

Role of Human Relationship in the Play Nalini : Nissim Ezekiel

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Accepted 10 March 2007, Available online 15 March 2007, Vol.2007

Abstract

This research work is an attempt to present an analysis of the plays of Ezekiel which had been an unexplored area so far. This work aims at analyze the role of human relationship view in the plays of Nissim Ezekiel. The trend of modernity and tradition has been explored in the plays of Nissim Ezekiel i.e. Nalini- A Comedy (1969). Some important themes that he takes up are related to the city life, politics, loneliness, love, sexuality and similar human situations

Keywords: Human Relationship, City Life, Love, Human Situations

1. Introduction

Nissim Ezekiel (December 24, 1924-January 9, 2004) was a poet, playwright and art critic. He was considered the foremost Indian writer in English of his time. Any study pertaining to a critical assessment of his plays can be made, whether merely as a separate corpus of works, or in relation to his poetry, or in relation to other Indo-Anglian drama. This last has been briefly touched upon therefore this is an attempt to contribute to the field of Indian Drama in English. A brief but comprehensive account of the history and background of Indo-Anglian drama becomes relevant here in order to place Nissim Ezekiel as a playwright. When we deliberate on the present scene of Indian writing in English in general and of Indian Drama in English in particular, we may not get great play righting comparable to the world's greatest, but we are likely to get serious and interesting work. Indian English Drama dates from 1831. Nissim Ezekiel, the father of post independence Indian verse in English, was a poet, critic and playwright. Though the present work concentrates on the plays of Nissim Ezekiel, yet one can trace a subtle thematic unity of traditional and modern experiment fervour. His plays are also a contribution to the modern techniques of theatre and theoretical tradition of Indian drama. Ezekiel believed that plays were written for performance and not only for reading; as such it must have a strong theatrical element. His plays are a reflection of the problems of modern urban civilization and display the trivialities, permissiveness, consumerism and absurdities of their existence. The use of comic and satiric elements, irony, wit and humour make his plays appear more real to the recipients. His plays focus on his sharp observation of the oddities of human life and behavior; they provide glimpses of a cross-section of contemporary society. His drama is realistic and shows the real facets of human life.

Ezekiel's most interesting play 'Nalini' is a three act comedy. It reflects the unauthentic state of the complex life of metropolitan middle class men and women. The play is an interesting social satire which presents a contrast between dream and reality, the ethereal and the substantial. It depicts the unauthentic life of two modern advertising executives Bharat and Raj. Ezekiel dramatises the real condition of contemporary life style and mindset of Bharat and Raj and their farcical existence which is full of meaninglessness and bare ideas. Ezekiel employs satire as a powerful weapon thereby presenting an alarming pragmatic picture of present day India. He makes use of wit and satire to expose the conceit of urban middle class. The play oscillates from reality to fantasy and finally ends at the note of reality. 'Nalini' is beautiful blend of the old and the new, dream and reality and the traditional and modernistic value system, and of all those contraries which constitute the present day human life of complexities and difficulties. The play depicts conventional modes and discusses the myth of 'Sitas and Savitris' and relates it to the character of modern Nalini. This presents to the recipients of the play a fusion of the modern and the traditional woman. The play deals with post-colonial experiences and the themes of identity crisis and shift in values. Ezekiel is conscious of the tensions between the cultural and the colonial past of India, between the attractions of the western modes of thought and the Indian tradition. The issue of effect and aftermath of the colonial rule on a country's future economic, social and cultural development. As such there exists among the modern civilisation a 'nostalgic idealisation' of the native Indian tradition and values and a 'compulsive urge' for modernity and western modes of living. In fact, Ezekiel's

own sensibility is a fusion of the two cultures. He has double impulse of being a native and an alien and he belongs to the period of transition in which the values of modernism paved the way for post-modernism in India. Nalini is an independent woman who is conscious of her dignity, values and moralities. She rejects the romantic advances of Bharat and exposes him. The play has a modern urban setting, characters belonging to same section of contemporary middle class having modern attitude, references to mythological characters claiming one's own past, departure from the past and projection of contemporary values are the highlights of the play. The influence of urbanization and excessive modernisation is felt among the urban civilisation and the quest for identity is a post-modernist trend. Such modern themes of identity crisis, alienation, hollowness, interior or existential conflict and disillusionment have been dealt in the plays of Ezekiel. Ezekiel's short-length plays 'Marriage Poem' and 'The Sleepwalkers' also depict a smooth blend of tradition and modernity. The playwright strikes a balance between the conventional and contemporary elements at the level of themes and dramatic techniques. The 'Marriage Poem' reveals the dark and bright sides of the institution of marriage. The couple Mala and Naresh belong to upper middle class section of society. The playwright is about a situation, a perfunctory domestic situation and depicts the failure of their marriage in which the wife and husband nag and love. The themes of an unhappy marriage and man-woman relationship have been dealt at length in this particular play. Mala and Naresh live under the same roof, experience emptiness, loneliness and a sense of alienation. Naresh tells Leela, the other woman in his life, that he loves her but at the same time he is well aware of the fact that has a family too. The superficial nature of marital relationship can be predicted through the dramatization of dream-like entrance and exit of the other woman, Leela. Though Mala experiences her husband's emotional indifference, callousness and bitter negligence, yet like a typical Indian housewife she is extremely sensitive to the traditional norms of morality and reminds her husband of the marital duties. At the same time she is modern in her outlook, and bold and assertive in her manners, and leaves no stone unturned to win her husband back. Naresh is caught in the crossfire of marital loyalty and romantic love. He is self-contradictory and oscillates between the reality of his marital duties and his fantasy for Leela. Thus Ezekiel presents a very realistic picture of the present day urban Indian society. Similarly, another play 'The Sleepwalkers' satirises the nature of Indians who always praise and accept the superiority of the Americans. The American couple is shown in an interaction with the Indian guests trying to promote their magazine. A contemporary study of Indian and American lifestyle, beliefs, diction, and culture and value system is portrayed with a blend of Western theatrical modes of opera with an excessive use of sound, light, music and masks effect. Ezekiel's another play 'Song of Deprivation' discusses the plight of the modern young lovers He and She who are bound by the conventions and restrictions of the Indian society. They are unnamed characters in the play. The

entire play is in the form of telephonic conversation. The concepts of urbanization, excessive modernization and technological means, and how these gadgets affect the quality of life of the modern man have been the focus of the play. The action lacks rapidity and pace that is why different background sound effects of transistor, teleprinter and bell are used to substitute the physical action on the stage. Nissim Ezekiel's 'Don't Call it o Suicide', a tragedy in two acts, is another specimen of the blend of the tradition and modernity. The play centres around the family of Mr. Nanda and the case of the suicide of his eldest son. It is a domestic tragedy of death, guilt, remorse and atonement. The playwright has voiced the typical modernist's disregard for Indian conventions and prejudices. The playwright deals with the ordinary people, their day to day life, relationships and frustrations, and he expects the recipients to recognise and identify themselves with the modern man struggling with a life full of dilemma. The play reveals the pathetic plight of the family of Mr. Nanda and deals with such themes as alienation, modernity, condition of women, human predicament, violence, insecurity, fear and dilemma. A close examination of Nissim Ezekiel's plays reveals that there is a skilful and perfect use of ironical fantasy in almost all of his plays. Some important themes that he takes up are related to the city life, politics, loneliness, love, sexuality and similar human situations. Ezekiel's selection of theme, art of characterization, choice of western theatrical devices, deliberate expression of post-colonial diction and a blend of urban and rural Indian settings establishes his plays into a wider global perspective. Indian English drama attains glory, validity and vitality through consistent attempts of playwrights like Nissim Ezekiel who add their western insights and Indian vision to relocate the identity of Indian English theatre. His dramas are realistic and show the real facets of human life

The same person is behind the plays as behind the poetry. If there are differences, the careful reader of both will discover and comment on them. (Sharma,1995,32).

Conclusion

Ezekiel's most interesting play 'Nalini' is a three act comedy. It reflects the unauthentic state of the complex life of metropolitan middle class men and women. The play is an interesting social satire which presents a contrast between dream and reality, the ethereal and the substantial. It depicts the unauthentic life of two modern advertising executives Bharat and Raj. Ezekiel dramatizes the real condition of contemporary life style and mindset of Bharat and Raj and their farcical existence which is full of meaninglessness and bare ideas. Ezekiel employs satire as a powerful weapon thereby presenting an alarming pragmatic picture of present day India. He makes use of wit and satire to expose the conceit of urban middle class. The play oscillates from reality to fantasy and finally ends at the note of reality. 'Nalini' is beautiful blend of the old and the new, dream and reality and the traditional and modernistic value system, and of all those contraries

which constitute the present day human life of complexities and difficulties. The play depicts conventional modes and discusses the myth of 'Sitas and Savitris' and relates it to the character of modern Nalini. This presents to the recipients of the play a fusion of the modern and the traditional woman. The play deals with post-colonial experiences and the themes of identity crisis and shift in values. Ezekiel is conscious of the tensions between the cultural and the colonial past of India, between the attractions of the western modes of thought and the Indian tradition.

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