

## Indian Sensibility of Nissim Ezekiel

**Bhagwan D. Gunjalwad**

Research Supervisor & Head Department of English, KRM Mahila Arts, Commerce and Science College, Nanded -431601, Maharashtra, India

### Abstract

Indian literature is known for its uniqueness, miracles and mythology. R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao wrote on Indian culture, tradition and socio-political milieu. Nissim Ezekiel wants to focus the Indian hypocrisy of English speaking men and women. Indian literature also talks about freedom struggle, untouchability, and importance of education, temperament and mood of the contemporary youth. Indian sensibility is also described by so many authors. R. K. Narayan shows religious hypocrisy in *The Bachelor of Arts*; whereas Raja Rao talks on welfare of downtrodden and withdrawal of untouchability.

**KEYWORDS:** Indianness, Sensibility, hypocrisy, temperament, and linguistics.

Nissim Ezekiel was born on 16 December 1924 in Mumbai. His father, Moses Ezekiel, was a professor of botany at Wilson College, and his mother was principal of her own school. The Ezekiels belonged to Mumbai's Marathi-speaking Jewish community, known as the 'Bene Israel'.<sup>1</sup>The Bene Israel means 'Sons of Israel,' are a group of Jews who migrated in the 19th century from villages in the Konkan area to the nearby Indian cities, primarily at Mumbai, but also to Pune, and Ahmedabad. Prior to these waves of emigrations and to this day, the Bene Israel formed the largest sector of the subcontinent's Jewish population. The native language of the Bene Israel is Marathi.

In 1947, Nissim Ezekiel earned a B.A. degree in Literature from Wilson College, Mumbai, University of Mumbai. In 1947-48, he taught English literature and published literary articles. After upheaval in politics for a while, he sailed to England in November 1948. He studied philosophy at Birkbeck College, London.

Fortune Press published his first collection of poetry, *The Bad Day*. He joined The Illustrated Weekly of India as an assistant editor in 1953 and stayed there for two years. Soon after his return from London, he published his second book of verse *Ten Poems*. He also worked as a broadcaster on Art and literature for All India Radio.

His poem *The Night of The Scorpion* is used as study material in Indian and Columbian schools. Nissim Ezekiel also penned poems in 'Indian English' like the one based on instruction boards in his favourite Irani cafe. His poems are used in NCERT and ICSE English textbooks. He got Padmashri award in 1988 and the SahityaAkademi Cultural Award in 1983.<sup>2</sup> He wrote the following poems *Time To Change* in 1952, *Sixty Poems* in 1953, *The Discovery of India* in 1956, *The Third* in 1959, *The Unfinished Man* in 1965, *The Exact Name, Snakeskin and Other Poems*, translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant, *Hymns in Darkness* in 1976, *Latter-Day Psalms* in 1982, *Collected Poems* in 1989, *The Three Plays* in 1969, *An Emerson Readers* in 1965, *A Joseph King Reader* in 1969, *Another India*, anthology of fiction and poetry in 1990. Some other poems are *Night of the Scorpion*, *The Doctor*, *Case Study*, *Poster Prayers*, *The Traitor*, *Poet*, *Lover*, *Birdwatcher*, *Latter-days Psalms*, *The Railway Clerk*, *Enterprise*, *In India*, *In the Theatre*, *The Couple* and *A Time to Change*.

The term sensibility is related to writers and poets often deal with Indian culture, experiences, events, landscapes, socio-political milieu and Indian subject matter. Nissim Ezekiel dealt with squalor, heat and ugliness of Indian metropolis. Indian sensibility also covers blind superstitions, Indian contexts, and picture of poverty, Indian situation, and imagery. After all it is Indian thought and Indian sensibility. He also touched Indian way of speaking English. Newly learned people were using present continuous tense instead of simple present tense. 'Therefore, the crucial point here is that as a poet, he has observed and experienced much of Indian life very closely.'<sup>3</sup> Indian sensibility lies in Ezekiel's commitment to this country and it is his earnest and sincere desire to bring about some improvement in the lives of Indian people through literature. Therefore we should appreciate the poet's desire for this country that he wanted to develop on so many ways.

Nissim Ezekiel was influenced by British culture and literature at the same time he feels to be Indian. He wrote in a simple contemporary voice on urban life, love, alienation, death, loneliness and of course spiritual values. He has a fine sense of irony and a sense of humour. English as the language of power in colonial India, gave the users of the native language an inferior status. Indians preferred to be educated through the English medium but made many errors in usage and pronunciation. There is subtle attacks on the sense of superiority of Indians who know the English language well. There are many examples of mother tongue disturbances in diction and syntax in the poem, which makes it an example of typical Indian English.

The poet meets his one of the students and said he is Professor Sheth. He taught him or her geography but now he is retired. He said his health is very good but his wife died some years ago. And by the God's grace all children are well settled in life. 'By God's grace, all my children Are well settled in life'<sup>4</sup> He says that one is a sales manager, another is a bank manager, both have the cars. Other children do well but not so well as expected by him. It is believed every rich family must have a black sheep. The black ship is very useful animal in Maharashtra.

Sarala and Tarala are two daughters and they got married. Their husbands are very nice gentlemen, but the poet has referred them as a boy. He also tells he has eleven grandchildren. Then he asked to his student how many issues he or she has? The student told three. The poet said that is good because now a day family planning is observed strictly. The poet is not against it. He says that one has to change according to time and need. The whole world changes. In India many things are observed. There is lot of progress. 'Our progress is progressing. Old values are going, new values are coming'.<sup>5</sup>

Bad traditions are left new ones are practiced which are very good for humanity. Everything happens with leap and bounds. The poet goes out rarely. This is only the advantage of old age. Now his health is fine. 'My health is O.K. Usual aches and pains. No diabetes, no blood pressure, no heart attack.'<sup>6</sup> Sometimes he has aches and pains but no diabetes, no blood presser, no heart attack. This is because he followed good habits in the youth.

Then he asked how his health is? The student said it is nice. The poet is very happy to listen about his student's health. This year the poet will cross sixty-nine years and he has a hope to score a century. The student was very thin like a stick when he was studying.

Finally the poet asked him if he will come this side by chance should pay a visit to his humble house. Then he told the address of his home which is backside of these houses.

Nissim Ezekiel is among the writers, though very few in numbers, who are Indian by both ideologically and linguistically. That's why Dr. M.S. Thirunalai writes in Language in India that Nissim Ezekiel will be remembered 'for the clever use of Indian English as a means to explore the Indian mind and sensibility'.<sup>7</sup>

In a nutshell, Nissim Ezekiel has made a sincere and honest attempt to establish Indian culture, civilization and spirituality at her best realistic image. He brings the sense and sensibility of the Indian people. He used present continuous tense instead of simple present tense to show the hypocrisy of half learned Indian people. Indian learned people through usage of English language, also wanted to show they are superior from the rest of the non -English speaker. But the fact is that if you know only English, you will not become a superior human being. Knowing little things and showing more than that is a kind of hypocrisy. To show such kind of hypocrisy is not good sensibility. Literature reveals such kind of sensibility many times.

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