

Nissim Ezekiel and his influence in Indian English poetry

Sanki Sarkar

Abstract

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most important names among the Indian English poetry. He reveals a consistent commitment to the craft, authenticity of articulation and sincerity of purpose. He gave an urban touch to poetry. Ezekiel is aware of Indian social reality. His observation on habits and manners of Indian speaker is equally remarkable. This paper tried to analyse the influence made by Ezekiel in Indian English poetry.

Keywords: Indian English, poetry, observation

Of the group of poets attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as the leader who advised others and set a standard. His main significance is not, however, as a promoter of poetry; it is in his will to be a poet, his continuing involvement in the poetry scene and the ways in which the developing body of his work expresses his personal quest for a satisfactory way of living in the modern world. Ezekiel, brought a sense of discipline, self-criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry.

Ezekiel wanted precision of diction and imagery, which was structurally embodied in the rounding-off of a poem with an observation. He aimed at a contemporary manner which would voice modern concerns and which in style and theme would avoid the dated provincialism of colonial verse.

Life in the city, the problems of marriage, need to overcome alienation etc are Ezekiel's early and continuing themes. Modern characteristics such as irony, heightened critical self consciousness, strong intellectual purpose, a multiplicity of tones, the artistic distancing of emotion through a persona were among his contributions to Indian poetry.

Ezekiel showed that it was possible to write about oneself without being self-consciously Indian and that an Indian poetry could express the experiences of the educated and urbanized and need not be obsessed with mythology, peasants and nationalist slogans. With him a post-colonial poetry started which reflects the lives and identities that an increasing number of educated Indians knew or would seek.

Ezekiel owns a large portion of the history of modern Indian English poetry. He looks for assimilation without abstraction, mystery and philosophy. His first anthology **A Time to Change** (1952) makes an indication to his fresh start in the territory of poetry with the rejection of the past trend.

Like Wordsworth, Ezekiel also writes poems that represent simple language of the common Indian masses. Through these poems, the poet strives to speak to readers who do not find him complex. Ezekiel can also be considered as a representative poet of Indian modernism. He is to a great extent inspired by the ideals of western modernism.

Ezekiel can be regarded as the most important English language poet in India who leads the school of Modern Indian English poetry. He scrutinizes his place, his country of birth, its people and writes poetry in an innovative form.

If we analyse some of his early poems, we may locate words, phrases or lines that mark his romantic inclination. One of the most important themes of romantic poetry is love that Ezekiel incorporates widely into his early poems. As the poet treats love:

This secretive and modest love

Is best, raining peace

Into the troubled night,

Mellow in the melody of light

The words and phrases like 'secretive', 'modest', 'raining', 'troubled night', and 'mellow' in connection with love certainly makes **The Recluse** a romantic poem.

Ezekiel imitates, though not blindly, twentieth century famous poets of modernism. His poem show the influences of T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound etc. Ezekiel though was inspired by the modern poets of the West, he never sacrifices his own individuality. Ezekiel is critical about the poets obsessed with mysticism and traditional romantic ideals. Instead of looking at the world, they take inspiration from abstract ideas and make poetry a storehouse of knowledge. Ezekiel considers that this kind of practices has marred the whole picture of Indian poetry. He believes that poetry should have contemporary sounds and scenes with fresh idiom.

Later phases of Ezekiel's poetic career are markedly distinct. Ezekiel occupies an enviable position among contemporary Indian poets for writing in English on Indian tradition and culture with western impact. He elevates Indian English poetry into a new height with materials from Indian life and culture. We also discover confrontation and assimilation between Indianization and westernization in his poetry.

Ezekiel's sense of contemporariness is widely acknowledged as he values and uses what he observes around him as objects for his poetry. His poetry reflects his observation, examines and expresses the condition of the Indians. Ezekiel always tries to renew himself as a poet and experiment with poetry.

Ezekiel does not glorify the Indian custom and culture but instead he sees it as it is. Even he is acutely and painfully conscious of the deficiencies and defects of the Indian people. In his poem **Background Casually** the Indian customs are reflected. It is generally believed that Indians talk loudly and knock at the doors heavily and this is portrayed very picturesquely:

When someone talked too loudly,...

They hawked and spat....

In the words of Ezekiel, " My poems in Indian English are rightly described as very Indian poems. So they should not be considered as mere lampoons." The characters and the situations projected are intended to be genuinely Indian, and the humour is in the English language as it is widely spoken by Indians, to whom it is not funny at all.

References

Islam Shafiqul Mohammad, 2016, Nissim Ezekiel's Modern Position: 'A Clean Break with the Romantic Past', The NEHU Journal, vol XIV, No.2, PP. 33-53

Pramila K, 2015, Indian Sense and Sensibility in Nissim Ezekiel's Poems, International Journal of Applied Research, 1(11): 327-330

King Bruce. Modern Indian Poetry in English, OUP, New Delhi, Revised edition 2001