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| **Ezekiel, Nissim (1924-2004)** |
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| Nissim Ezekiel was a poet, playwright, director of plays, University professor, art critic, literary editor and reviewer. Born to academic Marathi-speaking, Jewish parents of the minority Bene-Israel persuasion, Ezekiel’s existence within cosmopolitan Mumbai (then Bombay) rendered complex his poetic sensibility. After a Bachelors degree in Literature at Wilson College, Bombay in 1947 and some political engagement with M. N. Roy’s *Radical Democratic Party*, he sailed to England for further studies in 1948. As a student of philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, he published his first volume of poetry, *A Time to Change* (1951). |
| Nissim Ezekiel was a poet, playwright, director of plays, University professor, art critic, literary editor and reviewer.  File: NissimEzekiel\_image1.jpg  Figure  Source: unknown  File: NissimEzekiel\_sketch.jpg  Figure  Source: unknown  File: NissimEzekiel\_image2.jpg  Figure  Source: unknown  **Timeline of Significant Works Published**  1952 1953 1959 1960 1965  *A Time Sixty The The The*  *To Change Poems Third Unfinished Exact*  *Man Name*  1969 1976 1982 1989  *Three Hymns in Latter-Day Collected*  *Plays Darkness Psalms Poems*  Born to academic Marathi-speaking, Jewish parents of the minority Bene-Israel persuasion, Ezekiel’s existence within cosmopolitan Mumbai (then Bombay) rendered complex his poetic sensibility. After a Bachelors degree in Literature at Wilson College, Bombay in 1947 and some political engagement with M. N. Roy’s *Radical Democratic Party*, he sailed to England for further studies in 1948. As a student of philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, he published his first volume of poetry, *A Time to Change* (1951). This transit generated enduring exploratory tropes of journey, pilgrimage, departure, and venture in his poetry. His early oeuvre has affinities with the work of T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Ezra Pound and Rainer Maria Rilke.  After returning to India, Ezekiel’s literary career was divided between editing, reviewing, teaching and writing poetry. His commitment to art and literature is reflected in his ten years of broadcasting (1952-62) on these subjects on All India Radio. He was associated in an editorial capacity with esteemed journals like *Quest*, *Imprint*, *Poetry India*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Indian P. E. N.*, steadily contributing more than 500 discerning book reviews, besides essays as art critic for *The Times of India.* Ezekiel’s valued position as a forthright critic is borne out by his hard-hitting yet deeply reflective rubbishing of V. S. Naipaul’s controversial perspective on India in ‘Naipaul’s India and Mine’,(1965). His own cultural and ethnic commitments to this dark and wounded India are rendered evocatively in his poem, ‘Background, Casually’ in the unassuming passion of: ‘My backward place is where I am’.  A foundational voice in Indian English poetry, Ezekiel vitally influenced a whole generation of poets like Dom Moraes, Gieve Patel and Eunice de Souza. His early verse, in *A Time to Change* (1951), *Sixty Poems* (1953) and *The Third* (1958) shows the poet’s continuous and frequently ironic introspection on issues of home and belonging, of the self, the body and the world, of urban desolations and redemptive love, of prayer, penitence and poetry.  The ten poems of *The Unfinished Man* (1960) have a confessional quality, melding critical self-examination with the mode of prayer, self-parody at failure with a higher artistic aspiration toward a free mythic vision of primal innocence.  Ezekiel’s *The Exact Name* (1965), with its title and epigraph from Juan Ramón Jiménez, numbers among its twenty poems some well-anthologized pieces like ‘Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher’, ‘Paradise Flycatcher’ and ‘Night of the Scorpion’.  *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) includes a series of eight poems entitled ‘Very Indian Poems in Indian English’ that mimic the lilt of Indian speech cadences and parody the frequently flawed usage of what is called Standard English. A hybrid form of the language colloquially referred to as ‘Babu Angrezi’ is used to render ironically the usage of English by the Indian middle classes.  Ezekiel’s unflinching poetic exploration of the interior landscapes of his spiritual, carnal and aesthetic dilemmas is powerfully maintained through dramatic tonal colouring, stark emblematic imagery and a conscious metrical craftsmanship that never calls attention to its own formal manoeuvres.  Nissim Ezekiel received national honours of the Sahitya Akademi award in 1983 for his poetry collection, *Latter-Day Psalms*, and the prestigious Padma Shri Award in 1988. After a prolonged battle with Alzheimer's disease, Ezekiel died in Mumbai, on 9 January 2004.  Selected poetical works by Ezekiel:  *A Time to Change* (1952)  *Sixty Poems* (1953)  *The Third* (1959)  *The Unfinished Man* (1960)  *The Exact Name* (1965)  *Hymns in Darkness* (1976)  *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982)  Biographical and Critical Studies of Ezekiel’s poetry:  R. Raj Rao, *Nissim Ezekiel: The Authorized Biography*(2000)  Gieve Patel, ‘Introduction’, *Nissim Ezekiel: Collected Poems 1952-88* (1992)  Christopher Wiseman, ‘The Development of Technique in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel’, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 11, nos. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1976), Nissim Ezekiel Issue.  Keki N. Daruwalla, ‘Inroduction’, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry* (1980)  Eunice de Souza, *Talking poems: conversations with poets* (1999) |
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