



Theme of alienation in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry

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Abstract

It is an established fact that Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most prominent and towering personalities among the Indian poets writing in English. Nissim Ezekiel is one of the greatest poets of Indo-Anglian literature which grew during the last century. Some of the writers, who could with felicity use English as a medium of expression in their creative writings, created a kind of awareness about the Indian social problems. Indo-Anglian literature contributed its share in the Indian consciousness. The term Indian consciousness means the awareness that India historically has her cultural identity. By Indianness, we mean a subject that suits the Indian sensibility and most part of the Indo-Anglian literature is concerned with one or the other aspect of Indian-sensibility. The works of Nissim Ezekiel are not an exception to it. His works bring a typical incense of Indian tradition, culture and day-to-day life. "Indianness" is a term which in itself.

Keywords: Indianness, alienation, Indian sensibility, human relationships

Introduction

Nissim Ezekiel is an outstanding Indian poet writing in English who, like the metaphysical poets and T.S. Eliot, believes that all art is based on conflicts and contrasts of opposites.

According to Ezekiel himself, the poet should try to show how these opposites can be reconciled. Through a very common and ordinary Indian setting and situation, the poet analyses the various themes of human significance as he says himself:

"I want to acquire a human balance humanly acquired."

Where the central thematic stream is composed of human relationships and human feelings in their most naked and penetrating style. That is why, Nissim has rightly been called as a poet of urbanized way of living and thinking which makes him a poet of city also, nay a poet of Metropolitan life.

Throughout his poetic career, Nissim has remained conscious of his Jewish Bene Israel family background which separates him from the core of the Indian ethos. That is why, he is a typical victim of rootlessness, a kind of rolling stone who, after having been boxed down by a Muslim boy in a Roman Catholic convent school, ran away to London in search of his identity and belongingness, but even in London his basement was shared by poverty, philosophy, and religion. So, the theme of alienation is the very hinge on which the whole spirit of his poetry revolves.

Consequently, Nissim is a refugee of spirit in search of dim identity who tries to experiment with the different solutions to this sense of alienation. Sometimes, he assumes the cover of superiority expressed through irony as he says in his poem, *Background Casualty*:

"They told me I had killed the Christ
That year I won the scripture prize."

As P. Lal also opines, Nissim treats the common and mundane in his poetic furnaces with rare ability and intensity to make his vision a powerful and faithful account of the social and psycho-spiritual nuances of human life within the framework of Indianness. Albeit, influenced by the poets like W.H. Auden, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, Nissim's poetry bears his individual stamp highlighting the themes of moral degeneration, spiritual chaos and alienation expressed in terms of human relationships at the individual, the family, the society and the cosmic levels.

According to P.S. Kasture, Nissim's poetry is a reflection of our degenerated society with its cultural defilements, ulterior motives and with fractured vision resulting in to the loss of human values with its concomitant chaos and alienation in the personal and social life as the poet also laments as:

Religion, which once was a source of ultimate comfort and solace, has now lost its healing power as the poet remarks:

The more I searched the
Less I found

In this way, the poet has completely failed to find anything meaningful or significant in the whole world as we find in Ezekiel's poem, *For Elkama*, where the poet analyses the contemporary chaos and alienation at the family level through a typical Indian setting and situation, and concludes the fact that in spite of the chaotic behavior of the son, the mother's love keep the situation calm and under control as the poet also remarks:

'My wife's delightful laughter
Adds the three of us together.'

In his poem, *The Night of a Scorpion*, Nissim Ezekiel, through a typical Indian setting and environment, depicts a word of

ignorance and superstitions vis-à-vis the world of science and enlightenment where the mother is proud of the sacrifice and assert the fact:

“Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children”

Here, the Indian faith is shown a complex mixture of metaphysical beliefs and superstitions where as the father’s reaction is essentially urbanized, and the appeal of the magic is older than that of religion and science, but the power of maternal love is ancient than all these three. The endless flow of rain symbolizes the endless flow of life and that of scorpion. It also symbolizes the basic sufferings in human life. But, in spite of these facts, Nissim Ezekiel is not forgetful of the fact that:

“I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a natural outsider, circumstances and decisions relate me to India.”

In one of his memorable poems, *The Visitor*, Nissim Ezekiel describes the cawing of crow for three time as an indication of the coming of some guest as per Indian folks believe. However, the poet receives an idler who is an empty handed, and come to while away his time which, in turns, leads to disillusionment and a sense of alienation in human relationships.

Even, the most unifying force of love seems to have lost its sanctity, and degenerates in to lust. Hence, one of the recurrent themes, the theme of malice which is an ultimate and inevitable outcome of dehumanizing forces and selfish motives rampant in the society all around as the poet says I this connection:

“Barbaric city with slums deprived obsession
Its hawkers iron lunged.”

In this way, after making a hurried survey of Ezekiel’s poetry, we can safely and rightly aver that the whole poetic world depicted by Nissim Ezekiel seems to be a virtual hell with only a sense of disillusionment and alienation where the poet finds why the world is fighting and fighting. So, the themes of alienation, isolation, spiritual sterility, moral vacuity and lust constitute the central thematic stream where the poet seems to be engaged in an endless quest for identity by carrying on an eternal discourse with the reality all around.

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