

**A READING OF NISSIM EZEKIEL'S POETRY FROM BIOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE**

Dr. Rumi Rani Laskar

*(Assistant Professor, Department of English, Haflong Government College, Haflong-788819, Assam)***ABSTRACT**

Environmental cataclysm is the most imperative concern the globe is facing in the present day. A wide range of environmental tribulations such as climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, degraded air and water quality, dearth of fresh water, land contamination, deforestation, soil erosion and biodiversity loss have surfaced the entire globe. The issue of environmental crisis has become the major concern of environmental science and management unit or departments. They have been playing multifarious roles to tone down this crisis. In this context, creators of black and white pages are too playing crucial roles. Litterateurs have been presenting their biocentric ethical concerns in their pages. In literature, environmental concerns and awareness began to crop up in the 1970s with the importance that was given to Sahelian droughts of the 1970s and the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986. Thenceforth ecocriticism marched as a critical and deconstructive concept in literature. Nissim Ezekiel (1942-2004) has dealt with a wide variety of themes in his poems such as love, isolation, human flaws, imperfections and superstitions but at the same time he seems to have biocentric approach in some of his poems such as "Squirrel", "Sparrows", "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher".

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India has been a land of beliefs by tradition and culture. Since India is a land of multifarious religions, castes, sects, and tribes: the people here feel and strongly believe that in every object of nature there is the existence of divine being. India being an agricultural country, the farmers before reaping the crops worship various Gods and Goddesses; even when a person plans to build a house he worships the Almighty through various rites and rituals. However with the development of science and technology, the natural resources of the earth gradually began to be considered as exploitable possessions. Humanity has forgotten that it cannot make its existence alone. In order to survive, every living creature has to be dependent on each other for its survival. An endeavor has been made in this paper to explore the environmental concerns of Nissim Ezekiel in his poems. Ezekiel's awareness regarding the contemporary environmental crisis is brought by him in some of his poems such as "Squirrel", "Sparrows", "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher".

Nissim Ezekiel is counted along with A.K. Ramanujan, Parthasarathy as one of the modern Indian poets writing in English. His first volume of poems appeared in 1952 titled *A Time to Change*; this was followed by other volumes such as *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Man* (1965), and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). He has dealt with a wide variety of themes in his poems such as love, isolation, human flaws and imperfections, superstitions but at the same time he seems to have biocentric approach in some of his poems. Ezekiel was quite responsive to his environment as he seems to believe that "India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it" (Introduction CP xxii). The poet seems to have been deeply engrossed in the contemporary environment of India; he cannot part himself from it though at times he is satirical towards the human foibles. He has become at par with the culture, society, geography, polity, language, environment as well as humanity. Ezekiel's biocentric approach is observed in "Foresight", where he says "We shall not find a tragic end beyond the mountains where ancient gods are buried. We could be buried there beneath a landscape brave with life... (CP 51).

In this contemporary world of Mammon worship, mankind has forgotten the importance of 'landscape'; he does not carry even in his distant insight, the realization of the veritable fact that after life the dead will be buried in the landscape itself, in turn making the dead as well as the buried full of life. In the landscape, each and every species have to be dependent on each other to rule over the odds and this is what is called ecological consciousness.

Ezekiel's "Sparrows" is an outburst on the human cravings for materials beyond their requirements. Sparrows live a self-sufficient life, they seek minimal requirement such as just to fly freely without any stress of wants, they intend to mate which is quite natural, and then to build a nest. This motive of the sparrow has been used by the poet to satirize the mankind which constructs its manor grandly without requirements and even craves to have few more and thus stands as a hindrance in front of ecological fruitions. The 'nest' stands as a symbol for openness, warmth giving an overall view of things, which is quite against the contemporary human world. Mankind in this post modern world is happy to live in its fake cosset, in its illusory world. Man considers itself to be the superior amongst all living creatures, but it seems that man is breaking human/animal binary opposition by moving against the rule of eco system. The poet rightly mentions in his poem:

... and then I face

The facts- the mating and the nest

Primeval root of all the rest. (CP 104)

The poem "Squirrel" brings forth the poet's approbation for the world of non-human world. In this poem, Ezekiel uses the personal pronoun 'he' for the squirrel in order to bring down the binary opposition between human and non-human entity. This poem implies that humanity has been a danger to the animal world - the squirrel does not want to be 'caressed' physically but from a distance. The danger that lurks on the squirrel makes it run away from the human world into its own safety zone.

The poem "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" is included in the volume *The Exact Name* (1965). This poem carries beauty and aesthetic sense within it but at the same time it is blunt enough to criticize the human behavior towards nature. The language is



lucid enough and direct which makes the subject matter stand as a statement without any pretense. "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" brings within its purview nature as well as human and non-human entity. According to the poet, birds and women represent nature and that it is not possible to value and identify with them hastily. They cannot be studied under compulsion or even in fretfulness:

To force the pace and never to be still  
Is not the way of those who study birds  
Or women. (CP 135)

The poet urges to have patience so as to comprehend the incomprehensibility of the world. Mutual understanding, compromise and allowing others to the passageway of existence is the crux of ecological stand point. Ezekiel rightly points out in "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher":

The hunt is not an exercise of will  
But patient love relaxing on a hill  
To note the movement of a timid wing;  
Until the one who knows that she is loved  
No longer waits but risks surrendering. (CP 135)

Nissim Ezekiel seems to be of the view that mankind is destroying the ecological atmosphere and balance in the universe. Man in the blind pursuit of material possessions which is momentary on this earth is annihilating the ever valuable nature. In this poem, the poet says that it is the poets, lovers and birdwatchers that can annul the disparaging conduct of the contemporary world.

The poet brings forth his concern for ecology with a style that is suited for the purpose. His poems are written in lucid language and is full of intellectuality suggesting his great concern for the living as well as non-living community, which is both responsible in their own ways for the environment to be healthy. It seems that he wants to bring self-realization amongst the souls of this contemporary world to perform their due responsibilities to save the biodiversity as we all have to add towards the cycle of life. Through his poems Ezekiel seems to bring consciousness amongst the mankind and this shows his rootedness in nature.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author is an Assistant Professor in English and has been teaching since last 7 years. She has completed her M.Phil and Ph.D in English.