



## FRAGMENTATION AND MECHANICAL EXISTENCE OF MODERN MAN IN THE POETRY OF NISSIM EZEKIEL

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### ABSTRACT

*My aim through this article is to propagate that Nissim Ezekiel has made distinctive and unforgettable contribution to Indian English poetry. The poet is worried to see the loneliness, alienation, suffering and the tragedy of modern man. His poems question some of the norms and principles of society. Ezekiel concern is to shed light to the dilemma of modern man within his normal setting and occupations. His poems do not seem to be occupied with too high ambitions; in fact he chooses in his portrayal the theme often turns out to be homeless person and miserable people without a shelter or a job. Indeed, Ezekiel may be described as an everlasting surveyor of the tangle of the mind. Ezekiel creates poems out of the ordinary incidents, circumstances and events that one meets in day to day life. He picks out a normal situation, analysis it and describes it in such a way that it right away assumes a kind of common significance. He has used in his creative work to highlight the problem of real life.*

**Key words:** *Fragmentation, reality, Mechanical Existence and isolation*

### INTRODUCTION

*...The explosion of modern literature in to a host of distinct private styles and mannerism has been followed by a linguistic fragmentation of social life itself...Modernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes. (Jameson, Fredric. 2000. p.277-87). 1*

Literature is a reliable tool in the hands of creative writers to acclimatize and change the societal framework. In this paper, one of the great passions for man at this modern era, the theme of identity which has been bothered by the fundamental existential conditions of modern eras of Nissim Ezekiel poetic collections. He is a pacesetter, who started modernity

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in Indian –English poetry. Nissim Ezekiel is one of the productive Indian writers in English of the 20th century. Nissim Ezekiel is also known in Indian English poetry as the Psychologist and poet of the human psyche. He shows an obvious propensity to search the human mind. His poems expose not only the conscious but also the sub-conscious feelings and variance in human beings. The point that this paper is to explore is that although Nissim Ezekiel has taken on many qualities of the modern era, he has made much revolutionary attempt on his creative work. Ezekiel's poetic collections include: Time to Change, Sixty Poems, The Third, The Unfinished Man, The Exact Name, Snakeskin and Other Poems, Hymns in Darkness, Latter-Day Psalms, and Collected Poems. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his Poetry collection, 'Latter-Day Psalms. He was also awarded the Padma Shree by the Government of India in 1988. The poetry of Nissim Ezekiel is a sight in the modern Indian poetry in English. As modern poets, he adopted many modern elements in his poetry. . In many compliments, Ezekiel's poems explore the depths of the human psyche. The modernist poets purpose of normal usage of language for its uselessness in expressing the spirit of human experience. Ezekiel deals with another existential theme are that Alienation of the human being from the self and the others. Disaffection is somewhat caused by lack of communication, and as a result, the isolated self is tricked in his own condition. In short, modern writing is characterized by loss of faith, fragmentation, and isolation of an individual. Nissim Ezekiel's poem titled as 'Speech and Silence' converse level on this subject matter:

*Man is alone and cannot tell,  
The simplest thing to any friend.  
All speech is to himself, others  
Overhear and miss the meaning.  
And yet to speak is good, a man  
Is purified through speech alone,  
Asserting his identity,  
In all that people say and do. (CP, p. 53)2*

Nissim Ezekiel informs a secure mental picture of the traumas and the problems of a middle-class man. And he has trapped the minor strand of mental disturbance of human beings; especially he lies in the searching of the internal world of human psyches and deep feeling. Ezekiel's inspection of linguistic peculiarities is extremely sharp and his language must be considered to be one of the most sensible representatives of the authentic language of the modern time. Ezekiel wants straightforwardness of consideration and language in modern poetry. He extends the perception of simplicity to form into poetry. Ezekiel's poems expose the state of loneliness, nothingness, meaninglessness and isolation of human beings.



He is often called the “Father of Modern Indian English Poetry.” We can see Ezekiel’s thought of modernity and modernism; city life and culture in his poetic collections. Shaila Mahan has rightly described:

*Ezekiel wants to point out that living in a modern city, leads to loss of vigor and corruption of the essential self. It reduces man to the level of economic man, one whose psychological motivations are thought of largely in terms of self interest.*<sup>3</sup>

Ezekiel has described the images of slums ‘rains’, , ‘beggars’, ‘processions’, ‘seasons’, ‘hawkers’ ‘drums’, in his poems. Ezekiel freely centres on scarcity, nastiness, misery and the unhappiness suffered by poor people in a city like Bombay:

*Here among the beggars,  
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,  
Hutment dwellers, slums,  
Dead souls of men and gods,  
Burnt-out mothers, frightened  
Virgins, wasted child  
in that basement,  
a permanent and proud  
metaphor of struggle  
for and against the same  
creative, self-destructive self. (CP 199)*<sup>4</sup>

Ezekiel knows that life of modern man is far from being neat, tidy, carefully groomed, and iron-pressed and buttoned up. Life is confusion, an enigma over and above being cheats and disappointment. Modern people actions are largely incomprehensible, mysterious and unpredictable. The course of events forces them to question whether their attitudes are worth holding and whether their beliefs are true or false. In ‘Morning Walk’, there is the picture of a heavy rain –bind city heavily populated with impoverished.

*Barbaric city sick with slums,  
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,  
Its hawkers, Beggars,  
Iron –lunged,  
Processions led by frantic drums,  
A million purgatorial lanes,  
And child -likes masses, many –tongued,*

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*Whose wages are in words and crumbs? [CP-119] 5*

Ezekiel describes that India is stuffed with slums, naked children, unemployed youth and malnourished stacks. India's major problem is the vast difference between the rich and the poor. The minority of the population lives in "brightness" and rest live in acute "shadows". The isolation, prejudice and torment Ezekiel had to bear in his childhood are expressed obviously in many of his poems. Ezekiel's poem Background, Casually which is also his autobiographical poem. In this poem the poet articulates about his unforgettable experiences of school days:

*I went to Roman Catholic School  
A mugging Jew among the wolves  
They told me I had killed the Christ  
That year I won the scripture prize  
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears  
I grew in terror of the strong  
But undernourished Hindu lads  
Their prepositions always wrong  
Repelled me by passivity  
One noisy day I used a knife. (Ezekiel, Collected Poems 179)6*

He has used in his poems a very simple theme to highlight the problem of real life. His poem is not a mere cry of pain or despair but a sensible depiction of the contemporary man in the lane known for his dreams and frustrations in Indian society. He presents the contemporary reality of modern times. He struggles to challenge old established realities whose truthfulness we take for granted, and he forced his readers to question him. "Reality" is seen as a spot of light and empty space by him to point to its less concrete existence than we assume it to be.

Nissim Ezekiel's 'Speech and Silence' is an important contribution to Modern Indian poetry in English. The poem 'Speech and Silence' clears this theme:

*Man is alone and can not tell  
The simplest thing to any friend.  
All speech is to himself, others  
Overhear and miss the meaning.  
And yet to speak is good, a man  
Is purified through speech alone,  
Asserting his identity  
In all that people say and do. (CP, p. 53)7*

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He successfully recaptures the dark side of the sophisticated city life. He describes the inner psychological disturbance of human beings. In another Poem entitled “London” Ezekiel speaks about the fight within:

*Sometimes I think I 'm still  
In that basement room,  
I want to leave that room,  
the paraphernalia  
and go into something  
so public and anonymous. (2005:198-199)8*

My analysis is to discuss the impact of trauma on the individual in Ezekiel’s work by focusing on the depiction of impaired individual identities and disrupted life narratives. He investigates the psychological depression of an individual’s expedition for life itself, annoying, thus to depict the denotation and reason behind the thinking pattern of an individual. Nissim Ezekiel talks about his divided self in the poem ‘Subconscious’:

*Consciously, I ask my sub-conscious  
To supply me with a poem.  
It sends up this harsh message:  
You have not turned to me so long,  
I shall not speak now. (Collected Poems, p. 271)9*

Nissim Ezekiel has made distinctive and unforgettable contribution to Indian English poetry. The poet is worried to see the loneliness, alienation, suffering and the tragedy of modern man. His poems question some of the norms and principles of society. Ezekiel concern is to shed light to the dilemma of modern man within his normal setting and occupations. His poems do not seem to be occupied with too high ambitions; in fact he chooses in his portrayal the theme often turns out to be homeless person and miserable people without a shelter or an job. Indeed, Ezekiel may be described as an everlasting surveyor of the tangle of the mind. In the poem ‘Double Horror’, he openly shows the reality of life:

*I am corrupted by the world, continually  
Reduced to something less than human by the crowd,  
Newspapers, cinemas, radio features, speeches  
Demanding peace by men with grim warlike faces,  
Posters selling health and happiness in bottles,  
Large returns for small investments, in football pools*

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*Or self control, six easy lessons for a pound,  
Holidays in Rome for writing praise for toothpastes,  
(CP, p. 7)*

Modern man has discovered too many things and with that he has come in the state of utter confusion. He is unable to identify a thing and its proper use. This type of mechanical existence of the modern man can be seen in Ezekiel's poem 'Encounter':

*The city pressed upon me; shops, cinemas and  
Business houses Spoke in unambiguous accents.  
Only the people said Nothing.  
They bought the evening papers, hurried to a tube  
Station,  
Ceasing to exist. (CP, p. 35)10*

Ezekiel's poetic theme desires for a better understanding of men's plight; however, they are neither clarified nor saved from their permanent situation. He lives in the mechanical world where desires are satisfied artificially. In this sort of cross-examination, Here again his poems expose the hollowness of modern man's life. Ezekiel shows in his poem Urban that how modern people condensed life to a mechanical sphere as he says:

*The hills are always far away  
He knows the broken roads, and moves  
in circles tracked with in his head  
Before he walks and has his say  
The river which he claims he loves  
is dry, and all the winds lie dead." (Urban)11*

In Modern period Existentialism', in due course of time developed into an influential rebellion against reason, rationality, positivism and the traditional ways in which early philosopher portrayed man. It is completely different from traditional ways of literary theory. Man's predicament is replicated in a covered manner, embarking on his association with the external world, and then moving towards his inner suffering about the self.

Ezekiel has mainly highlighted the struggle for power both within a human being, and between an individual and an influential device or another dominant person. He has also been puzzled by the question of existence as the individual is often destined for an inner chaos, hence loses a sense of self. In the poem 'Double Horror', he narrates the effects of such disturbance and the problems. In this poem, he admits:

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*Corrupted by the world I must infect the world  
With my corruption. This double horror holds me  
Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake, denounced  
Only by myself, to others harmless, hero,  
Sage, poet, conversationalist, connoisseur  
Of coffee, guide to modern Indian Art  
Or Greek antiquities. (CP, p. 8)12*

Ezekiel Poetic collection is an instruction in the consciousness of individuals who lose their potential for usual consideration on being subjected to traumatic experiences. Ezekiel has obsessively occupied with the individual's quest for meaning and value, freedom and truth that provide to the alienated self in a seemingly confused and meaningless world. Existential conflict in Ezekiel springs from the self's craving for the fulfilment of certain psycho-emotional needs. The concept of Existentialism goes hand in hand with certain human feelings like fear, insecurity and hopelessness. These human characteristics are distinctive Ezekiel subjects elaborated in his poems. The unfair system and its persecutors find their complement of Ezekiel's poems of ambiguity, loneliness and loss of identity, all caused by a unidentifiable nuisance in their world, and these lonely characters, with their destroyed identities and with no support, trying to survive but failing in a hostile world close to the realm of Mechanical world.

Many poems of Ezekiel portraits the Indian society as poverty stricken; unemployment cultural conflicts, cultures, religions, multiplicity of languages Ezekiel has adopted humanistic approach in his novel for epitome helpless and suffering from inferiority complex. In his poem In India he describes the situation:

*Always in the sun's eye  
Here among the beggars  
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,  
Hutment dwellers, slums,  
Dead souls of men and gods,  
Burnt-out mothers, frightened  
virgins, wasted child  
and tortured animal  
All in noise silence  
Suffering the place and time  
I ride my elephant of thought  
A cezanne slung round my neck. (In India)13*

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In his poem 'Case Study', he wants to investigate his own mind and inner experiences. He has portrayed his personal image, but by using the feelings of another man. :  
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)14*

He explores the psychological recesses of an individual quest of life itself, trying, thus to sketch the meaning and purpose behind the thinking pattern of human being. The poet presents inner mind and thought in the poem 'Island':

*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)15*

Ezekiel creates poems out of the ordinary incidents, circumstances and events that one meets in day to day life. He picks out a normal situation, analysis it and describes it in such a way that it right away assumes a kind of common significance. He has used in his creative work to highlight the problem of real life. His work is not a mere cry of pain or despair but a sensible depiction of the contemporary man in the lane known for his dreams and frustrations in Indian society. He presents the contemporary reality of modern times.

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