

Analysis of Sociological Facets in Nissim Ezekiel's Writings

^[1]Dr. C Raghavendra Reddy, ^[2]Dr. V V Parthu, ^[3]Balamurugan N, ^[4]Dr. R. Devarajulu Reddy

^[1]Assistant Professor (SL) Department of English
School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Mohan Babu University (Erstwhile Sree Vidyanikethan Engineering College)
Tirupati, India

^[2]Assistant Professor Department of English
School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Mohan Babu University (Erstwhile Sree Vidyanikethan Engineering College)
Tirupati, India

^[3]Assistant Professor of English
Department of Humanities and Sciences
Nalla Narasimha Reddy Group of Institution
Hyderabad, India

^[4]Professor of English
Department of Humanities and Basic Sciences
Sri Venkatesa Perumal College of Engineering and Technology, Puttur

E-mail: ^[1]raghavendrareddy4323@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1939-1967>,
^[2]parthuchanti.v@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4778-3949>, ^[3]bmkvsrh@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5130-4675>, ^[4]drreddyvari@gmail.com

Abstract— This article delves into the examination of sociological aspects through an analysis of Nissim Ezekiel's literary works. In the poem "Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher," the poem is portrayed as a discovery rather than a deliberate creation or a meticulously crafted piece. Ezekiel firmly believed that every individual encounters numerous challenges and trials during their journey between birth and death, with the inevitable destination being death itself. In the poem "Enterprise," Ezekiel envisions life as a pilgrimage, celebrating the diverse joys of existence. He views being alive as a reason for celebration, as highlighted in the lines "is a cause for celebration" (quoting "After Reading a Prediction Collected Poems 155"). In this context, the worm, as depicted in "The Worm Collected Poems 10," symbolizes unwavering strength that endures rainfall and continues its path. Ezekiel's perspective centers on the idea that humans are merely temporary guests in this world, while Nature serves as the gracious host. He eagerly anticipates the feast of life, and Nature's silence and songs, such as "Solitudo and sobriety" (referencing "Day, Collected Poems 59"), fill him with a sense of joy, described as "Ananda." Ezekiel's writings also reflect a keen awareness of the human flesh, its persistent desires, intense ecstasies, and the complex interplay with the mind. "Enterprise" encapsulates the human condition on our often challenging planet, highlighting the frequent attempts, failures, and frustrations inherent to human existence. These sentiments are further expressed in the poem "A Morning Walk," where the poet traverses Bombay, encountering a disheartening experience.

"The Indian landscape sears my eyes
I have become part of it"

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1. Introduction

Shahane points out the religious philosophical stress vibrantly in the Indo-English poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. This sociological strain in the writings of Ezekiel raises the elementary question of poetry and belief.

It has been said of Nissim Ezekiel that "he treated life as a journey where the poetry of discovering and organizing one's life:

"While advocating the need for poets to develop a consciousness of the poet, T.S. Eliot admitted that he was alive to the objection that "much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility" In Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher', ¹ the poem is seen as an object which is found rather than created or crafted.

“To force the pace and never to be still
Is not the wary of those who study birds
or women. The best poets wait for words”

Ezekiel seems to believe that poems written by poets feel that writing poetry is a reduction to the essentials and is a kind of trying to reach the core truth. It is an art of bringing up-to-date the essential truth of old performances abandoning the Costumes, make-up setting, and stage directions.

At the very start of his essay ‘How a Poem Is Written’ Ezekiel draws a neat distinction between ‘How to Write a Poem’ (SP11) the distinction being suggestive of the conviction of the intellectual framework of ‘Poet, Lovers, Bird Watcher’ the conviction that poems are found rather than written. The true sociological aspects pertaining to Humanity, Philosophy, religion, Feelings, Life, and Death are dealt with meticulously.

‘Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher’ deals with the issue of the writing of poetry. The conducting of love affairs and the watching of birds. In his essay ‘Poetry as Knowledge’ Ezekiel thinks of poetry as a mode of knowledge. The poet, whether he is a good one or not, must see poetry as knowledge in his way. “He must insist on hate integrity, uniqueness, the primacy of the experience in poetry which is the experience, go to speak, of being on fire and not the experience of studying the flame that has cooled down. (SP 30). ‘A Visitor’ is the interaction between the speaker who lives in a basement room and a visitor. The latter shows his case before the former, caught in a classic love triangle the truth of his life is uprooted by a storm. The speaker shows his sympathy for the visitor and what is more important, gives him sound advice. ²The last stanza comes to us like a shock because it reveals that the speaker is in no way qualified to play the advisory role he does play.

“He spent the weekend in my basement room.
I talked as though there was a way to win.
Which I had found with ease, who Shared his doom
And had the self-same abstract written”

When an interview enquired Ezekiel what his philosophy of life was and what bearing it had on his plays he answered.” I don’t make claims about a whole philosophy of life expressed in the plays. There are perceptions, views, and ideas, reasonably integrated: The world of Ezekiel’s poetry is marked by a broad, deep sympathy towards the human race in general and the poor in Indian society. He was not satisfied with not being alien to things human or with merely loving humanity, he wanted to be loved in return. “But know my love reciprocated/Dancing in the neutral street’. The failure of Ezekiel’s poetry to project a coherent philosophy is largely a reflection of Ezekiel’s failure to possess one. Despite his incomplete or because of it-his outlook displays few of the traits of a professional philosopher. According to Ezekiel, “Poetry is the art of language philosophy is the art of thought one does not make poetry with ideas but with words.

One of the papers he read at the Bombay Philosophical Society in 1973 is titled “Philosophy of the Literary Man’ Ezekiel explains “The philosophy of the literary man, then appears to be dependent on his inventiveness, the pathos of his feelings or the resonance of his imagery along with a host of other utterly irrelevant devices so far as philosophy is concerned and which cannot make one iota of difference to its objective truth. The truth of the literary man is a private vision of reality”

Ezekiel had firm faith that between birth and death, a man travels and faces many difficulties. The ultimate end of every journey is death. ⁴ In the poem ‘Enterprise’ the poet imagines life as a pilgrimage.

It started as a pilgrimage
Exalting minds and making all
The burdens light.

Ezekiel had firm faith that all life is beautiful whether it is human beings or nature. He celebrated the joy of life in all forms. To him, to be alive ‘is a cause for celebration. (After Reading a Prediction Collected Poems 155) his worm (The Worm Collected Poems 10) is the symbol of unfailing strength that endures rain and moves continuously.

To Ezekiel, man is only a guest in this world and Nature is a Ford host. ⁵ He is “ready for the feast! Expectantly’ and her silence; song, ‘Solitudo and sobriety’ (Day, Collected Poems 59) fill his with Ananda (joy).

“I too am life
The image seems to say
Air-earth, fire, water, Joie de vivre
(The Cur, Collected Poems 90)

Ezekiel opines that man is a guest in this world”.

“Sprawling like a thought unformed Is the newly born, a small surprise of limbs and cries resisting light
And sniffing sweetly of the womb.”

Ezekiel compares the young and the old. ⁵ Ezekiel clearly paints the condition of both stages of life.

“But the old are stale weak and on the shelf.

And the young have shining eyes

But the old are stale in the morning light

And the young have shining eyes”.

(Wisdom, Collected Poems)

Ezekiel does not have any fixed view about the scheme of death. Death has uncertainties that make it fearful, though the poet knows that death is inevitable.

“I am afraid

of bleeding to death

as I once nearly did

but know I must find it”

(from Edinburg interlude Collected poems 295)

Ezekiel does not like just waiting for death. Although death is inevitable. Despite that, he will try his best to make life beautiful and worth living.

‘Life can be kept alive

By contact with the unknown and the strange

A feeling of mystery

of man and woman joined”

(To a certain Lady Collected Poems 28)

The famous critic Lynda Hess observes, “Ezekiel strikes her as an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious delvings and twisting of the ego, and the ceaseless attempt of man and poet to define himself to find through all the myth and maze a way to honesty and love.” ⁶ Ezekiel explores the theme of disillusionment and longs for the ‘perfection of human personality’ — A poem is an episode, completed

“In an hour or two, but poetry

Is something more. It is the why

The now, the what, the flow

From which a poem comes”.

Ezekiel’s primary concern is with man and his mind ‘The haze of self-deception in our eyes’ ‘Desire Labyrinthine ‘Desire with an object near and far’. In On Meeting a Pedant, he holds an essential attitude towards the unreal and fake:—

“Words, looks, gestures, everything betrays

The unquiet mind, the emptiness within,

Sunlight swarms around him and the summer”

The famous critic C. Paul Verghese rightly observes. ⁷ “If Ezekiel’s poems of senses generally reveal his commitment to living in a particular place and a keen awareness of the problems. vexations and conflict of those there, his meditative poems show that he is in a constant and continuous struggle to become a more and more fully integrated personality.

Ezekiel’s poetry is full of self-analysis and introspection and is related to the life he sees around him. The thoughts, that express the inner emptiness and disillusionment, can be found in many poems to Ezekiel. Later, his settlement in a town where the inhabitants are only ‘slaves of incessant race,’ intensifies his theme of disillusionment This idea of sociology is reflected in the poem In India:

“Always, in the sun’s eye

Here among the beggars

Hawkers, pavements sleepers

Hutment dwellers slums

Dead souls of men and gods,

Burnt-out mothers, frightened

Virgins wasted child

And tortured animal”.

Ezekiel is painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, and its disturbing fictitious with the mind. Enterprise expresses the human condition on this sorry planet of ours and the frequent efforts, failures, and frustrations to which man is subject by the very nature of his earthly life. Ezekiel expresses the same sociological feelings in the poem *A Morning Walk* which sees the poet wading through Bombay and it is a mortifying experience.

“Barbaric city sick with slums
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron lunged”.

In the poem *Standing at the Crossroads*, the city man who had a dream of being lost upon a hill too high for him watched the cold and dim dirty;’ He wondered’ Is he among the men of straw/Who think they go which way they, please? Checkmated, defeated, deadened, in sensibility; lost in the whorls of the hill.’ In the last two stanzas, the poet contrasts the societal conditions of the city man with his dream.

“The garden on the hill is cool
Its hedges cut to look like buds
Or mythic beasts are still asleep
her part is like a muddy pool”.

Ezekiel, striving to become a finished man compels him to self-analysis and introspection. He believes.

“To see things as they are is a habit
An acquisition in the blood
That will not let the eye grow old”.

2. Conclusion

In the 1976 authorized volume of *"Hymns in Darkness,"* the poet explored two distinct types of poems, namely *"Poster Poems"* and *"Passion Poems."* Throughout this collection, the poet took on a more contemplative tone, delving into the societal and philosophical aspects of their interests, which take center stage in their work. Two particular poems, *"Islands"* and *"A Small Summit,"* emphasize the theme of an individual's isolation from their surroundings. Among the poems in this volume, *"Background, Casually"* stands out as one of the poet's most renowned and impactful creations. This poem is deeply autobiographical, offering a vivid depiction of the societal conditions of the poet's time, infused with a strong current of anger and bitterness. Within its verses, the poet recollects the challenges and obstacles they encountered during their school years and various other aspects of their life. *"Background, Casually"* meanders through various experiences, with bitterness as the common thread linking them together. These memories ultimately lead to a sense of serene acceptance of the poet's native city, which was undergoing significant societal transformations during their time. The poem touches upon social behavior, social relationships, and the poet's profound identification with India.

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