

Subject-English

Hons. Core Course

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Nilanjana Chakraborty

About the poet: Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel is born in a family of Bene Israeli descent in 1924. He grows up in Bombay speaking mainly English and some Marathi. He does his graduation and Masters from the University of Bombay. He studies philosophy but shows an interest in visual arts, theatre and poetry. He takes seriously the vocation of writing poems with a deep sense of commitment. It is in 1952, he comes back to India. According to critics, Ezekiel is the first major voice after Sri Aurobindo that more or less represents the change of an era. He holds an important place in post-independence Indian Literature. He is opposed to idealism and romanticism of the earlier group of Indian writers and tries to look at any typical Indian situation with an Indian attitude with a novel and dynamic Indian insight as is reflected in his volumes of poems- *A Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems*(1953), *The Discovery of India*(1956), *The Third*(1959)*The Unfinished Man* (1960) and

others. The poem “Enterprise” is from this collection of poems titled *The Unfinished Man*. He has been awarded Sahitya Academy and Padmashree in 1983 and 1988 respectively. He dies in 2004.

The major movement in post-independence Indian English poetry has been modernism. This label is, at best, approximate. European modernism has more or less come to an end when Indian English modernism begins. In fact, modernism is being studied and anthologised in the West when Nissim Ezekiel has published his first collection, *A Time to Change and Other Poems* (1952). This collection clearly shows the influence of poets like T S Eliot and also of the later poets like Philip Larkin. Written in a serious, confessional, yet ironic style, it marks a definite departure from the poetry of Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo. Ezekiel's diction and imagery are contemporary and idiomatic; his persona and voice suggest an ordinary, middle class consciousness. Unlike the earlier poets who write of relatively remote themes and who are idealistic, nationalistic, and basically Victorian or Georgian in attitude, Ezekiel is distinctly of mid-20th century, and post-war. Ezekiel who stands as the colossal figure at the dawn of the

modern Indian English poetry has also steered so many of contemporary Indian English poets towards the new horizon which the poetry in English is to achieve in India. Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu express romanticism which surprise Ezekiel very much. He is the first who takes the risk of treating typical Indian English in poetry. High sounding words and phrases, long and complex syntax, expressions of Victorian English are prevalent before Ezekiel but he chooses to journey through a different way that gives a different viewpoint to his poems. He feels that poetry is a craft to be taken seriously. Ezekiel is deeply philosophical and has forayed the depths of human heart and revealed the noble virtue of patience and a quest to win over the desired elements of life. Life is for him a quest for wholeness, for intellectual and spiritual satisfaction and for maturity. His purpose is to bring out Indian heritage, Indian attitudes, their language, follies and their simplicity in its true tone. Like W.B. Yeats, he treats poetry as the record of the mind's growth. The remarkable aspect of his poetry is his sincerity and individuality that is recorded as his felt experience. He breathes life through poetry that paves his path to intellectual and spiritual satisfaction. His poems have the vast canvas,

that is, he deals with the themes of love, loneliness, creativity and many more in his poems.

“Enterprise”: Summary

This poem has six stanzas. The poet is talking about a group of people who have ventured on an enterprise. The poem revolves around a metaphorical journey to a pilgrimage started by some enthusiastic people. They undertake a journey moved by noble aspiration but it all ends in failure and frustration. The poem begins with a group of people who have started their journey with the determination and hope to reach their destination. They show their determination to overcome dangers and difficulties. They take notes as they walk ahead towards the destination. They minutely observe and note down everything to keep a record of witnessed things- significant and mundane. They pass through three cities where a sage is teaching people but they are not interested in the subject being taught. On their way, differences of opinion arise among them. They fail to decide unanimously how to cross a ‘desert patch’. They are divided into groups. Some of

them decide to leave. The speaker after looking at the disorganised lot of pilgrims, tries to pray in such critical times to seek divine blessing. The group becomes fragmented. The pilgrims now have lost their exalted minds. The pilgrims do reach the destination- but in total disarray- tired and frustrated- and without any sense of fulfilment. At the end, there is a complete disillusionment among the pilgrims . The poet suggests the whole act of starting on a mission is futile and that it may have been better if they have remained confined to their home. The pilgrimage in this poem can be said to symbolise life itself. The journey is a metaphor for the journey of life. The journey is also symbolic of the voyage into one's inner self, the voyage of self-exploration.