

## AN ORIENTAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF NISSIM EZEKIEL'S PSYCHOLOGICAL BENT OF MIND

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**ABSTRACT:** *Nissim Ezekiel is known as father of modern Indian English Poetry and also Post-independence Indian English Poetry. Displaying a dedication of heroic dimension to his vocation, he has created an oeuvre remarkable for its range and depth. He is the source of inspiration for the contemporary Indian English Poets. In his poems we find a wide range of religious and spiritual values, philosophical thought and east –west encounter with some oriental attitude. His poems are a piece of perfection as he rises above his personal limitations and his vision surpasses the surrounding limitations. He is against hypocrisy and dilemma as shown in his poetry. In this paper, I have tried to show his phenomena of mind and matter with psychological and oriental bent of mind through some of his everlasting verse.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sublime, Oriental, Philosophy, Psychology, Knowledge

### INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, India is considered as a ground where different cultures and creed meet. And as a result so many customs, rituals, religions are found here. So many poets came to write about this Indian temperament and Nissim Ezekiel is one of them. He is one of the most respected poets of Indian English Literature and he tries to assimilate the divergent currents and undercurrents into his poetry. He shows in his poems his philosophical outlook and with it he tries to show the psychological aspect of his poems including himself. He stands in between the fallen world and ideal world. His Jewish background and his assimilation into Indian mainstream show that whole universe is a brotherhood if we take all equally. And here his oriental attitude is also shown.

Before the short analysis of his philosophy, lets begin the discussion with his oriental outlook which is found in some of his poetry. Actually Ezekiel finds a congenial homeland in India after the humiliation and oppression which results in fear psychosis and persecution mania. He once said:

“Kick me around  
a bit more, O Lord.” (JSAL, 133)

His oriental attitude is found in the title ‘A Time to Change’ which is taken from a common prayer book. Taking the spirit of Renaissance and Twentieth century in Indian sub-continent, he wants to change himself and the whole mankind. He wants to bring fraternity, equality and liberty for us. Actually, he wants to raise India to a new level where air will be fresh with fragrance of freedom, free from fundamentalism, full of knowledge and wisdom. Although he lives in India but he has sympathy and feeling for the rural people who actually present real

India. In his poem, we often find the voice of the downtrodden people. As he says in 'For Her':

"I know that wood if burnt  
produces ash and smoke  
There is law about this, explaining  
How and where the burnt wood went." (For Her)

As an oriental poet, he wants to adopt other features, styles in his poetry and applies it in a new way. He tries to imbibe the spirit of Qawwali in some of his poetry to show the moral values, the mystery of life and unintelligible world. In his 'Two Nights of Love', we find the variations in many lines with slight changes:

"After a night of love, I dreamt of love  
After a night of love, I turned to love." (Two Nights of Love)

Actually he wants to experiment in his poetry with east west influences and attitudes. But at the same time he is conscious about his writing place and object. In his 'The Stone', we find a rhythmic and sublimated effort in different lines with slightest variations. As we find here:

"I have learnt to reveal in the stone,  
Not to be caressed, like flesh, but hard as bone  
I have learnt to love the texture of stone  
But shares its nature like the hidden bone."

As an oriental poet, he wants to surrender himself to the will of God. But it is not always possible and sometimes it becomes wrong. In his 'Planning', this change is shown:

"Relying only on the skillful hand  
Allotted for everything except a long  
Arresting arm, the unseen, the unknown." (Planning)

As a postmodern poet and to some extent a postcolonial one, he has taken in his poems Indian sensibilities, ethos, subjectivity, passivity, modesty and self-effacement. And his adaptation of oriental attitude is somewhat successful as he takes it as his duty which he rightly performs. In 'Background, Casually', he finally says:

"I have made my commitments now  
This is one: to stay where I am,  
As others choose to give themselves  
In some remote and backward place,  
My backward place is where I am." (Background Casually)

As a philosophical poet, Ezekiel's poetry often consists with metaphysics along with the principles of life and ethics. He also wants to show man's relationship with the supreme

being, man's place in the universe and the ultimate truth which can only be achieved after the realization of supreme being. As in '16<sup>th</sup> Hymns in Darkness', he writes:

“You are master  
neither of death nor of life  
Belief will not save you,  
nor unbelief.  
All you have  
Is the sense of reality  
Unfathomable  
As it yields its secrets  
Slowly One by One.” (16<sup>th</sup> Hymns in Darkness)

Not only metaphysics, but mysticism is also found in his poetry. He is really a consummate artist as he wants to bring the deep dark mystery lying in mankind, in universe and in supreme being. In his '12<sup>th</sup> of the Hymns in Darkness', he writes:

“Don't curse the darkness  
Since you're told not to,  
But don't be in a hurry  
To light a candle either.  
The darkness has its secrets  
Which light does not know.  
It's a kind of perfection  
While every light  
Distorts the truth.” (12<sup>th</sup> of the Hymns in Darkness)

To be a true poet, commitment, integrity and sincerity are needed and only after that his poetic imagination can clear his conceptions and ideas. As in 'Enterprise', he shows that the pilgrims discover nothing and their journey proves to be a failure the above qualities are absent in them. And we find it in concluding lines:

“When, finally, we reached the place,  
We hardly knew why we were there,  
The trip had darkened every face,  
Our deeds were neither great nor rare  
Home is where we have to gather grace.” (Enterprise)

Ezekiel's philosophy is about the fulfillment of self with the objective world. And his poetic world consists of religion, reality and past in a unified way. In his 'Philosophy', the concluding lines show:

“The mundane language of the senses sings  
Its own interpretations, common things  
Become, by virtue of their commonness  
An argument against their nakedness  
That dies of cold to find the truth it brings.” (Enterprise)

As a psychological poet, Ezekiel wants to explore human mind along with its conscious and subconscious thoughts and conflicts. In his 'Case Study', he also wants to explore his own mind. Here although he portrays his own image, but in disguise makes it seem that he explores the mind of another man. As it is shown:

“He came to me and this is what I said:  
The pattern will remain, unless you break  
It with a sudden jerk; but use your head  
Not all returned as heroes who had fled  
In wanting both to have and eat the cake  
Not all who fail are counted with the fake.” (Case Study)

The search for one's inner mind and thought to discover one's self is also shown in 'Island'. Here he also wants to explore mind both in philosophical and psychological way. As we find here:

“Unsuitable for song as well as sense  
The island flowers into slums  
And skyscrapers, reflecting  
Precisely the growth of my mind  
I am here to find my way in it.” (Island)

Spiritual awakening and theological aspects are also shown in his poems. He believes that God sends prophets to reveal his ideas and thoughts. And human being tries continuously to know God, the unfathomable reality. But it is beyond our capacity to know and understand the reality, the spiritual knowledge and wisdom. And Ezekiel says that God's creation is covered by humorous veils. So, without removing the veils we can't pursue the truth. And it is quite tough to remove the veils as behind veils man is hidden there. And he shows it in his poem 'Theological':

“I've stripped off a hundred veils  
and still there are more  
that cover you creation  
Why are you so elusive?  
.  
Even as myself, my very own  
Incontrovertible, unexceptional  
Self, I feel I am disguised.” (Theological)

As a philosophical poet, he develops a lot of ideas with his psychological bent of mind. Regarding salvation, he tries to put forward the naked truth that it is only God who can give salvation to all kinds of people. And he disagrees with the fact that only Jesus save man and only Lord give salvation. As he says in 'Letter-Day Psalms':

“Salvation belongs unto the  
Lord - it is not through.  
One or other church  
Their blessing is upon

All the people of the earth.” (Letter-Day Psalms)

Esekiel also wants to show the philosophy and psychology of spiritual teachers and healers as they are not always good. In his ‘Guru’, he tries to show the differences and conflicts among gurus and in their speech. They are self righteous stupor, hollow and double standard in their living and outlook. They are greedy and love foreigners more because they give more money than native rural poor Indians. As he says in ‘Guru’:

“But when we learn  
the saint is still a faithless friend,  
obstinate in argument  
ungrateful for favourite done,  
hard with servants and the poor,  
discourteous to disciples, especially men.” (Guru)

With a touch of irony and humour, he wants to show us about healer’s actual motive and aim. He wants to warn the world as well as his fellow Indians to choose consciously their guru as often they are full of confusions and contradictions in their teaching. They are not static although what they teachers refers to one static power, the supreme force of Universe more clearly God. As he says about their teaching:

“Sex is prohibited or allowed.  
Meat and drinks are prohibited  
Or allowed. Give up  
everything or nothing  
and be saved. The Master  
knows the secret.  
God’s love remains your heritage.  
You need not change  
Your way of life  
Know your mantra, meditate,  
release your Kundalini,  
get your Shakti awakening  
and float with spirit  
to your destination. (Latter-Day Psalms)

Ezekiel has firm belief in God. By examining the philosophy and psychology of mankind, he comes to a conclusion that man can’t be free from vices as he will obviously do it. And for this reason only God can save him. In his ‘Poster Prayers’, he shows this:

The vices I’ve always had  
I still have  
The virtues I’ve nearer had  
I still do not have  
From this human way of life  
Who can rescue man  
If not his maker?  
Do thy duty, Lord!” [JSAL, 133]

Ezekiel also believes that man's true power and potentiality come out in time of adversity, danger and misfortunes. So to achieve happiness and knowledge, one must have to go through problematic situations. In order to achieve this fundamental truth, he prays to God to give him misfortunes. As he says:

“Kick me around  
a bit more, O Lord.  
I see at last  
There's no other way  
For me to learn  
Your simplest truths.” [JSAL, 133]

Regarding wisdom and knowledge, he finally realizes that it is possible when one is in touch with his near and dear ones. Remoteness, depression, alienation and unfamiliar ness are obstacles in acquiring knowledge. So he wants to be touch with his near and dear ones, with his fellow Indians. Actually He wants to show his philosophy and also wants to give his natives a lesson in acquiring knowledge. He wants to live in unity. As he says in 'Poster Prayers':

“Respect for the near  
affection for the familiar,  
these I have learnt  
late but not too late.  
Let me never lose them, Lord.” [JSAL,13]

## CONCLUSION

So, regarding the above discussion it can be said that Ezekiel with his philosophy and psychology tries to analysis himself, the Indians and the human being in order to create a better social order. Apart from this, his philosophy and psychology also consist of his description of the extremeness of the society, his optimistic attitude, his Indian ness and many more along with his oriental attitude in order to develop his country's manner and customs to the level western countries. And I fully agree what Mallikarjun said about him, “P.Lal and Dom Moraes have admitted the fact that “Nissim Ezekiel was their poetic father....The other poets of the young generation think that Ezekiel is perhaps the first Indian poet consistently to show Indian readers that craftsmanship is an important to a poem as its subject matter....What Thomas Hardy was to England in the early twentieth century, Ezekiel is to India in the post-independence era. In fact, he is a great spirit to Indian poets in English for several decades.” (Mallikarjun, 170)

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