Biography of Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel (16 December 1924 – 9 January 2004) was an Indian Jewish poet, actor, 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. Ezekiel has been applauded for his subtle, restrained and well crafted diction, dealing with common and mundane themes in a manner that manifests both cognitive profundity, as well as an unsentimental, realistic sensibility, that has been influential on the course of succeeding Indian English poetry. Ezekiel enriched and established Indian English language poetry through his modernist innovations and techniques, which enlarged Indian English literature, moving it beyond purely spiritual and orientalist themes, to include a wider range of concerns and interests, including mundane familial events, individual angst and skeptical societal introspection.

EARLY LIFE

Ezekiel was born on 16 December 1924 in Mumbai (Maharashtra). His father was a professor of botany at Wilson College, and his mother was principal of her own school. The Ezekiels belonged to Mumbai's Marathi speaking Jewish community, known as the Bene Israel. His maternal uncle was a singer / actor, Nandu Bhende.

In 1947, Ezekiel earned a BA in Literature from Wilson College, Mumbai, University of Mumbai. In 1947-48, he taught English literature and published literary articles. After dabbling in radical politics for a while, he sailed to England in November 1948. He studied philosophy at Birkbeck College, London. After three and a half years stay, Ezekiel worked his way home as a deck-scrubber aboard a ship carrying arms to Indochina.

CAREER

Ezekiel's first book, *The Bad Day*, appeared in 1952. He published another volume of poems, *The deadly man* in 1960. After working as an advertising copywriter and general manager of a picture frame company (1954–59), he co-founded the literary monthly *Jumpo*, in 1961. He became art critic of *The Names of India* (1964–66) and edited *Poetry India* (1966–67). From 1961 to 1972, he headed the English department of Mithibai College, Bombay. *The Exact Name*, his fifth book of poetry was published in 1965. During this period he held short-term tenure as visiting professor at University of Leeds (1964) and University of Pondicherry (1967). In 1967, while in America, he used LSD. In 1969, Writers Workshop, Ezekiel published his *The Damn Plays*. A year later, he presented an art series of ten programmes for Indian television. In

1976, he translated Jawarharlal Nehru poetry from English to Marathi, in collaboration with Vrinda Nabar, and co-edited a fiction and poetry anthology. His poem *The Night Of The Scorpion* is used as study material in Indian and Columbian schools. Ezekiel also penned poems in 'Indian English' like the one based on instruction boards in his favourite Irani café. His poems are used in NCERT and ICSE English textbooks.

He was honoured with the Padmashri award by the President of India in 1988 and the Sahitya akademi cultural award in 1983.

EDITOR

He edited *The Indian P.E.N.*, the official organ of P.E.N. All-India Centre, Bombay from The Theosophy Hall, New Marine Lines, Bombay now Mumbai and encouraged poets and writers.

BOOKS BY EZEKIEL

Poetry

- 1952: *Time To Change*
- 1953: *Sixty poems*
- 1956: *The Discovery of India*
- 1959: *The Third*
- 1960: *The Unfinished Man*
- 1965: *The Exact Name*
- 1974: *Snakeskin and Other Poems*, translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant
- 1976: *Hymns in Darkness*
- 1982: *Latter-Day Psalms*
- 1989: *Collected Poems 1952-88* OUP

Other

- 1969: *The Three Plays*

Editor

- 1965: *An Emerson Readers*
- 1969: *A Joseph King Reader*
- 1990: *Another India*, anthology of fiction and poetry

- ^ [1] Kumar, Jai, "Obituary: Nissim Ezekiel", *The Independent*, March 26, 2004, accessed via Find Articles/LookSmart Ltd. Web site, accessed October 16, 2007

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