

**Realism in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel**

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**Abstract**

Nissim Ezekiel, a trailblazing figure in Indian English poetry, is renowned for his skilful use of realistic elements that effectively depict the essence of modern Indian culture. Ezekiel's poetry reflects the vibrant, tumultuous, and often conflicting cityscape of Bombay (now Mumbai). The depiction of urban existence in his work is not only a setting, but rather a vibrant force that both influences and is influenced by the people who live inside it. Poems like *The Night of the Scorpion* and *The Patriot* are excellent examples of how they portray urban life, where ordinary and significant aspects mix, and personal and global themes intertwine.

Ezekiel's realism is characterized by his sharp societal observation. Ezekiel uses comedy and irony in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.* and *Very Indian Poem in Indian English* to reveal the illogicality's of societal norms and the intricacies of linguistic identity in postcolonial India. The poet's contemplative poems, such as *Enterprise* and *Background, Casually*, expose his inner struggle, contemplation of existence, and search for self-identity. These works provide an honest and direct view into the human mind, skilfully portraying the nuances of emotions and the intricate process of personal development.

Ezekiel's work in postcolonial writing is notable for its skilful handling of cultural identity. Ezekiel's art provides unique insights into the postcolonial predicament by realistically depicting cultural alienation and identity issues. Ezekiel skilfully combines elements of urban life, societal criticism, self-reflection, and innovative language to produce a complex and vivid portrayal of reality in his poetry, which still powerfully resonates with modern readers.

**Keywords:** Tumultuous, societal, postcolonial, societal criticism

**Introduction: Nissim Ezekiel and the Dawn of Modern Indian English Poetry**

Ezekiel played a pivotal role in the establishment of modern Indian English Literature. Ezekiel's emergence in the Indian literary scene brings forth a new period of English poetry, replacing the old tradition. In his poetry, he accurately portrays the contemporary reality of India. He transforms India into an idyllic haven for poets and reigns supreme in the sphere of Indian poetry as the eminent poet, adeptly navigating between the realms of traditional Indian culture and the influences of Westernization (Islam 33).

Ezekiel portrays the life and traditions of Indian society in his poetry. Ezekiel's poetry may be classified into three primary themes: interaction, contemplation, and Indian essence and form. The first component mainly comprises metropolitan regions, rural communities, natural environments, and the inclusion of women. Ezekiel's long residency in Bombay has inevitably shaped the content and style of his poems (Chelliah 1).

**Realism in *The Night of the Scorpion***

*The Night of the Scorpion* takes place in a rural location where the speaker's mother is bitten by a scorpion that had taken refuge in their house to escape the constant rain.

*Ten hours  
of steady rain had driven him  
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.  
Parting with his poison – flash  
of diabolic tail in the dark room –  
he risked the rain again.*

Upon completing its objective, the scorpion swiftly rushed out once more. The poem, written in 1965, accurately depicts the dwelling with mud walls and the absence of power. This is evident from the peasants' use of candles and lamps to look for the scorpion. A significant portion of rural India still lacks access to power.

The neighbours display superstitious behaviour, believing that the woman's suffering will cleanse past sins and reduce future pain. Despite their beliefs, they gather in concern and attempt to help using traditional remedies. This cooperative spirit reflects a characteristic feature of Indian rural society. The bond among peasants represents the humanitarian essence of rural living, marked by unity, compassion, and selfless support (Antony 49).

### **Religious and Philosophical Undertones: The Spiritual Dimension**

Religion holds a central place in society, evident in the summoning of a priest to help the afflicted woman. Herbal remedies, prayers, and incantations are employed, yet her suffering persists. Her husband adopts a rational approach, experimenting with remedies and even burning the sting site.

Eventually, after enduring twenty hours of pain, the woman expresses gratitude that she—not her children—was bitten. This reflects maternal selflessness, courage, and acceptance, reinforcing the spiritual and emotional realism in the poem.

### **Urban Experience and Alienation in *Island***

*Island* presents a realistic portrayal of Bombay (Mumbai), the city where Ezekiel was born, lived, and died. Contrary to the romantic image of an island, the city is crowded with slums and skyscrapers. The poet experiences alienation, choosing introspection over external engagement.

*I am here to find my way in it.  
Sometimes I cry for help  
But mostly keep my own counsel.*

Despite its flaws, the city offers opportunities, symbolized by:

*Bright and tempting breezes  
Flow across the island.*

The poet accepts urban life, resonating with inhabitants of the city that never sleeps.

### **Urban and Rural Realities: Indian English and Social Satire**

*Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.* is a monologue delivered at a farewell gathering. The poem satirizes Indian English and social aspirations. The misuse of tense and idiomatic expressions reflects common Indian speech patterns.

*Whatever I or anybody is asking,  
she is always saying yes.*

The speaker remains confident, unaware of grammatical inaccuracies. English is portrayed as a marker of social mobility (Gustafson). The poem also reflects the Indian tendency to seek better prospects abroad.

*She is going  
to improve her prospect  
and we are wishing her bon voyage.*

The satire is gentle, humorous, and non-patronizing.

### **Social Reality in *The Professor***

*The Professor* presents a retired geography professor conversing with a former student. The monologue highlights Indian parental pride, marriage concerns, health discussions, and social status. The professor boasts of his health and family achievements.

Indian English is evident:

*Whole world is changing. In India also*

*We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing.*

The professor dominates the conversation, a typical social trait. The poem reflects authentic Indian life through humor and realism.

### **Conclusion**

Nissim Ezekiel was instrumental in shaping modern Indian English literature, replacing traditional poetic modes with contemporary realism. His poetry blends Indian tradition with Western influence, offering an authentic portrayal of Indian life. His extended stay in Bombay deeply influenced his poetic vision.

Through poems like *The Night of the Scorpion*, *Island*, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.*, and *The Professor*, Ezekiel realistically captures rural compassion, urban alienation, linguistic identity, and social aspirations. His use of Indian English, humor, and colloquial language creates a unique poetic voice.

Ezekiel's poetry transcends caricature, presenting nuanced, verisimilar representations of Indian society. His contribution has given Indian English poetry a distinct identity, leaving a lasting impact on literature.

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