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CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE IN NISSIM EZEKIEL'S SELECT POEMS

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arrangement of the couple which solely aim at happiness. It attempts to gratify various needs of human being such as sexual and parental urge, social and religious sanction and protection. It is stated as social agreement by which the members of the opposite sex are brought together as husband and wife, under the current social sanctions, for sexual pleasure and children of one's own blood.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica defines the term 'marriage' as follows:

A legally and socially sanctioned union between one or more husbands and one or more wives that accords status to their offspring and is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners. (Safra. E. Jacob 2003)

In India the marriage is a sacred ceremony which chiefly rests on certain long term, deeply rooted beliefs and customs. It is treated as a religious and emotional bond between the couple rather than a contract of two opposite sexes. Although marriage is a private affair, it hardly breaks the rules or

ABSTRACT

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the greatest post-colonial Indian English Poets of the last century. He has been widely acclaimed as a founding father of Indian English poetry for his affluent works. His social commitment to Indian life reveals his acknowledgement of India as a home. His Jewish background hardly alienates him from the Indian society that develops and strengthens his interaction with new lines of communication. A well-known critic Sivaramkrishna rightly remarks about his place in Indian English poetical cosmos,

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INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel's poetry is marked by a natural sense of Indianness and is characterized by an intense involvement with the milieu. (Pathak, R. S. 2003: 26)

Marriage caters to the social needs as it is strongly rooted in the society. Like other social institutions, it paves way for the spread of human civilization. It is interconnected with the human population, preservation and protection of human species under a social and religious sanction. It is private as well as social or public affair that welcomes participation from different groups of society. In India, marriage seems to be systematic

codes of social rituals. It manifests the inherent traditions and cultural patterns of a particular community. The term 'marriage' designates a long term mating arrangement for the couple properly institutionalized in a community. It expects a kind of responsibility from husband and wife. As they represent inseparable components of a society that is restricted to a particular ethnic group or community.

Though it is believed that the marriages are made in heaven, it takes place on the earth between the two earthly human beings. It is matrimonial union of two human beings of opposite sex that shares common bread and board. It culminates a relationship of affinity between the couple and their relatives. The ceremonial atmosphere of marriage consciously makes them aware of their duties and responsibilities of forthcoming life. In the social context, marriage is a fulfillment of love, a social and legal contract, a holy ritual of social sanction, a memorable and inevitable event of human life, the end of one's bachelor life, a mark of new beginning, a celebration of body and mind. Being a Jew, Ezekiel gives a graphic and ironic account of a Jewish wedding ceremony in the poem 'Jewish Wedding Bombay':

Her mother shed a tear or two but wasn't really
crying. It was the thing to do, so she did it,
enjoying every moment. The bride laughed when I
sympathized, and said don't be silly. (Ezekiel Nissim 2005:234)

The speaker observes the customs and traditions of a wedding ceremony. The bride's mother sheds tears on the occasion of parting from her beloved daughter. Her weeping is a part of a wedding customs. Like every coin has two sides, marriage also suffers from certain drawbacks. In Indian context, the male enjoys considerable freedom rather than female after marriage. The semi-God figure of a husband is thoroughly maintained in the male dominated society. Traditionally he is more powerful, venerable and all-pervading in every sectors of human life. On the contrary, a woman, a wife of somebody, loses her dignity and the decisive power in the most crucial situation. The newly married couple expects too much from each other at the initial stage. The bridegroom expects complete loyalty and devotion from bride. The marriage tie emerges as a symbol of her security and acceptance of new home. As the bride settles in the new home, she is worshipped as goddess, a symbol of charity, devotion, hard work and extreme sacrifice.

An exploration of mysterious human relationships is always an enchanting idea for the literary figures like Nissim Ezekiel. His alienated approach pertaining to the traditional Indian marriage has made his comment neutral and impartial without any prejudices and inhibitions. Like other Indian English poets, Ezekiel is occupied with the problems of marriage at the early outset of his poetic achievements. His various have proved his inclination towards the marital issues and its nature in the Indian context. As the marriage is one of the social institutions, his social zeal never stops him to comment on its multifarious aspects with its oddities and failures. His exposure of harsh realities of human life has brought him close to the aspect of marriage which is the root cause of social relations.. In India, the society is dominated by male where the woman has marginal and subordinate status. A woman can hardly enjoys the higher status in Indian society. The principle of patriarchy has accentuated male domination and female subordination. Patriarchy has played a major role in the dynamics of power equations between men and women. Writer Andrienne Rich defines patriarchy:

'Patriarchy consists of philosophical and social systems in which men by force, direct pressure, ritual, tradition, law and languages, customs, etiquette, education or division of labor, determine what part woman shall play or not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed by the male'. (Rich Andrienne 2005:33)

Nissim Ezekiel draws attention of the readers towards the darker aspects of marriage in India. He vehemently exposes the so-called modern people in the poem 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay', who indirectly collect the dowry in the marriage as he says,

There was no dowry because they knew I was 'modern'
and claimed to be modern too. Her father asked me how
much jewellery I expected him to give away with his daughter
when I said I didn't know, he laughed it off. (Ezekiel Nissim 2005:234)

The marital relations are spoilt due to various reasons such as the lack of confidence, inability to cope up with the new atmosphere, lack of proper communication, improper treatment, extreme restrictions of social customs etc. The neutral relationship between the married couple breeds distrust and disharmony. When both are exposed to the life, the romance starts to fade. The poet's persona captures this infertile relationship in the poem 'To a Certain Lady' as follows:

Then absence and quarrels, indifference
Sucking like a leech upon the flesh,
Crude acceptance of the need for one another,
Tasteless encounters in the dark, daily
Companionship with neither love nor hate
By an image are redeemed,
By a mode of love expanding to away of life. (Ezekiel Nissim 2005:29)

The poet's persona sadly notes the drastic change in the behavior of his wife who turns into teasing and quarrelsome ordinary woman. She did not remain as a passionate beloved but ever demanding wife. Therefore he mentions the inevitable sorrow that burdens his mind and he sadly confesses in the poem 'Case Study':

His marriage was the worst mistake of all.
Although he loved his children when they came,
He spoilt them too with just that extra doll.
Or discipline which drove them to the wall.
His wife and changing servants did the same-
A man is damned in that domestic game. (Ezekiel Nissim 2005:125)

Marriage offers new vistas, challenges and opportunities to a couple. It sets certain goals, and objectives that inspire and activate to be lively in life. It teaches the quality of love, acceptance, mutual adjustment, cooperation, unity, tolerance, sacrifice, art of living with dreams etc. Consequently the basic purpose of marriage is purely human and social irrespective of certain drawbacks. It suffers on account of human beings who exploit it with snobbish and selfish attitude. The poet aptly points out the invisible currents of love, compassion and mutual understanding that flow between the couple as follows in the poem 'Marriage Poem':

Between the act of wedded love
A quieter passion flows,
Which keeps the nuptial pattern firm.
A passion comes and goes,
And in the soil of wedded love
Rears a white rose. . (Ezekiel Nissim 2005:46)

Thus, Ezekiel seems to be an exponent of marital harmony which is the most vital social relationship. His realistic portrayal of husband and wife relationship vividly captures the glimpses of marital life.

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