

# Indian Sensibility in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel

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**Abstract:** 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. In fact, we can regard him as one of the towering figures among the Indo-English poets though we find it difficult to accept him as an Indian poet because he is essentially and basically a foreigner who was born in India and who has lived in India all his life. Yet, he is accepted as main poet in the history of Indian English Poetry. He is the first Indian poet to express modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom. Indianness is an important element and a major theme in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. His Indianness lies in the commitment to this country and in his earnest and sincere endeavour to bring about some improvement in the conditions of life in this country through his poetry. And we should appreciate this Jewish authors' identification with this country to the extent of wanting to bring about certain improvements in the depressing, degrading and disgusting conditions of life in this country as represented by the metropolitan city of Bombay. The desire to see better conditions of life in this country connotes a certain degree of patriotism and in Ezekiel's case it certainly shows his love for the country of his adoption.

**Keywords :** Indianness, Sensibility, Culture, Language, Identification.

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the greatest poets of India writing in English. He is considered as the father of modern Indian English poetry. Nissim Ezekiel has developed great inclination towards his country India, its landscapes and its social milieu. He was born in a Jewish family but embraced India as his country. He not only loves his country but also the city, Bombay in which he lives and because of this love he does not want to leave his city. C. D. Narsimhaiah says, "... to the extent he (Ezekiel) has availed himself of the composite culture of India to which he belongs, he must be an important poet not merely the Indian context but in a consideration of those that are writing poetry anywhere in English"(40) In an interview with Frank Birbal Singh he says, "I am an Indian national I was born in India; my tribe of the Jewish community has lived in India for 2,000 years. If I had rejected my Indianness, which some other writers obviously have done, and if I had decided that I am so much of an outsider that I have to settle down in London or New York, and then, even if I did write about India, I don't know if I could be regarded as an Indo-English Writer. There would be some problems in that situation, though there are marginal cases." Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is full of Indianness. 'Background Casually' is one of the biographical poem written by Nissim Ezekiel which shows his loyalty towards India Some of the lines from the poem are as under:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes  
 I have become part of it  
 To observe my foreigners.  
 They say that I am singular,  
 Their letters overstate the case.  
 I have made my commitments now.  
 This is one, to say where I am  
 As others choose to give themselves.  
 In some remote and backward place.  
 My backward place is where I am.

(Collected Poem, 181)

Indian writing in English displays the author's cultural, socio political and religious history. Nissim Ezekiel is so devoted to his Bombay city that he has made the city and the city life core of his poetry. He

says, "I am conscious of my very special situation in relation to India, as a poet, but as a person and citizen I identify myself completely with the country. Its politics, social life, civic problems, education, economic difficulties, cultural dilemmas are all part of my daily life. I would like that cultural identification to be fully expressed in my poetry but it is perhaps only partially so." (Chindhade 2001)

Like T.S.Eliot, Ezekiel has felt a liability to serve his country and society in which he resides. His Indian sensibility brings a new charm in his poetry. Bruce King says,

"His main significance is not, however, as a promoter of poetry; it is in his will to be poet, his continuing involvement in the poetry scene and the ways in which the developing body of his work expresses his quest for a satisfactory way of living in this world. Whereas previously Indian English verse was a hobby, something done in spare moments, Ezekiel made it central to his life. Others wrote poems, he wrote poetry. The difference is reflected in his craftsmanship and purposefulness; this is as much a matter of will as talent. Ezekiel brought sense of discipline, self-criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry." (Bruce 1981).

'Night of the Scorpion' published in the poetic collection *'The Exact Name'* 1965 is one of the best poems of Indian English poetry. According to M. K. Naik, "*Night of the Scorpion*' is generally taken to be an ironic presentation of the contrast between popular superstition and skeptical rationalism." (Naik, 1984). The poem describes how the mother of speaker is stung by a scorpion that enters the speaker's house because of rain outside. To get poison out of her and to get relief from the pain she is given several treatments. She is more concerned for her children than her own suffering.

"My mother only said  
Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
And spared my children." (Collected Poems 131)

The languages of Ezekiel's poems contain a large amount of 'Indian' English. The informal language and the frequent use of present tense is the indication of use of 'Indian English' by the native speakers. Chetan Karnani says, "No other poet has successfully exploited the nuances of Indian English as Ezekiel has done." (Chetan, 1947)

## CONCLUSION

Nissim Ezekiel being the father of modern as well as post independence Indian English poetry has brought an innovative change in Indian Poetry. He not only loves India but also the city of Bombay in which he lives. Indian sensibility is an important element that Nissim Ezekiel uses in his poetry to express his thoughts and feelings. Indianness is one of the major themes in Ezekiel's poetry. Nissim Ezekiel, because of Indianness is deeply connected with India, its people and culture.

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