



The Reflection of Indian Ethos in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

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Introduction:

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most towering figures in Indian English poetry. His poetry is many –faceted, and it has certainly enriched Indian English poetry and given a new dimension to it by extending its scope and range. In all his works Ezekiel stresses the centrality of man in the universe and prefers poetry of statement and purpose. He was born in 1924 in Bombay of Jewish parents (Bene-Israel) both devoted to education. Ezekiel's profession as a teacher of English literature for a number of years at Bombay University shaped his literary personality. In 1964 he was visiting Professor at the University of Leeds.

His poetry collection consists of A Time to Change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), Hymns in Darkness (1976) and Latter-Day Psalms (1982). Besides, a considerable number of poems have been published in several journals, periodicals, magazines and anthologies. His poetry is a landmark in Indian English poetry because he could write approximating to the demands of the present-day world. The proposed thesis will attempt to focus on the major themes in his poetry.

Objectives

The present study has certain major objectives regarding Ezekiel's poetry. It attempts to make an analytical and in-depth study of Ezekiel's major poems. It proposes to collect the haunting ideas behind these poems. Obviously the poems will be subject to rigorous examination in terms of Ezekiel's experiences. The aim is to measure the therapeutic effect of his poems. It would not be out of place to say that Ezekiel delves deep in the psyche of modern man, particularly in a metropolitan city.

Materials and Methodology

This study will attempt an incisive and in-depth analysis of Ezekiel's poems in terms of their major thematic concerns. It aims to dissect his poems into smaller units in order to take an authentic and comprehensive view of life and human issues in his poetry. The images of women, city and the moral self will be explored to locate the heart of his world-views and convictions. Ezekiel's response to his experience and its execution in his poetry account for his development as a poet of great significance.

Discussion

The present paper endeavours to analyse Nissim Ezekiel's poetry from an innovative perspective in order to trace the Indian ethos in his poetry. It is not for nothing that Ezekiel was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 and the Padma Shree in 1988. Born in 1924 and influenced by poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Rilke, Spender and Auden, he is considered a foundational figure in post colonial Indian English poetry.

Ezekiel is a poet of Indian ethos and sensibility in the true sense of the term. This is very much evident in his portrayal of Indian culture, moral values, philosophy, and the contemporary social reality. His awareness and delineation of the vast pluralistic set up of India, particularly its myths and reality, scriptures and religions, rites and rituals, not only enrich his poetry but also give a unique Indian flavour to it. The response of Ezekiel to the vast panorama of Indian life is very fair, impartial and objective. His linguistic craftsmanship is superb as reflected in the use of phonological and syntactic devices. They create a typical Indian setting and make Ezekiel a poet of unrivalled stature.

Over the years Ezekiel has several volumes of poems to his credit, and these volumes appeared under the following headings: **A Time to change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), Hymns in Darkness (1976), Latter Day Psalms (1982) and Collected Poems (1989)**. An analysis of Ezekiel's poems reflects predominantly the Indian ethos and sensibility in his poetry. His poetry is replete with the sense of belonging to the native land. His commitment to India is also expressed in his essay 'Naipaul's India and Mine'. This commitment to India and the Indian people, this sense of being rooted to the Indian soil, this Indian spirit pervades all his works. He emphatically says:

"In India - I am an Indian_". When Ezekiel was asked by a friend about his ambition, he said, "To do something for India..... India is simply my environment - I havenot withdrawn from India I love India." This strong sense of belonging to Indiaparticularly to Bombay (his birth place) is very much pronounced in his poem 'Island':

"I cannot leave the island.

I was born here and belong."

Ezekiel's identification with the Indian environment and the Indian landscape is complete and total:

"The Indian landscape sears my eyes,

I have become a part of it."

(Background, Causally).

Ezekiel's growth as a poet displays his preoccupation with Indian milieu and setting all the more. Some of his poems in '**The Exact Name**', '**Hymns in Darkness**' and '**Latter Day Psalms**' bear witness to this fact. His autobiographical poem '**Background, Casually**' amply demonstrates his assimilation into Indian culture and ethos. His acceptance of India as his home is very well expressed in the lines.

"to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves,
In some remote and backward place,
My backward place is where I am."

(Background, Casually).

Ezekiel's strong affinity with India evokes his mixed feelings of hatred and love for it. His feeling of belonging to India is very well established in his poems, '**The Egoist's Prayers**'. His identity is merged with the collective identity of India and he says:

"Confiscate my passport, Lord
I don't want to go abroad
Let me find my song
Where I belong."

In poems after poems Ezekiel weaves and confirms India as his home in spite of all its vagaries and paradoxes of life:

"..... I
know it
well. It is home
which I recognize at last."

Ezekiel, thus, is an Indian English poet coming to terms with the self and surrounding amidst the rapid modernization and urbanization. He is an urban poet who portrays the urban sensibility and urban life style with all their nuances in a befitting language. He was always conscious of the religious sensibilities of India and advocated the Hindu view of life. His position is very much clear in his letter to V.A. Shahane when he writes: " I always veered the Hindu view of life, which I consider mystically, religiously and metaphorically right." The Hindu concept of the Supreme Power that controls the world and every person has the part of Divine person in him is projected in his poems collected in '**Hymns in Darkness**'. His

depiction of the Hindu way of doing 'Tapasya through meditation, mantra, release of kundalini and awakening of shakti is remarkable. The following lines from his poem 'The Hindu' are worth noticing:

"Know your mantra, meditate
Release your kundalini
Get your shakti awaken,
And float with the spirit
To your destination."

Convinced of the supremacy of Indian Philosophy and the concept of world brotherhood (that the entire world is one family) he advocates the attitude of tolerance and sense of unity in diversity. He championed the philosophy of tolerance, brotherhood, love for mankind and the concept of Ram Rajya. His poem 'Patriot' encapsulates this philosophy in no uncertain terms:

"All men are brothers no?
Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Hindiwalas
All brothers
Though some have funny habits
Still, you tolerate me,
I tolerate you.
One day Ram Rajya is surely coming."

In addition to the religious sentiments, Ezekiel is also sensitive towards the natural feelings. He appears to be influenced by Mahatma Gandhi so far as his concept of nation is concerned. His poem 'The Patriot' is a testimony to this concept:

"I am standing for peace and non-violence
Why world is fighting and fighting
Why all people of the world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi."

The terrorist activities in Kashmir inflicted severe hurt on Ezekiel's sensibilities and can be felt in the following lines from his 'Poem of Separation'.

"To judge by memory alone

Our love was happy.

When the bombs burst in Kashmir.'

Ezekiel's poetry reflects a sincere effort on his part to voice Indian culture and milieu. He has crafted the English language to express a typically Indian sensibility. His experiment with the English language for creative purposes is highly commendable. He appears to be grappling with the various nuances of English language not only for ironic, parodic and humorous purposes, but also for creating much more serious effects. Some of his poems like "Good-Bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.", 'The Professor', 'The Railway Clerk', 'The Patriot', 'Irani Restaurant Instructions' etc. serve as a paradigm case.

Ezekiel's poems stem out of and reflect particular Indian experiences. His poems confirm the fact that English language has covered a long distance in Indian English poetry as it has served a number of purposes. Ezekiel has, thus, made the English language bear the weight and texture of multiplicity of sources of language.

Ezekiel wrote through a period in Indian history marked by heightened nationalism, heady Nehruvian Socialism, Indira Gandhi's infamous emergency and increasing disenchantment with the system. One notices a cross-current between an unwillingness to let go off the Raj legacy and a quaint exotic supposedly native use of language in Ezekiel's poetry. Bruce King in his book '**Three Indian Poets**' says, "His most important contribution was in the idea that poetry is a discipline which takes a larger share of one's life, and is not a hobby for amateurs. His own life was an example.... As a social democrat Ezekiel was often in the forefront of those concerned with preserving personal liberating against both reactionary and government forces." (King, Bruce, **Three Indian Poets**, New Delhi: O.U.P. 1991.

To sum up, Nissim Ezekiel secured Indian English poetry a space on the Indian literary horizon. He articulated beautifully the anxiety of so many educated, middle-class Indians. His pioneering efforts paved the way for later generations of poets. He inspired, encouraged and guided several younger poets like Dom Moraes, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawala, Ranjit Hoshote, Menka Shivdasani, Jerry Pinto, Jeet Thayil and others. Dom Moraes, who met him in the 1950s, recalls: "He gave young poets the feeling that they were not alone." Hence, Ezekiel carved out a niche for himself in Indian English poetry.

References and Bibliography

- (i) 'Jejuri' by P.S. Rege. He expressed his view about Jejuri and Arun Kolatkar. According to Rege Arun Kolatkar alienated from the mood and atmosphere of Jejuri. Arun Kolatkar was not much interested to take direct experience of Jejuri. He described the bus, tap, an old woman, work of

yeshwantrao, dance of hens, setting sun, railway station, the priest, the reservoir etc, but he worked as a mute spectator while observing Jejuri. He did not suggest the improvement of Jejuri while describing the social and cultural situation of Jejuri.

(ii) 'Arun Kolakar's poet' by Vasant Davtar. Jejuri is a picturesque poem, bus, the priest, tap, ruined temple, old beggars, the hill, waghya and murli, mythical stories of Khandoba, these are vivid pictures of Jejuri.

(iii) 'A history of Indian English literature' by M. k. Naik M.K. Naik emphasizes the theme of alienation in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. Nissim Ezekiel is not only alienated from Indian environment but also from his own minority religious ethos.

(iv) 'Indo- Anglian poetry' by A.N. Dwivedi. He said that "Ezekiel is a representative poet of Indian writing in English and his respect, he resembles Robert Lowell of America and Austin Clark of Ireland.

(v) 'Indian writing in English' by Srinivasa Ieyngar. He commented on the poem entitled "Enterprise by Nissim Ezekiel." There is a moment, a growth; something is gained but something is lost also, between the emotion and the act, falls the shadow, and so, poem like "Enterprise "becomes Images a weary trek by time the goal is reached."

(vi) "Contemporary poets" [an essay on Indianness] by Nissim Ezekiel. "Indianness means those traits in the Character of a man which show him to be an Indian , and certainly not those traits which shows him as a foreigner of which shows that, though an Indian by birth, he behaves like a westerner and has picked up not only western tastes in food and dress but also is mode of speech."

(vii) Purnima Bali - ISSN 0976-8165 , February 2013 - Poetry of Protest and Confession: A Study of Kamala Das - The study of Indian English poetry is incomplete without the study of women poets. After 1960, women poets poetry was focused on feminism. It is the new literature which began after the World War II.

(viii) Dr. Seema Chaudhary ISSN 0976-8165 Vol. III. Issue. IV 2012 : - Confessional Theme and the Crisis of Woman s Identity in the Poetry of Kamala Das - Confessional theme, Indo Anglian poetry, Man- woman relationship, Quest of love, Women s identity, Controversial poet, Childhood experiences, Daring portrayal, Poetic psyche, Women poet.

(ix) Tawhida Akhter - ISSN: 2278 0211 (Online) May, 2013 Vol 2 Issue 5 - Kamala Das: The Voice Of Indian Woman s Quest For Liberation - Her longing for true love gives her neither the peace

of mind nor the emotional fulfilment. She complains of the failure of love within and without the bonds of marriage.

(x) Tarun D. Rawal - ISSN 2278-9529 2013 - Quest for Female Identity in Kamala Das - The main feature of all Kamala Das s writing seems to be her desperate obsession with love. Das establishes herself firmly as a desiring female subject searching for love in a world that rarely understands her.

(xi) Mrs. Charu Kohli - Volume 3, Issue3, Feb 2014 ISSN: - 2348-0459 - SKETCHES OF FEMININE SENSIBILITY IN THE WRITINGS OF KAMALA DAS - I am different; I am an entity - Kamala Das the exploration of female sexuality and sexual desires of women.

(xii) K. SURYA CHANDRA RAO - Vol. 3, Issue: 2,February:2015 - ISSN:(P) 2347-5404 - Her poetry is characterized by extreme sincerity and integrity; she speaks out of her love-longings, frustrations and disillusionments with a disarming frankness.
