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INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND NISSIM EZEKIEL: A STUDY

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Abstract

"Ezekiel is one of the few Indian poets who is empowered to present and explain life so realistic and in such changed and renewable language. Here body and soul, form and content become one to define the self of the poet to know the depth of life. Apparently simple and straightforward, Ezekiel's poetry makes abundant use of paradoxes as a poetical tool. Even at the first reading one would notice that he makes conscious use of it to gain comprehension, precision and suggestion. He describes an event, an idea or a situation directly but in a paradoxical way".

Keywords: Study, English, literature, paradoxes, etc

Introduction

It is really difficult to place Ezekiel on the map of Indian English particularly when the Indian English poetic movement started by him in the fifties and sixties ultimately succeeded in overcoming the Anglo American influence in the mid-seventies. It is for this reason that critics praised him sky-high and he got maximum critical attention along with blind adulation. Bruce King says, "the story of Nissim Ezekiel's life and role as a founding father of Indian English poetry is well known and is, at times, the material of romance". Adil Jussawlla states, "Ezekiel is perhaps the first Indian poet consistently to show Indian readers that craftsmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter Linda Hess observes, "In my attempts to survey the work of the Indian poet Outstanding in craftsmanship, maturity, range and depth of sensibility. Ezekiel entwines the reader's mind and emotion in his verses.

His perception is complex in the way that Eliot suggested. He said that a modern poet must be complex in order to comprehend the verity and complexity of modern civilization. But

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his expression is simple, in a way that Eliot's often was not." William Walsh refers to Coleridge and George Santayana to bring out the greatness of Ezekiel as a poet. According to him, "If poetry as Coleridge said, is rationalized dream, then the emphasis in Ezekiel is very much in its calls to rationality and that 'Nissim Ezekiel's work calls to mind a remark George Santayana made, "art Supplies constantly to contemplation which nature seldom affords in concrete experience -the union of life and peace ". Leading Indian critics like K.R.S. Iyengar, C.D. Narrashimhaiahm, M.K. Naik and V.A.Shahane are full of praise for Ezekiel and they accord him pride of place among the Indian English poets of our time.

The question is: What's Ezekiel's contribution to Indian English poetry and what makes him great as a poet? The fact is that he is the first Indian English poet in post independence India to make his mark as a poet. No doubt, he is a pioneer in the field of Indian English poetry There is also a grain of truth about what all the leading critics (both Indian and foreign) have said about him. But to my mind, his greatness lies elsewhere. It lies in the answer to the following questions: (i) What significance has Ezekiel for the contemporary poet? (ii) Can he continue to be a source of inspiration to poets and writers in the twenty-first century? The answer is in the affirmative. I like to put forward what Contemporary poets in India may derive from Ezekiel.

Nissim Ezekiel Phases of Poetry

First, Ezekiel came as a liberating force, technically and encouraged poets to make more of the interplay of past, present and future than they had done before. He helped to popularize free verse in Indian English poetry. After him, except A.K Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy, no other Indian English poet writes in regular stanzas in metrical verse. Ezekiel is the only poet who writes successfully both in metrical verse and free verse A host of Indian English poetes write in free verse following Ezekiel.

He gave the much needed leadership to fellow Indian poets to write poetry in our own way free of Anglo- American influence The Second Important contribution of Ezekiel is that he has liberated Indian English poetry from the imitative and romantic trend set by his predecessors like Toru Dutta, Sarojini Naidu and Shri Aurobindo As J. Brije Patil rightly points out, his poetry constitutes a revolt against the incipient romanticism and rapid narcissism which had long made it impossible for Indian poetry in English to be criticism of life. He made irony a powerful instrument to describe corruption in our contemporary society, it is irony that he comes to grips with ambivalence of the Indian situation. In a number of poems, he expressed his social commitment and made ironically comments on the subjects or persons Some of his very Indian poems in Indian English. 'Guru', 'Entertainment', 'Ganga', 'The Couple', 'The Truth about the

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foods', 'How the English lesson Ended', 'Poverty poems and Jewish wedding in Bombay', are cases in point.

The third important contribution of Ezekiel is his artistic effort. Ezekiel has shown the way (like A.K. Ramnajan in, 'A River') how to express everyday Indian reality in personal voice to achieve the reader's total participation. R. Parthasarthy emphasizes this point when that poems like, 'Night of the Scorpion' and 'A River' by their visions of everyday Indian reality expressed in an unobtrusive persona voice stood out in the reader's mind as sign-posts indicating the directions poetry in English was likely to take in the future. Ezekiel is very Successful in creating poetry out of commonplace observation and what is more important, is his use of everyday conversational language. The first person and the third person narratives often alternate to bring alive the situation and character accurately to elicit the readers participation. Ezekiel's poetry speaks to us in our situation. The voice that through it is throughout homes and therefore whispers result.

Another point which I want to emphasize here is that Ezekiel is a humanistic poet. It is in this respect that he scores over all his contemporaries and successors. Ezekiel is a conscious artist. The centre of poetic interest in him lies in the process of adjustment between the knowledge derived from experiences or personal feelings and the knowledge which imposes a pattern. To read his poetry is to watch an actor enacting his comic play in all its facets love, sex, commitment to life on the stage, it is to know him inside out Ezekiel stands with W.B. Yeats for 'profane profession of mankind' in which sense spirits are fully and harmoniously exploited.

Conclusion:

Ezekiel's poetry shows both growth and continuity between his early poetry and later poetry. There is no clear cut division either thematic or technical, though he tries to write 'Poetry of popular impersonation in the eighties and after his later poetry in a way consummates the beginning and Ezekiel broadens the range of his poetry thematically by writing poetry Echoes of Yeats, Eliot and Auden have finally discovered his own voice.

Not only that he also set examples and standards for many to follow. Like a true humanist, the poet advances in years wishing all well and trying to do some 'human good' before he hears his last song. To conclude, I should say that Indian English Poetry would not have been what it is today without Ezekiel. He is immensely readable. His poetry will be long remembered for quality immeasurableness and authenticity of experience that went into the making of it.

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