



EZEKIEL & FROST: CRUSADERS OF WISDOM AND DELIGHT

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Human life is full of endless possibilities. It's a wonderful manifestation of varied aspects which ultimately leads to the beauty which make the world a place worth living in. Literature has always proved to be the torchbearer of humanity. It has corrected the erring human society from time to time. The literature thus has proven its mantle by becoming the mirror of human life. Writers, from all ages, have performed their duties honestly and have shouldered the responsibility of keeping an eye on the progress of human society, and scrutinising it till the end. The world has suffered to the extreme end in the consequences of the conflicts arising out of wasted interests of few. In such situations, the writers from literary field have shown their solidarity and gave way to their feelings in establishing the ever necessary peaceful co-existence. Robert frost, the American and Nissim Ezekiel from India are two such poets who, thorough their poetry, have penned the words like the men with a mission.

Robert Frost was the poet whose poems portrayed a realistic picture of life, and same can be said about Nissim Ezekiel too. Their poems are full of the harsh realities of life, presented in most simplistic way. Their poetry reveals their love for the social values and establishes them as the humanitarians. Both these 20th century poets are considered as true representatives of the society that believes in peace and harmony. Frost is considered as a Nature poet who likes to stress his point with the help of Nature, whereas Ezekiel talks through depiction of the society, rural as well as urban.

Here, as a case study, two poems each of these two writers have been taken into consideration. Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"; and Nissim Ezekiel's "Night of the Scorpion" and "The Patriot" give us ample scope to ponder over the degradation of human values. In fact, Frost's "Mending Wall" starts with his positivity about Nature:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,

And spills the upper boulders in the sun;

And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. (1-4)

His belief in Nature is clearly visible and the supremacy of it also is established without any doubt. There is a strange incongruity between human thoughts and the way Nature reacts to humans. This universe is a beautiful creation and we people, by our own wrong doings, are

giving it a bad name! He says that Nature doesn't like any boundaries or walls created by us humans. We have done so only to gain profit and in process have caused tremendous harm to it. The invisible force of Nature itself destroys all such wrong doings of humans. When the two neighbours try to set the wall disturbed by Nature, one asks another a question to which the neighbour plainly replies, and Frost repeats the same sentence once more in the poem, "Good fences make good neighbours" (27/45). This surprises the other and he asks why good fences can establish good relationship between two neighbours, to which the other replies, "He will not go behind his father's saying" (43). The tone and attitude of the neighbour is so rigid that he is neither ready to argue logically nor to listen to his neighbour's point of view. He blindly believes the old customs and conventions set by forefathers so much that he can't even put forward any specific reason to do so. This has become a problem with humanity that we start implementing things without taking into consideration if it is passable in present condition. The concept of neighbour, now days, is in diminishing stage and this could be seen at all levels of human life, be it in village, towns, cities, metros, or even between different nations. A country, too, faces regionalism which causes threat to internal harmony of a nation.

Ezekiel, too, in "Night of the Scorpion" laments over such mentality of humans. He takes help of Nature to prove validity of his point. The narrator's mother has been stung by a scorpion and is passing through a very difficult phase full of pain. The rural folks get the news and visit the narrator's house in that rainy night, just to show their sympathy. But the events that follow later become dramatic enough:

With candles, and with lanterns

throwing giant scorpion shadows

on the mud baked walls

they searched for him: he was not found. (11-14)

For the child there is no difference between the scorpion who had stung his mother and the people who were searching for him. We too are full of poisonous thoughts, like the poisonous insect and even a little child could find no difference between the two. We human beings too are poisonous like the scorpion, and try to harm our fellow humans by means of fights and wars. We have grown into immature crazy group of savages. But on the positive side, the same rustics show their concern for the suffering woman. Though they are uneducated, the people show their concern for the victim and want her to get instant relief for which they offer their prayers to God:

The peasants came like swarms of flies

And buzzed the name of god a hundred times

To paralyse the Evil one. (8-10)

The poet brings out the modern rationalism through this poem. It also stresses Ezekiel's belief in always looking forward and to not to ponder over the negatives in life. Adversity presents us a golden opportunity to meditate and to introspect over what went wrong. Moreover it gives us a chance to move ahead more vigorously. His rejection of old themes and investing a revolutionary approach in poetry proved to be a vital literary event for the then India, because most of the poets in those days used to write in English as an external compulsion than an inner motivation. Here was a writer in form of Ezekiel who started doing exactly opposite. His giving importance to internal motivation showed an innovative way to future writers.

The style and treatment of poetry of these two writers is completely different from each other, but the end effect is just the same in all aspects. The delight their poetry provides is great in many ways. The wise investment of the words by both of them is highlight of their poetry. Every sentence shows their deep concern for society. While commenting on Frost, D. S. Brar says, "His motto is to give sight, insight and excite" (Brar 5). Though somewhat unnoticed Ezekiel too, use almost the same method to educate his readers. The very list of the poems written by Frost is evident enough to reveal his true identity of a hardcore humanist. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "The Death of a Hired Man", "A Soldier", "Mending Wall", "The Road not Taken", are some of his poems which established him on world literary map as a man who had the power art of looking into human psyche. In Contemporary Literary Criticism edited by Jean C. Stine an apt analysis of Frost's poetry is done.

Frost is recognized as one of the foremost American poets of the twentieth century. Because his settings and subjects are usually the landscapes and folk of New England, Frost was once considered a simple farmer-poet. However, critical re-evaluation has centred on the complex themes and profound philosophic issues beneath the deliberately rustic surface of his poems. Frost's best work explores fundamental questions of existence, depicting with chilling starkness the loneliness of the individual in an indifferent universe. (Stine)

The highlight of Frost's poetry is the excess use of symbolism. The two poems taken here for study too have this salient feature. In *Mending Wall*, the wall is used symbolically. The wall for Frost is a symbol of barriers between man and man, between classes, creeds, religions. It is a barrier between nations and many more. Man, in this modern world, has become machine, having no human values, without sympathy and fellow feeling. . C.E.M. Joad, a famous writer and critic, talks about the possible dangerous consequences of such mass destructive weapons in his book *The History of Civilization*. According to Joad, the whole world now looks like a military base and is sitting on a huge volcano which need only a single match to set it ablaze and the whole modern civilization would come to an end! The nations are fighting for false pride and while doing so they are moving in all wrong directions. Even, Matthew Arnold, too, have lamented over the loss of humanity from this world. While looking at the sea he tells his beloved the story of loss of humanity to her, in his poem "Dover Beach":

The Sea of Faith

was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

retreating, to the breath

of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

and naked shingles of the world. (Dover Beach , 21-28)

Man has changed a lot and that has caused him a loss unbearable. The literary world, from time to time, has pointed towards this problem. Frost's poetry starts with delight and ends in wisdom. This in fact is the mainstay of his poetry. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", a poem published in his collection New Hampshire, he talks about man's ultimate goal of life. He concludes the poem on following witty lines:

Woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep (13-16)

These probably are the most quoted line from any poet. After enjoying the woods, the narrator returns back to harsh realities of life. We get a very little time to finish the task, as lifespan is short and there are so many different assignments we have to finish before "sleep". Frost reasserts the ever important nature of true hard work and the focus needed to be able to do so by keeping the last two line of the poem same. Here the poet highlights the ever essential reality of human life. Many a time we get distracted by the temptations surrounding us. During that phase, we forget to work and start just to enjoy life. The precious time is being wasted and then later on we only repent over the loss of Time! This philosophy of life is being presented in a very simple, lucid style by Frost. He want man to remain always focused on the destination, rather than indulge in futile exercise. His horse too knows that there is something wrong in his stopping by woods and not moving on:

My little horse must think it queer

To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year. (5-8)

Same way Ezekiel too through his poem "The Patriot" tries to establish the necessity of living

a peaceful life. He urge the youth to not to waste their powers in paltry things or activities:

Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct,

I should say even 200% correct,

But modern generation is neglecting –

Too much going for fashion and foreign thing. (6-9)

Again he appeal the youth to remain calm and retain peace. The world is a beautiful place to live in and we must always try to help the society to prosper. But we fight in the name of religion or region. In the same poem he further says:

What you think of prospects of world peace?

Pakistan behaving like this,

China behaving like that,

It is making me really sad, I am telling you.

Really, most harassing me.

All men are brothers, no?

In India also

Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Hindiwallahs

All brothers –

Though some are having funny habits. (29-38)

Nissim Ezekiel ruled over the Indian literary world and countless hearts for years. His poems are at once simple, enjoyable, and most importantly honest enough to present him in a truly proud Indian avatar. . It must be noted that Robert Frost and Nissim Ezekiel belong to entirely different cultural backgrounds, but both of them worked, through their literary pieces, for a common purpose of spreading awareness amongst their readers and also to establish the humanism. In the same poem, the poet shows his concern for his countrymen and for the progress of a newly independent India. The poet mixes typical Indian flavour by stressing mistakes made by common Indians in their use of English. He highlights the value of peace and non-violence. India is the land of beliefs, superstitions and sentiments. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation and great humanist, had a strong influence on Indian freedom struggle. While giving reference to Gandhiji's belief in non-violence in his poem "The Patriot" Ezekiel says:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.

Why world is fighting fighting

Why all people of world

Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,

I am simply not understanding. (1-5)

Ezekiel believed that this life is a precious God gift and must not be wasted and we should leave not a single stone unturned to make it meaningful and worthy. First we are humans and then come our family and nation tags. So it is but natural that we must think of well

being of all humans. The term *peace* has always been the one with many aspects attached to it. Jesus Christ, Lord Buddha sacrificed their life in search of it and also to let people understand the importance of leading a peaceful life. But the more we made progress, in science particularly, the civilizations changed, their attitude changed; and that has caused a great deal in degradation of human values, the values that are the core of any civilization. It cannot be denied that all the civilizations came to an end only because of the evil forces existing in the same civilization. Those people with vicious attitude, though numbered less, were responsible for the doom of it. Prof. Ram Sharma, commenting on the style of Ezekiel says,

As a story teller Ezekiel creates poems out of ordinary incidents, situations and events that one encounters in day to day life. He picks out a situation, analyses it and describes it in such a way that it immediately assumes a kind of social significance because he views the ordinariness of most of the events with a sense of detachment. (Sharma 1)

Life has become a very confused process, as now it is driven by modern technology. The technological advancement has caused so deep a trouble to humanity that there are hardly any human values left in society. Man created machines to save his time. He then used the time saved, for making modifications in the same machine. So the result was that it saved more time for him. We have grown so dependent on the machine that now the machine is our master and we have grown into its slaves! Such is the attitude of man, that we have forgotten how to enjoy life, how to appreciate and to take care of nature. We don't care for people and for humanity. The philosophy of all great Messengers has been dumped. We engage ourselves in destructive activities more and that too at the cost of precious peace and happiness. Frost and Ezekiel served as an artist with a soothing touch in such a feeble world. Like a torch bearer they fought for the betterment of society throughout their career as a poet.

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