

**A STUDY OF TREATMENT OF INDIAN SENSIBILITY IN NISSIM
EZEKIEL'S POETRY**

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Abstract

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most important Indian poets, writing in English. The most distinctive aspect of his poetry is the facts that even while voicing general human concerns, he remains essentially and quintessentially an Indian poet. While he voices like other poets writing in other parts of the world, feelings like, love, disappointment, awe, envy, desire, ambition, search, etc, he gives to these feelings a typical Indian tinge and shade. A distinctive Indianness can be noted out after reading his poems. The theme, the diction, the imagery etc. all aspects of his poetry reflect his Indian sensibility. Indian thinking feeling, rituals, beliefs, customs, practices, superstitions, etc. all are reflected in his poems. He was born in Bombay and lived most part of his life in India. He knows India very well in all its colour and shades. Free and frank treatment of human sexuality, portrayal of Indian spirituality, expressing egalitarian concern in Indian characters, Indian speech etc. all these aspects of Indian sensibility are rendered through his poetry. He is most representative poet, reflecting the multiple Indian reality is his poetry. The present paper aims to make his study of treatment of Indian sensibility in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. What constitutes Indian Sensibility and how it is portrayed in his poetry is the main focus of this paper.

What constitutes Indian Sensibility

Before an analysis of Ezekiel's poems, we must work out a sketch of Indian sensibility. Most obviously, the Indian sensibility comprises Indian rituals, beliefs, practices, customs, and superstitions. The Indian sensibility also implies a spiritual, other worldly frame of mind. Here spirituality has always been an integral part of Indian life. A search of self and a quest for spirituality has been in the fabric of Indian society since ancient times. Free and frank treatment of love is also the main element of Indian sensibility. It may also be extended to a general love of humanity or a streak of humanity. Perhaps the most literal and obvious manifestation of an Indian bend of mind would be the use of Indian English, Indian expressions and Indian way of thought. In all these aspects, in addition to a number of indirect and subtle ways, Ezekiel reveals his Indian sensibility in his poems.

Ezekiel's Rendering of Indian Rituals, Practices and Thoughts

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Ezekiel's poems on their face have an Indian imprint, for these are set in Indian settings, they have Indian characters, rituals, practices and thoughts. *Night of the Scorpion* is the most celebrated poem of Ezekiel's precisely for this reason alone. The poem describes how the poet persona's mother is bitten by a scorpion and how the villagers sympathize with her.

"The peasants came like swarms of flies."

They "buzzed the name of God a hundred times to paralyze evil one."

They "Clicked their tongues."

The typical Hindu attitude of fatalism, (beliefs and superstitions) of regarding life as a continuum, of accepting realities as sacred and sacrosanct- all get perfectly reflected in these lines.....

"May the sins of your previous birth

Be burned away tonight, they said

May your suffering decrease

the misfortunes of your next birth, they said

May the poison purify yours flesh of desire,

and your spirit of ambition, they said."

Indian beliefs and superstitions get fully reflected in his poetry. The poet persona in – 'The visitor' listens to the cawing of crow three times. This makes him excited with the expectation of an important visitor, but to his disappointment nothing special happens.

Free and Frank Treatment of Human Sexuality

The emphasis on frank treatment of human sexuality is a part of Ezekiel's poetic legacy. His "Passion poems" especially like 'Summer', 'Monsoon', 'Names', 'On Giving Reasons,' 'Loss' etc. can be read as representative of Indian sensibility of frank treatment of human sexuality. Love is a favorite theme in his poetry. In 'Passion Poems' he focuses on bodily and physical aspects of reality. He presents passion as legitimate There is no guilt or shame about the game of love. His 'Passion poems' celebrate the physical and sexual relationship between man and woman.

"Summer" describes summer season as -

" too warm for love making but not too warm for caressing"

In "Monsoon" the parts of female anatomy are talked about.

"Loss" where the poet persona would not like to resist the seductive charm of the beloved. Only the meditating Shiva can remain unmoved, and he does not 'meditate at all'. the emphasis on celebrating the experimental ,the passionate love in the poems like 'On Giving Reasons', 'Names' among others can be taken to be rendering of Indian sensibility.

Physical Love Equated with Spiritual Love

Ezekiel equates sexual with the spiritual .In his poem only genuine and sincere love has been celebrated. Ezekiel celebrates only genuine love, while selfish love and use of partner has been condemned by him. It is only genuine, sincere, reciprocal love that is healthy and giving meaning to the life of the lovers .He asks his readers to rise from physical love to spiritual love. There should be meeting of hearts and minds along with the meeting of bodies.

‘Tantra Sutra’, Vatsyan’s, ‘Kamasutra’ and Khajuraho temples all accept and respect and celebrate human sexuality. Same acceptance and celebration of physical love, we find in Ezekiel’s poetry. They ask man to accept, respect and celebrate physical love but at the same time to take it higher realms of human experiences. Rising from sex to superconsciousness has been in Indian philosophy since ancient times. This has been well portrayed in Ezekiel’s poetry,

Ezekiel’s Rendering of Indian Spirituality

Despite being a Jew, Ezekiel imbibed thoroughly the Indian thought and philosophy and that finds authentic representation in his poetry. Poems like “Happening”, “Speech and Silence”, “Tribute to Upanishads” and others clearly reflect Indian spirituality and philosophy. In “Happening” the poet expresses the Indian religious belief that the whole cosmos is contained within individual consciousness when he says-

“I am near everybody
Being near myself alone”.

This refers to the Hindu Advaita Philosophy enunciated by Shankara in 6th Century A.D, where the operative word is “Brahmsami” or “ I am the cosmos”. Ezekiel considers himself as a part of the divine spark.

In “Speech and Silence” the poet espouses the virtue of silence which in Indian philosophy is highly prized as communication with one’s inner self and with God, he says:-

“If speech in truly speech,
Silence a whisper of eternity’.

In “Tribute to Upanishads” he perceives himself as the observant part (“eye”) of the ever present cosmic reality (“eye”) i.e. , “eye of the eye”

Ezekiel’s Egalitarian Concerns are Indian

His poetry aims for Satyam ,Shivam, Sundaram. i.e. the truthful, the eternal and the beautiful. Ordinary events of life should be taken up with pleasant and happy attitude. Despite of all its ugliness the world is beautiful. In ordinary lies the extraordinary.

“Secret faults concealed no more.
Withdrawn to look,
At my condition,
Secret faults concealed no more.
A lighter touch,
A smoother line
Excesses cut...Simplicity...
And secret faults concealed no more.
The going forth.... Prepared with prayer...
The timely return...Redeemed with prayer,
The aspiration.....Found again.... I start again,
With secret faults concealed no more.” (A Time to Change)

His praying to God has strength end him to renew his aspiration for the higher states of mind. In such an enlightened, reinvigorated and renewed mood, the poet start a new his onward

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march in a state of complete self –awareness. He knows his strengths. He knows his weaknesses also because he is no more hiding his weakness from others as well as from himself.

Simple living and High thinking has been appreciated. The poet is emphasizing the value of a joyfully singing inner voice and a contented simple life.

“The talking voice..... For hours and days..
The singing voice.....To utter praise..
A bit of land..A woman too...
Grapes of figs.....
And metaphors... ..Insight illumination.
Secret fault concealed no more.” (A Time to Change)

Ezekiel Reflection of Indian Characters

Ezekiel poetry reflects Indian sensibility by portraying some attitudes which are taken to be associated with Indian character in general. Some such general Character traits are- excessive concern with politics, exaggerated importance given to achievements of ancient India, fondness for the things Indian and debunking of modern or foreign things and love for high sounding ,pompous word. ‘The Patriot’ shows most of these attitudes:-

“Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi.”
“ Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct
I Should say 200% correct.
But Modren generation is neglecting_____
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.”
“ How one goonda fellow.
Throw stone at Indirabekn”
“ Everything is coming-----
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception”
“ You want one glass lassi?
Very good for digestion.
With little salt lovely drink,
Better than wine.”

Ezekiel’s Reflection of Indian Speech

Ezekiel reflects Indian sensibility by portraying Indian speech also. One common way of lending an Indian touch is to use Indian names, Indian terms and Indian ways of speech. Ezekiel in a number of poems like “ The Patriot”, “ The Railway clerk”, “ Goodbye Party of Miss Puspha T.S.” etc. has presented English as supposedly spoken by Indians. In “The Patriot” he makes his speaker- persons says:

“I am standing for peace and non –violence
Why world is fighting, fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.”

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“I am not believing in ceremony
I am always enjoying your company.”

Obviously Ezekiel is targeting at the insistent use of progressive tense for the simple variety of the tense, not using the definite article ‘ the’ and collocation of a number of words in a rather- amusing manner. Such touches become very convenient of raising a laugh. Nissim Ezekiel is a very Indian poet writing in English. He is entirely Indian in his sensibility. He has not only tried to describe Indian culture but he has made good use of ‘ Babu Angrezi’ or Indian English.

Conclusion

Ezekiel is the Indian English poet well aware of Indian sensibility. He is well aware of past and present Indian culture and society. He is well dipped in knowledge of Indian values, thoughts, beliefs, customs and traditions. Indian philosophy, speech, characters etc. all are depicted through his poetry All these aspect which constitute Indian sensibility have been well incorporated in his poetry. He is an Indian poet and all his poetry carry an Indian ring about it. Nissim Ezekiel is essentially Indian in his sensibility; he is a great Indian poet writing in English, without losing his national identity. “Background, causally” gives expression to his love of the soil in quite unequivocal terms. He affirms that he is very much an Indian and that his roots lie deep in India. “I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am Indian.”

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