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## Nissim Ezekiel : An Introduction

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 about him :-

"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 themes dominates Ezekiel's poetry. He is a poet of the City Bombay. He does not mince words to engage

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 likes 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 Bellogis Road", "Guru" and "Night of Scorpion", he has focussed upon 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 supersti

villagers is depicted. In 'Night of Scorpion' the poet throws light on superstitious nature of common villagers. As he writes about the activity of common illiterate villagers, when a scorpion stung poet's mother in a rainy season:-

"The peasants came like swarms of flies  
and buzzed the name of god a hundred times  
to paralyze the evil one.

with candles and with lanterns  
throwing giant scorpion shadows  
on the sun baked walls

they searched for him."

Like any modern poet, love and sex, 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, possessiveness, passion, etc. 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".

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. 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 poem", "Night of Scorpion" and "In India" Ezekiel tries to strike roots in the reality which is the meaningful centre of Indian life.