

Nissim Ezekiel: A Poet of Indian Sensibility

Paper Submission: 03/03/2021, Date of Acceptance: 23/03/2021, Date of Publication: 24/03/2021

Abstract

Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Bombay in a Jewish family. His parents were devoted to education. They influenced him very much. His father was the principal of several colleges in the later part of his life. He was rational, questioning and had an immaculate taste for proverbs and homespun wisdom, which runs deep in his poetry. This paper aims at illustrating the fragrance of Indian sensibility in Ezekiel's poetry.

Keywords: Jewish, Rational, Questioning, immaculate, Homespun, Wisdom.

Introduction

He looks at literature in relation to society. He is a poet of the city of Bombay. He does not mince words to express the ugliness, dirt, wickedness, inhumanity and squalor of the metropolis. Wading through Bombay is a mortifying experience for the poet in "A Morning Walk".

Barbaric city, sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains.
Its hawkers, beggars, iron lunged,
Procession led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes.
And child-like masses many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.¹

Bombay, the symbol of any modern city, is the theme in a large number of his poems. The dehumanizing influence of the city on human individuality is described in "Urban"

The city like a passion burns.
He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand.
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand;²

Ezekiel's entire poetry is suffered with Indianness. His commitment to India and to Bombay which is his chosen home, is total. In his commitment to and attachment with India:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes,
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners
They say that I am singular,
Their letters overstate the case.
I have made my commitments now
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place
My backward place is where I am.³

Ezekiel says that the major themes of his poetry are love, personal integration, the Indian contemporary scene, modern urban life, spiritual value. Ezekiel is a poet of Indian Urban life. K. N. Daruwala remarks: "He seeks his identity in the country and its incongruities. He is basically an urban poet, the city spilling over into his verse not as cosmetic but as an organic growth."⁴

Ezekiel poetry is closely related with his environment. His roots lie deep in India. He has not inherited the great classical tradition of India, of Vedas and Upanishads, "but to the extent he has availed himself of the composite culture of India to which he belongs, he must be said to be an important poet, not merely in the Indian context, but in the consideration of those that are writing poetry anywhere in India. The poet vividly and



Kavita Singh

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English,
Raja Mohan Girls P.G. College,
Ayodhya (Faizabad), U.P. India

picturesquely depicts the rampant poverty, squalor, heart and ugliness of India, especially in big cities, in "India":

Always in the sun's eye,
Here among the beggars,
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, slums
Burnt out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal,
All in noisy silence
Suffering the place and time
I ride my elephant of thought,
A Cezanne slung around my neck. 4

In the second part of this poem he sarcastically exposes the hypocrisy of the "The Roman Catholic Goan Boys", who "copied, bullied, stole in pains" and "bragged about their love-affairs", but they "never missed their prayers". He writes with a touch of mild sarcasm:

The Anglo- Indian gentlemen
Dark whisky in some Jewish den
With muslims slowly creeping in
Before or after prayer. 5

In the third part exposes the pitiable condition of Indian wives who are subjected to stern discipline, whereas their husbands are free to enjoy sex:

The wives of Indians sit apart,
They do not drink,
They do not talk,
Of course, they do not kiss.
The men are quite at home
Among the foreign styles
(what fun the flirting is!)

I myself press a thing or two in sly innocence.

The party is a great success. 6

In the fourth part the poet reveals the East-West tensions. The conflict of two cultures is brought out by the episode in which English boss tries to seduce his Indian secretary.

Ezekiel has written many poems on the subject that immediately surrounds him. In Bombay the Irani Restaurant is as much the part of the city as the sea breeze that blows at every corner. "Irani Restaurant "brings to light the dirty and unhygienic conditions in Indian hotels and restaurants. In a short poem "Irani Restaurant Instruction"

Ezekiel creates the authentic atmosphere of peace by the peculiar flavor of language:

Do not work letter
Without order refreshment
Do not comb
Hair is spoiling floor
Do not make mischief in cabin
Our waiter is reporting
Come again
All are welcome whatever caste.
It not satisfied tell us
Otherwise tell others.
God is Great. 7

Ezekiel has graphically painted in vivid picturesque words and phrases a vast gallery of portraits representing various Indian professions and ways of life. How pitiable is Dhanya, a typical Indian beggar:

His old skin
Is like the ground
On which he sleeps
So, also his rags. 8
(The truth about Dhanya)

The poor railway clerk, who is the only support of his family, finds it difficult to make both ends meet because he gets no bribes. Nobody appreciates his work:

I am never neglecting my responsibility
I am discharging it properly,
I am doing my duty,
But who is appreciating,
Nobody, I am telling you. 9
(The Railway Clerk)

The subject of "The truth about the Floods" is occasional but the poet has imported universality to it by describing the great human agony. The official indifference and apathy for the victims of flood, and the craze for publicity of a relief party of students are highlighted with a touch of satire:

"Don't make a noise."

Said the students

'sit down in a circle.'

The villagers sit down in a circle.

They did not say another word.

The transistor was on,

The biscuits were distributed,

The camera clicked.

Then the students left

Humming the tune.

Of a popular hindi film song.10

The hypocrisy of Indian gurus and saints is revealed in "guru", the money charmer is described in "Environment", "in rural site" the exploitation of of superstitious villagers is depicted:

It's a shameless exploitation

Of the people's ignorance,

It's not even as if they need the food,

Most of them are wealthy farmers

From the neighbouring villages

With a taste for hoarding gold. 11

The acceptance of the Indian reality is an important characteristics of Ezekiel's poetry. He is not critical of the Indian scene like Nirad C. Chaudhari. His poetry portrays the social aspect of Indian with a humanistic strain. So we see Indianness and Indian sensibility in the poetry of Ezekiel.

Aim of the Study

This paper aims at illustrating the fragrance of Indian sensibility in Ezekiel's poetry and to acquaint the readers with Indianness and to provide them a deep insight into the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we can say that Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is suffused with Indianness and Indian sensibility. Most of his poems delineate Indian cities and there landscapes, Indian values and its customs and traditions.

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