

## Use of Indian English in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel

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**Abstract.** Nissim Ezekiel is a great Indian poet who is very much conscious of imageries, myths, social rituals and religious aspects of India. He gave strong Indian colour to his poetry. Ezekiel has used Indian English in his poems to parody the confused use of English by most of the people in India. In the poetry of Ezekiel the choice of words and phrases and their setting in Indian backgrounds are typically Indian in the expression of emotions and sentiments of Indian people. Like a true Indian poet, he has exhibited Indian way of thinking and Indians' love for traditional culture and contemptuous views against new generation's love for modern fashion and foreign things. The present paper intends to focus on Nissim Ezekiel's treatment of Indian ethos in his poetry in particular and those of some of his contemporaries in general.

**Keywords :** Phonological and lexical components; Indian English; hackneyed use of English; repetitions; syntactical deviations.

English language took birth from the Teutonic tribes, living on the bank of the river Thames of the British Islands who were invaded several times by the Celts, Romans and Anglo-saxon. Celts came from western Europe and settled in north of England. They spoke Celtic language. But in the first century B.C. England was taken over by Romans who ruled there for four hundred years. Their official language was Latin which was mainly used by upper-class people. But the Celtic language was spoken extensively by common people of England. In 410 Romans withdrew from this land and it was exposed to several attacks. The invaders were Angles, Saxons and Jutes who came from North-west Europe, the region of Denmark, Holland and Germany. They established themselves, occupying the larger area of Celts. Their invasion in 449 A.D. continued for more than hundred years. When they settled, they created seven kingdoms – Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex and Wessex known as anglo-saxon Heptarchy. The people of the seven Anglo-Saxon spoke Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon and Kentish – the dialect of old English. The old English literature was written in west Saxon dialect and got prominence. But it suffered a setback in 1066 due to Norman's conquest of the land. Ultimately Anglian dialect emerged as the more dominant of all dialects. And Angles dominated Germanic tribes. Hence the language was called Englisc (English) and this land was called Englaland (England). The first epic in English named, *Beowulf* is about teutonic People in Anglo-Saxon language of which manuscript has been written in West-Saxon dialect of old English language.

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### Use of Indian English in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel

Language has a powerful impact on the society. It awakens response in fellow citizens through annotations and connotations which are more powerful regionally. It may not have the same response in different society or nation though the language remains the same. It has a social bias which differs from one region to other regions and it is distinct from one society to another society in tone, temper and manner. Same is the case with Indian English. English is a global language but it is different from nation to nation due to different social and geographical factors. Indian English has also its own factors.

Nissim Ezekiel is a great Indian poet who is very much conscious of imageries, myths, social rituals and religious aspects of India. He gave strong Indian colour to his poetry. He composed the poems in English in the way Indians speak generally and painted the picture of Indian way of speaking English. His phonological and lexical components and semantics are Indian in nature. His English is replete with Indian connotations and Indian words.

English is the language which is spoken in most of the countries of the world. It has become a global language nowadays. But the British English, American English and Indian English are famous in the world of today. India, being the third largest speakers of English and some of its writers having the capacity of the best writers in English of the world, is well-known for its own English. Ezekiel also belongs to same group of writers. His poems in Indian English expose his Indian sensibility and Indianness in texture.

Nissim Ezekiel, a recipient of the Padmashri (1988) and Sahitya Akademi Award (1983) is a renowned leading poet of Indian sensibility, composing poems in Indian English. He has published eight volumes of poetry including *A Time to Change*(1952), *The Unfinished Man*(1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness*(1976), *Latter Day Psalms* (1983) and *Collected Poems* (1989). The themes of his poems render Indian ethos with philosophical flavour to Indian English.

Ezekiel has used Indian English in his poems to parody the confused use of English by most of the people in India. Indian people often get confused in the use of subject-object relationship and present continuous tense in place of simple present as we find in the poem “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.”. Speakers use present continuous tense (you are all knowing) instead of simple present (you all know) and many more like this. In his another poem “The Railway Clerk” the speaker’s statement is the hackneyed use of English which is the trait of Indian English. The Railway Clerk’s statement is in Indian English in which the article and the preposition have been dropped. His poems “The Professor”, “The Patriot”, “Soap”, “Irani Restaurant Instructions” and many other poems, reflect Indian English.

In the following poems, “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.” Ezekiel has recorded the rambling in Indian way of speaking :

What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa  
 I don't mean only external sweetness,  
 But internal sweetness,  
 Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling  
 Even for no reason,  
 But simply because she is feeling –  
 Now I ask others to speak  
 And afterwards Miss Pushpa  
 Will do summing up. (King 101)

People in India generally use present continuous instead of simple present. Their obsession with present continuous tense is conspicuous in the following lines of Ezekiel's poem "The Patriot" :

Why world is fighting, fighting.  
 Why all people of world are not following Mahatma Gandhi  
 I am simply not understanding –  
 Other day I am reading in newspaper  
 Every day I am reading Times of India  
 To improve my English language. (Ezekiel 180)

In the poetry of Ezekiel the choice of words and phrases and their setting in Indian backgrounds are typically Indian in the expression of emotions and sentiments of Indian people. The following lines of his poem "The Patriot" have such features of Indian English :

How one goonda fellow  
 Throw stone at Indirabehn  
 Must be student unrest fellow,  
 I am thinking Friends, Romans, Countrymen.  
 I am saying (to myself)  
 Lend me the ears  
 Everything is coming –  
 Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception  
 Be patiently, brothers and sisters. (182\_

The syntactical features of Indian English are conspicuous in these lines. It is the common feature of Indian people to omit articles in their writings however they are required to be placed on the places of omission. In this poem, we find the missing of article 'The' in the line 'I am reading in newspaper' and 'a' in the line 'Throw stone at Indirabehn'.

Like a true Indian poet, he has exhibited Indian way of thinking and Indian's love for traditional culture and contemptuous views against new generation's love for modern fashion and foreign things. He says – "But modern generation is neglecting too much going for fashion and foreign thing". We find that the transitive verb is used without objects in the line "But modern generation is neglecting". The unnecessary extended use of nouns and noun phrases as premodifiers for nouns, is prevalent in Indian English which we find in this poem. It has been used in this poem as – "One goonda fellow" and "student unrest fellow". We also find semantic shift in Indian English as we find here – "Be patiently" instead of "have patience". There we find unusual interrogative sentences which reflect Indian English. These sentences are – "You want one glass lassi". "All men are brothers; you are going", literary pilfering is very common in Indian English which we find in the line of this poem as – "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me the ear". This is the sentence spoken by Mark Antony in Shakespeare's drama *Julius Caesar*.

In the following lines of this poem we find the speaker's obsession with present progressive tense and the defiance of perfectness of grammatical norms :

If you are coming again by chance,  
Visit please, my humble residence also.  
I am living on opposite house's backside. (184)

In Ezekiel's another poem, "The Railway Clerk" we find the speaker's use of Indian English. Having gone through the lines of this poem we can acknowledge such features of Indian English :

I do what I'm told  
But still I'm blamed  
Every day there is so much of work.  
But I don't get overtime.  
I wish I was bird  
I am never neglecting my responsibility,  
I am discharging it properly  
I am doing my duty,  
But who is appreciating?  
No body, I am telling you. (184-85)

Hence we find the speaker's obsession with present continuous tense instead of simple present in which a preposition and an article have been dropped unnecessarily. The duplication in the statement and inappropriate grammatical use in the sentence are also conspicuous.

Semantic shift in the words is very common feature of Indian English which we find in his poem “Irani Restaurant Instructions” in the following lines:

Do not comb  
 Hair is spoiling floor  
 Do not make mischiefs in cabin  
 Our Waiter is reporting  
 Come again  
 All are welcome whatever caste. (186)

Here, we find semantic shift in “Spoiling floor”. In India different languages and many dialects are spoken. These influences on Indian English have strange colloquial expressions. Repetitions are conspicuous in his following poem “Soap” :

Though in Hindi, I’m saying it,  
 and my Hindi is not so good as my English ...  
 phase to note this defect in soap,  
 and still he is denying the truth,  
 so I’m getting very angry that time  
 and with loud voice of I am saying  
 you are blind of what?  
 What you will show me  
 Which I have n’t got already?  
 It is vulgar thing to say  
 But I am saying it  
 Now small crowd is collecting  
 And shop man is much bigger than me  
 And I am not caring so much. (202)

In this poem we find strange collections, repetitions and syntactical deviations which are the common features of Indian English which we find in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, a great representative poet of Indian English poetry. He composed poems in Indian English which have been appreciated by Indian people and the people of the west as well. He has confessed himself, I regard myself essentially as an Indian poet writing in English, I have a strong sense of belonging and only to India, but to this city, I would never leave Bombay. (Beston Interview. 44)

Ezekiel is a great Indian poet and his poetry is the profile of Indian English. He uses many Indian words in his poetry which show close nativity and attachment to the soil of the places to which the poets are born and brought up. More or less almost all Indian poets and fiction writers have this feature of Indian English. In the poems Kamala Das also uses the words of her mother tongue :

I am Indian, very known, born in  
 Malabar, I speak three languages, write in...  
 It voices my joys, my longings, my  
 Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing  
 Is to crows or roaring to the lions. (Prasad 41)

In her another poem the poetess has expressed the feeling of Indian women with the flavour of Indian English, “Vrindaban lives on in every women’s mind and the flute luring her from home and her husband.” (Saha 64)

A renowned Indian poet, Parthasarthy has also used such Indian words which are spoken everywhere in Indian society. In the following stanza of his poem “The Killing of the innocents” we find plenty of such words:

On December 25, 1968, sixteen women, five men,  
 and twenty three children, all of them Dalits,  
 Were burnt to death by upper caste Hindu  
 in the village of Kilvenmani in Tamil Nadu. (Parthasarthy 290)

In the poetry of another Indo-Anglian poet Keki N. Daruwalla, we find the input of Hindi words as we find in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. In his poem, “Defining : Sufi”, he has used such words:

A Sufi is he who as he enters  
 a Bangladeshi fake tandoori entry  
 thinks he is in Moti Mahal or Khyber.  
 (He can’t think of Bokhara as yet  
 to think of Bokhara you have to be  
 spiritually very elevated. (Daruwalla IJES, 2008)

Most of the Indian poets writing in English and Indo-Anglian fiction – writers have such flavour of Indian English. The prevalence of this character in Indo-Anglian writers is natural because the language has input of social affairs. There is a close relation between the man who speaks and the language which is spoken by the man :

Linguistically speaking, language is a social activity/ affair rather than as a means of individual self expression. Speech is the instrument of society. There is a very close connection between the two facts that man is a speaking animal and that he is the social animal par excellence. (Yadav IJES 2008, 211)

These special features of Indianness which we find in Indo-Anglian writer are prevalent in the poetry of Ezekiel.

Nissim Ezekiel has used Indian English not for the purpose of humiliation of Indian people but for putting on record the Indian way of speaking English because Indian English is marked with influences and interference of the mother tongue. It is not ironic in statement or parody in style to learners or readers. It is an exposition of Indian way of speaking English and their regional and cultural influences on English language.

More or less, almost all Indian poets and poetesses like Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarthy, Jayanta Mahapatra, A.K. Ramanujan and fiction writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya and many more have used Indian English in their poems and fictions. Many critics have denounced the use of Indian English in the poems of Ezekiel but he has used Indian English to promote and explore the Indian consciousness and awareness of Indian peninsula through the use of Indian English in his poetry.

Critics may denounce the use of Indian words in English poetry but Indian poets and poetesses can't resist themselves from the use of such words. Sarojini Naidu, the nightingale of India has also used such words in her poetry:

If in the darkness a serpent should bite me,  
Or if an evil spirit should smite me,  
Ram Re Ram! I shall die (Prasad 23)

Amrita Pritam, the winner of Padma Shree, Sahitya Akademi (1956) and Jnanpith Awards has also used such words in her poetry.

I am kama kanya, the daughter of love  
I am kal kanya, the daughter of death  
Wearing this body, I have came.  
( I am the Daughter of the Land of Dravida)

The use of such Indian words is the exposition of Indian English because most of the languages of the world are hybrid creations. Many words of different languages have been lapped off here from other branches in the passage of time. Indian English has adopted so many such words from Hindi and it has not debased Indian English rather it has made it more emphatic and dynamic :

Most languages are hybrid creations to some extent  
: words lopped off here with the passage of centuries  
.... To remain static is to become stagnant. And all

of this is particularly true of English. As the one truly global language it has found within it – as it must, have relevance in the many societies in which it is used – the scope for adopting words from those cultures. (The Times of India)

Thus we find that English is capacious enough to adopt words from other languages. Indian English has adopted Hindi words and other words from different regional languages spoken in India. So the use of such words in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel has made his poetry more relevant and comprehensive to Indians. It doesn't dispel the beauty of Indian English rather it adds beauty to its salient features :

When scrabble adds, say, Hindi words, it isn't debasing the English language. It is staying true to its essence, which is its ability to grow. (Ibid. 203)

In this way Indian English has grown in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel like those of other Indian writers in English. But some critics are dead against the use of such words in English. They are of the opinion that Hindi words and other regional words would undermine the significance of English language if they are used in English. It would make English beyond recognition :

English is a means of communication between diverse peoples the world over. The more it's debased, stretched beyond recognition to include alien words, the less it will be able to serve this fiction. (Yadav 43)

Whatever the critics may say to the poetic expression of Ezekiel but he is very much appreciated for the use of Indianness in his poetry because language is a social activity rather than the means of individual self expression. It is not only the expression of feeling to air the views but to awaken a response in the fellow beings and influence their attitudes and acts. Ezekiel has done this task of awakening response among Indians through the exposition of Indian English in his poetry.

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