

# The Sleepwalkers

(B.A.2)

By Nissim Ezekiel

A Presentation By:

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## Introduction to the Playwright

- Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 in a Bene-Israel family.
- He was an Indian English poet known for his Indianness.
- He worked as Professor of English at the University of Bombay.
- He widely travelled reading his poetry in many countries.
- He won Sahitya Akademi Award and edited several journals.
- He died in 2004.

## Introduction to the Play

- *The Sleepwalkers* falls in the category of farce.
- It was written in 1968 apart from Ezekiel's poetical works.
- It satirically attacks the modern Indian society.
- It reflects how elite Indian class receives Americans.
- It exposes their hollowness as they hold Americans in high esteem.
- It is full of healthy social criticism.

# Major Characters

- Mr. and Mrs. West: An American Official and his wife
- Mr. and Mrs. Morris: An American Publisher and his wife
- Mr. and Mrs. Raman: Guests
- Prof. Shah and his wife: -do-
- Mr. and Mrs. Kapur: -do-
- Mr. Varma: -do-
- Miss Ganguli: -do-
- A Bearer: An attendant who takes care of all the guests

## Central Theme

- Indians are very fond of Americans.
- They repeatedly chant, ‘ Give us this day our daily American’.
- They arrange special social gatherings in their honour.
- They don’t show their individuality.
- They compromise their self-respect.



## Important Key Points

- Irony and satire
- Farcical humorous characters
- The typecast of individual characters
- Pseudo-civilised society
- Ridiculous exchange programmes in India

## A Brief Overview of the Story

- Mr. West arrives from America with his wife.
- He is on his official visit to India.
- He receives a warm welcome from Indian guests.
- A reception party is organised in his honour.
- The Indian guests are shown wearing masks.
- They are typecast and lack individuality.
- The bearer does not wear the mask.
- The sound of aeroplanes is heard everywhere.

## Contd.-

- Due to dark environment, masks of Indians cannot be seen.
- All Indians warmly welcome the American couple.
- They are shown chanting at the Airport reception.
- The word 'American' is repeatedly chanted.
- Soon after Mr. Edward Morris arrives with his wife.
- They have come to launch their American Magazine *Blank*.
- This magazine is supposed to discourage thinking.
- He opines that Americans do not think at all.
- According to him Indians think too much.
- The title of the play is justified as a state of sleepwalking is all pervasive.



## Contd.

- Mrs. Morris is excited about India.
- Earlier, all the Indian guests are shown with their backs.
- Later, Indian guests face the audience with their masks visible.
- Even the American couples are wearing the masks.
- Mr. West introduces all the Indian guests to Mr. Morris.
- Prof. Shaw is a Gujarati poet and he writes criticism now.
- Mrs. Shaw remains silent throughout the play.
- Mr. Raman is a journalist.
- Mr. Kapur is an editor.
- Mr. Varma is a short story writer.

## Contd.-

- Miss Ganguli is a Bengali playwright from Calcutta.
- Mr. West and Mr. Morris greet everyone present there.
- Interactions take place and Mr. Morris introduces his magazine.
- He requests all the guests to contribute in it.
- The play ends with the chant.
- The Indian guests turn their backs soon after the Americans leave.

## Irony and Satire

- MR MORRIS: Gee, that's tremendous. We Americans are productivity-conscious, but only in industry. In literature you beat us hollow, Mr. Varma. P.110
- PROF SHAH: and in the things and spirit. (*The circulating, sleepwalking movement stops abruptly. They break up into informal groups again*). P.111



## References:

- Siroha, Sunita, Sukhwinder Singh Rehal, and Dinesh Kumar, eds. *Centre Stage*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2016. Print.



THANKS