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Social aspects in the poems of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla

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Society marks the beginning of any civilization. Before understanding the poems of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla we should understand the proper meaning and function of social aspects. Society is constructed through some set up rules which include religion and language. This acts like a tool in constructing a healthy society. After religion and language there comes education which distinguishes human beings from other creatures of the earth. We all know such things but we take these things as for granted and that is why we have anti social elements and criminals in our society. No society can exist without these antisocial elements and criminals. I am talking about anti social elements and criminals because keki N. Daruwalla has served in Indian Police Service and he has a wide experience of reading characters in the society. It is visible in his poems and it is one of the reasons that we should understand the proper strata of the society. History has witnessed so many civilizations which vanished with the flow of time. Every society were nurtured according to the demand of time and thus it is clear that time plays a very important role in constructing any society. Let us not be confused between civilization and society. They are not synonyms to each other but they complete each other.

Keywords- Society, Nissim Ezekiel, Religion, Language, Rules

Nissim Ezekiel was a man who was considered as an outsider because of his race. He has an insight to scan the society with his critical eyes. He belonged to the group of “New Poets”¹.

Readers found new hopes with the rise of new form of literature. The reaction of Second World War was also visible in India and it was the precursor of modernism. Nissim Ezekiel is like William Wordsworth in terms of subjectivity. Ezekiel becomes nostalgic for Bombay and

Wordsworth for Tintern Abbey. It is not the place which matters a lot but it is about special people in life. Thus, place becomes important because of our loved ones. Wordsworth has visited Tintern Abbey with his sister but on the revisit he was no more with his sister. This was the thing which was ailing him because he was comparing the revisit to the earlier visit. This sense of comparison gives him a sudden pain and the particular place becomes important for him. It is the condition with Ezekiel also because time and again he says that he has special place for Bombay because he spent his lovely days here. It is also visible in case of Keki.N.Daruwalla because he also mentions the Ghats of Banaras in some of his works. Here, I want to state that place is not important without our loved ones. A particular place becomes important when it is attached to our memory. Memory plays a crucial role in social construct. Memory is related to surrounding that is to say environment. This is one of the reasons that we have different classified poets. In the poems of Nissim Ezekiel we hardly find elements from mythology because his poems are full of bare reality and the philosophy of the society. In *Prayer* he says that it is a “transcendental speech”². It secures us from evil forces. This kind of poetry elevates us to understand the contemporary society. It is interesting to compare such beliefs of Ezekiel and Daruwalla because both have different understanding of similar subject. In *Prayer* Ezekiel is transcendental whereas in *Fire-Hymn* Daruwalla is intentional. To compare these two elements we will have to understand the true meaning of transcendentalism. It has been taken from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant³. This concept was taken far away by Emerson. It is actually related to human understanding of the nature. It was a movement in New England in 1836 which taught the world that there is a universe away from the scientific enquiry. In simple terms we should understand that it supported spiritualism. There was always a dichotomy between rationalism and transcendentalism. It is a state of mind which perceives

things differently. In Fire- Hymn Daruwalla states that- “wandering ghost lights frightened passers-by”⁴. Daruwalla is a kind of poet who writes on different themes. To him what a human mind cannot perceive is transcendentalism. This is one of the reasons that there are negativities in his poems. I have already stated that he was in police service so he had a vision to look the society critically. His concept of ghost is like a light which is capable of making people scared. He was a true Zoroastrian by heart who wanted to save people from committing sin. Here lies the basic difference between Ezekiel and Daruwalla. The former wanted to critic the society and the later wanted to save the society which was not possible. Thus, Ezekiel is capable of creating awareness in the society yet he was looked down by the prominent members of the society. Ezekiel hardly cared about this and he made people believe that he was a true Indian. He was practical in nature and it is visible through his use of free verse in several of his poems. He hardly cared for set up rules for writing poetry because he considered poetry as an inward force to understand the world. I have used world in place of India because the sentiments generated by Ezekiel is universal in appeal. It is visible through the poems like *Night of the Scorpion*⁵. In this poem the poet successfully depicts the rural society where people believe in karma. The mother is stung by a scorpion and she cries in pain yet she is thankful to the almighty that the scorpion spared her children. For a mother everyday is children’s day because she always thinks about the betterment of her children. It is truly visible in this poem. Either it is India or abroad a mother always loves her children. In this poem the mother is suffering but she is not thinking about herself but her children because she perceives herself in her children. It proves that a child is the reflection of his mother. Critics and scholars can argue that this kind of love is also narcissistic because by loving her children the mother loves herself. However, this is not correct because literature has seen mothers like *Medea* who

killed her own children only to take revenge from her husband Jason. Euripides has tried to show us the darker side of revenge through *Medea*. Let us not go deep in this debate and come back to the present chapter. The social aspects in Ezekiel's poetry parallel to Keki N. Daruwalla in terms of realism. If Daruwalla shows us the darker side of the society Ezekiel also gives us a glimpse of evil forces present in the society. These evil forces are in form of malpractices and superstitions which corrodes Indian society and thus acts as a hurdle for national development. In *Under Orion* Daruwalla has presented an admixture of mythology and reality. It is the collection of poems where readers can witness so many themes in a single book. This is one of the reasons that it has attracted scholars and critics. *Curfew in a Riot-torn City* is the beginning poem where we can find the conditions prevailing to situations like riot and curfew. *Death by Burial* is another poem where we can find the clash between the ideologies of the Hindus and the Muslims. Daruwalla has tried to show us the situation of the country during that period. A village of North India is mentioned in the poem and villagers have caught members of a gang who have revisited the village. The bloodshed and violence depicted in the poems of Daruwalla suggests that it cannot be poetry but it is poetry expressed with feelings which cannot be denied. It was the period where people felt distrust in the society. After partition of the nation Hindus and the Muslims were ready to kill one another. It was the situation which witnessed division of the country on the name of caste and religion. Before partition of the nation Hindus and the Muslims used to live together in the same village like brothers. They used to celebrate together their happiness and divided their anguish but with the flow of time everything changed. Rape, violence, murder and mutilation were commonly found in almost all the regions of the country. The poems of Daruwalla clearly reveal such things. On the other hand if we look at the poems written by Nissim Ezekiel we

find that in his poetry there is less violence and turbulence yet it is more critical. It is critical because he fights for asserting his own crisis. It can be personal because he keeps on thinking about his identity. Scholars and critics assert that his subject is India. He continuously pledges about his own belonging. Identity is uprooted in Daruwalla whereas it is asserted in Ezekiel. Awareness of the country is the raw material for the poems of Ezekiel.

The social aspects in the poetry of these poets make us understand that no one's life is perfect and imperfection is the essence of life. Some people have a natural strength to deal with it positively and some need help to do the same. Ultimately, the intent is to live and appreciate the life God has given us with a smile. And such beautiful works of literature help people in achieving this goal. The relationships of the characters in the poems reveal that sometimes in life we give so much importance to trivial things that the real essence of life and relationship seems to fade away. People miss to see the good part in other peoples' behaviour and focus more on the shortcomings. For example, a couple is supposed to complement each other and not be the mirror images. God made perfect pairs and designed them as puzzles which he later broke into halves. We all are halves of a puzzle and are supposed to find our right half. This would recreate a perfect puzzle. We tend to forget this in life and keep on looking for our twin as a perfect match.

The characters in the poems teach us that no matter how much unhappy we are in a relationship, there is always a way to sort things out. And if fixing things are not possible, it's okay to part ways in a peaceful way. We always hear that love is meant to be eternal but in case there is no love it is better to end the companionship rather than making it ugly. Losing dignity, betrayal and disrespecting can never be a wise way of dealing with the problem in our

life. This solution would not help anyone in the long run. The intricacies of life and relationships have been discussed in the work of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla.

The identity crisis in the poems of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla makes the characters wonder why God had given others everything when they never desired for it. Their question was why they were not chosen for that blessing and they want to know what wrong they did to deserve such a huge hit in their life. Eventually, they get their answers and learnt that God give everything to people who walk on the path of unconditional love, compassion and are satisfied with whatever they have got in life. People who chose shortcuts or the wrong path to get their desires fulfilled get the hit from the cycle of Karma. They now understood that life comes in a circle, whatever we give definitely comes back to us. Karma of my life had taught them a good lesson which can never be forgotten.

The characters in the poem express their feelings by saying that they had utilised another chance given by life to improve my track record. And as the poet said we do not have control on what has already happened. We can only work on our future actions to correct our past and improve our future. We believe that's how cycle of life works. We were very happy and feeling better to see people blessing me from their heart. The tough times faced had given the characters an awakening call in life and they had now started believing in Karma.

The social aspects in the work of Nissim Ezekiel reveals that in life sometimes we do not give importance to what we have and keep on trying for other things. May be that is a basic human nature. Further, it states that even if we want to punish someone, taking revenge is not the right solution, as that will make them feel proud of their decision of leaving us. If we really want someone to realise our importance, the best way is to leave them, forget them and forgive

them. If they are meant to be in our life, they will come back, else just let them go. It is good to end things on a happy note. Bitterness is not going to help anyone. Life is long and it is fine to end a chapter and start a new one if we are stuck and not going anywhere. There is no point spending our time and energy in anything which is aimed for destruction. In life change is the only constant and we have to keep on moving to survive.

The poet Keki N. Daruwalla also talks about the love through his characters and says that being in love is a beautiful feeling. And life is blank without love. No material thing can replace the satisfaction that is given by the beautiful feeling of love. His characters explain that love can be found in different forms. It was not necessary to have a partner in our life. It was very important to love ourselves in a way that makes us happy. It was significant to love others as well. Any action of ours that give others a reason to be happy will give us the kind of satisfaction which cannot be defined.

The poet further states that in our society it is a taboo to talk about our mental health. We have medical provisions readily available to take care of our physical well-being. But the options where we can go to bring our mental health on track are not very much acceptable socially. Even the poet was not much aware about such therapy clinics until he portrayed that through his characters and realised its need in the life. His characters had never thought that in any place like this they would be able to sit in front of a stranger and discuss their life problems that had been impacting their mental peace. They would have never realised this urge to come up and talk about it unless the signs of depression were evident in his characters. He says that his characters have always been a happy soul with a lot of dreams in their life. However, his characters were facing such prolonged phase of sadness that would take them towards

depression. The tussle created while finding the identity and the roots of origin in his poems had created a long term impact on the mental health of his characters.

Post independence Indian English poetry is filled with the trauma of partition and poets like Daruwalla and Ezekiel try to bring some solace in the society through their poems. In a poem entitled *Choices* the poet Ezekiel unfolds his understanding of morality and spirituality. Both the terms are interconnected to each other. The poet makes a point that he want to live with full freedom. His understanding of freedom is philosophical in nature. Several scholars and critics have said that his freedom is the quest for liberalism. He believed in the theory of live and let others live. It was applied not only in case of freedom but in case of loyalty and love also. In *The Room* Ezekiel again remarks that his individuality and struggle for “existence is presumption”⁶. This presumption is like a door which is not closed. This kind of presumption is challenged in *To a Certain Lady* and finally we come across the real meaning of life. Ezekiel talks about life of lovers in this poem. He says that a lover and a beloved is married not only to pay bills and think for their children but to understand each other every time. Even in the minute time difference there must not be separation among them. This kind of existence can hardly be found in real world. If we talk about today we will find wives and husbands falling apart to create a hollow world. Modernism has not only given us technical advancement but it has also created a wasteland. Thus, what Ezekiel wrote was a paradox and it will become clearer in poems like *Happening*. In this poem he says that to move forward in life a man must have skeptical eyes. That is to say he should withdraw his persona into himself. It can be self speculation. Scholars will understand it as introspection. This kind of introspection is also found in the poems of Keki N. Daruwalla. In case of Ezekiel speculation is personal that is why it is self but in case of Daruwalla the speculation is created after violence. Thus, violence is

missing in case of Ezekiel. Let us find it in detail in case of Daruwalla. Looking into the dynamics of the poem *Death by Burial* we will find that chaos and mob violence is marked throughout the poem. The gang members caught by the villagers are brutally treated and it reminds me about an Indian cinema entitled “Gangajal”⁷ where culprits and criminals are made blind through the use of an acid taken out from the battery used in vehicles. This deed is performed by top cops and in the city of Tejpur it becomes an example for common men. People start practicing such violence even on road and the society stands neutral. These practices are evil because it cannot be accepted in any civilized society. Here again the role of images becomes crucial. We will have to understand it to understand the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla. He is conscious of images related to one another. It is related to social aspects because in society everything is interlinked. This is one of the reasons that in a society every good thing is shared by people. We have public transports, public toilets, public cinema, schools, theatres, colleges. I mean to say that every good thing shared by people in a civilized society. Now, the question arises that if goodness is shared then what about the evil. Every coin has two sides that is to say positive and negative. If positivity is shared and appreciated then we should also think about the negativity because we cannot forget it. Anti social elements and criminals also flourish in the same society. If positivity exists then it means that negativity cannot be denied. Ezekiel and Daruwalla are two wings of same society. I am making a point here that Daruwalla is conscious enough to understand that social aspects of any civilization is dependent upon its criminals. I mean to say how clean is the society is decided by criminals and anti social elements. In Pakistan terrorism is widespread it means that it is not only lethal for India and the world but it is lethal for Pakistan also. A father exists in the society only if his son or daughter survives. Similarly existence of God is dependent upon the existence of the

devil. If devil is finished it means that people will start losing faith in the almighty. Ignorance cannot be bliss in this case. It is one of the reasons that poets like Daruwalla keeps on raising the issues of violence and turbulence. It is needed to restore normalcy in adverse situation. Indian mythology is full of such violence. In Ramayana and Mahabharata we have seen how normalcy have been restored by the use of violence. On the other hand let us analyze *The patriot* by Nissim Ezekiel. In this poem Ezekiel asks the readers to follow the path of Mahatma Gandhi but he forgets that Gandhi was neutrally taken by the citizens of India during the time of partition of the nation. Ezekiel asks the readers to follow the path of non violence but he forgets that people consider the principles of non violence as feeble and weak. It is one of the reasons that during the time of partition bloodshed, violence, rape, murder and mutilation was commonly found in streets. I mean to say that the doctrines of Ezekiel is good but impractical whereas Daruwalla is less emotional but practical. I may be wrong in my interpretations but such points which I have made cannot be avoided. The present chapter acts like a scrutiny to analyze the social aspects presented through the poems of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla. To establish equilibrium in the society a saint and a sinner both are necessary. This is why William Blake wrote *The Tyger*⁸. Blake has asked a very good question-

“Did he who made the Lamb make thee”⁹

It is a question of survival that lamb and tiger both have been created by God and both exist together. How is it possible that God can create soft Lamb as well as tyrannous tiger? The answer lies in the fact that the ultimate goal of the almighty is to restore peace in the world. Both lamb and tiger is Christ himself and both stand firm according to the situation. Similarly Ezekiel and Daruwalla both are pillars of modern Indian English Poetry who act like alter ego

of one another. The reference of Christ as a tiger can be seen in one of the most famous poem of T.S.Eliot entitled *Gerontion*¹⁰. These aspects are necessary to prove that in a society God's wrath and benevolence both is necessary otherwise the situation of chaos will be created. Ezekiel is as soft as lamb and it can be seen in his "*Latter Day Psalms*"¹¹ where he suggests that every man, woman and child has the right to sleep peacefully and when they rise they have mercy of God. This mercy is also seen in the poems of Daruwalla but his mercy comes out of chaos where we find God in form of tiger. In *Fire-Hymn* Daruwalla says that he wants to save the fire who forgets to burn fully the dead bodies. By saving the fire he means that fire also commits sin by eating only half of the body and leaving the half and this act is not less than "debauchery"¹². We have already seen the violence in *Death by Burial*¹³. It reminds me of Eliot's *Death by Water*¹⁴ which is a part of *The Wasteland*. Eliot talks about the futility of modernism in the poem. Scholars and critics have agreed that the poem highlights moral degeneration of the people. It is one of my favorite poems because it was taught to me by Dr. Arun Kumar Jha and he made me understand that there is no need to rush in life. God has gifted us life to enjoy his creations but we human beings have gone ahead and forgot the almighty. This is why Eliot talks about moral degeneration where human beings are spiritually and morally sterile like Fisher king. There are certain parallels in the writings of Keki N. Daruwalla and T.s Eliot in terms of language. The language used by Nissim Ezekiel is simple but his philosophy is complex yet it appeals to the readers. His sense of assertion is strong and it seems that his language is the language of the poetry of modern India. In case of Druwalla we will find that there are several characters in his poetry and it seems that it is not poetry but some prose. It is the nature of poetry that it evokes sentiments in readers whereas it is the nature of prose that it evokes catharsis in readers. Catharsis is a term widely used by Aristotle

and he has also explained the effect of catharsis to readers. The motive of catharsis is to evoke pity and fear in readers. It is closely associated with tragedy and by reading the poems of Daruwalla we find the elements like darkness, sadness and death. Thus, it becomes clear that as a poet why Ezekiel was more popular than Daruwalla. It is correct that Daruwalla is more practical than Ezekiel but his language is not the language of poetry. I am not talking about form and class of poetry because in modern times we are aware that poets feel free to use blank verse and free verse. Ezekiel has also used blank verse and free verse along with iambic pentameter but his poetry is somehow sensual. In terms of sensuality it is not similar to Keats but it has the appeal like Sri Aurobindo and Rabindra Nath Tagore. Thus, in this chapter we have seen how social aspects have been dealt upon by Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla. In the next chapter we will discuss in detail problems of style and imagery.

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