

CHAPTER 1

Indian English Drama: An Introduction



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Drama, being close to life and experience holds philosophy and instructive value in perfect synthesis of modernity in technical performatory aspects and traditional sanctity in the expression of variety of contents and themes. India has had a long tradition of myths, dances, music, folklores and other art forms; this is now beginning to receive devotional and sensitive acceptance from mass media and public. It would be noteworthy to present here, a background of Indian drama as a relative feature to express traditionally oriented modern worldview.

Indian Drama or Indian theater includes within itself many characteristics. When one talks of 'Indian theatre' one enters a vast and intricate arena, both idiomatically heterogeneous and polyglot in character. Although numerous strands show us links, it is after all, an arbitrary term, randomly used to designate one or the other of the diverse performance arts practised in the country, belonging to diverse traditions. It is extraordinarily inclusive-encompassing the classical (like the kathakali, or some Bharatanatyam pieces), ritual (such as the Raas, the Ramlila or the Theyyam), devotional (many of the musically-dominant performances), folk (like the Chhau or the Therukuttu) and modern, partaking of sundry traditions, forms and lore, sometimes unique and sometimes bewilderingly intermingling with each other. Dance, drama, mime, song,

instrumentation, puppetry and the orally delivered narrative, all combine happily and almost seamlessly in a performance by an ensemble of artistes working simultaneously.

The origin of drama dates back to the Christian era. It originated in India, as Bharat says, when once all the gods prayed to Brahma to make a source of entertainment for them which could entertain them. They prayed to Brahma to create something which would suit all sections of society Brahma created for them something that would have visual and auditory appeal, and then he created the drama out of the four Vedas: plot from Rigveda, music from Samveda, acting from the Yajurveda and rasas, or human emotions from Atharvaveda. After combining all these he created a fifth Veda called Drama.

Hence in India drama was brought in to existence by Lord Brahma. It thus has a divine origin. Drama is mentioned in great epics like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The Epics present a description about drama and dramatic art. In *The Ramayana*, Valmiki, the first poet, discusses the word 'Nat' or 'Narataka'. The meaning of this word is actor or player. Likewise, *The Mahabharata* also defines drama which involves in itself many things; it is a blend of story poetry and action.

About the origin of Indian drama, *A.L.Basham*, a prominent historian, observes:

The origin of the Indian theatre is still obscure, it is certain, however that even in the vedic period, dramatic performances of some kind were given, and passing references in early sources point to the inaction at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and mime (Basham, 1987,434).

The tradition of drama in India can be identified by various forms, because it has a splendid past that can be traced back to Sanskrit drama. The tradition of India drama is preserved in the “*Natyashastra*” which is said to be the oldest text on the theory of drama.

In the Vedic age drama was performed in a different but simple way. The dramatic performances of those times include depictions of everyday life. Some members of the tribe acted like animals and others like hunters and in this way a mock hunt was presented. The person who acted as hunter followed the one who behaved or acted like goats, buffaloes, reindeers, monkeys etc. This was one of the way in which drama was performed during the age of Vedic Aryans. Initially drama was concerned with this type of performance; later the themes of plays were taken from *The Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad-Gita*.

These types of performances which were earlier popular are still in practice during Dussehra, etc. The episode of killing of Ravana is enacted in different parts of India. There are references to drama in Patanjali’s *Vyakarna Mahabhashya*, Jame’s *Aagam of Rajpasini Sultan* as well as Vatsyayam’s *Kamasutra*, *Kautilya’s Arthashastra* and Panini’s *Ashtabhyam*.

Thus, the origin of Sanskrit drama dates back to 1000 B.C. In Sanskrit all literature is classified into two- Drishya and Sravya. Drishya means that it can be seen or exhibited and sravya means that it can be heard or recited. Drama is said to be Drishya, while poetry comes within sravya. Drama can be seen or exhibited while poetry is meant to be heard or recited. In Sanskrit literature, drama falls under ‘Rupaka’ which means depiction of life in its various aspects represented in forms by actors who assume

various roles. '*Rupaka*' can be divided into ten, in which Nataka (Drama) is the most important one, which means all dramatic presentations.

The Sanskrit drama was based on three primary constituents: Vastu (plot), Neta (hero) and Rasa (sentiments). The plot can be divided into two principal (adhikarika) or accessory (Prasangika). Principal concerns the primary characters of the theme and diffuses the entire play, and Accessory supplements the main topic. It also relates to subordinate characters. It can be further divided into two: banner (pataka) and incident (parkari). The banner is a small episode that presents, describes, improves and then hinders the primary plot to create added excitement. The incident involves minor characters.

The hero or Neta which is prescribed by Natyashastra has several characteristics. The hero is always depicted as modest (vineeta), sweet tempered (madhura), sacrificing (tyagi), capable (daksha), civil in talks (priyamvada), belonging to a noble family (taptaloka), pure (sachi), articulate (vagini), consistent (sthera), young (yuva); endowed with intellect (buddhi), enthusiasm (utsaha), good memory (smrthi), aesthetics (kala), pride (manna) brave (shura), strong (dridha), energetic (tejaswi), learned (pandita) and pious (dharmika). These are characteristic in which hero is always depicted, but the main category in which a hero of Sanskrit drama comes is '*Dheerodatta*', which means one who is brave and sublime at the same time.

Indian English drama gained certain validity through translations and adaptation in other languages. It was Sir William Jones who translated *Shakuntala* in 1789 and made Hindi plays first known to the European world. It was thought that in India, Greek literature penetrated or had its influence on the playwrights. This thinking however changed with

time. According to many critics, the Hindu drama originated by itself and is neither borrowed nor an imitation.

In earlier times, Bhasa or Bharata is traditionally known to be the founder and “father” of Indian Drama; thirteen of his works have been discovered and published. There is always confusion about the authorship of many plays because earlier there was this custom of attributing a literary work to the ruler at whose court or under whose favour the actual author lived. The earliest extant stage piece is ascribed to a Sudraka. It is one of the oldest play which dates back to 400 A.D. It is among one of the oriental dramas which deals with the life of the middle class.

The works of traditional playwrights Bhasa or Bharata, and Sudraka is said to be the earlier works in the field of drama. Hence drama has a glorious past. The Sanskrit dramatic works depict different mental states, emotions and ideas, desires and aspirations, strengths and weakness, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments they also present a many layered, fascinating picture of the social, political, economic and cultural life of those times. Plays like *Madhyama Vyayoga*, *Urubhanga*, *Swapnavadatta*, *Pratima*, *Abhijnan Shakunthala*, *Vikramorvarshiya*, *Mrichachhakatika*, *Mudrarakshasa*, *Uttaramacharita*, *Ratnavali*, *Kundamala*, *Bhagawadejjukiya* are significant works that would bring credit to any literature, for their delicate aesthetic sense, structural spill, variety dramatic and theatrical quality of the language, and excellence of their poetry. These plays earned a distinct place in the dramatic literature worldwide.

The classical period of Indian drama lasted until the 8th century A.D. According to some authorities this period extended to the 11th century, and the period after it which is post classical is divided into period of

decline, which lasted till 14th century, and the period of decadence, that is, 14th century and after.

The dramatist of the classical period wrote romantic and dramatic idylls rather than tragedies. In their plays women's role were performed by the women not by men or boys, as in Greek theatre. Indian drama was written in Sanskrit on special occasions for an upper class audience and it accordingly never attained the vigor, significance and humanity of a social or national art.

It is due to an elaboration of liturgical practices by which drama originated in Asia. India is said to be the source of Asian theatre. There are several causes which helped in the development of Indian drama and one of them is the Buddhist pilgrims who, after their gradual expulsion from India wandered to different places and helped art and literature to flourish. Therefore, the influence of dance and drama is found everywhere in the east.

There are also several factors which created the hindrance in the path of the development of drama. In India, Muslim invasions from 12th to 15th century adversely affected development of the drama, and British rule in the 18th and 19th century almost put an end to the native art of India. These factors influenced the indigenous art in India and in a way restricted the drama. But later this form of art was encouraged and prospered.

One of the earliest known Sanskrit grammarian and scholar Panini wrote in his *Ashtadhyayi*, approximately around the 6th century B.C. about the *Natyashastra*, which is a text book for Nata (Sanskrit word with different meanings actor, dancer, acrobat), attributing it to Silalini (thought to be an actor community) and Krisasava. Bharata's *Natyashastra* is a treatise

on dramaturgy. It involves, in itself, description about the drama. *Natyashastra* (2000 B.C. to 4th century AD) was the most elaborate treatise on dramaturgy.

The traditional account in Bharata's *Natyashastra* gives a divine origin to Indian theatre, attributing it to the *Natyaveda*, the holy book of dramaturgy created by Lord Brahma. Various traditions in dance, mime and drama were consolidated and codified by Bharata Muni. *Natyashastra* also describes the ten classifications of dramas which vary from one to ten acts. *Natyashastra* is the only book of ancient time which contains in it such a vast or thorough study on dramaturgy.

Natyashastra contains in detail, a description about the composition, production and enjoyment of ancient drama, also a wealth of information of types of drama, dance, stage, equipment, production and music.

Bharata believes drama to have divine origin, especially from devotional dance drama forms. According to him poetry (Kavya), dance and mime (nritya) are life as play (lila) that produce emotion (bhava), but only drama (natya) produces flavour (rasa). The eight basic emotions depicted in drama are joy, humour, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion and wonder. Thus, when the dramatic art was well comprehended then, on the occasion of Lord Indra's victory over the asuras and danavas, *Natyaveda* was performed. In the sixth chapter of *Natyashastra* there is a verse which can be quoted as Bharatmuni's own summary of his dramatic theory.

The combination called natya is a mixture of rasa, bhavas, vrittis, pravrittis, siddhi, svaras, abhinayas, dharmis, instruments, song and theater house (Sharma, 2009, www.literacyindia.com).

Ramayana, Mahabharata and later legends of Krishna are the sources which provide plenty of thematic material by which the Indian drama developed from the Northern Ramlila which is performed yearly in Delhi to the Kathakali dances of South India and the dance dramas of related countries.

In its first chapter, the *Natyashastra* records the legend of the origin of drama. The legend is important to an understanding of Indian drama interpreted variously; the legend is significant in defining the Indian concept of theater. (Rubin,1998,127).

Traditional Indian drama seems to be connected with religion from the time of its origin. It is associated with the gods. It was performed by them as an act of worship and watched by the people as an act of devotion.

In the Indian aesthetics tradition, drama is known as Drishya Kavya (visual poetry), in performance it is Preksha (Spectacle) Drama and dance are so inseparable in Indian aesthetics that, it is at times, impossible to distinguish them as two separate art forms. *The Natyashastra* gives a detailed description of all aspect of the art of acting, especially hand gestures and bodily movements.

The *Natyashastra* is incredibly wide in its scope. *Natyashastra* influences English drama too in India. It describes about the manner in which portrayal is to be done and also what is to be portrayed in drama. It contains, within itself, the minutely detailed precept for both playwright and actors. It gives knowledge to both playwright and actor. It also lays down principles in each individual chapter for stage design, makeup costume, dance, a theory of rasas and bhavas, acting, directing and music. Indian English drama develops as a blend of classical spirit and western theatrical models.

Some of the well known Sanskrit play such as *Shakuntala* and *The Little Clay Cart* (also called the Toy Cart) have been translated and widely performed in Europe and America. The larger part of this literature is hardly accessible outside of India. The scope of Sanskrit drama is very vast as far as the range is concerned. On these great works, Keats's famous line is very apt "nor hungry generation treads thee down."

Sanskrit plays which can claim to influence the works of European dramatists particularly, of Shakespeare. This influence can be seen in the work of Sri Aurobindo, *Vasavadutta*, which is very close to *Swapan vasavadattam*, (by the great poet Bhasa).

Like their Greek and Elizabethan counterpart's, Indian playwrights writing Sanskrit literature borrow extravagantly from history and legends for their plot construction. Most writers whether old or new, find in Indian culture ample matter for their work. Writers find this rich tradition an inexhaustible source of story, plot and music. Works of Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Gopal Gandhi, Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sircar are highly influenced by the rich tradition of Sanskrit plays and western insights derived from Greek and Roman models of dramaturgy.

14th century periodic Muslim invasions in India are thought to bring an end to the writing and production of classical Indian drama. After this, Sanskrit plays in India were written at great intervals and seldom performed. The plays of Sri Rabindranath Tagore then gained popularity.

None of these later isolated dramas, moreover, attained the poetic level of the dramas of the Indian classical period, at least until the advent of Sri Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) whose poetic and symbolic dramas, including *The King of the Dark Chamber* and *The cycle of Spring* stirred interest

throughout India and abroad. (Encyclopedia Americana, 1829, 307).

The sad Cinderella of Indian English literature from the beginning, drama remains its Cinderella still, waiting for her prince. (Mee,2001,201).

There were many restrictions in the growth of Indian English drama. Certain factors are there, which became a hindrance in the way of development of Indian drama in English. English fails to recreate that impact on the minds of the Indian recipients, readers, audience. This is the reason why a framework is provided to make the Indian drama grow vigorously in regional languages. There are many writers who enriched Indian drama in English; in the past, writers like Shri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, T.P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabhai and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and at present Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Badal Sarkar, Lakhan Deb, Gurcharan Das and Vijay Tendulkar.

There is one more reason for the failure of Indian English drama to plant itself in the Indian ethos. In India, dramatists use many things to enrich their writings because India has been a rich store house of myths and legends of folk tales and customs, of historical events and cultural heritage, but all the writers are not able to do so. Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore tried also to make use of this but they could not decide firmly about the conflict and ambivalence between the inner and outer worlds. The reason for their failure was that the classical Sanskrit tradition has to be tailored to modern needs, but they ignored this aspect, but some contemporary playwrights who benefited from it are Girish Karnad and Asif Currimbhoy. They incorporated ancient tales and myths,

folk tales and conventions in their plays. Some of their works are conspicuous example of this experiment, like Karnad's *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana* and Currimbhoy's *Goa*, *Inquilab* and the *Hungry Ones*. These all are plays which focus unexplored themes. All these plays are of cultural, social and political relevance and point towards the direction which is not so thoroughly explored.

Indian English drama is rich storehouses of a variety of concepts. The third cause behind the lesser popularity of India English drama is its lack of suitability to the Indian stage. Due to this inadequacy it has suffered greatly in theatrical effects.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks,

Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity nor, on the whole, of high quality. Enterprising Indians have, for nearly a century, occasionally attempted drama in English but seldom for the actual stage production. (Iyengar,1985,226).

In the Elizabethan age English drama flourished rapidly all over because many talented writers produced plays which contained within them an element of wit, humour, song and dance. They made use of these elements in their plays according to the public taste Indian English drama could not serve as an effective medium to express Indianness through content and technique.

Post-colonial Indian drama was source of protest against the British Raj. The first phase (fifty years after the independence) of Indian post-colonial theatre reflected and executed protest through anti-British sentiments, partition, assassination of Gandhi and themes associated with nationalism. Later phase reflected the different aspects of Indian life and

displayed various issues connected with social life like poverty, suffering and agony of the common people.

Hence it can be said that British colonialism in India changed the face of drama in India. From a source of entertainment and delight it became a weapon to showcase social changes in India. English theatre originated in European countries and evolved in diverse stages. But Indian English drama came to India in the later part of the 17th century with the coming of the East India company British colonialism is said to be one of the major causes in changing the face of Indian dramaturgy.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, a nation's culture is judged by the standards of its theatre. In India there is a cultural revival in the recent years and the effect of this cultural revival can be seen through literature of several Indian languages. It is drama which is thought to be the embodiment of contemporary life of a nation. Though drama is obviously intended to be enacted, it is a *Drishya Kavya*; it co-existed with poetry and novel and other literary forms. The theatre is said to be worthy even when it is able to show the contemporary life of the nation.

If the theatre is to be really potent and great it must be an embodiment of contemporary life of the nation. Otherwise the theatre would cease to be a living force. It might probably provide for a certain amount of entertainment, but otherwise it would be worthless and ephemeral. (Gokak,1957,297).

P.V.Rajmmannar remarks,

I, however, use the expression "contemporary life" in a very wide and comprehensive manner since I do not mean to say that a play should be a chronicle of contemporary events. It will not then be a creative work of art, the life of a nation does not consist only in the material events, which happen in the political and other spheres of its activity, it comprises its

beliefs and ideals, its traditions and achievements, its aims and aspirations. (Gokak,1957,297).

There are many subjects that supply themes and perspective for a living theatre like history, biography, myths and folklore contemporary events and thoughts, etc.

P.V. Rajammanhar remarks,

I have recently come across several plays which appear to be popular and deal with certain problems of contemporary life, but are definitely propagandistic. I do not deny that the drama can be used as a means of propaganda. But such plays, in my opinion, can never be really great art. (Gokak,1957,298).

The playwright should have, within him this urge to educate the public through his dramas which should not merely be a source of entertainment to all, but it should provide a better outlook and be able to educate the public.

The public is like a flock that needs good shepherding, and a good shepherd can always drive his flock wherever he desires them to go. (Gokak,1957,298).

In comparison to poetry, prose, novel the outcome of drama is meager. It can be said that during the time of Indo-Anglian writing good plays could not be written as theatre were suppressed and under strict government control. Plays were written on derived themes from great Epics like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Vasudeva Rao's *Nala and Damayanti* (1928) is one such example T.P. Kailasam's *the Burden* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna, the Brahmins Curse* (1946) and *Keechaka* (1949) interpret mythological and historical themes.

There are other plays which are based on historical legends. For example, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya wrote *Siddhartha, Man of Peace* (1956)

which tells the story of Lord Buddha in prose and K. Nagaraja's *Chidambaram: A Chronicle play* (1955) M. Mujeeb's *Ordeal* (1957), K.A. Abbas's *Invitation to Immortality*, Gurcharan Das *Larin Sahib*, Lakhan Deb's *Tiger Claw* (1967) etc.

Similarly, some plays focus on the theme of contemporary social life Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's *The Widow* and *The Patriot* focus on the miserable life of the poor. His three plays, *Sentrey's Lantern*, *The Coffin*, *The Evening Lamp* deals with social revolution. Asif Currimbhoy has been hailed as a versatile playwright. He wrote *The Clock*, *The Dumb Dancer*, *Om*, *The Captives*, *Hungry Ones*, and *Thorns on a Canvas*, *Goa and Doldrummers*. He has been praised for his choice of unusual themes and picturesque setting.

One of the most distinguished women dramatists was Bharati Sarabhai (1912), a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. She has written two plays, *The Well of The People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) which shows an impact of Gandhian thought. Among her plays are *The Well of the People*. It is a play which is based on the real story found in Gandhi's *Harijan*. It is a story about an old widow in verse. In this play she shows how in the Gandhian age, new social awareness fused itself with the age old religious consciousness, thereby leading to a resurgence of the spirit.

In this play she uses symbolic characters. Her verse is unaffected and energetic, eschews poeticism and makes frequent use of speech rhythms. Colourful Indian imagery is used, but without a trace of self consciousness. This play deals with the supreme moment in the life of an old widow in a pilgrimage to Haridwar. She uses symbolic and mystic expression to evoke India's national aspiration. She dramatised the most significant religious moment –Kumbha Mela at Haridwar in the spring of

1938. Hence, *The Well of the People* is a pageant and a poetic expression of Sarabhai's feeling.

Another play is *Two Women*; it is a prose play and it has a sad anti-climax. It is story of two women-Anuradha, a typical Hindu wife having unhappy married life with a westernized husband; and the other is Urvashi, an unattached singer and dancer and both of these women are essentially one-an artist and the other a saint. Both the women in the end accept the message from the Gita that the only way to moksha (salvation) is doing one's duty.

Throughout the play, there is a conflict between tradition and modernity, between the material and the spiritual.

As Iyengar remarks,

The great merit of the drama is that, although it reaches some sort of conclusion, we are left with the impression that the real conclusion is yet to come not in the lives of Anuradha and Urvashi alone, but in our own lives. (Iyengar,1985,240).

J.M.Lobo Prabhu was the last great name in pre-Independence Indian English drama. He has written over a dozen plays. *Mother of New India* (1944) a three act play, *Death Abdicates* (1945) came before independence, and *Collected Plays* was published in 1955 in which there are six plays; '*Apes In The Parlour*', '*The Family Cage*', '*Flags of The Heart*', '*Winding Ways*', '*Love Becomes Light*', and '*Dogs Ghost*'.

As Iyengar comments on the Lobo Prabhu,

.....Lobo Prabhu's energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise situations; but his characters are rarely live, and his denouements are seldom wholly convincing. (Iyengar, 1985, 242).

He has written many plays on different themes like *Mother of New India* based on the theme of social reformation. It is a story about Narsa who is mentally disturbed by the death of her fiancé Indra. Thus is helped by his uncle's suggestion to devote her in village construction. And she is respected as the Mother. Another play, *Apes in the Parlour* is based on the theft of a precious stone from a temple by a cinema actress. In *The Family Cage*, the theme of leprosy is shown. *Flags of The Heart*, shows love thwarted by caste, *Winding Ways* presents the 'Christian ethic of love' and the 'Hindu ethic of detachment'. *Dogs Ghost* is a play for non-vegetarians. We can say that his characters are paste board. And his dialogue is full of poeticism.

Other playwrights are A.K.Krishnaswami who has written plays like *The Two Twice Born* (1914) and S.M.Michael's *With Nation's Builders*. This play focuses on widow remarriage and intercaste marriages. Dramatists of this period mostly focus on social ills and other such problems.

V.V.Srinivasa Iyengar (1871-1954) was a master of social comedy. He had a real talent for farce and comedies. He mostly deals with the lives of the sophisticated middle class people, frequently encountered in metropolitan cities. In which one can find out interesting situations with entertaining and witty dialogues.

Sudhindra Nath Ghose (*Colours of The Great City*), R.K.Narayana (*The Watchman of The Lake*), K.R.S.Iyengar (*The Storm In The Tea Cup and The Battle of The Optionals*) Balwant Gargi (*The Vultures And Other Plays*) and Mrinalini Sarabhai (*The Captive Soil*) and some other playwrights, through one play or the other, have enriched the Indian drama with variety of classical and modern themes and values.

In post-Independence period Indian English drama has had less advancement due to the fact that there was no regular theatre. But after independence, when The Five Year plans got implemented they became a medium for encouraging performing arts. Many institutions were established such as the National School of Drama in Delhi. Institutions for training in dramatic art were founded in many cities and in many Universities, departments of drama were introduced. The National Drama Festival was started by The Sangeet Natak Akademi in Delhi, through it could only benefit regional theatres in India. The Agencies and Theatre Group of Bombay presented many plays and staged them. Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness*, Asif Currimbhoy's *The Doldrummers*, Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib*, Gieve Patel's *Princess*, Shiv Kumar's *Last Wedding Anniversary*. But these plays failed to contribute much in the field of Indian English drama.

Modern theatre in India focused on the middle class and upper middle class. It became an urban phenomenon and it developed in urban cities like Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai). Earlier drama was performed in English, but in the last century drama started developing in Indian languages too. And it became one of the weapons used against the social and political reform. Many playwrights started focusing on social problems.

Most of the major theatre of India is Amateur theatre, in which one has least scope of earning. It is basically for those who are really interested in theatre and drama. Many cities have a high quantity of Amateur theatre. In Kolkata there are three thousand registered theatre groups that involved themselves in serious plays, having social, satirical and political ideas. In Mumbai there are over five hundred theatre groups. Here plays

are written in many languages-Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, English and South Indian. After the establishment of The Indian National Theatre (INT) in 1944 all plays came under (INT). Delhi also has a hundred theatre groups. Many personalities nurture the theatre and give it a new direction, like the late Prithviraj Kapoor who founded the Prithvi theatre and did remarkable work for the progress of Hindi theatre. Another one is Ebrahim Alkazi who started the theatre group in 1953. Alyque Padamsee is a personality of the theatre movement in Mumbai and is known to lead directors of English theatre. But drama got a specific direction with the establishment of the National School of Drama in the 1960s.

A branch of Amateur theatre is the Experimental theatre. But this group is different from Amateur theatre in its objective and approach. In Kolkata, Badal Sircar is a leader of the experimental Theatre (Third Theatre). In Delhi Safdar Hashmi is street formntheatre focused on the working class. In Mumbai, Mohan Rakesh ran experimental workshop which developed a new area in the production of non- realistic plays in Hindi till his death in 1972. In his plays the main focus was on the physical movement, gesture and sounds, rather than on text.

In post-Independence phase many plays were staged abroad which increased the interest of the audience outside India, like the plays of Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma and Gurcharan Das whose plays were staged in Europe and America. Even after all these interests drama was not benefited and it could not lead to the establishment of a regular school of drama. Due to the Indian regional language theatre drama lacked to show its worth on a living theatre. But it is this period in which many talented playwrights made drama a stronger and more expressive medium. Playwrights like G.V.Desani, Lakhan Deb, Pratap Sharma, Gurcharan Das,

Asif Crrimbhoy and Girish Karnad with their new methods, techniques enriched the Indian drama in English.

G.V.Desani one of the modern playwrights, has written 'poem play' *Hali* which is of about 300 pages. It was planned as an epic but later changed into drama. It is Desani's solitary experiment with drama, it is a complex work. In *Hali* Desani shows everyman's quest for fulfilment. The protagonist of the play is Hali who stands for humanity in both its male and female aspect. This play received a high praise from British critics for its thematic richness and style.

Iyengar comment on the play *Hali*:

.....it was published in 1950, and received due praise for its originality, its symbolism, the richness of its imagery, its sheer apocalyptic quality. A short poetic play, *Hali* is an attempt to project the story of a 'passion'. In another words Hali's confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communion with love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place.....
(Iyengar, 1985,243).

Lakhan Deb is one of the playwrights who has specialized in historical themes. He has composed two plays-*Tiger Claw* (1967) and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976). His three act play, *The Tiger Claw* shows Shivaji's killing of Afzal Khan. In this play Shivaji is shown to be a wise warrior and a generous man.

As Iyengar remarks,

The Shivaji Afzal Khan theme has elements of pure drama, and Lakhan Deb has presented a credible enough Shivaji...
(Iyengar,1985,241).

Iyengar talks about the *Tiger Claw* and writes;

. In his candid preface, Lakhan Deb says that, even when “the death warrant of English is signed by the political executioners” English will continue to be loved in many Indian homes for her wealth of active verbs and subtle charms of expression, her flexible syntax and semantic power..... (Iyengar,1985,246).

His other play *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* shows the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathu Ram Godse. The theme and technique of this play is based on Greek Model and employs the unities of time, place and action, as was a prologue and chorus too.

The most prolific Indian English playwright of this period is Asif Currimbhoy (1928). He has written almost thirty plays within eighteen years starting from 1959. He is a playwright who covers a wide range of themes from history, politics, society, religion, art and metaphysics. As far as his subject matter is concerned it is based on amazing history and current politics, social and economic problems, the east-west encounter psychological conflicts, the religion, philosophy and art. He has many plays which are based on different themes. It can be divided into groups according to their themes or subject matters. There are many plays which deal with recent political events, like the partition and its aftermath (*The Restaurant*, 1960), the Sino Indian conflict (*The Captives*, 1963), The liberation of Portuguese Goa (*Goa* 1964); the coming of freedom to a typical island in the Malaysean archipelago (*Monsoon*, 1965); the India freedom struggle and the assassination of Gandhi (*An Experiment with Truth* 1969); The Naxalite movement (*Inquilab*. 1970), The Bangladesh war (*The Refugee*, 1971) and *Sonar Bangla* 1972; The Chinese invasion of Tibet (*om mane padme hum*; 1972), the vicissitudes in the history of Indo-

China (*Angkor* 1973) and the recent agitation in Gujarat (*The Dissident M.L.A.*), a play which deals with the social issues. *The Doldrummers* (1960) and *The Miracle Seed* (1973) it shows famine situation in Maharashtra. The East -West encounter is shown in the *Tourist Mecca* (1959), *The Hungry ones* (1965, 77) and *Darjeeling Tea* (1971), *In the Clock* (1959) psychological portrayal is shown and in *Om* (1961), the evolution of Hindu religion is shown.

He has a variety within him, as is written in *Perspective and Challenges*.

He has the unique ability to create visual and auditory images on the stage with the help of various theatrical techniques he wants to shock the audience and make them feel for human suffering. He has been constantly experimenting with new forms, new subject matters, new structures and new modes of presentation. (Tandon, 2006, 18).

But sometimes he uses superficial themes and pasteboard characters which make his play appear artificial. Dialogues are lacking in invention, symbols are crude but instead of all these features, he is capable of creating proper atmosphere, interesting situations and powerful characters. Pratap Sharma, another dramatist of post-Independence period had his play *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) banned for the reason that in this play a red light district of Bombay is shown. The story revolves around the young street urchin Pidku and his attachment with the beggar girl; Prema, and due to this attachment, a man Banarsi Babu, a pavement dweller, passionate about chess, develops a feeling of jealousy for them. Banarsi Babu, sells the girl but his adopted son Pidku, wants to buy freedom for that girl. When he is able to afford money she dies of a venereal disease. This play is one of the flawed works. It shows the language which is seen to be influenced by Hindustani words and

expression; the characters are not believable. The plot of the drama moves jerkily and it shows sentimentality and melodrama.

As Shanta Gokhale remarks in *An illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*,

.....It is the first attempt at showing the seamy side of a country, which in the 1960s, had become the west's spiritual Mecca. The play raised the hackles of India's image makers, who banned it from going to the first commonwealth Arts Festivals. (Mehrotra,2003,342).

Gurcharan Das was born into a middle class family in pre-Independence India. He is the author of three plays, which he composed in his twenties. He has written many novels. In the Introduction of his book *Three English plays* 2001. Gurcharan Das writes:

Writing a play takes a certain amount of audacity, which I seem to lack today. I wrote all my plays in my twenties. I had more courage then and I would be very scared of writing a play now. (Chandra,www.museindia.com).

He is one of the writers who took up themes from history. He takes characters and stories from history and puts them in to a new frame to make it a romantic tale. Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1970) shows the crisis of Punjab which occurs after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When East-India Company routed the Sikhs, one of the friends of Indians, the legendary Henry Lawrence appointed the company agent. Some sort of intimacy developed between him and Ravi Jindan Kaur, widow of Ranjit Singh. She presented a ring of her husband to him and it developed in him, a feeling to become the second king and he started calling himself Angrez Maharaja. The language used by Das is very apt according to the class and race representative characters in the play.

As written by Santa Gokhle,

.....He did not wish to be seen as interpreting history, but as breathing life into facts. Larins Sahib, is as a consequence, a well crafted piece of colourful dramatic entertainment rather than an attempt to relate the past to the present. (Mehrotra,2003,343).

Another important dramatist of this period is Girish Karnad who is the living legend of contemporary Indian English Drama. He is a leading playwright and outstanding practitioner of performing arts. He is a playwright, actor, critic and emissary of Indian art and culture. He has received recognition both nationally and internationally. He has played many roles together; as an actor, director, art critic, film star, but best in playwrighting, as he has himself admitted. His contribution to Indian English Drama is Immense. He has written five plays: *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala*, *Tale Danda* and *the Fire and the Rain*, and translated them into English.

Karnad is influenced most by Irish playwright Henrik Ibsen; an outstanding figure of his age in dramatic art and whose works became model for many dramatists since the late nineteenth century. Karnad has acquired much of the style and technique of Henrik Ibsen; hence he allows symbolism to permeate his plays with a blend of classic Indian myths.

His play *Tughlaq* (1972) is a historical play, which is based on the life of sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq of fourteenth century India. Another play is *Hayavadana* (1975) in which he has used folk motifs, like the Bhagavata narrator, masks, miming, the chorus etc. It is taken from the ancient *Kathasaritsagar*.

Karnad has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has represented India in foreign lands as a representative of art and culture.

An intellectual playwright whose work has the tone and expression of a great Drama. He has the genius and the power to transform any situation into an aesthetic experience the quality of which to use Joyce's vocabulary would be static rather than kinetic (Kurkoti, D. Kirtinath contemporary Indian Drama Indian Drama collection of papers. 108). (Kirtinath, 1974,108).

Cyrus Mistry, another playwright who has written plays like *Doongaji House* and *The Legacy of Rage*, in which *Doongaji House* in 1978 won the second Sultan Padamsee award. The play shows the life of a Parsi family living in Bombay and their declining fortune. His other latest play *The Legacy of Rage* deals with the Christian community.

Dina Mehta is also an award winning playwright. Her play *Brides Are Not for Burning* got an international award from the B.B.C in 1979. She has written other plays like *Getting away with Murder*, *Sister like you* (1996). Her play *Brides are not for Burning* shows issue related to social problems of dowry and harassment of brides which they have to face for not bringing enough dowry. Her *Sister like You* (1996) shows domestic violence. Her plays are short listed for various playwrighting competitions.

A noteworthy playwright and a successor of Girish Karnad is Mahesh Dattani. He is the first Indian English playwright who received the Sahitya Akademi Award. He is a very versatile personality in theatre, a drama teacher, stage director, actor and Bharatnatyam exponent. He is director,

playwright, actor, producer and the founder of a theatre group 'PLAYPEN'. He is among those playwrights who can easily explore the life of contemporary urban Indian society and analyse the clash between tradition and modernity. He has written many plays *Final Solution* and *other Plays* 1994, *Collected Plays* 2000. *Where There's Will* 1986, *Dance Like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara*, *Collected Plays* comprises six full length plays and two radio plays.

Dattani's drama complements Karnad's in that mythology and history are Karnad's favourite subjects, while Dattani is preoccupied with social and political realities in India today. (Mee,2001,206).

He has written on many themes like the Indian joint family system and its impact, the plight of women in Indian society, homosexuality etc. He also writes about the oppressed or the marginalized class like minorities, women gays, hijaras etc. He has enriched Indian English drama and wants to give more opportunity to the new voice of contemporary era.

Vijay Tendulkar was born in 1828, and is a journalist by profession. He started his career as a creative writer, he wrote short stories, and later children's plays, and screenplay writing. But his genius can be seen in his creative writing and drama. His First play was *Grihasth* in 1955, and after it he has written many plays which depict different aspects of human life. His play *Chimanicha Ghor hote menache* (1960) *Kal ojarichi Shalai* (1968), *Ek Holti Mugli* (1967) deals with the exploitation of individual. In another play *Silence! The court is in session* (1968) and *Ghasiram kotwal* (1972) the theme of oppression is shown. *Sakharam Binder* (1972) deals with human violence. *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadan* (1982) shows marital

status and it is also based on theme of exploitation and the second one *Kanyadan* shows cultural and emotional up and down of a family.

In his plays Tendulkar deals with many themes. He shows the agonies and suffering suffocations and cries of man; they also focus on middle class society. He shows theme of isolation and violence in individual, in most of his plays.

Commenting on Vijay Tendulkar, one can say

.....His plays vary from purely naturalistic plays and stark tragedies to farces, from musical set in traditional folk modes to absurd drama, from full length plays to one act. Thematically, his plays have ranged from the alienation of the modern individual to contemporary politics, from social individual tensions to complexities of human character.....
(Dharan,1999,26).

Hence, Tendulkar is one who is associated with new theatrical movement in Maharashtra. He is said to be both a venerated and a controversial figure in modern Indian theater.

Badal Sarcar is another known name in the field of contemporary theatre. In India, he represents the New Theatrical Movement. He is among those playwrights who write on different themes. He is the one who created Puple's Theatre and later established in 1967 his theatre group called 'Satabdi'. His plays include *Solution x*, *Evan Inderjit* (1962), *That Other History* (1964), *There is No End* (1971) and further, he wrote plays like *Parykonodin*, *Jaldi Aur Ek Baar*, *Palap* and *Pagla Ghoda*, *Procession*, *Bhoma* and *Stale News*. His plays are based on different themes; political, social psychological and existential problems have been depicted. His play '*Procession*' is about a 'real home' and *Bhoma* shows

the life of peasants in India. *Evan Inderjit* is about the playwright and his struggle in writing plays. He is a prestigious name in the field of Indian English Drama.

Another dramatist who comes in this category is Mohan Rakesh, who writes in Hindi but his works have been translated into English and other regional languages. He has published many plays on different themes. He deals with different aspects of human life. His plays include *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* in 1958, *Leharon Ke Raj Hansa* 1963, *Adhe Adhure* 1969, *Tale ki Zamin* which was later completed by Kamleshwar. He deals with different aspects of human life like the crises of contemporary man. His play *Leharon Ka Rajhans* shows the problem of relations between man and woman, *Adhe Adhure* deals with the life of husband wife and their ego clash; he has made many an experiment in theatre. He thinks drama to be a complex art involving in itself various other skills. With him there are other playwrights whose work cannot be ignored like Mahaswetadevi and Usha Ganguli. Mahaswetadevi is among those playwrights who want to find out something new and creative and has written five plays *Mother of 1084*, *Aajir Urvashi o' Johnny*, *Byen and water*. In her plays she deals with different aspects like *The Play Mother of 1084*, shows a mother who has seen the horror of Naxalite movement. In *Aajir*, deterioration of society is shown; reality of women's life is shown in *Byen*.

All these playwrights contributed to the field of drama to make it more versatile and authentic. The work of all writers, from pre- independence to post independence era, shows that drama in Indian is full of variety and many talented writers with the passage of time, have made it an acknowledged branch of knowledge.

Shaping of Nissim Ezekiel as a Playwright

The attempt to focus on Nissim Ezekiel's life, personality and experiences is relevant to establish a blend of tradition and modernity in his creativity that has a bearing on the quasi-consciousness of his background. This may help this study to be more revealing and authentic in its explorations of the thematic concerns of the writer.

Nissim Ezekiel who is known as the father of post independence Indian verse in English is a poet, critic and playwright. In the 1990s he was a Professor of English and American literature at Bombay University. He worked also as secretary of the Indian branch of the international writers' organization, PEN. A versatile man who has played many roles is at the same time, prolific dramatist, poet, critic, broadcaster and social commentator.

.Nissim Ezekiel is without doubt, one of the best of the post- Independence Indo-Anglian writers. Forthright and unaffected, precise in his diction, even the careful craftsman, he has set certain standards that few others have been able to attain. (Karnani,1975,165).

Ezekiel was born in December, 1924 in Bombay, in a Bene Israel family, which was Jewish. His parents were highly qualified and devoted to education. His father was professor of Botany and Zoology and principal of several colleges. His mother was principal of her own school. So, right from birth he had an atmosphere which inspired him and motivated his upbringing and shaped his personality.

In an interview, he himself commented:

I've never experienced any conflict between my role as poet and as critic/teacher. I enjoy and love all these roles. My father was a professor of Botany and Zoology, my mother was

**a primary school teacher with Marathi as the medium.
Teaching was in my blood, so to speak. (Sharma,1995,43).**

In his lifetime he has published many literary articles and reviews in different magazines and periodicals. He has had various careers throughout his life time. He was a brilliant student and held several academic records. He got first division in M.A. Examinations in English literature in the Bombay University, in 1947 and won a R.K. Lagu Prize. In 1947-48 he taught English literature at Khalsa College, Mumbai and published literary articles. He studied philosophy at Birkbeck College. He worked as a deck-scrubber aboard a cargo ship carrying arms to Indo-China. Later, he became an active member of the Radical Democratic Party. This is because of his coming in contact with the M.N. Roy. He later went to England in 1948 November and tried a hand at various careers like theatre, cinema, art, psychology and modern Indian Culture. But, he was mainly interested in the literature. In 1952, he published his first book of poetry, *A Time to Change* and then he came back to India and joined the Illustrated Weekly of India as an assistant editor for two years. Then he worked as a broadcaster on art and literature for the Bombay station of all India Radio for ten years. In November, 1952 and next year in December 1953 he came up with his second book of verse *Sixty poems*. Next year in 1954 he worked with an advertising company as a copywriter. But finally, he came back to his academic career and retired as a professor of American literature from Bombay University. In 1960 *The Unfinished Man* was published. With this he had contributed in many other areas; he co-founded the literary monthly in 1961 and became an art critic with The Times of India (1964-66) and also edited *Poetry India*. In 1965 he published *The Exact* a book of

poetry. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Leeds and University of Chicago. Later in 1969 he came up with his three plays which were published by Calcutta Writers Workshop. In 1976 he translated poetry from Marathi. He also co-edited a fiction, poetry anthology *Another India*. Then he mostly devoted his time to writing poetry. He also contributed in the field of plays, art criticism, short stories, columns and articles and hundreds of reviews. He has also written some essays which appeared in selected prose, especially *Naipaul's India and Mine*.

Ezekiel received the Sahitya Akademi cultural award in 1983 and the Padma Shri in 1988. Nissim Ezekiel (b.1924) happens to be one of the most productive talents and most distinguished poetic personalities of modern India.

His works include.

Books by Nissim Ezekiel

Time to Change -1952

Sixty poems -1953

The Third-1959

The Unfinished Man-1960

The Exact Name -1965

The Three Plays- 1969

Hymns in Darkness -1977

Latter day Psalms -1983

Poems-

The Patriot

Night of the Scorpion

The Professor

Case Study

Enterprise

Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher

Background Casually

Poster Prayers

Book edited

The Emerson Reader

A Martin Luther King Reader

Indian Writers in Conference

Writing in India

Journals edited

Quest 1954-57

Imprint 1962-69

Poetry of the Commonwealth 1965

Poetry India 1966-67

The Indian P.E.N 1972

World Poets in English 1974

Plays

Nalini -1969

Marriage Poem -1969

The Sleepwalkers -1969

Song of Deprivation-1969

Who Needs no Introduction-1969

The Wonders of Vivek -1986

A Family Failure- 1986

Don't Call it Suicide -1993

After a prolonged battle with Alzheimer's disease Nissim Ezekiel passed away in Mumbai on Jan 9, 2004 at the age of 79. A doyen of Indian English

Literature, Nissim Ezekiel will be always remembered as a versatile writer. Though the present study concentrates on the plays yet in the Indian dramatic poet Ezekiel we can trace a subtle thematic unity of traditional and modern experimental fervor. A brief assessment of his poetry may offer a more substantial approach to analyze the themes of his plays as a combination of old and new ideologies.

In Ezekiel's poetry one can find loneliness, lust, creativity and political pomposity, human foibles and 'kindered clamour'. In his poetry we also find the post-war movement of England, Ironical voice in poetry moves from strict meter to free verse. Most of his poetry was based on or shows urban India, issues of alienation, love, marriage and sexuality.

His poem *The Night of the Scorpion* shows his mastery of free verse. His *Unfinished Man* and *Exact Name* show a break with the past. *The Night of the Scorpion* shows his views about the common Indian reality; in this poem he shows his personal voice. He is the one who has invented the idiom and metric of Post-Independence Indian English verse *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher* shows his search for poetics. *Hymns in Darkness* show his concern for the nature of religious experience. In *Marriage poem* one can find the excitement of romantic love.

.....Ezekiel has been a ceaseless experimentalist with both form and content, he is unquestionable a "modern" Indian English poet who has, through his admirable work, brought about a stylistic revolution in the domain of creative writing and a fresh social awareness among the people of this multidimensional and multicultural country. (Dwivedi, 1992, 434).

In some of his poems one can find the autobiographical element like his *The Night of the Scorpion* or *The Way It Went*. At the same time, in some of his poems he uses the Radha Krishna Myth in which he reveals his own sexual reverie. He has also written on city life, basically because he hails from Bombay. His many poems are based on city life, *The Unfinished Man*, *A Morning Walk* shows how the city of Bombay is like a barbaric city, sick with slums due to poverty. In these poems one can find the effective use of rhyme and music. He is a poet who has admitted that he is unable to identify himself with free India.

One of the distinctive qualities of Ezekiel is his use of Indian English with which he can explore the Indian mind and sensibility. In the late 1940s he used formal and correct English which was criticized by others because it was associated with the colonialism, but in 1965 he started experimenting with Indian English. He is a Jew by birth and he deals with poetry as an outsider. After Joseph Furtado, he is the only poet who used the 'babu' English in his work. But he effortlessly Indianized the English language; this can be seen in his poems like *Good -bye Party for Miss Pushpa T S* and *The Professor*.

He is a poet who shows in his work the reality of everyday life. He took themes from the surrounding and common life. Most of his work shows the reality. His poems and other works are based on real life as is said in one of the articles on Ezekiel.

Ezekiel successfully captures the mainstream of Indian reality with striking elegance and charm and his pan Indian sensibility and outlook lend his poetry both originality and authenticity. (Want,2004,116).

Ezekiel can be identified with his Indian sensibility. In many of his poems he uses Indian English like in 'very Indian poems in Indian English' and he shows a particular Indian attitude by his use of continuous present tense.

The Indian landscape scars, my eyes I have become a part of it. (Benson,1994, 478).

His contribution could not be ignored as Salil Tripathi comments:

Nissim Ezekiel gave English poetry space in the crowded Indian literary Landscape. A poet writing about urban alienation, he articulated the anxiety of so many educated middle class Indians. His pioneering efforts created the room in which later generations of poets were to thrive. (Tripathi,2004,www.newstateman.com).

Later he became the mentor for younger poets like Dom Moraes and Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel. He helped many Mumbai poets in the last few years of his life. As a poet Ezekiel has shown remarkable dedication. He is the one Indian English poet who shows his ability by contributing his own experience to the world. He is very sincere about his works and this is the real strength of his work. In the second half of the 20th century there are poets who inaugurated the modernist revolution in Indian poetry in English, and Ezekiel is known to be at the centre of this group. And in this version of the history of Indian verse, when he returned to India in 1952, from London where he lived up to 1948, he brought a poetic with him which challenged the lyrical romanticism of proceeding generations of Indian poets. He followed the European modernist masters such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound due to their dedication towards finding objective co-relative for subjective emotions and abstract ideas.

Besides poetry he has contributed in different fields. Ezekiel essayed many roles with envy and grace: poet, editor, art critic, playwright, teacher and a literary organizer. He spent twenty years as an academician. For some time he worked as manager in Chemould, a frame making establishment which later becomes the leading art gallery of Bombay. He worked in advertising broadcasting and publishing. He also wrote some plays that were performed on the Bombay stage. He also wrote art criticism, many literary reviews and edited many periodicals such as 'Quest', 'Imprint', 'Poetry India' and 'The India PEN Quarterly'.

Ezekiel is a versatile genius. Besides being a poet of foremost importance, he is very good art critic, journalist and a distinguished teacher of English literature. He has been editing P.E.N. with distinction. He is a widely travelled man and has delivered lectures and given poetry readings in America, Australia and England In collaboration with Vrinda Nabar, a Marathi Scholar he has also translated Marathi poems into English (Sharma,1995,11).

The process of creativity free and unending phenomenon, hence which found expression in Ezekiel's urge to extend and elaborate his area of interest in his conscious choice of playwrighting. His plays were also contributions to the modern techniques of theatre and theoretical traditions of Indian Drama. A comprehensive note on the themes of the plays is given here which deals in detail in the following sections of the study on the plays of Ezekiel.

Nissim Ezekiel is primarily a poet who added diversity to his creative ventures by writing his *Three plays*. He contributed in the field of drama by *Three plays* in 1969. He himself humbly admitted that he is a greater poet than a playwright.

**I can sense no real influence in my plays, as i can in my poetry.
(Sharma,1995,29).**

There is some reason which prompted a poet like Ezekiel to write plays as he himself said about his indulgence in playwright.

**I became interested in the theatre through my association with E. Alkazi and his work in Bombay's theatre Group. Later, we formed the theatre unit to write plays became at that time a dream for me and to some extent it is still a dream.
(Sharma,1995,29).**

But one cannot ignore his contribution in the field of drama. His plays depict the reality of life and are a reflection and criticism of contemporary conditions. They disclose trivialities, permissiveness, consumerism and absurdities.

As a poet, Ezekiel has not only made a niche for himself but has also contributed significantly to making Indo- English poetry a force to reckon with. Whether the same could be said of his plays is perhaps, a moot point..... (Sharma, 1995,87).

He has written six plays like *Three plays 1969* which consisted of *Nalini*, *Comedy in Three Acts*, *Marriage Poem*, *One Act Tragic-comedy* the one act *Sleepwalker's Indo-American farce*, *Song of Deprivations* *Comic morality*, *Who Needs no Introduction* and *Don't Call it Suicide*, a socio-psychological analysis of suicide. Ezekiel said about his plays in one of the interview.

**'No, I cannot find a specific "message" in my plays, but I feel there are ideas in them which add to their dramatic value.
(Sharma,1995,29).**

In his plays one can find the themes which focus on hollow-middle class life in cities and the social institution of marriage. He basically focuses on

the urban man and his problem. In his plays we find the recurrence of the themes associated with the middle class man and his suffering.

There are many techniques which are used by Ezekiel in his plays to treat various themes. All his plays focus on the Modern Man and revolve around their problems. Ezekiel doesn't have any dramatic theory. He approaches drama mainly as a performance. One of his remarks reveals his Idea about dramatic theory.

I can't claim again, to have a whole dramatic theory. I believe that plays are written for performance and not only for reading. Therefore, they must have a strong theatrical element, that is all. The interest of the audience must be sustained, not only by the dialogue but by the movements, the action, the events that happen within the plot or story. (Sharma,1995,30).

In his plays one can find the comic or satiric element. He makes satire on everything which can be clearly seen in his plays. In *Nalini*, he has satirized the life of two advertising executives and their profession, in *The Sleepwalkers* he comments on the Indian people's habit of always looking up to America. In his plays, he exposes the reality of various professions. His characters are real. As Ezekiel says:

Yes I feel my characters are living, but I don't like to make claim for my work. It is for the critics to decide. (Sharma, 1995,30).

His characters are urban men living in city, busy life. His characters talk like real people. He shows many techniques in his plays which add up to the dramatic quality of his plays. He uses inner conflict in his plays. The conversation is very informal, there is self contradiction within the characters, and Ezekiel also employs the dream technique. Technique of

mask is also used. He employed all devices of diametric opposition which was not used before so effectively.

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).

He is a modern playwright; hence he concentrates on the problem of the modern man. He avoids artificiality in his plays.

. This return to nature and the normal is Ezekiel's chief contribution to Indo-English theatre. Even if he uses masks, they fall off at the proper time revealing the unreality of pose. . . . (Sharma,1995,91).

All his plays mark his indebtedness to the English dramatist Bernard Shaw; we find the mouthpiece of the dramatist in the character. Ezekiel finds women equal in status to men. Like Bernard Shaw, Ezekiel has also projected the 'new women' in his plays like *Nalini* and *Marriage Poem*. While making comment on Ezekiel's plays, Meenakshi Raja said, to Prema Nanda Kumar,

Their stage worthiness apart, the plays make pleasant reading matter, for Mr. Ezekiel handles this tool, the English language with polished expertise. (Bhatta,1987,147).

Ezekiel's plays provide an example as they are symmetric in construction. He used irony, parallelism, wit and humour and treats hackneyed themes in Ezekielian manner. His plays focus on his sharp observation of the oddities in human life and behaviour; they provide glimpses of a cross-section of contemporary society, and his plays are just situations. In this regard Santan Rodrigues comments.

He is an excellent craftsman. The plays are merely theatrical plots without drama. Most of the action is infect in action the real happening relegated to the arena of the readers mind. . . . it is Ezekiel the playwright laughing at the characters and through them at the world around him. The characters seldom grow beyond caricatures. Only in Nalini does Ezekiel succeed in going beyond the farcical. Otherwise these are only drawing room plays about the banality and banter of life. (Anklesaria,2008,112).

In his plays one can find the freshness and willingness to experiment with new techniques and also a real hope for Indian drama in English. About the technique of his plays he himself said in an interview with Nilufer E. Bharucha,

Ezekiel: No, I would say that I took a kind of straight forward, comparatively simple attitude towards the writing of the plays. And there is nothing much by the way of the experimental or the absolutely original or anything like that it is just about coping with their main concepts, and the main characters and their problems and relationships plus whatever are been introduced by way of humour and seriousness. That's about all. It doesn't have the larger ambitions like some really original plays. I've never written a play like that. (Bharucha,1998,33).

His three plays include *Nalini*: a Comedy in Three Acts. It is a play about two young advertising executives and a painter Nalini. Raj and Bharat who are advertising executive want to hold an exhibition of her paintings, but they are not really interested in the exhibition. Both have their hidden motive. And Nalini has the double personality of an artist, half woman, and half-Omniscient with the eyes of God. In this play, Ezekiel shows the modern man and their problem who suffers from hollow life, alienation

and identity crisis. They are unable to identify themselves with India. Whereas Nalini who comes as a dream Nalini of Bharat and in the end, rejects the false notion of Bharat and Raj.

. Nalini concerns itself with precisely that class of westernized Indians who were then beginning to express their guilt about being without roots. Both the plays protagonists belong to this class (Mehrotra,2003,344).

Marriage poem: A Tragi-comedy explores the life of a married couple who have an unhappy married life. Both Naresh and Mala are married but due to extra marital relationships their married life is a wreck. Mala longs for the love of her husband who has a relationship with Leela, and Naresh is torn between marital duty and extra marital relationship. In this play Ezekiel shows how extra-marital relation can destroy the happiness of married life *Marriage Poem* is described as,

***Marriage poem* shines like a polished gem, but in a very small setting. It explores an upper middle class marriage in which the homebound wife craves the attention and love of a husband who, if he ever loved her, is now indifferent. The insecurity of her position drives her to alternate between nagging him and trying to seduce him (Mehrotra,2003,344).**

The third play is *The Sleepwalkers* in which Ezekiel shows the Indian attitude towards America. He presents an American couple who come to India for the publicity of their magazine and how all the Indian guest try to impress the couple as the play begins with a chant.

Give us this day our daily American. (Ezekiel,1969,84).

In this play Ezekiel satirizes; characters are seen in a mask, and they all act and behave like sleepwalkers.

***The Sleepwalkers*, although a farce, is tautly constructed; it demands much; it presents a subtle criticism of American and Indian society, eerily snobbish and relentlessly tense (Gowda,1998,526).**

His other play *Song of Deprivation* is a comic morality in one act; it is for the non-existent underground theatre in India. The play contains two characters only he and she. It is a small play with two small rooms. It describes the plight of the modern man who is deprived of privacy. Another play *Who Needs no Introduction* is about a professional politician who addresses the youth in a seminar on young Generation. Another play *Don't Call it Suicide* (1993) it is a domestic tragedy of death, guilt, remorse and atonement. It centers on the isolation of a hypersensitive individual in a tough world.

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