

## **Alienation As The Major Theme In The Poetry Of Nissim Ezekiel**

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### **Abstract**

Nissim Ezekiel is regarded as the father of the post-Independence Indian English Verse. He is a trend setter who started Modernity in Indian English Poetry. Indian English poets followed the simple conversational style of Nissim Ezekiel. Ezekiel has expressed his experience of alienation in his volumes of poetry. He was born in India and grew up in Indian atmosphere and surroundings but he could never establish a harmony between himself and his surroundings which makes him a poet of alienation and this has become the central theme of his poetic creations. Ezekiel himself was aware of this aspect of his poetry and he once said that a feeling of alienation from one's environment may be undesirable from the moral and social points of views, but it is always paying fruitful and productive in artistic ways and this is quite true in the case of Ezekiel himself.

Indian poetry in English surely partakes this deepening spirit of the modern age and tries to articulate distinctly Indian response to it which lands it a particular flavor. M.K. Naik's observation is very perspicuous in the regard, "while alienation is the dubious birth right of the modern artist in any society, the situation of the contemporary Indian English poets reveal several forces at work which appear to generate a specially strong sense as alienation in him;"

The alienation, discrimination and torture Ezekiel had to bear in his childhood are expressed clearly in many of his poems. Background casually his autobiographical poem produces a powerful feeling of alienation. This poem is satirical. He frankly admits the social and cultural alienation. It is because Ezekiel was a Jew, he did not belong to India by blood and so the harmony between two foreign strange cultures was impossible. It is obvious that Ezekiel had decided to live here and adopted India as his own but the gap of place in his poems, his irritation and dislike disclose this fact of alienation. He recollects his school days when the Hindu and

Muslim boys teased him to his great irritation but he was quite helpless. In the poem 'Background Casually' the poem speaks about his school time:

I went to Roman Catholic School  
A mugging Jew among waves  
They told me I had killed the Christ  
A Muslim Sports man boxes my ears  
I grew in terror of the strong  
But under nourished Hindu lad  
Their prepositions always wrong  
Repelled me by passivity  
One noisy day I used a knife

(Ezekiel Collected poems 179)

Ezekiel indicates the prevailing feeling of religious and communal discrimination in Indian society. He feels alienated from his class mates. He again feels alienated among the Hindus and the Muslims as he belongs to a minority community. "He feels alienation with his family as they try to bind him to follow bend of the family responsibilities against his free will as poet. To escape all this he flies to London. But there also the feelings of alienation among the strangers haunts him and he starts craving for returning back to India, his birth place.

(Ezekiel collected poems 179)

Ezekiel Continues in" Background Casually  
I have made commitments now  
This is one: 'to stay where I am  
As others choose to give themselves  
In Some remote and background place.

{Ezekiel collected poems 181}

These lines reflect that Ezekiel is totally committed to India as he has no place to go. He understands that he cannot get rid of his sense of being an Indian. Now he is a part of India as India is the part of his soul. A Passage in Ezekiel well known essay Naipaul's India and Mino shows the importance of Indian is life. In India which have permitted to call mine. I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all darkness. My Naipaul discovered to other countries. I am a foreigner in India. I am an Indian.'

(Awasthi 81)

He was frequently ill-treated by Indian boys and once a Muslim had boxed him on his ears and since then he was in a terror of the other boys.

They had tortured him in a various other ways. This was his early experience and so a harmony in these surroundings was impossible. A feeling of hatred and alienation developed since his school time which haunted him all his life. Although he lives in India and describes Indian life and society, the irony and ballerinas in his tone is quite obvious everywhere. He

sometime tries to attain were harmony but failed because his early impressions were much more powerful and he could not wipe them away all his life. Landon and background casually are the best proof of his sense of alienation in him. He disagrees with the prevailing Indian condition still he is committed to stay in India which is enough to prove the deep rooted sense of alienation in him. M.K. Naik writes:

“Ezekiel is acutely aware of this alienation being accentuated by the fact that he has spent most of his life in highly westernized circles in cosmopolitan Bombay with Marathi con is own admission as his lost mother tongue” and English his second’ Mother tongue; Ezekiel quest for integration made for a restless career of quick change and experiments including, Philosophy/Poetry and poetry in a London basement room and attempts at journalism, publishing and advertising – and even a spell of working as a factory manage – before he settled down as a university teacher in his bitter native city. The alienation theme is thus central to Ezekiel is work and colours his retire poetic universe” (2)

In an interview Ezekiel discussed the phenomenon of alienation at some length some years ago and asked the questions: “How would you react to the change that most Indian writers in English are alienation?”

Ezekiel replied, “Actually I would like to see some alienation among Indian English writers. However undesirable from social moral and other points of view, it has been aesthetically very productive, provided it is genuine. You cannot pretend you cannot play the game of alienation ..... feel you are hostile towards others and they are hostile to you. You hate their gate and they hate yours. This can produce great literature. This genuine alienation, is really absent. Asked to define alienation he answered:

“For an Indian, English writer to be alienated, he must have contempt for his audience and a similar failure on his part pointlessness in trying to communicate. I know no such Indian writer, isolated like a Camus or Dostoevsky character. What they really mean is that these writers use an alien language.”

Ezekiel’s background itself provides a copy book example of social and cultural alienation, the story of which is told in background causally. He was born in a Israel family which migrated to India generation ago.

My ancestors, among the cases,  
Where aliens crushing sped for bread.”

Man has now because an aliens a stranger to himself and to his fellow man by virtue of his willed seclusion. Building empires of worldly success on the foundation of human exploitation he prides himself on the glittering but hollow appearance of super civilization. A sensitive artist like Nissim Ezekiel probes deep into the real nature and essence of this civilization, and gives us his vision of dark interior that breeds monstrous infidelities and sinister betrayals and reveals beastly ingratitude’s and foul deception the beneath the transparent garb of false cordiality Nissim Ezekiel’s poems are a compassionate plea for the resuscitation and

preservation of human values to enable mankind to avoid searching a state of nothingness and total extinction.

Express your gratitude  
By giving what you have to give  
You may get nothing in return.  
And bear your restlessness with grace.

Ezekiel has himself declared. "My background makes me a natural outsider circumstances and decisions relate me to India." At the same time the poet's alienation from his own minority religious echoes also appear to have begun quite early. He himself has confessed, At home on Friday nights the prayers were said, my morals had declined. I heard of yoga and of Zen could I, perhaps, be rabbi saints? The more I searched, the less I found." (Background Casaully.)of great leaders.' Gradually interpolate these things into the collection consciousness  
....

Latter day psalms also offer direct criticism of modern life and civilization as when the poet asks,

What have we done with the dominion  
Thou hast given up,  
What are we doing to the sheep and the oxen?  
And beasts of the field the fowl of the air  
And the fish of the sea."

The concluding lines of latter day Psalms is a comment on the previous line on The one hundred and fifty Old Testament Psalm. The poet tells us here that he finds:

All that fuss about faith etc .....  
Bearing and pathetic though  
He adds but how elemental,  
How spiritual the language.  
How fiery and human  
In the felly as its feeling."

This is alienation between the religious persons and the common man which causes the frustration in the poet. He has also attacked the charity groups with same sense. Nobody has any sympatric feeling for others. The students go to distributes edibles among the flood victims not because they have any attachment with them but because they want to be photographed in this act. So not only the poet but every man in the society suffers from this alienation. Ezekiel could not identity his sells with his own culture and the ways of life on the one hand is the picture baggers who smile at and mock every foreigner which implies their alienation from them. But on the other hand, as in Jewish Wedding in Bombay, his alienation from his own, Jewish community is clear. His alienation ironically describes the Jewish ritual and hypocrisy of orthodoxy and reveals his disillusionment.

But the fact remains that in spite of the alienation, Ezekiel wants to create reconciliation between himself and society around him –

I cannot leave the island  
I was born here and belong

### **Works Cited**

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