



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Nissim Ezekiel as a Postmodern Poet

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Nissim Ezekiel, founder and father of postmodern Indian English poetry was born on 16 December 1924. He belonged to a well educated family. Father being a professor and mother a Principal of her own school. Nissim Ezekiel through his poetry shows his skill of high order. He is master in the use of language in his poetry. The poetry of Ezekiel is considered as an important link between pre-Independence and post-Independence Indian poetry. Contemporary poets not only follow him in his writing style but also in the selection of themes. So far as the Indian English poetry is concerned, it is the oldest form in the literature in India. In order to break down the manacles of traditional English poetic theme and style, Indian-English poets have immersed in their own Indian sensibility and their perception regarding the prevailing situations. They expressed their ideas and emotions in a new Indian-English style

Key words: Nissim Ezekiel, Postmodernism, Language, Emotions

Nissim Ezekiel, one of the greatest poets of India was born on 16 December 1924. He is considered as the father of postmodern Indian English poetry who has developed great feeling towards his country India, its landscapes and its social milieu. Nissim Ezekiel through his poetry shows his skill of high order. He is master in the use of language in his poetry. The poetry of Ezekiel is considered as an important link between pre-Independence and post-Independence Indian poetry. Contemporary poets not only follow him in his writing style but also in the selection of themes. So far as the Indian English poetry is concerned, it is the oldest form in the literature in India. In order to break down the manacles of traditional English poetic theme and style, Indian-English poets have immersed in their own Indian sensibility and their perception regarding the prevailing situations. They expressed their ideas and emotions in a new Indian-English style. M.K.Naik's view about the poetic technique of Ezekiel is that:

"Ezekiel's poetry reveals technical skill of a high order. Except in latter work where his choice of an open form sometimes makes for looseness, he has always written verse which is extremely tightly constructed. His mastery of the colloquial idiom is matched by a sure command of rhythm and rhyme. A happy use of cool understatement. (e. g. 'A certain happiness would be to die ;) and a lapidary quality have made him one of the quotable poets of his generation (e. g. 'Home is where we have to gather grace'). Though hardly a poet with the shattering original image, he employs the extended metaphor effectively in poems like "Enterprise" (M.K.Naik, 38).

'Postmodernism' is prominently a broader term which covers an ample variety of disciplines of study such as art, architecture, music, film, literature, fashion, technology etc. In relation to literary studies; it denotes certain extremely experimental works that came into being after World War II. It signifies a way of life, feeling and a state of mind. The most important characteristic trait of the postmodernism is freedom which means that postmodern writers are not bound to any rule for writing. They can write in any style and on any subject. The postmodern writers were influenced by the II world war. Actually it was a reaction against the modernism (a movement that emerged in late 19th century). Modernism itself was a reaction against the traditional way of writing style. Postmodern features in the poetry of Ezekiel are associated with the theme of playfulness, satire, irony and so on. Such themes are found in the poems 'The Professor' and 'The Patriot'. Nissim Ezekiel not only used free verse in his poetry but also mixed it with rhymed lines. He wrote his poetry according to his own choice in terms of writing style and subject matter. His poetry shows his love for India. The poem "Night of the Scorpion," is very notable in the study of the Indian content in Ezekiel's poetry, where the poet's mother is stung by a scorpion. This is a typical family situation where the world of superstition and the world of science collide at loggerheads. His poetry collections include 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). The plays written by Nissim Ezekiel are: Nalini, Marriage poem, The Sleep- Walkers, Song of Deprivation, and Who Needs No Introduction.

Michael German gave his view about Ezekiel's contribution to poetry:

"He brings to the established traditions of love, religion and the passing hour, the modern attitude of the need for a commitment, an existential plunge into life, and of old analytic disgust, becoming more ironical and detached as he develops". (Garman, Michael 106)

His Indian sensibility brings a new charm in his poetry. Bruce King says,

"His main significance is not, however, as a promoter of poetry; it is in his will to be poet, his continuing involvement in the poetry scene and the ways in which the developing body of his work expresses his quest for a satisfactory way of living in this world. Whereas previously Indian English verse was a hobby, something done in spare moments, Ezekiel made it central to his life. Others wrote poems, he wrote poetry The

difference is reflected in his craftsmanship and purposefulness; this is as much a matter of will as talent. Ezekiel brought sense of discipline, self-criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry.”

(Bruce 1981).

Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is full of Indianness. 'Background Casually' is one of the biographical poem written by Nissim Ezekiel which shows his loyalty towards India. Some of the lines from the poem are as under:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes
 I have become part of it
 To observe my foreigners.
 They say that I am singular,
 Their letters overstate the case.
 I have made my commitments now
 This is one, to say where I am
 As others choose to give themselves.
 In some remote and backward place.
 My backward place is where I am (Collected Poem, 181)

The languages of Ezekiel's poems contain a large amount of 'Indian' English. The informal language and the frequent use of present tense is the indication of use of 'Indian English' by the native speakers. Chetan Karnani says, "No other poet has successfully exploited the nuances of Indian English as Ezekiel has done." (Chetan, 1947)

Conclusion

Nissim Ezekiel being the founder and father of postmodern Indian English poetry brought revolution with his writing. His poetry is full of Indianness. Postmodern features in the poetry of Ezekiel are associated with the theme of playfulness, satire, irony and so on. Nissim Ezekiel not only used free verse in his poetry but also mixed it with rhymed lines. He wrote his poetry according to his own choice in terms of writing style and subject matter.

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