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NISSIM EZEKIEL-A POET OF INDIANNESS

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Abstract

Nissim Ezekiel is a pioneer and foundational figure in introducing modern English poetry in post independence era. He wrote a lot on different matters in his own way. From a railway clerk to a vendor in the Bombay Street every man and woman are in his poems. He is the poet of ordinary men and women with Indian sensibilities. The way Indians talk, behave, their wearing, manner, festivity all these are in Ezekiel's poems. His poetry is essentially poetry of statement. But he introduced Indian poetry in English with a new identity. His poems are introspective, pensive, reflective in nature. Ezekiel has used irony in different tone new to Indian poetry. He has accepted all that is Indian and his belonging to his birth place could well be perceived in his poems. He has changed the track of Indian poetry rejecting the overriding emotion of earlier practitioners. He has used the language in his own way and the straightforwardness of expression with subtlety is something new to Indian poetry as it never happened before him. He criticizes mediocrity and narcissistic attitudes in poetry. He writes mostly as he himself says in Indian environment. The Indian ethos find a poetic turn in his poems. Ezekiel has depicted poverty, squalor, anguish, and irony of Indian existence. Nissim Ezekiel is the first Indian English poet to express modern Indian sensibilities where Indian men, women, naked child, historical incident, vendor everyone are in his poems.

Indian English poetry & its practitioners waited a long time for its recognition to come. Now this genre is ready enough to run if not to fly surely on its self-made path that has gained consistency and momentum a lot. Since English came to India as a legacy of colonialism, this language was not meant for the benefit of the colonized subjects rather chiefly introduced to serve the purpose of British rulers. Indian English poetry should be Indian first expressing aspirations, joys, and sorrows of Indian

sensibilities. Nissim leaving the footprints of English poets tried to write poems in his own manner and style. The earlier imitative, infantile approach of composing poems in English language got discarded. Nissim Ezekiel came out from that imitative approach to write poems with ease and elegance. R. Parthasarathy rightly observes that after independence the direction of writing Indian English Poetry got a change:

"Indian English Poetry is Indian in sensibility and content and English in language."

Nissim Ezekiel a foundational figure in postcolonial India is an acclaimed poet of Indian English Poetry. He took the poetry writing seriously with hard work and dedication that led him to a life of poetry and poverty. He attempted and took several jobs but he never left poetry. His poems are the experiences he gathered and his mode of writing is not overburdened with emotion. Ezekiel is the poet of common ordinary men and women and his poetry is about mundane realities furnished with humor. Whatever he wrote was not glorious or lovely all time but his words were crystallized truth and kaleidoscopic Indian sensibilities. Bombay in his poems become the metaphor for urban India. A man living in abroad comes back to his origin as he lives always there psychologically-this homesickness attitude is very much Indian. This sentiment finds an appropriate expression through his poems:

"As others choose to give themselves. In some remote and backward place. My backward place is where I am"

Ezekiel is by all means a poet of Indian sensibilities; but obviously that does not mean he never wrote on anything else, Indianness has been remain a predominant & prevalent part of his writing. Indian civilization since Vedic ages has been remain attached with philosophy & poverty-poverty in Indian soil makes people think his existence in terms of philosophy; a prevalent sense works unconsciously that poverty is episodic in lifecycle bringing forth the ultimate song in tune with poetic flow. The poet rightly expresses this belief:

"There is a place to which I often go
Not by planning to, but by a flow"

Ezekiel accepts reality-in his poems a leper, asaint, a beggar, a woman in the street selling oranges, a naked child, and superstition find a straightforward expression. He has placed all these mundane realities excluding overriding sentiment. Moreover, the point is that he never attempts to hide or to provide sugar coating for covering up--he accepts India, his own land, his origin, his place of

birth as it is. He clearly expresses his attitude that he lives in INDIA, particularly in Bombay not by any compulsion but he does so by his own choice and this choice is very much personal: "I am here to find my way in it". A man who loves his motherland can utter such phrases when the emotion he carries forward is genuine as he declares:

"I cannot leave the island
I was born here and belong"

This belonging has been remaining a spring source to him and to his poetry until death.

He was aware of the fact that every Indian is not a strong believer of God yet they pray out of their practice in social life out of their "sanskar" which is very much Indian culture. Nissim Ezekiel never criticizes that attitude but with soft sympathy for his fellows he declares without hesitation:

"to pray without belief in prayer
When we don't know what to do"

The poet is very much determined in his Indianness and he loves his birthplace with Indian sensibilities, he loves everything Indian soil .its people, culture, hybridity of Indian society .Poetry seems to Nissim Ezekiel India and India means to him Poetry as he says that Indian landscape sears his eyes and he has become a part of it. With this feeling the poet , the man Nissim Ezekiel has made his commitment:

"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."

Linguistic and cultural milieu of India finds expression with benign humour. He tries to express all the mundane realities and his reality is not exaggerated rather photographic presented in prosaic manner with ease and elegance ,the tone of the poems is confessional sometime but he never deviates from truth and his greatness lies in the fact that his mode of acceptance is ironical with sympathy for the fellows around .

He is the pioneer in expressing modern Indian sensibilities with the use of modern idiom. Miss Pushpa T.S., the shopkeeper, the railway clerk, the professor all these characters of Ezekiel's poetry reflect the way of spoken English by the Indians. The use of English idioms brings different connotations to the Indian public and the use of present continuous tense very often are there in the poems.

'I am never neglecting my responsibility

I am discharging it properly.'

Ezekiel tries to show the Indian context and content but he never attempts to mock. The language used in the lips of the professor shows that most of the Indians are second language learner and English language they use are not grammatically sound. Making personal comment and inviting people in short time are very much common in Indian culture.

Through the lips of the professor in true Indian style makes a personal comment:

You were so thin, like a stick,

Now you are man of weight and consequence.

That is good joke.

Ezekiel, the trendsetter has written both in traditional verse forms and free verse. Influenced by poets like Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Rilke, Spender, Auden he composed on a variety of themes like love, modern urban life, spiritual values with controlled meaningful statements with Indian ethos and sensibilities avoiding obscurity and emotional outburst.

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