



Since
March 2002

A National,
Registered & Refereed
Monthly Journal :

English Literature

Research Link - 172, Vol - XVII (5), July - 2018, Page No. 44-46

ISSN - 0973-1628 ■ RNI - MPHIN-2002-7041 ■ Impact Factor - 2015 - 2.782

Nissim Ezekiel and his 'A Time to Change'

When Nissim Ezekiel published his first collection of poems, A Time to Change, 1952, in London, it was for him a time to change literally. The young man in his twenties, who was a student of Philosophy, discovered himself to be an authentic poet. He decided to devote himself for the creation of poetry. He treated life as journey where poetry would be the chief source of discovering one's self. In this connection Chetan Karnani says, "He treated poetry as a way of life, as a continuous flow and as something which is inextricably related to existence". (Karnani, Chetan, 1974: 14) He has written this volume (A Time to Change) in London, when he was away from home, from happenings in India and experiencing a new kind of reality in which he was trying to find his own personal voice.

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The title poem, 'A Time to Change', of this volume (A Time to Change) outlines a man's departure from home, consequent desolation, search for a new life and the desired pattern of the future. This poem is about the departure from home, frustration, search for identity, desired pattern of future, dreams and remorse. Ezekiel reminisces that he cannot rely on his past for help. The poet earnestly desires refuge in poetry because only poetry can redeem him from the present state of frustration, despondency and gloom. The present life of the poet is equally frustrated because he is in his twenties hence there is the overpowering influence of sex. He feels that only observation of the outer world is not sufficient. He went to London to acquire knowledge but got nothing. He cannot depend on only Philosophy but the renunciation of life should be there.

In the disturbed state of mind Ezekiel seems that the outer world is inimical to him hence life can be disclosed for the adoration and admiration of the people through his creation only. He says that there is the materialistic pleasure in the outer world. Actually it is the unknown land (London) for him. He knows that this foreign land won't be helpful to him but he tries to develop the optimistic attitude towards it. In his disturbed and confused state of mind, he wants to get the poetic pleasure and desires the equilibrium of mind.

Nissim Ezekiel's poetry may be called as the journey into the heart of existence and to the root of one's self. There is the endless quest for identity hence he decided to continue creativity. There is a strong urge in his mind for the creation despite the hurdles and obstacles that are plenty in his life. He would like to harmonise the strong urge of creativity with the outer world.

Ezekiel feels that only observation of the outer world is not sufficient. The renunciation of life could come to him through the creation of poetry only. "Only poetry can achieve for him a viable balance between observable reality and personal temperament" (Kurup, P. K. J, 1991:22). The confessional mode of the poet is revealed here because he accepts his own failures and records his own experiences of life. As he is in the quest of identity, only poetry can become helpful to forget the present state of mind. Ezekiel would like to create the poetry "to know the various lives and dreams of men" (C. P., 1989:4). The pure invention is not only related to outside world but also the personal temperament. It is the only way to redeem and satisfy him.

"The pure invention or the perfect poem." (C. P., 1989:5)

The redemption is there only in his mind. Hence he thinks that he has to create the poetry. In his poem, 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher', Ezekiel says that action is not needed in all these cases, but patient waiting is important. He has to plan to reach the goal. He would like to create his poetry hence he has to work hard for it. He decides to create verse but he knows that patient waiting should be there like the lover and the birdwatcher. The stubborn workman also waits for fruits after hard work. He thinks that there will be a lucky day in his life.

In the disturbed state of mind Ezekiel seems that he is corrupted by the world in the poem 'The Double Horror' hence he begins the poem with "I am corrupted by the world" and concludes with "as infected I correct the world" (C. P., 1989: 7-8). Here the word 'corruption' may carry a reference to the testing of fruit by Adam and Eve. By tasting the fruit they committed the sin. They, thus, were deprived of the

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heavenly bliss which God had graced them with. Ezekiel has become corrupted and by the way of being corrupted he is perpetuating the corruption hence he states 'infected I corrupt the world'.

There is the conversation of the poet with an imaginary character, Robert. The conversation is a kind of confession. Ezekiel sees himself as a man of errors in the same way as Robert sees himself; both of them try to rectify themselves. Hence he says:

***“And then I saw him clearly, the long
Epic story of his errors.” (C. P., 1989:10)***

Robert is an imaginary character, but there are real characters also whose company Ezekiel desires most. He desires the company of his beloved. Ezekiel goes in accompaniment of his beloved in London. The relation between them is platonic. There is no evidence of indulgence in physicality between the lovers; it is there in the poem 'An Affair'.

***“And then she said: I love you, just like this
As I had seen the yellow blondes declare
Upon the screen, and even stroked my hair.
But hates me now because I did not kiss.”***

(C. P., 1989:11)

The company of the foreign lady is also one type of his corruption because it is also one of the reasons of his failure. The poet doesn't like to corrupt her chastity even though there is the response of the foreign lady. He doesn't want to spoil his or her chastity by using her body because his intention is only to get knowledge and compose poetry.

But in 'And God Revealed' Ezekiel develops the concept of love, which can strengthen man-woman relationship. In the creative carrier, Ezekiel observes the man-woman relationship in London and tries to explain the concept of love. Being through the flowering years of his youth, he wants to handle the matter of love, which also becomes the obstacle in his creative mind. Because “In the early period of his poetic career Nissim Ezekiel associated sin with woman and the phantasmagoria of sex caused a split in him- an emotional split”. (Sharma, T. R, 1994:67)

This is the cause of his frustration in his efforts to bring about a synthesis between love and sex at one side and poetry and prayer at the other. Ezekiel delineates himself as a voyager with the use of his intellectual power, growing awareness of physical passion and sexual impulse. He shows the religio-philosophical attitude of his own. His belief is not in the institutionalized religion.

While the poem 'To a Certain Lady' shows the synthesis of sex and meditation. He observes the quarrels and man-woman relationship in married life in London but Ezekiel extols such petty conflicts. So Ezekiel states:

“But I am interested!

...

I can't make poetry out of this. (C. P., 1989:29)

He admits that poetry writing is impossible without love so he thinks about his marriage. But he is equally aware

that there are so many hindrances in married life, but he is ready to face them and posses the creativity. It means that he is ready to compromise, co-operate and adjust. His portrayal of man-woman relationship is never free from a touch of regret and a sense of sadness. He portrays the conjugal life of man and woman in his poetry, which has the touch of a feeling of despondency and gloom. The same theme is continued in the five-part structure of the poem, 'To a Certain Lady'. This poem opens with a description of the wife's virginal coyness as well as the persona's definition of life within this new relationship. Being at the age of twenties, he is interested in handling the topic of love and marriage.

***“Life can be kept alive
By contact with the unknown and the strange,
A feeling for the mystery
Of man and woman joined ...***

....

The simple things that make a home.” (C. P., 1989:28)

Ezekiel would like to handle the topic of love i.e. married life, man-woman relationship, as he is personally interesting in entering into an alliance with a woman. He dreams of the pleasures of marriage, because now he is in his twenties and thought of a female partner constantly wrecks him.

***“A quiet woman
Stands by me***

...

Breasts like rose. And such eyes!” (C. P., 1989:28)

He feels that he can meditate only after entering the bonds of the marital relationships. Ezekiel's observation of the married life of man and woman is not the vivacious one, but the optimistic one. While observing the marital harmony of the foreign people he is disgusted and his dreams of love are overshadowed, because he sees the worst side of the marital experiences of them.

“Then, absences and quarrels, indifference

Sucking like a leech upon the flesh.” (C. P., 1989:29)

But Ezekiel thinks that the only way to remove the discord and disharmony is to synthesize sex and meditation. It is quite imaginary. In the voyage of life there should be certain compromises between man and woman. Both man and woman are voyagers in the same boat. The poem concludes with a prayer. There is the reconciliation over the topic of the dreams of the failure of the marital love. There is the religious note and he prays as:

“Teach us, love, above all things, fidelity to music,

...

And let us die, love, as though we chose to, for a reason.” (C. P., 1989:30)

While thinking about the man-woman relationship, love and sex, dreams of marriage, Ezekiel would like to develop the sense of creative continuity in life. Ezekiel decides that only poetry can give him relief from the disillusioned state of his mind. Hence he tries to get accustomed with the creative power and tries to get the knowledge in urban area (London). Ezekiel declares that there should be no end of his art i.e.

poetry. He would like to write poetry and not poem. He wants to create poetry because it is a source to get out of the sense of alienation, boredom and ennui that he continues to suffer from.

Ezekiel differentiates a poem from poetry. Bruce King has also popularized the idea of Ezekiel's writing of poetry. So R. Raj Rao remarks: "But it is Nissim himself who makes us aware of the distinction, in a poem called 'Poetry'." (Rao, R. Raj, 2000:107) With the help of the meditation he wants to create poetry that would not include his own experiences but would include the existence of the outer world. It is the proper time for meditation to write poetry.

The creation of poetry is not only intended to bring aesthetic pleasure to the poet, but it is largely concerned with the poet's own redemption, which certainly carries strong personal experiences.

***"And time is only meditation,
Prayer and poetry, poetry and prayer." (C. P., 1989:16)***

He thinks that only meditation and poetic culture are not sufficient to redeem him from his despondency and nervousness. Hence he decides to come out from the alien land and settle in his own native land and create the poetry. To solve the problem of redemption, he abandons the city.

***"After a night of love, I left the city
With intention to return, but carried it
Within me." (C. P., 1989:18)***

There are so many obstacles in his way to redeem himself. In the fourth section of the poem the poet thinks that he is very near to solve the problem of redemption. Ezekiel's disillusionment, alienation and hopelessness make his poetry - writing very difficult. So he could not write poetry without referring to his own self in his poems, which may also termed as poetic intrusion. In the poem

'A Word For the Wind' the poet expresses his inability to find out appropriate words for poetry, particularly for wind. Ezekiel is in search of the appropriate words for his poetry. He doesn't like to use the simple and ordinary words to compose the poetry but there is the endless quest for the words for his poetry to show his endless desire of showing his identity. Hence he says, "I cannot find a word for the wind". He points out that the wind will inspire him hence he wants to use another word for wind. Ezekiel states that he is blind as Homer but wants to create the inspiring poetry.

Ezekiel tries to peep into history in the poem 'The Great' because he wants to learn the lives and paradoxes of the great men of past. Because he would like to associate the good qualities of the great men with himself, so he states:

***"The great are egoistic, sensual,
Self-sacrificing, self-controlled, unique
And universal, lovable and damnable,
Selfish and sympathetic." (C. P., 1989:22)***

The great men have the qualities as 'self-sacrificing', 'self-controlled', 'lovable', 'damnable', 'selfish', and 'sympathetic.' Ezekiel discovers "a pattern for our lives" (C. P., 1989:22) in the "shameful failures dignified" (C. P., 1989:22)

of the great men of the past. He is desirous of associating himself with whatever is pure in the lives of the great. But he becomes very disillusioned. He does not like to read anything because he is nervous. He would like to abandon the city, which is an alien land. He feels oppressed by the crowds of the city in alien land. It shows the introspective nature of the poet. He feels that the inner moods and the state of mind are more important than the outward life.

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English Literature

Research Link - 172, Vol - XVII (5), July - 2018, Page No. 47-49

ISSN - 0973-1628 ■ RNI - MPHIN-2002-7041 ■ Impact Factor - 2015 - 2.782

Representation of Parsis in Indian English Literature : A brief Study

Boman Desai's The Memory of Elephants is an expatriate novel with a conspicuous difference. While in other emigre Parsee novels, the protagonists struggle in the alien land to adjust, psychologically and emotionally, and to attain an identity of their own. Homi, the central character in this narrative, discovers his roots through a creative encounter with the racial past of the Parsee. Thus his return to India is not a gesture of submission; on the contrary, it is a Parsee's realisation of his own dilemma which is invariably part of the racial past. Thus Homi's tryst with the unconscious is an intellectual adventure.

DIKSHA TIWARI

Though, Kanga, Vakil and Dhondy (Britain), Rohinton Mistry (Canada) and Boman Desai (America) are expatriate writers. They continue to write about Indian life with their essentially Indian sensibility. At the same time, their works have a distinctive ethnic character to give them an identity of their own. In his first novel, *Trying to Grow*, Kanga does not depict expatriate sensibility. The novel is set in India; the action revolves round Brit, a thoroughly westernized invalid Parsee boy in Bombay whose quest for identity is, at the same time, a passionate struggle to grow, emotionally and psychologically, though there is virtually no growth at the physical level. Similarly, Mistry, now settled in Canada, writes about 'politics' in high places in *Such a Long Journey*, the victim of which is an innocent Parsee. This novel is typically Indian in theme and setting. The 'local colour' in the narrative adds to the genuineness of Mistry's account. Here memory acts chiefly as a device in evoking nostalgia. Vakil, an expatriate, depicts the adventures of a young boy from the Parsee elite class of Bombay. Dhondy, on the other hand, raises vital questions concerning the cultural disintegration of his motherland. For this purpose, he employs the *Ramayana*, a Hindu epic. *Bombay Duck* is significant for two reasons: one, it is a telling comment on the cultural vacuum which prevails in India today. Secondly, it portrays vividly, the predicament of 'black birds' in a white land. Xerxes, an Indian, is a victim-figure who represents the Asian immigrants in England. Dhondy's account of expatriate experience is authentic. Similarly, like Vassanji, he lays emphasis on racism which is implicit in life in the white man's land. Thus Xerxes is an immigrant through whom the alienation and angst of the expatriate speaks.

Westernization, on the other hand is an upward movement in the social, economic and political hierarchy. Although characters like Shirin in *More of an Indian*, Roshni in *And Some Take a Lover* and Brit in *Trying to Grow* are adequately westernized (what with their lives being enacted on the Bombay scene, Lahore, London or Chicago), they are first and foremost Parsees. Despite active acculturation, they always, and everywhere call)', practise and propagate the values of good thoughts, good words and good deeds in their purity and purpose.

In the novels of Sidhwa, Kanga, Karanjia and Mistry, Parsee life is depicted as in a state of flux. Here the conflict is not within the Parsee community but between the socially, economically and culturally mobile and enterprising Parsee community and the rest of the world. It provides sustenance in a Parsee's quest for greater achievement in expatriate experience and westernized life in India alike. It attaches due importance to social prestige, prosperity and success in this world. Loyalty to the ruler of the State is a value which the Parsees meticulously practice.

All the Parsee protagonists in the works under study, whether they be westernized or expatriate, derive motivation and sustenance their religion. In Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters*, Freddie's quest for prosperity and social prestige is very much a tendency promoted by his religion. Thus, even Diaspora acts as a creative means for this end, it is a complex and painful process but it promotes adaptability. Hence Freddie's journey from Central India to Lahore involves mobility in life. With his enterprising out-look and dynamic approach, he emerges ultimately as the patriarch of the Parsee community in Lahore. At the same time, he remains a devout

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Parsee since his commitment to the values of charity and benevolence is unflinching. He also practices the essential value of loyalty to the ruler. Till the end of his eventual life, Freddie remains a fierce supporter of the British. Thus, Freddie accomplishes what he advocates-both material success and spiritual progress in life.

Ice Candy Man, at least to some degree, illustrates the principal value in the Zoroastrian worldview-charity. In the narrative, Godmother and Lennie's mother are engaged in the relentless task of rehabilitation of 'fallen' women like Ayah during the Partition. Thus, though they are minor characters and are of peripheral interest in the narrative, they nevertheless take the path of Asha as highlighted in the religion ethics. Similarly loyalty to the British was a value practiced by the Parsee community during the freedom struggle. Colonel Bharucha, the spokesman of the microscopic community of the Parsees in Lahore, states their position in categorical and unambiguous terms.

In *An American Brat*, Parsee religion operates explicitly. The heightened consciousness of Feroza is the outcome of expatriation. Since only New World ensures happiness coupled with freedom, she opts for it. Though, there is a change in the external mode, her inner self remains typically Zoroastrian. Thus, her survival in the new habitat is due to her success in preserving her ethnic identity. Both Freddie and Feroza are typical migrants who practice the values of charity and adaptability. While Freddie makes charity the cornerstone of his existence in Lahore, Feroza takes the idea of adaptability to the point of consummation. Thus, for both the chosen land (Lahore or America) provides adequate social space to grow and attain prosperity and success whereas Parsi continues to provide enough emotional and religious space.

In Farrukh Dhondy's *Bombay Duck*, the religion operates, however covertly, as the focal point. Xerxes, the protagonist, like Dhondy himself, is a non-conformist who rejects institutionalism and ritualism. He attaches due importance to the 'content' of the doctrines. Though, he scoffs at the shallow notions and outdated ideas in Zoroastrianism. Xerxes subscribes to the central doctrine of the Parsee, viz., humata, hukhta and hvarshata. By taking the path of Druj, he accomplishes precisely what Parsee condemns. Towards the end of the narrative, he is reborn, symbolically though, for there is a tangible shift in his consciousness.

Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants* is an expatriate novel with a conspicuous difference. While in other emigre Parsee novels, the protagonists struggle in the alien land to adjust, psychologically and emotionally, and to attain an identity of their own. Homi, the central character in this narrative, discovers his roots through a creative encounter with the racial past of the Parsee. Thus his return to India is not a gesture of submission; on the contrary, it is a Parsee's realisation of his own dilemma which is invariably part of the racial past. Thus Homi's tryst with the unconscious is an intellectual adventure.

Homi is a true Parsee in his outlook. His quest for roots abroad is an exercise in futility. The glittering existence in the New World fails to sustain him since his interior landscape remains unaltered. He, an expatriate, singularly though, attaches considerable importance to humata, hukhta and hvarshata. He, like Feroza in *An American Brat*, is engaged in the revival of ethnicity. His very rejection of the suggestion of conversion of Christianity bears adequate testimony to his unshaken commitment to the Zoroastrian faith. His return to India and Rusi's gleeful acceptance of the westernized life are the two contrary states in expatriate experience. In the evolution of his consciousness, the racial past plays the role of a catalyst. His acceptance of the racial past of the Parsees as a reality thus resolves his existential dilemma.

Karanjia's *More of an Indian* and Kanga's *Trying to Grow* illustrate the concern of westernization which is the outcome of the exposure of the Parsee community to English culture and education. Shirin, the central consciousness in *More of an Indian* represents the modernist section in the Parsee community. Her attitude to her own religion is singular in the westernized Parsee life. Her thesis that a true religion is a spring of motivation and sustenance resolves her moral dilemma. Her quest, thus, is for a religion which is life-sustaining and hence, creative. Her stance is typical of the modern Parsee community. Her realisation that the Parsee religion is only a handmaid to life brings to an end the conflict between the two warring principles in her mind.

Kersasp, her father, though westernized, rejects ritualism in his own religion and thus becomes a quester in his own way. His ultimate rejection of the dead and outdated values is a moral need. Likewise, Shirin his daughter is an emancipated woman since she achieves the singular fusion of westernization and Zoroastrian value system.

In Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*, Parsee life is depicted as under the influence of westernization. Although not deeply religious, the Kotwals attach much importance to the idea of adaptability in the Indian society. Kanga's critical stance is the result of expatriation. His prolonged stay in the west makes him an outsider to his own faith as a Parsee. Similarly Vakil's *Beach Boy* deals with the westernized life of a Parsee family in Bombay. Cyrus Ready money is a happy-go-lucky type of person who attaches little or no importance to religion. However, he too, like a true Parsee, realizes the significance of charity after his father's sudden death. This novel deals with the cultural aspect of the Parsees. Adaptability is Cyrus' forte and his juvenile existence is characterized by a passionate attempt to grow.

Gustad, the protagonist in *Such a Long Journey*, is a devout Parsee who attaches paramount importance to good thoughts, good words and good deeds. His bleak existence in Khodadad Building in Bombay is characterized by charity and benevolence. Deeply religious and an ardent follower of the preaching's of prophet Zoroaster. Gustad is a true Parsee whose journey symbolizes the conflict between Good and Evil. He takes the path of Asha as enjoined by Parsee religion.

The ultimate survival of Gustad is the celebration of the Parsee faith. In the ultimate analysis, Gustad emerges as a sad symbol. His triumph, however humble it may be, is the victory of Good over Evil.

Thus, explicitly the conflict in the narrative is between Gustad, an individual and a corrupt system which destroys the happiness of the ordinary people. Implicitly, the archetypal conflict rages in the mind of the protagonist. He, who is myopic at the beginning of his journey, attains full vision towards the end. His journey, which is invested with symbolic significance, is a manifestation of the cosmic phenomenon-the conflict between Good and Evil.

In Dina Mehta's and Some Take a Lover, the Parsee religion operates overtly. Sudhir's brave and heroic death gives a new lease of life to Roshni. She who takes the path of Druj returns to the path of Asha. She resolves to lead a virtuous life, to practise humata, hukhta and hvarshta like a true Parsee. Though adequately westernized, she returns to the parsis faith since it alone ensures emotional space for her.

These novels dramatize the happy and adaptive lives of the Parsees wherever they are-in London, Canada, New York or Bombay. Most of these novels end in happy 'resolution.' "Conflict" is always in redefining the external mode and means of adapting oneself in a 'land of willing exile' without failing to practise the Parsee values. In this conflict between the traditional modes and displaced attitudes, the achievement of the Parsee protagonists in emigre Parsee novels namely Feroza, Homi, Rusi as well as Shirin, Freddie and Gustad in the westernized Parsee context close at home, lies in realising ultimately for themselves and for others, a happy and dynamic life ahead.



शोध-पत्र प्रकाशन सम्बंधी सूचना

'रिसर्च लिंक' (राष्ट्रीय मासिक शोध जर्नल) में शोधपत्रों के प्रकाशन हेतु किसी भी प्रकार का प्रकाशन शुल्क नहीं लिया जाता है। शोधपत्र प्रकाशन हेतु आप शोधपत्र की सॉफ्टकॉपी हमारे ई-मेल आईडी - researchlink@yahoo.co.in पर भेज सकते हैं। शोधपत्र प्राप्त होते ही रेफरी प्रकाशन हेतु स्वीकृत, अस्वीकृत अथवा संशोधन हेतु परामर्श प्रदान करता है। शोधपत्र प्रकाशन योग्य होने पर ही केवल शोधपत्रों, प्राध्यापकों से सदस्यता शुल्क लिया जाता है। सदस्यता शुल्क का भुगतान ऑन-लाईन हमारे खाते में सीधे किया जा सकता है। बैंक सम्बंधी जानकारी निम्नानुसार है -

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