

UNCONSCIOUSNESS IN NISSIM EZEKIEL'S POEMS 'NIGHT OF THE SCORPION' AND 'TRUTH ABOUT THE FLOODS'

Dr. Prashant S. Dafar

Smt. Rajkamal Baburao Tidke Mahavidyalaya,
Mouda Dist. Nagpur

Abstract: *Nissim Ezekiel, with an analytical way and argumentative qualities, has highlighted false beliefs in Indian society. Having the touch of modern writings, he has put forward the most crucial issues in Indian society. In his poetry, 'The Night of the Scorpion' and 'Truth About the Flood', Nissim Ezekiel has endeavoured to wipe out the superstitious and false beliefs from the minds of Indians. Like the sting of a scorpion, Nissim Ezekiel has vibrated unconsciousness of Indians who believe in orthodox and superstitions since generations. This paper throws light on the gap between real and unreal, and attempts to bring Indians back from unconsciousness to consciousness.*

Key Words: *Culture, traditions, superstitions, orthodox, consciousness, unconsciousness, natural calamity, inhuman attitude.*

Nissim Ezekiel, Being an Indian Jewish poet, actor and a playwright, has influenced the literary scene in India. His poems deal with daily life in India. Through his literary work, Nissim Ezekiel has touched the minds of superstitious and orthodox Indians. His poetry has argumentative qualities and exposes true picture of India and Indian culture and tradition. His poetry is supposed to be a voice against unfruitful principles of life deeply rooted among Indians since generations. Nissim Ezekiel, with his humorous and spiritual vein, exposes the unimportant and unfruitful ideals in Indian Life. His poetry deals with modern writings with vivid experiments. Being a post -independence Indo- Anglian poet, he believes that social innovation is an urgency of the hour in order to make Indian's conscious of the fact and newness. Indians have been living with the impact of unfruitful ideals, ignorance, superstitions and orthodox. Hence his poetry is concerned with those Indians who live patterned life. His approach is towards newness. K. R. S. Iyengar opines:

A global war spread over several years is apt liquidate a whole generation- the 'middle' generation. And a new generation comes up with a striking individuality of its own, a sharpness in its features, an angularity in its gestures, a tone of defiance (or at least of new conformity) in its speech, a gleam of hope in its eyes, a new order perhaps, and even new rhythms and nuances and acceptabilities speech. (Iyengar 641)

According to Nissim Ezekiel, urbanization and civilization can be cause of dehumanization. Although the purpose of his poetry is social and cultural, his agenda is to illustrate the dehumanization in order to make the mass conscious. He says that



The pattern will remain, unless you break. It with a sudden jerk. (Iyengar 641)

Nissim Ezekiel points out false belief of Indian masses without rationalism. R. Taranath and M. Belliappa writes about the poem that

The observer's neutral attitude to the scene, balancing the superstitious with the presence of the faith, 'sceptic, rationalist', makes the supernatural a poetically credible quantity in an episode which stands transformed into an experience of significance, at least to the believers. (Taranath and Belliappa 14)

Generally, scorpion, a pest, is found in tropical regions. The sting of scorpion is very painful, always unbearable. The mother in the poem '*Night of the Scorpion*' is stung by a scorpion and her pain is unbearable. Nissim Ezekiel describes the scene and her treatment not only pathetically but humorously too. All the family members and the villagers gather around the mother. All of them opine not to go to a physician to release the mother from the pain, but they suggest superstitious tactics to cure her. Although the father in the poem is rationalist, he only observes the painful plight of the mother. Indians believe in superstitious tactics. They assume that such incidents are associated with philosophy of life that these incidents are a part of making their free from wills. It is a metaphysical concept that God and Satan fight and man is a mean of sufferer in Christianity. Hence Indians believe that murmuring the name of God can make one free from evil power. All of them endeavour to sympathize mother.

May the sins of your previous birth
Be burned away to night, they said
May your suffering decrease the misfortunes
of your next birth, they said.
May the sum of evil balanced in this unreal
world against the sum of good becomes
diminished by your pain. (Ezekiel 49)

The sting of scorpion has been associated by the Indians to birth and death. The villagers whisper that the sin of previous birth of the mother is being burned with the sting. The holy men try to release the mother's pain. Even rationalist father put a match to the stung part of the mother. It is very awful that instead of weakening her pain, he adds to her pain.

After twenty hours
It lost its stings. (50)
At the end, the mother thanks God.
My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked me on and
Spared my children. (50)

Nissim Ezekiel points out in a humorous way metaphysical philosophy through the sting of the scorpion that is evil power and the pain of the mother.



Nissim Ezekiel's another poem *'The Truth About the Floods'* points out unconsciousness of Indian mass at the plight of flood. In a humorous and anguished manner, he throws light on the habits of Indian people. Flood is a natural calamity. In India, flood affects the flooded area as well as other areas. The Indians endeavour to seek profit from such natural calamity. This inhuman act is exposed with arrival of rescue and relief team including students.

A relief party came at last.
Five students with a transistor,
A tin of biscuits,
A camera. (Ezekiel 19)

The people who suffer due to flood, rushed to them as they have lost everything in the flood.

The villagers ran to them.
They slapped their bellies and whined:
'I have not eaten for three days.'
'My husband has been washed away.'
'My parents have abandoned me.'
'My son is dying.'
'I can not find my daughter.' (20)

The victims of flood expect hands of help for them. However, attitude of the relief team is exposed as follows.

'Don't make a noise'
And the students,
'Sit down in a circle.'
The villagers sat down in a circle.
They did not say another word,
The transistor was on,
The biscuits were distributed, the camera clicked.
Then the students left
Humming the tune
Of a popular Hindi film song. (19)

The attitude of the relief team is doubtful whether they desire to help the victims or they want to maintain the record of relief work. Government officials too are not worthy of trust for the villagers. The government officials give the record of relief work. They declare that their area is worst-hit by flood.

Meet any official
he will claim his district,
sub-division or block
is the 'worst-hit,'
and pass on a hand-out
with statistic of relief work. (19)

Every team whether it is relief team or government officials, does not ponder over the plight of flood-affected people. It explicates the inhuman attitude of human to human. The blame is put to the nature as it is a nature's curse and their relief report is written.

In the poem '*Night of The Scorpion*', Nissim Ezekiel highlights the mystical and metaphysical philosophy while treating scorpion stung mother. Indians have been lacking rationalism. They have been associated with the superstitions and orthodox since generations. Their metaphysical and mystic psychology do not allow them to think with rational manner and consciousness. Their false beliefs have diminished the sense of rationalism and they are in dilemma of believable to unbelievable, to differ truth and untruth. However, the mother, although not conscious of her being treated, is conscious of her children. Nissim Ezekiel himself says,

'Night of the scorpion remains an interesting and very valid poem, containing a fascinating tension between personal crisis and mocking social observation, -----.' (Wiseman 145)

Similarly, inhuman tendency of Indian masses has been highlighted in the poem '*The Truth About the Flood*'. The relief team and the government officials, instead of assisting them, out of their inhuman tendency, stress on only the record of relief. It exposes the lack of consciousness of Indian masses. The suffering that caused by natural calamity, have been assumed as a medium of the benefits of relief team and government officials. The human pain and suffering is not comprehended by Indian masses out of unconsciousness.

In both the poems, Nissim Ezekiel has raised voice against the false beliefs and inhuman tendencies of Indian masses, being the complex issue of the result of the social and traditional attitude of the Indian masses. It is a production of unconsciousness and the lack of fight between consciousness and sub-consciousness.

References:

- K. R. S. Iyengar: Indian Writing in English, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. 1989. Print.
- Taranath, Rajiv and Belliappa, Meena: The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, A Writers workshop, Calcutta. 1966. Print.
- Ezekiel, Nissim: Letter-Day Psalms, OUP, New Delhi, 1982. Print.
- Ezekiel, Nissim: Hymns in Darkness, OUP, Delhi, 1976. Print.
- Wiseman, Christopher: 'The Development of Technique in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel', Contemporary Indian English Verse: An Evaluation, ed. Chirantan Kulshrestha, Arnold Heinemann, New Delhi, 1980. Print. [https://www.gradesaver.com/author Nissim Ezekiel](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/Nissim_Ezekiel)

