

URBAN: CRITICAL SUMMARY

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NISSIM EZEKIEL: INTRODUCTION

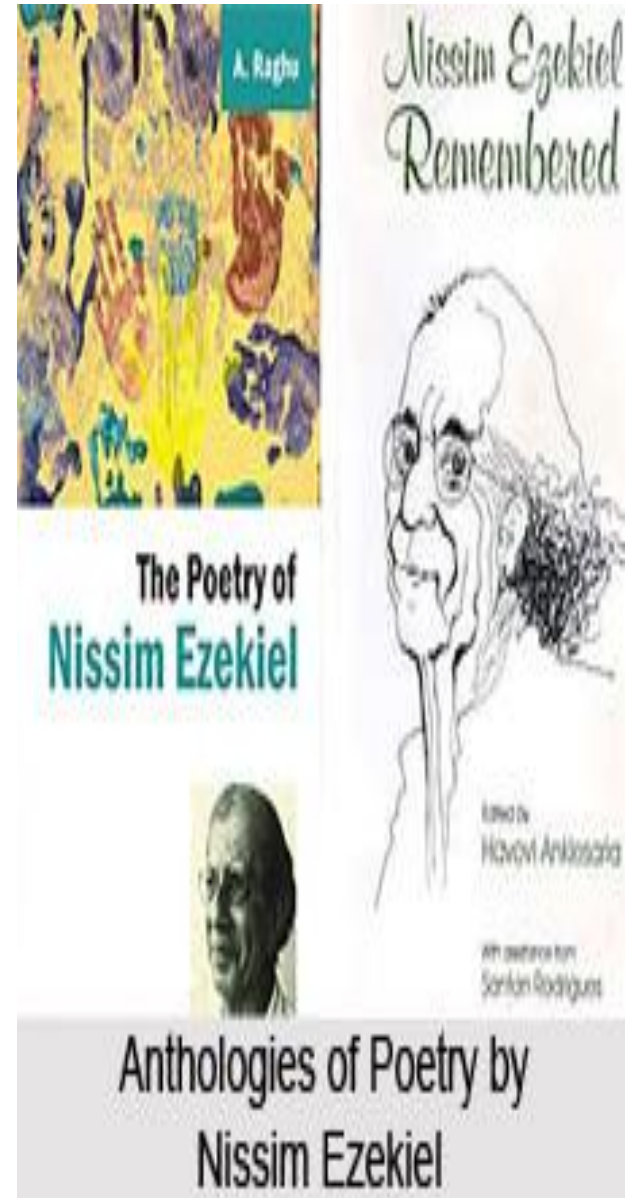


Nissim Ezekiel was an Indian Jewish poet, playwright, editor and art-critic. He was a foundational figure in postcolonial India's literary history, specifically for Indian writing in English. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his Poetry collection, "Latter-Day Psalms", by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters. Early Life Ezekiel was born on 16 December 1924 in Bombay (Maharashtra). His father, Moses Ezekiel, was a professor of botany at Wilson College, and his mother was principal of her own school. The Ezekiels belonged to Mumbai's Jewish community, known as the 'Bene Israel' .

NISSIM EZEKIEL: INTRODUCTION...

In 1988 he received another honour, Padma Shri, for his contribution to the Indian English writing. He passed away on January 9, 2004, in Mumbai after a prolonged illness. Major works of Nissim Ezekiel are:

- Time To Change
- Sixty Poems
- The Third
- The Unfinished Man
- The Exact Name
- The Three Plays
- Hymns In Darkness
- The Night Of Scorpion
- The Professor
- Case Study
- Poster Prayers





Urban

The hills are always far away.
He knows the broken roads, and moves
In circles tracked within his head.
Before he wakes and has his say,
The river which he claims he loves
Is dry, and all the winds lie dead.

At dawn he never sees the skies
Which, silently, are born again.
Nor feels the shadows of the night
Recline their fingers on his eyes.
He welcomes neither sun nor rain.
His landscape has no depth or height.

The city like a passion burns.
He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand.
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand.

URBAN: INTRODUCTION

Urban life, both as setting and subject matter, appeals to the modern literary artists. The rapidly developing modern metropolis proved to be an inspiring enough environment for artists and thinkers because of its immense variability and diversity. The city life provokes ambivalent attitudes and feelings in many who are mere thrilled by the opportunities it affords for their self-realization but who, sometimes hypocritically, also fear its vices and abhor the crudity of its life.

Many modern Indian English poets ventured urbanism in their poetry. Nissim Ezekiel is supreme among all to whom city of Bombay became the epicentre of his being. Most of his poems were set in this city. It was the city of the poet's "birth and rebirth" having a prominent place in the poet's conscience.

URBAN: INTRODUCTION....

Nissim Ezekiel is an urban poet. He knows the pulse of city life, and has dealt with the different dimensions of life in the city in his poetry. A big city like Mumbai has people from all corners of India, and in fact it is a mini-India. The undercurrents in the social and cultural life of Mumbai, has been presented authentically by Nissim Ezekiel in his poems. The diversity in the life style of people in the cities, and the unique party-culture followed by them have been depicted by Nissim Ezekiel in his inimitable way.

Urban is a wonderful poem by Nissim. It tells us of about the story of a man living in a big city such as Bombay in India, and this man is caught up in the dream of sex and power and for whom there is no recovery. The poem describes the struggle of a man between the Bombay search for the nourished dream of a free and peaceful existence and his persistent inability to get to that level because of the city influence on him. He never sees the skies; he never welcomes the sun or the rain; his morning walks are dreams floating on a wave of sand.

CRITICAL SUMMARY



Nissim Ezekiel's *The Unfinished Man* is an important contribution to Modern Indian poetry in English. His poetry has reached a new peak of perfection in *The Unfinished Man*. Nissim Ezekiel has delved into the basis of human life and the nature of self, and conveyed his vision and understanding of the human pursuit for perfection. The imperfect individual, is termed as unfinished individual by Nissim Ezekiel. He says that no one is perfect, before reaching the ideal of perfection. Distress and anxiety haunts the unfinished man and he suffers from his own clumsiness.

CRITICAL SUMMARY....

The disadvantages of life in urban environment, is symptomatic of the life of the unfinished man. Life is devoid of charm and aesthetic sense in the urban setting, and people start behaving like machines says Ezekiel. The hostile environment does not help the individual, to coalesce with it harmoniously. The urban individual is always subject to the jarring effects of the environment, which stunts his growth morally and creatively. He says:

At dawn he never sees the skies
Which silently are born again.
Nor feels the shadows of the night
Recline their fingers on his eyes.
He welcomes neither sun nor rain.
His landscape has no depth or height.



CRITICAL SUMMARY....

Nissim Ezekiel does not like the urban life, but he accepts that there is no escape from it, and he had to accommodate himself with it. The poet is ready to make the compromise, and live with the contradictions and complexities of life in the city. He finds that, in the present world he is not the only person who is confronted with the contradictions of urban life, for the entire contemporary generation is faced with the same dilemma. Nissim Ezekiel feels that, human existence cannot escape the perplexing situation enveloping it. He says in his poem *A Morning Walk* that the city is barbaric:

sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

CRITICAL SUMMARY....

The tone in the first stanza of the speaker is hopeless. He can not see a shadow at night. The poem set at an area where everything is broken and lifeless. It has contrasts of both nature and the city. The ironies and vicissitudes of city life find a place in his poetry. He refers to the poet himself and he is shown being disheartened in the poem. The main idea of the poem is to describe the deplorable condition of the poet's mind and how he sees everything being vividly destroyed.

A poem explores the bad impact of rampant, mindless urbanization and industrialization of our space which houses the populated exodus and congested city space clamouring for natural greenery and vegetation, gasping for breath and fresh vision and sunlight rarely explained elsewhere. Urbanizing our space, where have we reached ultimately? The dry river, silent nature, what are they telling about?

CRITICAL SUMMARY....



Ezekiel uses symbols and imagery in strictly functional sense and not for decoration. Through these symbols and images he makes the abstract concrete. The ever recurring images in his poetry are the woman, the city and nature.

Imagery is a poetic device, which is a way to make the idea much more imaginative in nature. Imagery is based on the details of taste, touch, sight, smell and sound. Imagery is used to increase the depth of the sentence. Auditory imagery is a type of sound imagery will create the image in our minds, adding the depth of the literature.

Symbol is a literary device containing several meanings, not clear at first sight.

THANK YOU

