces of analysis, description and narration............The culture-vulture, foreign-facing space of largely – official ‘creativity’ and ‘Social welfare’ in the sleepwalkers................. (Anklesaria, 2008,547).

The play has some elements of Absurd Theatre as most of the characters experience a sense of hollowness which is an intrinsic feature of modern drama. Ezekiel presents a human condition which is essentially absurd since the characters are in search of their identity. They all walk in a circular motion around the American couple. Their actions seem to be senseless and useless. The dialogues are like those in absurd drama and are repetitive and suggest a breakdown of communication but in fact it’s a mode of meaningful communication at the level of plot, theme and characters. The name of the magazine ‘Blank’ reflects the thoughtlessness and hollowness. The word itself signifies nothing. Mr. Morris, who is the editor and publisher of the American International magazine ‘Blank’, comes to India to sell the magazine and wants publicity for the magazine because India has a big population:

Mr. Morris:........ I’ve got this magazine, see. It could be sold here to your people. Back in the states, it’s popular. Millions of copies are sold you have a big population, don’t you? (The Sleepwalkers,1969,87).
The name of the magazine displays thoughtlessness when all the guests ask about the magazine, Mr. Morris defines that the motive of his magazine is to avoid excessive thinking. He elaborates:

Mr. Morris: ........what is the chief cause of division and unhappiness? Thinking! If we discourage thought, we shall decrease unhappiness...... Thinking divides humanity into warring groups. In my magazine, there is no thought. We only describe we don’t say something is good and something else is bad. We merely report. We present it...... (The Sleepwalkers,1969,89).

The motive of the magazine makes us laugh at the situation. The magazines name itself is without anything. As Mr. Morris say:

Mr. Morris: ........It’s merely to help you avoid thought when you’re reading. That helps you to avoid thought when you’re not reading.....(The Sleepwalkers, 1969,92).

Talking about the magazine, he says that there is no humour in his magazine, there is no serious philosophy, yet it sounds thought provoking. It presents the superficiality of the American couple and their magazine, which is without any motive; as Mr. Morris describes:

Mr. Morris: ........there is no humour in my magazine. When you laugh, you laugh at something, at somebody. The person laughed at is separated from the person laughing. This divides humanity. Individuals laughing at one another leads to nations laughing at one another, and ultimately to conflicts...... He who does not laugh, neither shall he weep. (The Sleepwalkers,1969,91).
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Through the magazine of Mr. Morris the writer brings the affects of media and modern technology on the thinking of modern man and comments on the modern world and technology which made human being inconsiderate. As Mr. Morris says:

Mr. Morris: ....In the modern world we have marvellous technological means for neutralising thought. My magazine is merely a humble effort to further that cause. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 92).

Ezekiel’s personality, background and social and artistic temperament are responsible for the treatment of his themes. One of the themes of *The Sleepwalkers* which occurs is the Indian habit of always looking up to the Americans as their ideals. One of them is another journalist; one is Gujarati poet another, short story writer in Hindi and a Bengali playwright. All the characters are masked. Mr. and Mrs. Morris arrive in India to promote their magazine; all the Indian guests are seen praising the American couple. The play depicts an insight that the Indians should go back to the wisdom enshrined in their own cultural heritage instead of running after the American way of life and ideologies. All the Indians gathered around Mr. Morris make attempts to impress him in various ways. This is discernable in short pieces of conversation quoted below from the text. Mr. Varma, who is a short story writer of Hindi, asks Mr. Morris about his work:

Mr. Varma: Will your magazine be needing Hindi short stories, Mr. Morris? (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 87)

Same like Mr. Varma. Miss Ganguli also said:

Miss Ganguli: Bengal has hundreds of great playwrights, Mr. Morris. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 88).
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Miss Ganguli: Bengal has hundreds of great playwrights, Mr. Morris. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 88).
Mr. Raman, who is a journalist, said:

Mr. Raman: Do you need correspondents in India?
Mr. Kapur: You will need editions in the Indian languages,
Mr. Morris
Mr. Varma: My stories are perfectly suitable for your
magazine, Mr. Morris. My critics say that they
are totally without thought. (*The Sleepwalkers*,
1969, 90).

The play opens with a note of high appreciation for the Americans.

The content of the ‘mantra’ (chant) is western in spirit yet
traditional in its tonal supplications.

Our American town planner
Our American traffic control expert
Our American Educational Advisor

Our American Sunshine
Our American Air (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 84).

Ezekiel seems to make sarcastic comments on the Indian population:

Mr. Morris: .......... We visited Japan. We just loved Japan, my
wife and I. Great place Japan. So we thought,
Why not India this year, another great place. I’ve
got this magazine, see. It could be sold here to
your people – Back in the states, its popular.
Millions of copies are sold. You have a big
population, don’t you!
Prof. Shah: Five hundred million people.

Mr. Morris: Five hundred million, Christ. Takes your breath
away, doesn’t it?

Prof. Shah: It takes our breath away, Mr. Morris. We can
hardly breathe. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 87).

Prof. Shah compares American modernity with Indian traditional values:
India is culturally rich, Mr. Morris, though economically backward. Our spiritual life is so much better compared to materialistic America. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 88).

Prof. Shah: We give you spiritual aid, you give us financial aid.

In another instance Mr. Raman says:

Mr. Raman: You give us training in journalism. We attack you in our journals. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 88).

Mr. Kapur makes a light hearted remark on the nature of women in India:

Mr. Kapur: A magazine without thought will be popular with Indian women, Mr. Morris. We get along peacefully without thought. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 90).

A witty and meaningful exchange of views is observed in the following dialogues between Prof. Shah and Mr. Morris,

Prof. Shah: In this country, Mr. Morris, the ideal of many of us is to transcend thought, to reach a state of mind where thought is unnecessary.

Mr. Morris: We Americans find that too high for us we prefer to be below thought not above it. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 90).

Ezekiel portrays professional behavior of the Indians and depicts social reality in different dimensions. The characters reflect Indian traditional thinking and approach to various issues and aspects of modern life.

Besides all the other themes associated with the disillusionment of the modern man in the play, Ezekiel comes up with the theme of alienation. The modern urban man’s existence is marked with a quest for identity. They suffer alienation and struggle hard to survive in a complex and competitive world around them. In their respective efforts all the
characters follow the American couple blindly. It is evident through such characters as Mr. Varma, Miss Ganguli, Mr. Raman and Mr. Kapur. Ezekiel groping for identity at times appears to reflect an East-west dichotomy. All characters, Mr. Varma, Miss Ganguli, Mr. Kapur, Mrs. Kapur have position in the society, they all are educated yet they have no real individuality. They all are in search of identity by associating themselves with Mr. and Mrs. Morris, the American couple. They all hide their suffering by pretending. Social and cultural environment is responsible for estrangement of the individual in *The Sleepwalkers*. The India characters find themselves in an amusing and humorous situation; they all entirely depend on the American guests and as they have no self respect due to lack of traditional insights and faith in their own native values, the Indians find themselves in an insecure and isolated position vis-à-vis the Americans. Language is another important factor which dissociates people from one another. As the conversation reveals:

**Mr. Morris:** Have you been to the states?
**Mr. Kapur:** Yes, I was there last year.
**Mrs. Morris:** (to Mrs Kapur) Did you accompany your husband, Mrs. Kapur?
**Mrs. Kapur:** No, I couldn’t go. At that time I was expecting.
**Mrs.Morris:** Expecting? (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 85).

Here the word ‘expecting’ dissociates the American listener and the Indian speaker.

Dress can also differentiate between people. Mrs. Morris and Mrs. West wear different dresses where as Mrs. Raman is shown wearing a sari. Another instance of alienation is the statement of Mr. Varma who is a writer of Hindi:
Mr. Varma: No, in Hindi, India’s national language one hundred and eighty seven short stories in Hindi. Also four hundred and seventeen poems. In Hindi I am one of the well-know writers. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 85).

But he urges Mr. Morris to print his stories in his magazine:

Mr. Varma: Will your magazine be needing Hindi short stories, Mr. Morris? (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 87).

Further he says:

Mr. Varma: My stories are perfectly suitable for your magazine, Mr. Morris. My critics say that they are totally without thought. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 90).

The way Mr. Varma reacts is the perfect example of alienation. Due to Ezekiel’s own experience in different areas like editing, teaching, advertising, anthologizing and writing, he is able to portray before the audience a realistic picture of the modern urban society, which is multidimensional and multicultural. Ezekiel also employs the techniques of realism in the play. He displays a reality of the various aspects of Indian life, and shows reality through the characters. It will be apt to quote the words of Brahama Dutt Sharma:

........In his poems as well as in his plays Nissim Ezekiel exposes peoples especially his countrymen’s follies, foibles, weaknesses and deficiencies and often seems to be trying to laugh them into honestly, sincerity, efficiency....like. (*Sharma*, 1995, 4).

He points towards the over population of India. Another reality is focused when Prof. Shah talks about India which is culturally rich and economically backward. The playwright makes a comparison between
India and America. And again the comparison is made between the two, as Mr. Morris says:

**Mr. Morris:** Gee, that’s’ tremendous we Americans are productivity conscious, but only in industry. In literature you beat us hollow, Mr. Varma. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 94).

Ezekiel brings out his own experience and encounters with people at different places and is able to portray the Indian realities on the stage. Ezekiel also shows the reality of journalism. In India, journals have financial purpose. They are meant to promote particular brand, they have no real worth and motive. As Mr. Kapur said:

**Mr. Kapur:** It’s called the Indian Automobile, Mr. Morris. It’s devoted to helping owners of Indian automobiles to cope with them. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 93).

The playwright exposes the reality of the rural population of India and the working of the Indian Government system. The professional playwrights use art forms to promote tourism, trade and business. The real Indian rarely appears in their attempts to earn money and project suppressed presentations. Miss Ganguli laments:

...........I’m commissioned to write plays by the Government of India. The themes are supplied by the Government. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 93).

The spiritual hollowness of the American couple is reflected in the play when Mr. Morris remarks:

**Mr. Morris:** That’s true. We Americans are certainly materialist. In spiritual matters, we have a great deal to learn from you........ (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 88).
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Their magazine also shows their futility. Thus the playwright represents life and the social world as it seems to common reader. The playwright ridicules the way women are treated in the pseudo-civilized society of contemporary India:

Mrs. Raman: O no, our husbands drink whisky, we drink orange juice.
Mrs. Kapur: Our husbands eat meat we eat vegetables.
Prof. Shah: .....This is division of labour...... (The Sleepwalkers, 1969,86).

The typical Indian style of living, especially of pseudo-civilized society in which women do not enjoy equality of status, is pointed out by Ezekiel. Women are supposed to be inferior to men even in the civilized society. They do not get equal status as their male counterpart. It focuses on the typical man woman relationship phenomenon in Indian. Both the women, Mrs. Raman and Mrs. Kapur conversation highlights their inferiority complex.

Ezekiel focuses on the social position of women in the male dominated socio-cultural contexts. Ezekiel conveys his feminist perspective regarding Indian women in his plays through female characters.

...Ezekiel’s plays, like Bernard Shaw often appears as mouth pieces of the dramatist especially his views regarding women and their writings. Though Ezekiel felt that men and women should always be equal yet from time he has betrayed this sense of equality...... (Iyer,1985,69).

Ezekiel, who is himself a playwright, creates Miss Ganguli’s character who too is a playwright. She deals mainly with the treatment of the themes associated with Indian village life. Miss Ganguli ironically remarks that her plays are neither acknowledged nor accepted by the Indians as their true depiction. She candidly confesses to Mrs. Morris:
Mrs. Morris: ...Do the villagers like your plays, Miss. Ganguli?

Miss Ganguli: I’ll be honest with you, I’ll be frank, they don’t. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 93).

Here Nissim Ezekiel presents the character of Mrs Ganguli as a creative artist who makes compromises with her creative urge to make it an instrument to face the challenges and complications of the modern life. She writes under strict government control and sponsorship about restricted themes related to government policies and agendas. Miss Ganguli says:

Mr. Morris: What kind of themes?
Miss Ganguli: Mostly connected with family planning. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 93).

After the performance of the play the villagers still seem unconvinced of the need for family planning as described by Mr. Morris:

Morris: ....What happens after the villagers have seen the plays? Are they convinced of the need for family planning?

Ganguli: O, they are convinced all right. But they can’t do anything about it. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 93).

Even the answer of Miss Ganguli is full of sarcasm when she said:

...you see the villagers don’t have any, they don’t have any....I mean, they can’t practice what we preach,.....(The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 94).

Here, the stark reality of the Indian rural scenario is displayed where the people are deprived of basic understanding about the fundamental needs. They seem to be ignorant of the population control measures. They hardly believe in costly mode of recreation as they cannot afford it. In a way they fail to understand the connectivity between family planning
and the quality of existence. Religion and culture in India is a big obstacle unlike the western and developed countries where family planning is adopted readily by the people to ensure its huge success.

Miss Ganguli: .....Mr. Morris, all your foundations know about it, and they all help, many of them help, but you see, we are five hundred million, and most of us are in the villages, and there’s no entertainment in the villages or anything like that you know, the way you have night clubs, and so on. (The Sleepwalkers,1969,94).

Here we notice that though the villagers do not have the basic things in the villages yet they are planning to establish a night club. It evokes laughter and puts a sarcastic remark on the programme of cultural and economic exchange between India and America, because there is no use of establishing night clubs in villages. It reflects the disorientation, superficiality and lack of channelization of the programme. He points out the difficulties and challenges faced by the policy makers in implementation of family planning measures in the rural India.

The writer diverts our attention to the superficial life of the modern urban man who has become insensitive to the cultural values. The human psyche undergoes a change due to rapid urbanization and modernization. The magazine of Mr. Morris is also a means to present the insignificance of man in the present era:

Mrs. Morris: ..... Lots of pictures and things. People want pictures these days. You’ve got to give it to them. I mean to say, words are all very well in their own way. I got nothing against words, but the pictures the thing, that’s what I say........(The Sleepwalkers,1969,87).
He makes comments on the English spoken by the Indians; Mr. Varma is translating his work into English and says:

Mr. Varma: Some I have translated in English, but I am not knowing English. (*The Sleepwalkers*,1969,86).

Ezekiel presents a contrast between Indian and Western standards of academic accountability. To an extent Indians lack experimentation, innovation, and are less updated in their professional fields. Prof. Shah illustrates this in the context of his teaching practice.

Mr. Morris: You combine teaching and writing, don’t you Prof. Shah? You must find teaching takes up a lot of your time. (*The Sleepwalkers*,1969,92).

Prof. Shah: Only the mornings, Mr. Morris. My afternoons and evenings are free.

Prof. Shah: My lectures were all prepared twenty years ago...

Prof. Shah: The notes I prepared as a student, Mr. Morris twenty years ago I use those. (*The Sleepwalkers*,1969,93).

Ezekiel, in this play, criticizes the concept of consumerism. Through the publicity mania he portrays the reality of the commercial world. In the modern times publicity is an important factor. Mr. Morris and Mrs. Morris come to India for the publicity of their magazine. They both are not confident about their magazine which focuses on ‘thoughtlessness’. They use the means of publicity for their magazine rather than the actual worth. The writer projects traditional India through his characters. Mr. Raman describes the topics on which he is writing a report:

Mr. Raman : I don’t know anything about that, Mr. Morris. I specialise in reporting strikes, protests, processions, and so on.

Mrs. Morris : That must be very interesting.
Mr. Raman : It is. There’s plenty of work. Not a moments’ rest. *(The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 94)*.

Ezekiel takes up the issue of his countrymen’s inadequacy to tackle their problems.

The playwright ridicules the way the Indians converse in English. Some of the characters speak an inter language in which several rules of the Indian languages have been employed in the words and sentences of English. Ezekiel, through his own observation and experience of the languages spoken in India, employs the Indian English which is spoken by the Indians. Mr. Varma translates his work into English but he actually has no proper knowledge of the language. The programme of cultural and economic exchange India and America also becomes the target of Ezekiel’s satire.

The theory of post-colonialism can be applied to the play *The Sleepwalkers*. Peter Barry says,

……*The superiority of what is European or Western, and the inferiority of what is not*……. *(Barry, 2007, 192)*.

Thus, the play is based on the concept of the superiority of the whites over the non-whites. Due to the colonial effect the psyche of Indians has undergone a huge transformation and they regard the Americans as superior to them.

After colonization Indians are in search of their real identity. This conflicting and unstable identity is the chief cause of their thoughtlessness and hollowness. Ezekiel presents before us a cross-cultural interaction which is one of the characteristics of post-colonial
criticism. As all the characters belong to the educational class they interact with the people of the other cultures and thereby it affects their thinking. Due to this they seem to neglect their own culture and praise foreign culture. Mr. Raman says:

**Mr. Raman**: No, in English. I studied journalism in New York.

**Mr. Morris**: How delightful. We sail in the same boat, Mr. Kapur. Have you been to the states?

**Mr. Kapur**: Yes, I was there last year (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 85).

Miss Ganguli remarks,

**Miss Ganguli**: Bengali has the most advanced literature in India, Mrs. Morris, according to foreign observers. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 86).

A critic observed that the play of Nissim Ezekiel don't deal with an individual character and its development, rather, he says,

**In all four plays the characters are distinctly and purposely types, for it is the situation that is central and dominant. There is no psychological development, these are not plays of individual character analysis, and that is most clearly seen in the types involved in the Sleepwalkers. (Blackwell,268).**

Ezekiel presents before us such of the characters who compromise their self respect by exposing themselves.

**Miss Ganguli** : This will be a very good thing for Bengal people think too much there that's why all this stone throwing and burning of buses if we had less thinking we could have stable Government.

**Prof. Shah** : In this country, Mr. Morris, the ideas of many of us is to transcend thought, to reach
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... a state of mind where thought is unnecessary. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 90).

Through Mr. Morris, Ezekiel brings out the reality behind Indian and American programmes. Regarding Mr. Morris, it may be quoted:

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...... There is a peculiar connection between Mr. Morris and Bharat (Nalini) so far as ‘thoughtlessness’ is concerned. Between thoughtlessness and intellect there is not only a conflict but also a diametric opposition. This paradigm is dear to the playwright and this has not found expression in Indo-English Drama so prominently before Ezekiel. (Sharma, 1995, 92).
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Mrs. Shah is a lady who remains silent throughout the play. She only shows her response by shaking her head or by the gesture of body. Another character is Mr. Raman and Mrs. Raman, Mr. Raman is a journalist who also wants to get benefit from Mr. Morris.

Through his characters Ezekiel present how modern men go abroad for higher studies. Mr. Raman who studies journalism in New York, but again sarcastically Ezekiel comments on the traditional Indian concept of arrange marriage. Through the statement of Mrs. Raman:

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Mrs. Morris : How sweet of him? How are you Mrs. Raman. Did you go with your husband to New York?

Mrs. Raman : No, our marriage was arranged after he came back. (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1969, 85).
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Mr. Kapur and Mrs. Kapur is another couple Mr. Kapur is an editor who wants to benefit from Mr. Morris foundation that launches a magazine in India. Mr. Kapur says:
Mr. Varma is a short story writer who writes in Hindi. He also writes poems and translates into English. He says in his own praise,

No, in Hindi, India’s national language. One hundred and eighty seven short stories in Hindi. Also, four hundred and seventeen poems. In Hindi I am one of the well-known writers. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 85).

My stories are perfectly suitable for your magazine, Mr. Morris. My critics say that they are totally without thought. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 90).

He wishes to publish his stories in Mr. Morris’ magazine which is based on thoughtlessness.

Mr. Verma: Some I have translated in English but I am not knowing English very nicely. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 86).

Through his character, Ezekiel satirizes the Hindi writer who writes amply but his work has no validity because he lacks the ability to use correct English. The playwright reveals the diction of the Indians as they speak English with dialectical varieties. One of the dialogues of Mr. Varma expresses the comparative merits of Hindi playwright against the English.

Mr. Varma: Hindi is also having hundreds of great playwrights only world is not knowing about them. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 88).

Miss Ganguli is a Bengali playwright. She also follows Mr. Morris like the other characters for professional gain. She talks about playwrights.

‘Bengal has hundreds of great playwrights, Mr. Morris’. Ezekiel wants to put forward the case of rich regional theatre in theatre with special
emphasis on Bengali playwrights who come at par with excellence of the modern and classical English theatre.

Ezekiel makes a special mention of women characters in this play as a blend of traditional and the modern. He depicts creative women like Miss Ganguli against a stereotype housewife character Mrs. Shah. These noteworthy female characters express a diversity of women’s experiences in the contemporary Indian society, their preferences, values and choices are different from that of the American ones. Indian women are projected through the character of Miss Ganguli and Mrs. Shah considerably independent and individualized model of western women is projected through Mrs. Morris’s character.

Ezekiel presents a blend of tradition and modernity in almost all the thematic and technical aspects of the play. The earlier section has dealt considerably in expressing this combination at the level of theme, characterization, plot, situation, actions, dialogues, devices and setting. Ezekiel prefers to give stage directions in this play as he anticipates a lack of action and difficulties related to performance of the play in the theatre. Technical direction facilitate this seemingly modern content of the play to be performed with technical expertise on the Indian stage.

Regarding the technique of the plays of Ezekiel, Shyam Ashani writes:

......In all the three plays, the playwright seems to be conscious of the stage problems as is evinced in his emphasis on scene and setting, sound and light acoustics, mask, music, hints within parentheses about the gestures and moods of the actors and other stage directions. But for want of adequate action, their stage worthiness is doubtful. However, they do make a pleasant reading matter.... (Singh, 1997, 100).
The play *Sleepwalkers* is a continuous blend of not only modern and traditional theatrical devices but also an effective merger of sound and light, mask and music, actions and pauses, words and silences. In *The Sleepwalkers*, music plays an important role. The use of music is a technique which Ezekiel uses in his play very well. It is one of the important theatrical devices used by the dramatists. In the beginning only the sound of aeroplane is heard. No other music is heard before the play begins. And again the sound of teleprinter heard. He also employs the voices which tell something about the play. The first voice in the form of background narration is heard by the audience:

**Voice:** The editor and publisher of the American International magazine Blank, Mr. Edward Morris, is expected to arrive in Bombay shortly for a three-week tour of India........*(The Sleepwalkers,1969,84).*

Again the voices are heard, the words of Mr. and Mrs. West are not heard by the audience. Ezekiel also employs the effects of lights which is visible in the drawing room. At the end of the play the sound of the teleprinter is heard then a voice reading:

**Voice:** Mr. Edward Morris, editor and publisher of the new American International magazine Blank, met a number of Indian writers and journalists during his short stay in Bombay.... *(The Sleepwalkers,1969,95).*

In the end the sound effects begin again. Lights reflect in the drawing room. In the play various conventional elements of stagecraft are used which are integral to the action of the play. Lightening on the stage serves the function to make the performers visible and creates the mood, and control the focus of the audience. Its primary function is to highlight the characters on the stage. The stage in the play is divided into two parts.
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One part of the stage is illuminated at one time. There are two basic types of stage lighting; one floodlights which lighten the broad area, and the spot light which focuses intensely on a smaller area. Music is used as one of the common sound effects. It includes any sound which is created by the performer. The sound on the stage makes the play appear to be realistic. Airport roar and ticking of a teleprinter provide the background music. The playwright employs technique of the fusion of sound and light on the stage to give a hint about the prominent setting of the play.

......Sound of aeroplane overhead well before the curtain opens, intensifying as it does. No other music before the play begins. From time to time, a standard arrival or departure announcement is made, heard by the audience in a somewhat muffled and incomplete form. Whirr of propellers, noise of engines, crowd voices rising and falling, footsteps approaching and moving away. Hooting of automobile horns, raucous shouting of porters, and the occasional barking of a dog, twice, clearly, the mooing of a cow....... (The Sleepwalkers, 1969,83).

The dramatist employs sound effects as a stage device in various forms to sustain and enhance the theatricality of the performance.

Another effective theatrical device is costume design which refers to what the performers wear on the stage. Costume reveals information about the characters, describes their mood, setting and indicates social class and personality trait of the characters. In the play, the American guests are in different dresses and rest of the cast i.e. Indian guests are in masks. Women are presented in sari, the typical Indian dress. Thus, the costume conveys information about the characters. Ezekiel uses an unconventional technique. When he presents the characters in mask
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(type), Ezekiel seems to deliberately 

desist from the mention of identity as it’s a derived technique from the western theatre and traditions of ball dance, mask dance and such festivities. In the beginning the description is given about the mask:

....The Indian guests are in masks. They are a varied lot but it is not necessary to describe them. Their physical characteristics, clothes, etc. Can be easily imagined by the director. He should seek to “type” them and avoid individuality. (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 83).

Here, Indian theatre seems to attain vitality with a perfect blend of Eastern and Western theatre insight. All the characters are shown wearing mask. They all wear masks which reflect their unthinking dependence on the foreigners. Due to mask, performers look more like puppets as it makes the face expressionless and incommunicable. Their expression depends on voice and gesture. Mr. Morris is shown to be masked when he appears at the top of the ramp with his wife behind him:

......... The audience now sees the two American couples advancing front centre. They are wearing masks......... (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 84).

In the end again Mr. and Mrs. Morris appear at the top of the ramp in new masks. The frequent changes in the masks express an identity crisis that is a conspicuous feature of contemporary theatre. Ezekiel puts it as a direction:

.... (Mr. and Mrs. Morris appear again at the top of the ramp, in new masks, run down the ramp,.....). (The Sleepwalkers, 1969, 95).
Ezekiel applies this technique to make his play appear modern in content and impact. Masks are more revelatory in his plays. As the appearance of the mask is expressionless, the characters appear and seem to hold identity as a type. The characters, lacking in personal and individual identity register a claim for greater universality. The technique of mask promises to provide greater fluidity and flexibility to the performers, as a performer puts it:

......When I put on the mask I become impersonal. It is easier to step into the body of another character. The face is not required to express, it passes its function to the body. (Gargi, 1962,176).

Witty dialogues, puns, word play, and farcical laughter have a special role to play in comic performances in the theatre. The play *Sleepwalkers* presents comic effects through the use of appropriate diction. William Meridith writes:

...... Words are inhabited by the accumulate experiences of the tribe the average adds about as much to the language as he does to the nitrogen content of his native soil. But he can administer the force that resides in words. (Sharma, 1995,192).

The play achieves its comic effects not by broad humour and bustling action but by the sustained brilliance and wit of the dialogue. The way all praise American couple seems to be comic:

Mr. Raman: Give us this day our daily American.
Rest of the cast: Give us this day our daily American.
Prof. Shah: Our American town planner.
Mr. Raman: Our American traffic control expert.
Mr. Kapur: Our American educational advisor.
Mr. Varma: Our American textile design director.
Prof. Shah: Our American architect for the national center of the performing arts.
Almost every dialogue is full of humour. The way English is spoken by Mr. Varma and the other characters when they interact with the native English character Mr. Morris is indeed humorous. The play is a mixture of traditional and modern technique and reflection of contemporary life and experience. All the characters are urban educated people who encounter the American guest, but the issues which they discuss are rooted in conventional Indian value pattern. They are seemingly modern but they deal with conventional Indian lifestyle.

Ezekiel remarks on the impact and reception of the play *Sleepwalkers*. In an interview with Zubin Driver Ezekiel say:

**Zubin Driver:** What made you write the Sleepwalkers? It is a very slight farce which merely portrays the attitude of Indians and Americans. It doesn’t analyze the complexity of the phenomenon.

**Ezekiel:** It is meant to be what it is. I would not deny the serious aspect of such a situation, but that is taken in one’s stride. If you have eight to ten such experiences, they tend to manifest themselves. Take poetry readings, for instance. Somebody asks a ridiculous question like “Do you write poetry in the mornings or at night?” and disrupts
the whole atmosphere. Now that kind of attitude interests me, which is not to say that I am dismissing the serious aspects of a poetry reading. It just means that I am not attracted to dealing with those aspects in terms of theatre. In any case, I would not make any big claims about the Sleepwalkers. (Anklesaria, 2008, 65).

To conclude, it can be established in the light of the arguments and descriptions given to trace the development of the play as an Indo-American farce. The blend of tradition and modernity is discernable in the theme, characterization, plot, action, diction, devices, comic sequences, setting and impact. The message and philosophy does not appear in the forefront and the play aptly justifies the manners and morals of the Indians and Americans on two contrasting social contexts. A delightful environment prevails throughout the play to mark the emergence of a light-hearted theatre for entertainment. The contemporary impact of cinematography is visible in the use of sound, light and mask. Ezekiel thus experiments a fusion of modern technique with traditional Indian thematic concerns.
The play *Marriage Poem* was published in 1969, in the *Three Plays*. It is second play by Ezekiel after *Nalini*. In August 1988, it was performed at the Alliance Francaise Theatre in Bombay directed by Patric Beck. It is a one act tragi-comedy which is domestic in content. *Marriage Poem* is a simpler play which reveals the dark and bright sides of the institution of marriage. In a very small setting, it explores the upper middle class marriage. It has six characters; of them there are two married couple and two women, one of them being the friend of one of the husbands. *Marriage Poem* reflects how extra-marital adventure and misunderstanding can wreck a happy family life. It begins on a quiet domestic lively conversation between husband and wife, Mala and Naresh. The play is about a situation, a perfunctory domestic situation and depicts the failure of a middle-class marriage in which the wife and husband nag and love, fight and talk. Their life is full of skirmishes and conflicts, which provide humour. It will be apt to quote in this respect,

...marriage poem is steeped in the common happenings of everyday life and Ezekiel extracts drama out of it. The stuff of drama lies, not in 'accidents' but in 'incidents' for accidents are unnatural where as incidents are normal and natural... (Sharma,1995,90).
The disturbed life of Mala and Naresh is represented throughout the play by Ezekiel. He points out the life of contemporary man and also criticizes at the institution of marriage.

Ezekiel’s dramatic technique is superb and flawless. The plots in his plays are precise and straightforward. The device of parallelism, contrast, and satire help in the logical development of the plot. His characters are vivid. Both plot and characters are co-related and promote the unity of effect or impression.

Marriage Poem centres on the marriage theme i.e. unhappy marriage. There are other themes which recur; the theme of the other women, possessiveness of man-woman relationship and the hollowness which occurs in married life due to extra-marital relationship. The marriage theme is not new but the way the dramatist presents it, makes it a modern play. Ezekiel also presents the possessiveness in the man-woman relationship which is related to the problem of identity and contemporary man. Ezekiel portrays the realistic situation and incident which are common; hence this return to normal or natural is his admirable contribution to the modern drama. The central issue in the Marriage Poem is ‘unhappy marriage’, and this unhappiness occurs due to lack of understanding. The hollowness occurs in the married life of Mala and Naresh due to extra-marital affair. This growing chasm of misunderstanding between them wrecks their marriage. The playwright develops our perception of an unsuccessful marriage. As Moutushi Chakravartee commented in Essays on Nissim Ezekiel,
... In marriage poem, the central problem veers round the so called ‘unhappy’ marriage. But happiness is a utopia that one craves for, without ever achieving it ....... (Sharma, 1995, 90).

The conversation between Mala and Naresh shows that they are unhappy. The reason of their unhappiness and suffering is Leela. Mala says to Naresh

Mala: ... are you in a bad mood all day in the office too? Or are the bad moods reserved for me? (Marriage Poem, 60).

The wife and husband live together under the same roof, experiencing emptiness, loneliness and alienation as Naresh says,

Naresh: ... I am alone. It has taken me a long time to learn how to be alone (Marriage Poem, 74).

Both are unsatisfied with their married life. Naresh, who loves Leela, is unable to understand the love of his wife, and Mala, who loves her husband, very much is unable to get back the same response and love from him. She confesses to Mrs. Lall,

Mala: I won’t give up my husband either He’s married to me. He’s my husband. We have two children I’ll never give him up. (Marriage Poem, 65).

It is the quest in Naresh for communication and feeling of sharing that leads him towards Leela in whom he finds warmth, friendship, understanding and compassion. It is evident that Mala is virtually devoid of communication with Naresh and this was the cause of confusion and lack of understanding and love between husband and wife. Naresh says to Leela that he loves her, not his wife Mala, but he is aware of the reality that he has a wife who loves him.
Naresh: what about my wife?
Leela: She doesn’t exist,
Naresh: She does, for me,
Leela: As a ghost only.
Naresh: The ghost who talks.
Leela: The ghost who nags.
Naresh: The ghost who bore me two children......
Naresh: She loves me thats why it’s easy to make love to her, even now.
Leela: ... I don’t believe she loves you
Mala: ... She does
Leela: ...all those things you tell me against her! How can she say and do all that if she loves you? (Marriage Poem,68).

Naresh: I don’t know, but she does, in her own way. (Marriage Poem,69).

Naresh realises the reality that his wife loves him, but at the same time he is not able to stop loving Leela. Lack of understanding is a factor that is responsible for the gap between Mala and Naresh. Naresh never feels guilty. He says,

Naresh: But I don’t love her, I can’t I love you. (Marriage Poem,69).

Mala is a victim of incompatibility of matrimonial relationship. Her marriage with Naresh turns out to be a vanishing search for love and understanding Mala very much wants her husband Naresh to recognize her love and compassion which she feels should form the base of their relationship.

Mala: He doesn’t know what’s good for him. He wouldn’t be happy with any other woman. I look after him well. He’s put
on twenty pounds since he married me. He’s happy with me but he doesn’t know it... (*Marriage Poem*,66).

Both the couple nag each other all the time. They both are not satisfied with each other. Naresh is busy in writing letters and forgets to do the works of Mala. He even denies the offer of having tea with his wife Mala in the evening.

Mala: you always distort everything I say. I like waiting for you because I want the pleasure of having tea with you in the evenings. So in the morning....
Naresh: ... It’s no pleasure. (*Marriage Poem*,60).

There are other instances which represent the fragmented life of the couple. Mala and Naresh talk about having tea and bread, which is a typical Indian trait of housewives, and which displays the gesture of togetherness, but it has no value in the eyes of Naresh.

Naresh: ... And dip a slice of bread in it for me ... put the slice of bread dipped in tea into my mouth....
Mala: I will, I will...
Naresh: .. Thank you that was delicious
Mala: I love it too
Naresh: (raising his voice) I hate it. (*Marriage Poem*,61).

These incidents prove the conflicting and dissatisfied life of Mala and Naresh. Here the playwright depicts how extra-marital affairs can ruin the happiness and peace of the life of married couple. It would be apt to say in this context:

........Naresh has no love for his wife Mala. As a result, their married relationship ends in skirmishes and in amities ........ deals with a boring marriage relationship, it indicates the futility of tradition oriented system of wedding. Ezekiel’s fine
realistic approach is discernible in these plays....... (Bhatnagar,2001,622).

The Woman has been Nissim Ezekiel’s major preoccupation in a sizeable portion of his drama in one way or the other. He has presented woman in various forms—as mother, wife, seductress, mistress, whore etc.

The theme of extra-marital relationships is also old but the way Ezekiel treats this theme focuses on the seriousness of the problem in the modern context. The superficial nature of marital relationship can be predicted through the dramatization of dream like the entrance and exit of the other woman Leela. Mala is a normal human being deeply in love with her husband. One can say that Mala does not feel quite at home in the presence of her husband. Her husband’s extreme emotional indifference and callousness have made her intensely vulnerable on the surface. She seems to be happy but she is far from it. Mala laments her experience of bitter loneliness in marital life.

Mala: If I could trust you, I’d trust every woman.
Naresh: if you can’t trust me, why don’t you give me up?
Mala: I’ll never give you up. (Marriage Poem,76).

She is also possessive like Mrs. Lall. It is possessiveness which is a facet of man woman relationship, and up to some extent it is connected with the problem of identity. Ezekiel’s approach is unconventional as he avoids artificiality as well as theatricality. This coming back to nature is the sign of modernity. Ezekiel implies the outsider woman theme in the modern context, and the other woman in the play is Leela, with whom Naresh makes love and finds better company than his wife Mala. Naresh and
Leela both are aware of the reality of their relationship yet they appreciate each other and continue. Leela says,

Leela: O, my poor boy
Naresh: Don’t pity me
Leela: I ran half the way from the station. My train stopped between stations over and over again... (*Marriage Poem*, 68).
Naresh: You don’t mind the secrecy, the lies, the danger of scandal?
Leela: I don’t mind.
Naresh: you don’t mind that we can meet only once a week? (*Marriage Poem*, 68).
Leela: I don’t mind

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Naresh: Does it upset you for me to say that my wife loves me?
Leela: No, not at all
Naresh: I see that it does
Leela: Well, I suppose ‘its’ natural for me to be upset, I’m jealous of her. She has you all the time. I have you once a week, sometimes only for an hour.........
Leela: I’m happy when I’m with you. I’m happy to be loved by you. (*Marriage Poem*, 69).

Hence, both Leela and Naresh are in love with each other but at the same time aware of their respective social realities too. Another female character, Malati, is the wife of Ranjit, with whom Naresh flirts in the presence of Mala. He talks to Malati in a poetical language and Malati also takes side of Naresh and seems to flirt with him. Naresh talks in a different way,

Naresh: ... I am alone it has taken me a long time to learn how to be alone. I’ve also learnt how to value to
condition. The whole world is recreated when one achieved it. All art, poetry, music everything that is true and beautiful is for the single man. Even nature exists only when a man sees her alone. Only when he is alone does she undress for him ......

Mala: What kind of language is this?
Malati: The language of poetry. (Marriage Poem,74).

Ezekiel presents the possessiveness in the man-woman relationship which is also connected with the problem of identity. Mala is shown to be a possessive housewife, who knows reality, yet she cares for her husband. When she talks to Mrs. Lall she says,

Mala: He doesn’t know what’s good for him. He wouldn’t be happy with any other woman, I look after him well is put on twenty pounds since he married me. He’s happy with me but he doesn’t know it. He was as thin as a stick he dressed shabbily. His hair ran wild. He dresses well now. Everybody says so. His hair is under control. I force him to have a haircut every three weeks, I love him. I care for him. (Marriage Poem,66).

The playwright comments on the conscience of the man thereby showing that woman has every right to question her husband i.e. on fidelity as is evident from the conversation of Mala and Naresh

Mala: You can’t run away from me. You’re my husband.
Mala: It is the most important truth in my life.
Mala: That you’re my husband (Marriage Poem,79).

Marriage is one of the favourite themes of Ezekiel—a social institution to be depicted. Mala and Naresh quarrel with each other. They have a love hate relationship. Love and understanding are the essential qualities of a happy marriage which are missing in the lives of Mala and Naresh. By presenting this married couple the playwright attempts to focus on the
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institution of marriage its dark and bright sides. The play also depicts how extra-marital relations or lack of understanding can create a disharmony in happy married life. In conclusion, we may say that the happiness of married life is based on mutual love and sympathy.

Naresh: What is love without understanding? (*Marriage Poem*, 75).

Naresh: Why do you quarrel with me.....?
Mala: I don’t quarrel with you. You quarrel with me. (*Marriage Poem*, 76).

Ezekiel points out the hollowness in the married life of Mala and Naresh. Due to the lack of mutual understanding and thoughtlessness hollowness develops in the marriage. Ezekiel treated this theme in the mode of conventional theatre.

In *Marriage Poem* we encounter one more theme of infidelity and lack of security and mutual trust. Mala and Naresh both quarrel with each other, misunderstand each other, and their married life is affected due to the presence of another woman Leela. On the other hand he loves his wife Mala. He is crossed between his dream fantasy for Leela and his marital duty for Mala. Mala and Naresh’s conversation reveal this dilemma,

Mala: It’s true then ... you’re writing to one of your women, no doubt.
Naresh: Yes, I’m writing to Indira Gandhi...... (*Marriage Poem*, 67).

Naresh know the fact clearly that his wife loves him. But he is the sort of man who could not decide properly. Naresh is aware of his love towards Leela, the woman of his dream but he also knows the fact that his wife
loves him sincerely; he has children yet, he is not able to decide his fate. He is always in a state of confusion.

Naresh: Why do we quarrel so much?
Mala: I don’t know. It’s because you don’t love me.

(Marriage Poem,70).

Naresh: I can’t help that
Mala: you could love me if you decide to
Naresh: How can I decide to? These things are not decided by us. (Marriage Poem,71).

This statement proves that he cannot decide anything; hence, Ezekiel focuses on the inconsistent nature of love, in which he displays how a husband like Naresh has a fickle mindset which keeps changing all the time. Sometimes he loves Mala and praises the fact that she loves him and on the other hand, he finds himself in love with Leela deeply.

The theme of urban sensibility runs through the works of Nissim Ezekiel. The Marriage Poem is also placed in the city. Ezekiel provides an aerial view of the city encompassing the civilized as well as the debased part of it. The drawing room becomes the centre of action where all the action takes place. By merely naming a few relevant features and highlights of the city life, Ezekiel builds up a very vivid and effective urban scene. He is essentially a writer of the city life and the city he describes is Bombay. For him Bombay is the metaphor for urban life in India. Bombay is used as symbol to show Indian modernization and its complexities and challenges.

Ezekiel presents the reality of man and woman. The male has more opportunity than the female as she is bound by domestic chores and children. Here, Ezekiel displays the issue of gender discrimination which
allows a man like Naresh to flirt with other women. He is also connected with Mala, his wife, who loves him sincerely and proves to be more faithful. Ezekiel focuses on the fact that it is the male who is allowed to roam here and there, while the female is supposed to remain steady. She presents an image of a modern woman who loves her husband sincerely. Even after knowing the unfaithfulness of her husband she fulfils all her duties towards children and her husband. The reality of man-woman relationship is presented by Ezekiel in *Marriage Poem*.

Ezekiel made a genuine attempt to encompass as many Indian realities as possible. He displays how marital relationships are wrecked by extramarital relations. He tries to depict very normal and natural condition within marriage and displays the man—woman relationship, their common expectations and the emptiness which arise due to unwanted and unauthentic relationship.

Mala: He never remembers to do anything I tell him.
Mrs. Lall: He has a bad memory........
Mala: He has a very good memory. He never forgets to do anything he wants to do.... he’s very efficient, except when he has to do something for me. *(Marriage Poem,63).*

Ezekiel very expertly deals with the realistic portrayal of society. As in *Nalini*, he shows, in the *Marriage Poem* the life of the married couple and brings us face to face with the ordinary condition.

Mala: I love it too.
Naresh: I hate it.
Mala: Don’t ask for it, then come on, sit down, have your tea.
Naresh: I don’t want it.
Mala: You never do anything to please me. (Marriage Poem, 61).

Ezekiel also portrays the reality of the fact that giving suggestions to others is simple but applying it to your own life is quite different. Mrs. Lall pacifies Mala by saying.

Mrs. Lall: Wives have to do things for their husbands. (Marriage Poem, 64).

She is giving suggestions to Mala to console her but when the things turn to herself she behaves as a different person. Mrs. Lall gets worked up and collapses at the induced suggestion that her husband could be as unfaithful as Mala’s, her mask goes off. She gives a long speech on how to reform a husband. She comments,

Mrs. Lall: ... I would make a terrible fuss. I would harass my husband night and day till he gave her up. I wouldn’t eat and I wouldn’t allow him to eat. I wouldn’t sleep and I wouldn’t allow him to sleep. I would behave like a mad woman. I would tear my hair and I would tear his hair ...... (Marriage Poem, 65).

Mrs. Lall is giving suggestions to Mala but when asked by Mala,

Mala: What would you do if your husband became attached to another woman? (Marriage Poem, 65).

By presenting this situation, Ezekiel attempts to show the reality and thereby present a realistic picture of human behaviour. Ezekiel’s portrayal of another couple Malati and Ranjit, shows a different aspect of married life, that in spite of having a different temperament one can have a happy married life. Their conversation reveals their different attitude.
Ranjit: I agree with Mala
Malati: ...That leaves Naresh and I on the same side, doesn’t it? *(Marriage Poem,73)*.

Throughout the play Ezekiel comments on different realities which in one way or the other affects human behaviour and life; how women suffer at the hands of man, and how an extra-marital affair can destroy the happiness of married life.

Ezekiel’s characters are vividly delineated. He emphasises those qualities of his characters which are needed for the development of the plot. Ezekiel follows the rule that every character should be so presented as to appear absolutely adequate to all the demands which the plot makes upon it. In the plays of Ezekiel characterization and plot are correlated and only those points of character are emphasised, which develop the plot. Ezekiel has ingenuously created close correspondence between character and situation. His characters reveal themselves through their own actions and words. Characters in the play are types. There are six characters in the play Mala and Naresh, husband wife, Malati and Ranjit another couple, Leela and Mrs. Lall; all the characters are real and near to life as they are presented in a realistic situation. Mala and Naresh are a contrast to Malati and Ranjit, Leela represents a different side of the woman, and Mrs. Lall expresses the mindset of the traditional housewife. Thus all the characters are a fusion of old and new, modern and traditional.

Mala is a fusion of traditional as well as modern woman. As a traditional woman she only wants her husband and children. Her traditional quality can be seen in behaviour. Like a typical housewife she likes to have tea
with her husband and want to share her evening tea with him. She also
likes to wait for him. The whole world of her’s revolves around her
husband. She even expects a word of appreciation from him. She says to
Naresh,

Mala: you always distort everything I say. I like waiting for
you because I want the pleasure of having tea with you
in the evening so in the morning.... (Marriage
Poem,60).

She cares for her husband and wants his affection and love in return. Her
talk with Mrs. Lall shows that like a typical housewife she cares for her
husband. Like a typical Hindu bride, she is emotional and has no interest
other than her husband and children. Mala is aware of the extra-marital
relationship of her husband; still she wants her husband back and loves
him. In fact, she is left isolated, unsatisfied and unhappy due to her
marriage. While talking to Ranjit and Malati, she reminds Naresh that he
is married and has two children.

Mala: What’s all this talk about the single man, anyway?
You’re not single. You’re married, I must remind you,
and we have two children. (Marriage Poem,74).

On the other hand Mala is modern too Like the new women she is
practical and confident, she is not ready to lose her husband at any cost
and, in the end, she wins her husband back due to her love and devotion
towards him. She becomes synonymous with the modern woman. She
talks with her husband about the coldness in love:

Mala: ....Talk to me. Come and sit beside me.
Naresh: I’m quite relaxed.
Mala: ... come and sit beside me.
She can boldly discuss with her husband about the coldness in love. She is frank in pointing out her husband’s weakness.

Mala establishes through the plot as a stronger character. She opposes her husband’s argument with him and gives him advice, but she is never seen to accept her life as it is. She has courage and will within her to change the situation and hopes to live a happy married life once again. She never feels herself defeated and faces every situation strongly and wins in the end. She is a practical woman and seeks advice from Mrs. Lall, an elderly woman about her husband. She is confident and not ready to give up. She says to Mrs Lall,

Mala: He’s my husband, and I love him.
Mrs. Lall: Accept him, then.
Mala: I won’t accept him running after other women.
(Marriage Poem, 64).

She can be described as a representative of contemporary Indian women in similar situations. She displays independence, bold attitude and self-assertiveness, but she is extremely sensitive to the traditional norms of morality, as she again and again reminds her husband of the marital duties and responsibility. She is tied down by the oppressive constraints of the label of Indians that is imposed on her by the self-styled guardians of social norms and cultural ideals even as she tries to live life on her own terms. Like a modern woman she can question her husband and remind her husband of his responsibility. She has done everything to save their
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collapsing marriage. She is a mixture of both conventional as well as modern. In the end she wins her husband back by her devotion, deep love and strong persuasion.

Through his female protagonists Ezekiel seems to convey the message that marital polarizations curtail human potential and individual happiness. Mala’s identity (character) is highly assimilative, she can adopt and accommodate herself both to traditional Indian values and at the same time she is confident and strong like a modern woman.

In Naresh we find a characteristic of a modern as well as traditional husband. He is married to Mala but finds no happiness in their married life and relationship. For him marriage is just a tradition bound institution. He lives with his wife but adores Leela and enjoys the company of Malati. Instead of his wife Mala, he finds love and emotional support from Leela with whom he is in extra-marital relationship. He knows the reality that his wife loves him but is unable to come out from his dreamworld with Leela. Naresh’s explanation to Mala that “our temperaments are very different” is not cunning but serves as a camouflage to his inherent weakness. Naresh is also the sort of husband in whom we find a blend of tradition and modernity. He knows his responsibility towards his wife and children.

Naresh is caught in the crossfire of marital loyalty and romantic love. He is not strong enough to love completely either his wife or his girl friend, but with holds from both. He is unable to decide anything. He is shown to be a confused man, who is torn between marital relations and duties in which he is not happy, and the dream like notion of Leela with whom he feels
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quite convinced and gets emotional support. He believes that “genes” are responsible for his extra-marital behaviour in his own words.

Mala: You could love me if you decide to.
Naresh: How can I decide to? These things are not decided by us.
Mala: By whom are they decided, then?
Naresh: By our genes.

Naresh: The genes are gods. (Marriage Poem, 71).

His modern outlook can be seen in his behaviour; he dislikes his wife’s habit of waiting for him. Naresh is conscious of his own weakness. He is no hard hearted villain but an erring human being.

Malati: The paradox of vice and virtue resembling each other.
Ranjit: Nobody says that.
Mala: For me, vice is vice and virtue is virtue. There can’t be any confusion between the two.
Naresh: In the space between the two, there is always confusion.

Malati: That leaves Naresh and I on the same side, doesn’t it? (Marriage Poem, 73).

Naresh finds marriage a bondage. He values the freedom of an individual more than his filial duties. Ezekiel attempts to present a man who is not able to decide between his marital duties and his own notion of love. The playwright shows that a modern man is not able to decide anything. He feels self contradiction within himself.

.........in Marriage Poem, in spite of occasional indications that Naresh is partially responsible for the failure of marriage, he come across largely as a men who has made a disastrous marriage, the disaster of course being his wife mala. The other
There are other characters who are hybridization of old and new. Mrs. Lall, who is neighbour of Mala, is an interesting character in the play and from whom Mala takes advice. She is very genuine and sincere in her advice. She is a representative of typical Indian housewife. In her character we find characteristic of a typical Indian woman. Her conversation with Mala reveals this,

Mala: Why shouldn’t he post them for me? I do lots of things for him.
Mrs. Lall: Wives have to do things for their husbands.
(Marriage Poem, 64).

She is a woman capable of making “a terrible fuss” if her husband runs after other women. Also she is conventional in her views and ideas. Like a very sincere adviser she gives suggestion to Mala.

Mala: He’s my husband, and I love him.
Mrs. Lall: Accept him, then.
Mala: I won’t accept him running after other woman.
Mrs. Lall: All husbands do. (Marriage Poem, 64).

Malati and Ranjit is another couple who are well adjusted and provide a contrast to Mala and Naresh. They are portrayed to be a happy couple. Malati and Ranjit both think differently; they are different in their ideas but they are a happy married couple. Their relationship provides a good contrast to that of Mala and Naresh who are not happy with their married life. They are a couple who prove that married life is more...
comedy than tragedy. They display the better aspect of married life. They also show the reality that husbands and wives think differently, but they can be happy by appreciating each other.

Naresh: What is love without understanding?
Mala: It’s still love.
Naresh: We think differently.
Malati: Husband and wife always think differently.
Ranjit: That’s not true.
Malati: It’s not acknowledged. It’s not accepted. But it is true. (Marriage Poem, 75).

Malati and Ranjit both have different opinions yet they accommodate thought. The frustration of Mala and Naresh is contrasted with the mirthful spirit of Malati and Ranjit to reveal the fact that marriage is ‘more a comedy..... more a poem than a dirge......’ Ranjit and Malati a modern couple who know that they have their own ideas and views. They think differently yet they love each other and understand each other. Ranjit allows his wife Malati to favour Naresh, and through this way allows her to be free to put her perspective. Hence, Ezekiel attempts to present a character which is real and natural.

Leela, a woman with whom Naresh is having an extra-marital relation meets Naresh only once a week. She represents another characteristic of modern woman who is aware that the man with whom she is in relationship with, is married, yet she loves him and finds pleasure in relationship with him. The fact that Naresh is a married man never upsets her. She is ready to share her love with Mala.
Naresh who is unmoved by the kisses and caresses of his wife gets electrified in Leela’s mere presence and transforms into a passionate lover. Leela finds absolute gratification with Naresh.

Leela: .....I’m happy when I’m with you I’m happy to be loved by you.
Naresh: Is that enough?
Leela: It’s a lot........... (Marriage Poem,69).

Leela, real or fanciful, gives form to the romantic dreams of Naresh. She represents a free-willed woman who is not bound by any responsibility and marital duties.

As a dramatic craftsman, Ezekiel evolves a dramatic technique which is so flexible that it changes according to the requirement of his plots. Plot is very essential for drama. It is that framework of incidents, however, simple and complex upon which drama is constructed. The events and incidents are organised into an artistic whole, with a view of creating unity of impression of effect.

Marriage Poem is a tragi-comedy. It explores the life of a married couple and their disharmonious relationship. Ezekiel introduces tension and conflict, which are essential for plot, in the very beginning and all events and actions of characters intensify conflict until it reaches climax and resolves into denouement. The plot of Marriage Poem is simple. It is a one act tragic comedy which is based on the theme of marriage. The setting of the play is the drawing room where all the action takes place. This setting is a reflection of the mood of the characters. The scene of action is “a drab, middle-class drawing dining room” with “a mixture of modern and old fashioned” furniture. There are no curtains, no carpets
Marriage Poem: A Tragi-comedy

and no flowers. Book cases, unclear dining table, papers, files and books strewn on the writing desk give an effect of untidiness ‘flat, thin lighting from overhead bulbs and ‘the large painting heavily overlaid with dust” all focus on the absence of colour or happiness in the life of the occupants of the house. Their disharmony and disturbed state of mind is reflected by the “untidy” room. The presence of children is shown by the toys which are thrown on a small mat and in the end the presence of children is reflected by “A loud childish persistent knocking at the door” The final reconciliation is suggested when light moves from the couple to the mat on which the toys are thrown. The atmosphere is urban and all the characters are modern, setting for the action is a metropolitan city. Ezekiel’s portrayal of this simple theme ‘marriage’ in the new context makes it fall close to the normal life of the common human being.

The play begins with non-violent domestic lively conversation. Ezekiel presents a language which is normal to human life. His English is lucid and simple and he has successfully moulded it to express typical Indian ethos. He employs a device like wit, humour, and irony to make the language more effective. The domestic lively conversation is shown in starting between the Mala and Naresh. He uses simple and clear language which is both suggestive and revealing.

The conversation between Mala and Naresh is joined by Mrs. Lall. Just to present the extra-marital adventure of Naresh.

Ezekiel’s characters use language which suits their status and temperament. The whole play is based on the situation which is domestic and lively. Ezekiel displays how foolishly people behave in this situation
and make themselves a laughing stock. The sarcasm will be more evident when the play is enacted on the stage by reading the comic spirit does not get proper justification and recipients fail to reach the exact meaning of a work of art.

In linguistic gestures, Ezekiel gives ample direction for body language and pace. In the beginning, Mala tries to cover her disappointment and this feeling of Mala is portrayed not by language but by gestures as she expresses “eating slices of bread which she dips into her cup of tea”. She is in a mood of despair and twists her face but just to hide her feeling she smiles to look normal, and suddenly she ‘picks up a magazine’ and ‘flips over its pages nervously’ just to relax herself from mental tension. These all are gestures which are presented to express the feelings of Mala.

The use of directions for actors to perform a particular scene establishes Ezekiel as a stage friendly playwright who keeps in mind the limitations of the performatory art form. We find Mrs. Lall who comes to give suggestion to Mala, but when she has to give answer of the hypothetical question of Mala Mrs. Lall transforms completely and her gesture proves this: ‘She stands up briskly, utters half the words below standing, the rest walking up and down’ and at the end ‘She sinks into a sofa in a state of collapse, breathing heavily’ (Marriage Poem, 65).

All these gestures are more significant in comparison to the language of Mrs. Lall. They help in bringing out the feeling of Mrs. Lall more powerfully. The gesture of Mrs. Lall focuses on her disturbed state of mind. Hence, the gestures are powerful and more revealing than the words.
Ezekiel also concentrates on the fact that the suggestion of Mrs. Lall is full of humor and there is a note of farce in her suggestion. The dialogue which is used by the playwright is effective and convincing. Naresh who is caught between dream and reality, flirts with Malati, and speaks poetically in her presence. Ezekiel employs the poetical language intentionally to make his play more effective. Naresh talks poetically in the presence of Malati. This near poetry prose of Naresh makes the play more effective, and makes dialogue look more convincing and interesting. The language of the play is also symbolic. In the beginning the setting of the room is presented which signifies the unhappiness in the house and the disturbed psyche of the dwellers. The mat on which toys are scattered shows the presence of children in the house. Children are the only saving grace and agents of mutual peace, love and harmony. In the end the knock at the door suggests their possible reunion and awakening of their parental duty to children.

The dialogues in the play are witty and interesting. And sometimes they are full of humor, irony and comedy. The statements of Mrs. Lall arouse comedy to make it more powerful Ezekiel employs music on the stage “spectacular music, military or similar to parody the aggressive speech just made” Mrs. Lall is full of humour she says,

Mrs. Lall: ..........I’ll write to all the papers. I’ll complain to the Home Minister. What is the use of being Home Minister, if he can’t guarantee the sanctity of the home?” (Marriage Poem,65).

Ezekiel uses words or ideas in an amusing and very imaginative way. Thus the whole play proves to be full of wit and humour. Ezekiel employs irony throughout his play Marriage Poem. The title ‘Marriage Poem’ suggests
the happy side of the marriage, in which two people live together happily and peacefully, but in this play Mala and Naresh a married couple who quarrel with each other and have a disharmonious married life. They are leading a life full of conflicts. Ezekiel mocks at the institution of marriage in which there is no real happiness and no mutual understanding. There are many instances in the play where irony is employed as a conscious dramatic device. Mala states:

Mala: .......He is happy with me but he does not know it...... *(Marriage Poem,66).*

In reality Naresh does not care for Mala, he only comments and quarrels with her. Another instance which is more ironical is the remark by Mala that she knows Naresh more than Naresh. In reply to this Naresh says,

Naresh: It’s sad that you should say so. Men run away from women who know them too well. *(Marriage Poem,79).*

Ezekiel also employs aphoristic statement in the play to suggest the general truth and the play is marked with ‘verbal action’ and situational wit.

Only his wife knows a man. *(Marriage Poem,74).*

The genes are gods. *(Marriage Poem,71).*

Gods don’t kiss. *(Marriage Poem,71).*

Husband and wife always think differently. *(Marriage Poem,75).*

Every woman is an understanding woman except your wife. *(Marriage Poem,77).*
Ezekiel chooses appropriate words, suitable diction from a rich treasure of vocabulary. His words are suggestive, symbolic and reveal both character and situation. He writes dialogues in lucid, pointed and precise language which is conspicuous for flexibility. It changes with the nuances of his characters. His dialogues are crisp, precise, pointed and full of dramatic verse. As Vrinda Nabar comments:

"............to me Marriage Poem is more representational and therefore more satisfying as theatre. Marriage poem is not an "ambitious" play. Its theme and treatment are in the mode of conventional theatre. These are defining statements not negative comments ... there is no deliberate avant gardeism, just as there is no fake existentialism, sense of alienation, etc. Nor is there any strenuous attempt to "modernize" the technique, which remains that of conventional theatre for the most part................ (Pandey, 1990, 760).

In Ezekiel’s play we find the atmosphere to be totally modern, as in Marriage Poem the setting is the drawing room where all the action takes place. This setting helps the playwright to bring forward ordinary reality. In Marriage Poem it is the married space of an urban middle class family. By making this space a central place Ezekiel attempts to make English language more convenient to the reader or audience by making the drawing room the central space for the activities. Ezekiel establishes an unconventional approach as commented by Tabish Khair:

"Once again; Ezekiel’s feeling for language – the indeterminacies, sullenness and brokenness of a limping marriage – is fully in evidence. And once again, the drawing room is a space of limitations and possibilities, which provides restrained access to other spaces. The neighbours walk in, the children are playing outside; the husband is having an affair elsewhere. (Anklesaria, 2008, 546)."
Ezekiel’s skill and craftsmanship in making use of sound effects are evident in the play *Marriage Poem*. Music plays an important role in all the plays of Ezekiel; it becomes slow sometimes and louder in other situations to match the mood of the character and the action. The use of music can be effectively seen throughout the play. It becomes the effective weapon on the stage to express vacuum and silence experienced by the characters within themselves. It helps in expressing the mood of the characters and one can easily note shifts of the seriousness and non-seriousness of the situation and mood. Music excites the curiosity of the audience. The play begins with the “Pre-Curtain music” and this continues till the end of the play. In the background music can be heard softly at the time when the dialogue goes on, and at every pause the music breaks out loudly.

The music starts again and never stops till near the end of the play being heard softly in the background when the dialogue is going on and breaking out loudly at every pause.... (Pandey, 1990, 76).

The skirmishes between the couple are nicely intonated by the music. The use of music is fully exhibited in the final scene when Naresh is shown to submit himself to his wife, at this time music stops abruptly. And the long silence is filled by the children’s knock at the door and in the play growing forcefulness expressed by the musical crescendo hence; music plays an important role in the *Marriage Poem*. Music provides an intended metaphor to the idea of marriage as a poem with a constant rise and fall in the harmony and tone.

Another theatrical device which is employed by the playwright is electric light on the stage. Lights get dim and brighten according to the situation.
and need of the plot. Light is a modern theatrical device to enhance
meaning and interest of the text.

(Mala gets up in a huff and leaves the room. Music louder.
Lights dim quickly, brighten slowly to reveal Leela......)
(Marriage Poem,67).

At another point the use of light can be felt.

(He sinks down on his knees, lowers his head gently towards
her lap. She slips out from under him and disappears as the
lights dim and the music increases in volume. When the lights
brighten again, Naresh is at his desk, waiting. Music continues
for a bit before it subsides and Mala returns......) (Marriage
Poem,67).

In the end Ezekiel fully exploits the use of light. As in the end we can see.

.......Music louder, much louder, than at any previous time in
the play. Lights out, except for a murky spotlight on the
couple, which shifts slowly to the mat on which the toys are
spread. Here, the spotlight becomes sharp and clear, defining
the quantity and richness of the toys. Music attains
crescendo. Then the spotlight goes off, and immediately the
stage is lit as before, somewhat more brightly than before, as
if the air has been washed clean....... (Marriage Poem,79).

Thus, the light becomes one of the effective theatrical devices due to
which the action of play appears more powerful and involves the
audience.

The end of the play appears to be “theatrical’. Mala is happy for the first
time in the play when Naresh makes love to her. At that point the play
could have ended well. But the reappearance of Leela, expresses that
Naresh’s reconciliation with Mala is incomplete. Naresh is surprised to
find Leela again before him. But the final reunion of Naresh with Mala takes place due to the reappearance of Leela and her awakening to the children's knock at the door; the existence of the children bring Naresh back to actual physical and social reality and responsibility.

Plot, characters, setting, style and language contribute to create the unity of effect and impression in *Marriage Poem*. They also reveal the dramatist's view of life which is the search of identity in the midst of modern world's challenges and growing complexities and demands.

The main thrust of Ezekiel's search was not to revive tradition, but to understand and assimilate it for creative use namely to express the contemporary human situation and its varied manifestations. Thus through the encounter with tradition the contours of fresh, innovative and flexible dramatic forms Ezekiel has skilfully and meaningfully transacted a vision of Indian modernity. Among the rapid global scenario Indian traditional family systems and social patterns are struggling hard to establish their revived apprehension in the modern world.
REFERENCES


