

M.A (English)

Semester - 3rd

Paper - C.C-13

Topic :- Nissim Ezekiel as a modernist poet

Nissim Ezekiel occupies a very high rank as a writer of Indo-English poetry; and his contribution to this poetry is very substantial, weighty and valuable. He has published six collections of verse. His poems have appeared in several journals and he is well represented in many anthologies. He looks at literature in relation to society. In all his writings Ezekiel stresses the centrality of man in the universe and prefers poetry of statement and purpose. The great critic Bruce King writes :-

"Ezekiel brought a sense of discipline, self criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry. He was the first Indian poet to have such a professional attitude."

Ezekiel is a modern poet in the real sense. He discarded "colonial provincial amateur poetry" which was old fashioned. His poetry reflects the present and the modern age. His themes are modern "Life in the city, sexuality, the problems of marriage, the need to overcome alienation and to create integration among the various aspects of his character are Ezekiel's early and continuing themes. Urban life, Indian sensibility, Love and

Sex, marital relationship, family and human relationship, and search for identity are the major themes of his plays. The urban theme dominates Ezekiel's poetry. He is a poet of the city Bombay. He does not mince words to expose the ugliness, dirt, wickedness, inhumanity and squalor of the metropolis. He points out how the city reduces human personality to a zero. Bombay, the symbol of any modern city, is the theme in a large number of his poems. The dehumanising 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."

The city dweller in this poem is closely attached to the city and its worn out tracks of custom and habit.

Ezekiel's entire poetry is suffused with Indianness. His commitment to India and to Bombay which is his chosen home, is total. In his famous poem, "Background Casually", he clearly reveals his commitment to and attachment with India :

"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"

Like a modern poet, Ezekiel has written many poems on the subjects that immediately surround him. In many poems like "The Truth About Dhanya", "The Railway clerk", "On Bellos's Road", "Guru" and "Night of Scorpion" he has focussed upon the Indian customs. The hypocrisy of Indian gurus and saints is revealed in "Guru", the money charmer is described in "Entertainment", in "Rural Site" the exploitation of superstitious villagers is depicted. In "Night of the Scorpion" the poet throws light on Indian superstitions.

Like any modern poet, love and sex occupy a conspicuous place in Ezekiel's poetry. Ezekiel has dealt with love and sex in all its variety - expression, meeting, indulgence, mating, fulfilment, consumation, fear, possessiveness, passion, surrender, misgiving, waiting, separation, wistfulness, yearning, praise offering thrill, joy, excitement and impatience. Ezekiel is a poet of the body, an endless explorer in to labyrinths of the flesh and desire. As a modern poet, he writes in "Love Song" :-

"Beneath your dress I find you young
Rewarding to my explorations, certain
soft and flowing
And tender to the touch, love."

Ezekiel refers to the union of bodies as "scheduled flight"

"bumpy ride" and "perfect landing in flight". He forcefully reveals his ideal of man-woman relationship in "Sparrows". He suggests through the images of sparrow and the importance of marital relationship and the significance of home, the centre of real felicity.

Marital, Family and Human Relationship play a vital role in the poems of modern poets. Nissim Ezekiel is not an exception of it. He has composed some very fine poems out of common and ordinary characters and situation. "Case Study", "To a certain lady", "Division", "Tonight", "A Marriage", and "Song to be shouted at" are best examples of it. In the poem entitled "Jewish Wedding in Bombay" he frankly describes what happens on the marriage day. In "Poster Poems" he pays homage to his professor-father from whom he derived his rationality and intellectuality. His mother is vividly remembered in "Cows", "Night of Scorpion" and "A Daughter's Illness".

Alienation and Search for identity is also the theme of some of his popular poems. The poem "Background Casually" is the best example of it. In this poem, he writes:

"My ancestors, among the Castles,
were aliens crushing seed for bread."

As a school boy, he felt alienated among his class-mates

"A mugging Jew among the wolves

They told me I had killed the Christ."

As a poet Ezekiel tries to explore his identity in a rural

India where he finds reality in "the eyes of supple innocence."
In some of his finest poems - "In the Country Cottage", "Poverty
Poems", "Night of the Scorpion" and "In India" Ezekiel tries to
strike roots in the reality which is the meaningful centre of
Indian life.