

The theme of Indianness in the poetry of Ezekiel.

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Prior to understand Nissim Ezekiel, we should look seriously about what is Indianness? It is a quality that present in Indian English literature or it will appear to be hollow or shallow, if not entirely hollow. Those authors who write in English naturally disconnect from most of the Indianness due to their language. On the other hand, if a literary work of production in the English language will have nothing that can reflect Indianness, the literary production will become redundant for Indians and for the foreigners.

Think it this way: an Indian mass will read the book because of the connect, that the English language often seize and a another country man will read the book because of something new that he can learn and the language simplifies that learning adventure. In this context, the critic M. K. Naik, in his book *Indian English Poetry*, reminds the readers of Longfellow's wonderful idea – nationality in literature is good, but universality is better. However, what is not universal? Any writer of the world draws inspiration from his roots. In the times he grows and in the society he dwells, a writer learns many things from his roots. it is fact that a writer adds strength to his work by picking the best arrows for his quiver from the annals of history and the womb of civilisation.

Indianness is an idea that strikes one's mind and compels the emotional outburst in a man to relate to the elements involved in a an event. It is a literary work. While anything can constitute the simple idea of Indianness until it connects the reader's mind with India – India that is a thought, not merely a nation. M. K. Naik again offers a beautiful instance of two Indian brothers, Aurobindo and Manmohan Ghosh, they went to England to become pure Englishmen. They both came back home after their education. However, one turned to Indianness and produced *Savitri* while another kept looking for the disconnect between himself and Indianness and could not produce anything remarkable. (Naik, 175)

The elements that highlight Indian values, Indian religious colours, the Indian way of life, Indian background and even various Indian lacunas and struggle, superstitions, practices should be called Indianness in literature and since this aper delas with Indian English literature. For an instance, here, the works of Raja Rao with a special focus on *Kanthapura*.

Indian literature have all the Indianness of that time, with constructive and destructive qualities focused in the novel. Another novels like *Coolie* and *Guide* by Anand and Narayan have wonderfully presented the Indian way to the world. In this sequence in the modern time, *Chetan Bhagat*, *Amish Tripathi*, Anita Nair and Arundhati Roy, even Durjoy Datta and other sensual writers exhibit Indianness but within a limited context.

The theme Indianness is defined as, “*A composite awareness in the matter of race, milieu, language and religion.*” (Prof. V.K. Gokak) rather Indianness is explained differently by different critics. It can also be described as the author’s feeling of being an Indian, whether he lives in India or abroad, Indian writing in English reflects the cultural, socio-political and religious background of the writer. The genre like drama, fiction poetry, or even essays, this unique identity of the Indian author is mirrored. K.N. Daruwalla remarks; “*Nissim Ezekiel was the first Indian poet to express modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom.*” In the words of Nissim Ezekiel, “*My poems in Indian English are rightly described as very Indian poems. So they should not be considered as “mere lampoons”.*”

Night of the Scorpion, is a narrative poem, portray a positive image of women and mothers in India. He offers the picture of woman as a creator, protector, and educator and as an integrating force. He recalls the painful night in the life of his mother when she was bitterly stung by a scorpion.:

“*The peasants came like swarms of flies
And buzzed the Name of God a hundred times
to paralyze the Evil one.*”

From the ancient times, Villages are the backbone of India. Although Bombay is an economical capital of india but the time when this poem was written the city was alike village. Ezekiel’s *The Night of the Scorpion* depicts a typical Indian village in flesh and blood. The relationship, is the strongest among the villagers. This is the most ideal humanitarian aspect of village life. Unity of all religions in India is visible here. Peasants of various faiths, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Jews came in large numbers to look after her and prayed for her in a different-different manner.

“*The lines May the sins of your previous birth, Be burned away tonight.*”
“*May your suffering decrease, The misfortunes of your next birth.*”

The priest or the pujari is the representative of Almighty in most Indian villages. In *Night of the Scorpion* also, Nissim calls the priest to execute the divine act of destroying the evil through rituals. Indian tradition is rich in spiritual ideologies and myths. The belief in the rebirth, and the relevance of the “karma” and the consequent sufferings in the present life, form the basic concept of Hindu mythology in Indian culture.

Through the sins, voices of the peasants, the poet shows the Indian belief in washing away their sins of their previous birth by suffering in the present birth. It seems to be ridiculous, but he does not ridicule the Indian traditions and verse the popular Indian beliefs as they are. The scene in *Night of the Scorpion* is made more dramatic by his father, a skeptic and a rationalist who tried “every curse and blessing/powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.”

The final lines of the Poem:

*“My mother only said
Thank God the Scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.”*

are very beautiful and heart touching and a befitting portrayal of a typical Indian mother. The concluding lines mesmerize and define the Indianness impressively in Nissim Ezekiel as it draw out the authenticity of India, though his poems are very simple, introspective and analytical. Finally, James H. Cousins says about Indianness that Indian poetry in English is: “*Indian in thought, Indian in emotion, Indian in imagery and English only in word.*”

Ezekiel’s poetry is to be a comment on the Indian social scenario where he attempts to present “what”, “how” and “why” of the various aspects of Indian society. He tries highlight the social facts and problems which Indians face because of their poverty, superstitions, squalor and many more. And also expresses his deep admiration for the Indian spiritual values. he is aware of the degradation or perversion of the social, moral and spiritual values in the Indian society. On the other, Ezekiel is equally attentive to them as they lead the society to the way of spiritual hypocrisy.

Reference

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