



DR. Indu Singh Rajput

Nissim Ezekiel as a Social Commentator

Associate Professor- English Department, Gokul Das Hindu Girls College, Moradabad (U.P.), India

Received-13.04.2023, Revised-17.04.2023, Accepted-21.04.2023 E-mail: indusingh65.rajput@gmail.com

Abstract: A foundational figure in post colonial India's literary history, specially for Indian Poetry, father of Indian English literature, most famous & influential poet Nissim Ezekiel has a long career spanning more than forty years, during which he drastically influenced the literary scene in India. Many scholars see his first collection of poetry, 'A Time of Change', published when he was only 28 years old as a turning point in post colonial Indian literature towards modernism. He was considered the most famous & influential Indian poet who wrote in English. 'A great poet in writing himself, writes his time'. The present research paper pointed out about the Ezekiel's work by the point of view— as a social commentator.

Key Words: : foundational, Indian Poetry, influential poet, drastically, influenced, published, modernism.

Ezekiel's poems primarily examine, themes associated with daily life of Indian people. Through his career, his poems becomes more and more situated in India, until they can be nothing else but Indian. Ezekiel has been certified in the post as not being authentically Indian on account of his Jewish background and urban outlook. Ezekiel himself writes about this in a 1976 essay entitled "Naipaul's India and Mine", in which he disagrees with another poet, V. S. Naipaul about the critical voice with which he writes about India-

Circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigners. In India I am an Indian. When I was eighteen, a friend asked me what my ambitions was. I said with the naïve modesty of youth- "To do something for India" (gradsever.com). We can see this attitude at work in Ezekiel's poetry- even when his poem are satirical.

They come from the voice of a loving insider rather than someone who is looking from outside. In this way Ezekiel's poems are quintessentially Indian because they exist there. Ezekiel's soul is Indian as he writes – "India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India." (gradsever.com)

'It is said that 'Literature is the mirror of society'. Writers penned to point out the outer and inner state of his heart & mind in their writing which they observe through the society. Ezekiel may be easily and certainly called a social mentor because his mostly poems point out about the condition of the contemporary society. He deals with a wide range of themes including the representation of the voiceless in his vast oeuvre of poetry. His poetic world is suffused with a variety of images, both urban and sylvan and his poetry present readers with the people of different backgrounds from around the whole country. Ezekiel fully, aware about the society. The poet depicted indivisals. As poem 'In India' he describes the horrible and tortured stated of people of slums area of Bombay city. In fact Ezekiel had particular liking for the poetry of such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Eliot had a deep desire to play some useful role in the society as a poet. He wrote in the 'use of poetry' that-

"Every poet would like, I, fancy to be able to think that he had some direct social utility." (ST-93)

Ezekiel's early efforts as a poet has seen him as some kind of dreamer but he developed into someone constantly seeking the truth. He saw much correption in Indian society, with a disenchanting population and tried to highlight the problems strongly enough so that something might be done to make things better. By the 1970 though his motivation has waned and he realized that nothing much could be done. He seemed to accept "the ordinariness of" most events". He laughed at "lofty expectations totally deflated." Reluctantly he had to acknowledge that –

"The darkness has it secrets

Which light does not know." (mypoeticside.com)

His Poem 'The Patriot' is an example of distinctive Indian English style. The poem points out his protest against the radicalism & violence seen all over the Indian sub-continent in the post war years of the 1940's onward-

"I am standing for peace and non-violence.

Why world is fighting fighting

Why all people of world

Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,

I am simply not understanding.

Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct,



**I should say even 200% correct,
But modern generation is neglecting -
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.
Other day I'm reading newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English Language)
How one goonda fellow
Threw stone at Indirabehn.**

Must be student unrest fellow. I am thinking"- 15 lines (mypoeticside.com)

Ezekiel has delineated a number of major themes in his poetry to expose the reality of society. He has dived deep in to the Indian contemporary scene, modern urban life, human relationships, love and sex and spiritual values. 'Society is the soul of human world.' Ezekiel is called the birdwatener of the society. He delineated the reality of the post independent society. His poem 'In India' depicted the inhumanity, exploitation of women, negligence of children and torment of animals:-

**"Burnt out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal,
All in noisy silence
Suffering the place and time."**

He exposes the secular state and various religious practices, of the society. In poem 'In India' Ezekiel comments that Roman Catholic goan boys, Anglo-Indian boys and muscle bound Islamic boys were very earnest and punctual in their prayers. But during the prayers they do not pay attention towards the prayers & God but they engage in their mischievous activities. They boast of their love affairs, confessed their solitary joys. As following lines are commented by Ezekiel-

**"The Anglo Indian gentlemen
Drank whisky in some Jewish den
With muslims slowly creeping in
Before or after prayers."**

Ezekiel satirically exposes the licentiousness, sexuality & freedom of Britishers and Indian husbands. Indian society is a male women & dominated society, where men have all rights to do anything according to their will, while women are bounded by the chains of the culture, morality & rituals. Ezekiel satirically exposes the difference between husbands & wives behaviour & position-

**"The wives of India sit apart
They do not drink,
The do not talk
Of course, they do not kiss."**

Just contrary of above lines, the freedom of men can be seen in the following lines-

**"The men are quite at home
Among the foreign styles
I, myself, decorously,
Press a thigh or two in sly innocence."**

Nothing is hide by the eyes of Ezekiel. He presents an irony through the poem- "In India.". He exposes his views about girls. One side the girls are not safe. He points out saying that 'frightened virgins' but other side he express about the fashionable modern secretary. The Indian secretary expects that her English boss will offer her 'True British Courtesy' but what she really gets is his boorish lust. She has a desire of high status & maintain the modernity but she fails to understand his evil eyes. As Ezekiel writes-

**"The struggle has been hard
And not altogether successful
Certainly the blouse
Would not be used again
But true British courtesy**



**He left her safety pin
Before she took the elevator down.”**

Marriage is sacred bond in Indian society. The poet has double aspect betterness & sweetness about the marriage. He is well known about the bitter realities of married life. In poem “Marriage’ he considers the period of joy and pleasure is very brief. According to him, the first flush of marital joy vanishes into nothingness. Soon the married couple is disillusioned. Differences come to the surface and they begin to quarrel frequently. The initial excitement is followed by the feeling of satiation. As he wrote-

**“However many times we came
Apart, we came together
The something over and over again.”**

Ezekiel peeped deep into marriage life. The poet feels that some men’s conjugal life is happy and blissful. It is good and he does not intend to spoil their marriages by disclosing to them his own disillusionment, frustration and bitter experience, So he asks himself rhetorical question-

**“Why should I ruin the mystery
By harping on the suffering rest,
Myself a frequent wedding guest.”**

He does not to spoil the mystic experience of newly married couple and he is delighted in his role of ‘a frequent wedding guest- In this respect he may be compared to Coleridge’s ancient mariners who emerged as “a sadder & a wiser man”. According to P. M. Chaclo:-

“Marriage is a confessional poem. The confessional condour with which Ezekiel exposes his home life is an index of his courage to explore truth in a very personal way. He depends solely on first hand experiences to discover and uncover truths from the home front, while other writers try to camouflage and cover up the bitter truths of domestic life, Ezekiel pursues them relentlessly inspite of possible misunderstandings. But that in the price he has to pay for having sworn to discover the truth about himself domestic relationship. KA(K) 22

Ezekiel comments through his poetry the various colourful facts of urban life of India. He was born and brought up in Bombay. In his poetry he tries to expose the reality of the life of a city like Bombay with frankness, objectivity and detachment. In this aspect “Linda Hess’ remarked “He is a poet of city, Bombay, a poet of body....” In the same context KRS Iyenger remarked-

“The recurring note in Ezekiel’s recent poems is the hunt that urban civilization inflicts on modern man, dehumanizing him, and subjecting his varieties to pollution and devaluation.” KKD-23

Ezekiel’s poems pervade a typical Indian atmosphere. The Indian society, the relationship between society and nature find a place in his poetry. A. S Guha in his essay entitled “Nissim Ezekiel’s India’ has rightly said- “Ezekiel’s I first major voice portraying at times most effectively its squalor, the anguish & the irony of India.” (KKD-33

Ezekiel considers “Social awareness” one of the basic requirements of a good poet. He was a keen observer of contemporary social reality. Poem, A Morning Walk describes the slums of India, presentation of the Kinred Calmer of the city in the poem ‘Island’, the poem “Night of the Scorpion’ points out about the rural folk swarm in to console his mother and resort to ‘mantras’ to cure the dying woman as well as it describes the native simplicity and superstitions of the Indian peasants. As a proof of the above description Ezekiel is the real commentator of the Indian society.

REFERENCES

1. gradesever.com.
2. sublime Tradition III, ISSN-0976-305, 2011.
3. mypoeticside.com.
4. Gupta, Dr. V. K. and Agarwal Dr. Kumual, “Nissim Ezekiel selected poems’ July 2011, S. K. publisher & Distributors, Bara Bazar, Bareilly.
5. KK Digest English Literature, Anjana Prakashan Mandir, Agra- 201-2011.
6. Kumar, Dr. Satish & Tayal Anupama, Narayan’s Indian English poetry: A critical study of the poets, Laxmi Narayan Agarwal, Agra.
