

**Demise and Agony in Modern Indian English Poetry: Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra and Dom Moraes**

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**Dr. Seema Maheshwari**

Associate Professor

N.R.E.C. College,

Khurja – 203131, U.P, India

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**Abstract**

Demise and agony, which has been interpreted differently by different philosophers and artists since time immemorial, have always been an irresistible and inexhaustible theme in literature the world over. As a matter of fact, if one thinks and writes about life and its various aspects, he has to deal with death and suffering which invariably accompany it and are the inevitable end of it. No wonder, then, if almost all the thinkers and creative minds of the world have seriously pondered over death, which is usually inseparable from suffering- physical, emotional and mental. True, death like love, is an archetypal theme and hence it has fostered the fruition of great works of the world, for every artist is basically concerned with the enigma of existence and in his attempt to explicate life he is confronted with the face of death and suffering. Thus, both Plato and Aristotle, the greatest of the Western thinkers, regard it as an essential stage to reach God, while the greatest of the ancient Western playwrights - Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides- consider it as something divine. But according to Democritus, it is wholly a biological evolution and almost the same is the belief of George Eliot, George Meredith and Robert Browning. However, for Samuel Butler, Thomas Hardy and Jean Paul Sartre, death is simply an accidental collapse of physical machinery and has hardly anything divine in it. Likewise the pre-Darwinists hold that it does not possess any spiritual nature; it is purely a biological phenomenon and nothing else. On the other hand Hindu scriptures, including the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita, present death as the gateway to enter a new world in consonance with one's previous deeds or karmas, and thus invest it with spirituality and religion. But in the age of fast, unforeseen advancement of Science and Technology, it is impossible to prove God or the Spiritual nature of death as scientific truth. And so the modern artists generally believe in death as a physical or biological phenomenon enwrapped in a variety forms of suffering.

**Keywords :** Inexhaustible, Inseparable, Death, Archetypal, Agony.

## Introduction

Contemporary Indian English poetry has won wide critical recognition for its authentic poetic voice and it has also been acquitted of the charge of innovativeness in the matters of theme and technique. Its originality and authenticity are also abundantly perceptible in its deft treatment of death, and in this context five Poets - Nissim Ezekiel, A.K Ramanujan, Jayant Mahapatra and Dom Moraes- are of special significance, and hence they have been selected for a thorough examination in the proposed research paper. Interestingly, they have given a very serious consideration to death and matters related to it, and are strikingly different not only from one another but also from their predecessors and contemporaries. Thus, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu have little appeal for them, and also they have shared very little with their illustrious contemporaries like P. Lal, R. Parthasarathy, O. P. Bhatnagar, Kamla Das and Shiv K.Kumar. Indeed, the entire fabric of their poetic corpus is intertwined with the thoughts of death and suffering, which haunts every human being right from adolescence to the end of his existence in the world, and hence the need and justification for analysing comprehensively their poetry from the point of view.

## Nissim Ezekiel

He is one of the five distinguished poets, referred to above, Nissim Ezekiel is the senior most post-independence Indian English poet and is perhaps the most widely known Indian poet in English. His poetic career began in 1952 with "a time to change" and reached its culmination in *Latter-Day Psalms* which brought him Sahitya Academy Award in 1983.

The theme of death and suffering looms large in his poetry. We come across a certain disproportionate image of inevitability, futility and helpless acceptance of death gathering dimension in his poetry. His sense of loss and suffering is at once revealed as he becomes nostalgic about his father who is already dead.

As the poet finds that his dying father issuing the breath of love, he armours himself with an irresistible desire of probing into the depth of living reality and sees death as part of the reality without feeling fear or hatred for it. Obviously, he accepts death with as much coldness as he accepts love or life, and often he paints the helplessness of a man in an inverted metaphor.

## AK Ramanujan

AK Ramanujan seems to opine that death is the climax of struggle in life, and that it is a kind of biological phenomenon. In his context, his notable poems are 'Of Curves', 'I listened', 'the whip', 'the gnomes', 'breaded fish', 'In the Zoo' and 'still another view of Grace'. Then demeaning death, he presents in 'Obituary' a striking image of the insignificance of death; it is relegated to a common ritual and no value with reference to character.

A poet of reminiscences, his 'hood of memory' coils and recoils to the past, and he recalls the death of his father who left dusty tables, debts, daughters etc. His father's dead body

burnt easily and only the rituals were left which the poet could not ignore. He had to collect ashes from the pyre.

Although Ramanujan's search for obituary lines in the newspaper show his pride, but it certainly Lays bare his painful obsession with his father's death, and it is evident in the concluding lines of the poem which reflects the poet's sense of tragic intensity in as much as he finds his very dear mother a completely changed person as himself burdened with painful rituals.

Ramanujan poet history records his collection of the day of his great-aunt's death. He was then a child and so was filled with unusual curiosity by the tragic death-scene. The poet was shocked to see how his little aunt and her sister managed to take away diamond-earrings, bangles, anklets etc. from the dead body of his great-aunt. He ironically paints the changed expression on the face of his little aunt while doing an ugly act at the face of death. After having read his poetry one feels that to Ramanujan death is a kind of fear that haunts man throughout his life, but it does not disqualify life in anyway.

### **Jayant Mahapatra**

Jayant Mahapatra regards death as a simple thing and at times assumes that it wears a beautiful face. He opines that darkness is the visible form of death. The poet imagines and presents man as a helpless prey to death. In this connection to the poem 'on the death of a boy,' is of special importance the poet harps on men's gradual Awareness of the flux of the time in the exquisite poem, "my boy".

The boy is seized with a state of timelessness in the first seven lines., but soon he is overtaken by the sense of mutability and sadly learns that Friday slips into Saturday, and Saturday into Sunday. This flux of time and mutability do not stop and all this leads to continuous weathering and decay. But notwithstanding the awareness of death, the poet is not frightened by the mutability and death in the world because he has unflinching faith in the invulnerability of men's strength.

Mahapatra staunchly believed that the uncontrollable power of death cannot kill or even reduce men's inner strength. Not only this he holds that death, despite its own laws and claws to seize upon men without caring for the time and place, is indeed life's fruition and it is this which imparts intensity and meaning to life and living

### **Dom Moraes**

Fascinated and influenced by the English Romantics, particularly Keats and young Yeats, Dom Moraes offers us a view of death and suffering strikingly different from that of either of the three poets so far discussed. He has a primarily romantic attitude towards death and suffering.

In the very opening poem of his collected poems entitled 'Figures in the Landscape', the poet dwells upon death and approaches it like a dreamer. like John Keats, he expresses longing for 'easeful death' and paints it as sleep. In his persona as the Piper, the poet Falls asleep and when he gets up he recalls a dream and wishes that someone should come and say 'I long to die'.

The poet's opposite sense of loneliness fills him with thoughts of death and pain, but he does not succumb to them like a defeatist and strives for the creative act which may pull him out of the state of death-point into new life with a new voice. In the lovely poem shyness, the poet overly speaks of the making of poem which is like a sexual act accompanied by ecstasy and birth of a new life, yet his preoccupation with death and suffering is evident.

### **Conclusion**

We reach this conclusion that they believe death is the essential and inevitable end of life. It is certain no mortal can evade it. It is in fact the culmination of change, the climax of the flux to which life aspires. It describes that life matures into death which, in turn, is a certainty of life. Death is described as the final phase of life, and described in different views in their writings. They have described it as fear of man, darkness and helplessness.

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