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Nissim Ezekiel's *Don't Call it Suicide*: A Causative Study

Anita Arora

Associate Professor of English
Government National PG College, Sirsa

Nissim Ezekiel, an eminent Indian poet in English, has authored some creditable plays also. Widely acknowledged fact that he is a poet of 'ordinariness of events' is further endorsed by his plays and bear witness to the fact that his keen perception arrested by the 'ordinariness of events' triggers his imagination which translates that ordinary event into an emotion packed drama. Suicide is a recurrent but generally overlooked occurrence of the human society. Affected individuals suffer the loss of deceased but the grief is transitory for some and for some it turns out to be traumatic depending on the intensity of their receptivity determined by sensitivity of the subject. His play *Don't Call it Suicide*, based on a real life incident, movingly deals with seriousness of the tragedy presenting before the reader the causes leading to traumatic departures from life. Mr. Nanda, a middle aged man, commits suicide after bearing the pangs of agony of the suicide of his eldest son for fourteen years. The play gives us a peep into the various stifling causes which lead to these suicides.

Drama is the most effective medium of literature to touch, stir and quicken the supine, stationary sensibilities of human beings thereby making them feel and ponder. Nissim Ezekiel, though primarily a noted and eminent poet of post-independence India, is a creditable playwright also theatre being his passion. He became interested in theatre through his association with Abraham Alkazi, a prominent figure in the world of theatre. He remembers in an interview given to Toni Patel, director of his plays and wife of the noted painter and poet Gieve Patel: "I met him in late 47 and from the time I entered his house and met him I was in the world of theatre.... Alkazi got me into the theatre on a big scale." Alkazi went to England to learn dramatics and took Nissim with him. Back to Bombay Alkazi joined Theatre Group and produced many plays. Later on Nissim formed Theatre Unit and did well. His irresistible passion for theatre urged him to author plays and he wrote *Nalini*, *Marriage Poem*, *The Sleepwalkers*, *Songs of Deprivation*, *Who Needs No Introduction*, *Don't Call it Suicide* and *Wonders of Vivek*.

One common factor in all his plays is that they are not Aristotelian in their themes or stagecraft with towering characters, powerful stories and perfect styles. Neither is he lured by history, myths, legends, philosophy, religion or aggressive and violent events of the society for his themes. What is widely accepted by the literary world is that he is a poet of 'ordinariness of events' is true of his dramas also. He admits before P.Bayappa Reddy that his dramatic work is an 'extension' of himself, "essentially the same person is behind the plays as behind the poetry." (Reddy 18)

He seeks drama in an ordinary occurrence, in common character, immutable, impelling issues confronting man and does not need to fly high on the wings of Poesy for his themes. Nissim Ezekiel, a man of sublime and subtle sensibilities, projects society imbibing social, moral, cultural, traditional, modern, religious and filial aspects with all their bright and gray shades. Lending charm to his dramas with a tinge of irony, satire and humour like a skilled artist, he displays his deep felt concern for the pressurising realities. He accepts satiric element in his plays but affirms that, "there is more than satire positive statements about life and human relationship, but not enough to add up to

a 'message'."(Reddy 8) Though Ezekiel is impressed by George Bernard Shaw, he is not a propagandist like him. He told Toni Patel, "I had read most of Shaw's plays and I loved them." But he does not write with the purpose to reform the society like Shaw. His humanistic approach in dealing with ordinary events which affect the very character, temperament of a person and the overall structure and ambience of the society gives relevance and force to his thematically varied dramas. Chetan Karnani finds, "The reason that prompted Ezekiel to write plays is to provide healthy social criticism through the medium of stage."(Karnani 112)

The play *Don't Call It Suicide* (1993), a domestic tragedy in two acts, is a social criticism of the behaviour of indifferent and callous individuals. It presents a common incident which might be brushed aside assuming it as something trivial and unimportant is dealt with sincere concern, taking it seriously that common occurrence can be stronger in effect and can play havoc with the life of society. It is based on a real life incident which was told to Nissim by his acquaintance. A.K. Raju in his introduction to the play quotes Nissim reminiscing, "It was about his son and family... but I didn't confine myself to his experience relatives etc." He goes on to say, "I had no literary source for the creation of the play. The real life incident served as a catalyst to explore the nature of suicide and its effect on the survivors" (Raju viii-ix). The play has, as Ezekiel himself admits an unusual title. Raju documents, "It (title) provokes conjecture, since it acknowledges the fact that someone had died an unnatural death which is neither owing to homicide nor an accident; at the same time it refuses to the only remaining possibility, suicide."(Raju ix)

The play begins with the tormenting reminiscences of the suicide of a young man, develops under the murky, grim atmosphere of strain and pressure caused by the tragedy and ends with a preventable suicide of a middle aged man, and leaves the reader/audience flabbergasted and writhing with unbearable pain. When this acute pain eases a bit, the reader/audience finds himself struggling to obey the instruction given in the title, as the apparent suicide is not a suicide but a step which is forced not by an individual but by society at large. The present paper aims at unfolding the causes leading to these suicides which though a common malady shakes the affected kith and kin, reader and audience compelling him to study the ways of society responsible for the poignant passing away of the victims.

Ezekiel reconstructs an agonising and heartrending incident in a simple but emotion packed drama. Mr. Nanda, a middle aged sensitive man is exchanging words with Mr. Sathe, a friend and impulsively tells him about the suicide of his twenty-five years old elder son. Fourteen years ago his son, married for two years to merely middle pass Meeta, had come on a visit. For no apparent reason he had hung himself from the rafters of the bedroom when nobody was at home. Mr. Sathe departs and the overpowered Mr. Nanda breaks down to be chided by his domineering wife for confiding in an outsider. To take his mind off his morbid obsession Mrs. Nanda invites her son and daughter with their spouses to a dinner which turns into a fiasco with the accidental reference to the traumatic tragedy with the breaking down of Mr. Nanda, with Malti revealing the biting truth of her being 'a happy slave', with the disheartening discussion between the siblings and with Mrs. Nanda treating her widowed daughter-in-law Meeta like a servant as she always does. Mrs. Nanda urges Hari, her younger son, to tell Mr. Sathe to 'drop dead' as his presence causes emotional disturbance in Mr. Nanda but as hard luck would have it Mr. Sathe visits Mr. Nanda after one month and once again despite the warning of Mrs. Nanda discusses the prohibited subject which

shakes Mr. Nanda terribly who in utter despondence and helplessness swallows the sleeping pills and dies leaving Mrs. Nanda in the same boat in which Meeta is already 'placed'.

The play leaves the reader thoroughly shattered and poignantly moved as the suicide of the father is totally unexpected and unacceptable while the suicide of the eldest son is quite unbearable. Awe-stricken reader is reluctant to accept the suicides and sets out on a foray to explore the causes leading to these unnatural deaths. Exploration reveals that psychologists opine that by its very definition suicide is a preventable cause of death. They find that suicide is not an impulsive decision. The malady is the outcome of acute depression, alienation, stress, pressure, an illness that could be caused by genetic or biological factors. These factors are diametrically opposed by suffocating institutions structured tightly in the very set up of society and smother the breathings of a very common, unguarded man. Ezekiel finds society consisting of institutions which are founded by individuals. The three are inter-related and inter-dependent. Space among the three causes confusion which leads to discord which in turn makes the individual alienated and disillusioned, institutions hollow and crumbling. They together thus shake the edifice of society making it morally and culturally weak and blank. Ezekiel asserts the point that these three are complementary to one another. Society supplies him a variety of characters who as individuals weave together the fabric of relationship on the loom of family, government and other institutions. Warmth, compassion, understanding, love, affection etc. lend grace and strength, vigour and longevity to this fabric whereas jealousy, hatred, selfishness, indifference, hypocrisy and artificiality in relations eat out into the vitals of society and mirror the worn-out and tattered threads of the fabric baring the undesired, hostile and callous environment of these institutions. It is the skill, art and will of the weaver to make the fabric fitted to his persona and spirit. Ezekiel favours elasticity and transparency in the relationships as he makes it clear that harsh and insensitive tightening of the relationship by social, cultural and traditional restrictions will distort the spirit and personality of the individual causing him alienation sometimes proving fatal.

The play bears a testimony to this and Ezekiel makes a dig at certain conventions of the society leading to dismal and grim environment through the delineation of some of the characters. Hari, an autocrat, gives an analytical character portrayal of his elder brother but is without any 'feel' and concern and support for him. He remembers him saying or doing 'something very peculiar' from time to time though 'to most people, he seemed quite ordinary'. He was having a very 'strange' and 'hopeless' kind of sensitiveness. Hari enumerates some biological or genetic factors determining the behaviour of the elder brother without being unaware of the smothering social factors to which he himself is a contributor. Hari admits:

I know that he suffered a lot in normal situations which didn't trouble other people, why should any student be miserable because some teachers are bad or some students don't care about education? So what? Let them be what they are, why should we be so sad about it that we actually want to die? Yes, you won't believe it, but my elder brother was like that. "I feel like killing myself", he would say, as if someone had personally done him some great wrong. That's foolish, isn't it? I mean, after all, we've got to survive, haven't we? We have got to be tough, develop a thick skin. (DCS 13)

Here lies the tragedy. Hari gives expert but critical comments on the behavioural aspects of his elder brother. Nowhere does he seem concerned and supportive for the emotional imbalance of his brother. He is as critical of him as if he is an outsider and

talks lightly and unconcernedly about his getting emotional on seeing a beggar child: “There are so many blind beggars all around us and some child beggars too who are blind and pretty. So what? We can’t afford to be sentimental about such things.” (DCS 13)

Such a rude and inhuman attitude of Hari adds to his brother’s silent sufferings, suppressed emotions and sensitive temperament generated dejection at the rampant oddities of society. Instead the elder brother is expected to overcome repugnance for school and college, to study hard like his siblings and many others, to do well in exams, in life, to build up a good career to keep him alive with a happy family. But Hari surmises, “...he just was not emotionally equipped to cope with life. He was a sensitive idealist. He wasn’t - what’s the word- pragmatic.” (DCS 13)

This is Hari, not an emotional fool, but a practical and cutthroat person, who inherited the sense of domination and indifference from his mother. This inhuman human being does not allow even his wife to have her own opinion on any subject and she has to agree with her husband, “Otherwise, life is hell” for her, she may have ‘to get out of the house’ even may be beaten by him as he usually does. With dogged helplessness she pours out the pain of her heart, “I am his slave, and wife. What I have become is a happy slave. It is better than being an unhappy slave.” (DCS 19) Hari is in a fume when Shiela pleads the case of Malti and he rudely says, “It’s not your business what I do.”(DCS 20)

Hari is portrayed as a foil to his elder brother and he has created a niche for himself and none is allowed to trespass. He is blunt enough in snubbing the discussion about his father with his mother. The unkind, loveless, indifferent ambience of the family is exposed in the following interaction between mother and son:

Mrs. NANDA: Wait a little. I want to talk to you about something.

HARI: Not about father, I hope.

Mrs. NANDA: Why not? You know what is happening. We have to talk about it. It concerns all of us. I must remind you. (DCS 24)

Hari is immune to the tense conditions of the house as is revealed in the way he retorts that he does not ‘need to be reminded of’ and that he feels ‘bored every time the subject comes up’. Thus it becomes quite obvious that he cares for none-neither his brother nor his father as he finds both owning weak personalities. At this his mother accuses him of not loving his father but in spite of realising this he holds her responsible for this and Mrs Nanda explains the reason of this:

Mrs. NANDA: Oh no, don’t blame me for that. I had to bring up my children in the right way. Your father had all kinds of silly ideas about how to treat children. I believed in teaching them discipline that is why I have to keep you at a distance from your father. It does not mean you shouldn’t love him. After all, he is your father.

HARI: I don’t understand him why is he so weak when it comes to action... (DCS 24)

N.Sharda Iyer finds Mrs. Nanda’s sense of discipline far from being healthy. She defines discipline in the words of J. Krishnamurti, “Discipline must be without control,

without suppression without any form of fear, else it could be a deadening thing.”(Iyer 82)

Hari is pragmatic in his perception of the world at large. Hari seems echoing believing in the saying ‘Might is Right’ and Darwinian philosophy of ‘Survival of the fittest’, when he says, “In this world, you win if you are strong, not if you are right. That is why I don’t allow anyone to boss over me. I boss over them.” (DCS 24)

It is amazing to see the behavioural discrepancies caused not as much by the environment as by the genes. Hari is totally different from his siblings in his approach to life: “I am strong because I have to be. That is the nature of the world... I do what I want to, always, with everyone, not what they want me to do or say. I am frank, like you. And I am strong. I must have my own way, with my family with everybody.” (DCS 25) Had Hari taught this outright approach to his brother and father both the tragedies could have been averted. Unfortunately Hari forgets that none has his own way – one can only strive to have as man is subordinate to nature.

Mr. Nanda is not only a sensitive but also a very weak person. He feels from the heart but lacks the strength to face the realities which have an unsettling effect on him. The traumatic tragedy is hell “Absolute hell” for all of them. In an apparent character delineation of his elder son before Mr. Sathe Mr. Nanda unearths without being aware like Hari, the causes responsible for the tragic end of his son: “My eldest son never did well in his exams. He never failed but he didn’t do well either. He was intelligent, yet, somehow, he didn’t care at all about his school and college. We didn’t know why! He just was not happy there. He complained bitterly all the time. He didn’t like most of the teachers and he did not like most of the students...” (DCS 4)

The words seem echoing of what Hari has said earlier and suggest that the eldest son was unhappy about the ways of the world but what is more pitiable is that family is not understanding. The family is aware, but not cautious, of the fact that their son is not common. He is more sensitive than the other boys of his age and needs special care and moral support not the ‘help’ about which the father talks, “we did our best to help him. He didn’t seem to appreciate or – never mind that”, meaning thereby that Mr. Nanda desires acknowledgement for the ‘help’ given to his son. An ambitious father, like any other father, has desperate expectations from his son to come out with flying colours. Not only this he discriminates his children who are generally ‘touchy’ about discrimination which usually not only impede but mar the very growth of uncommon, introvert and sensitive type of children, forgetting that every person has his own individuality, his own temperament. Sharda Iyer finds committing suicide as worst form of violence. She quotes the words of J. Krishnamurti:

All the time we are comparing ourselves- with those who are richer or more brilliant, more intellectual, more affectionate, more famous, more this and more that. The ‘more’ plays an extraordinarily important part in our lives. This measuring ourselves all the time against something or someone is one of the primary causes of conflict. This comparison has been taught from childhood.... (Iyer 86)

This comparison is mirrored with an air of pride in these words of Mr. Nanda: “he told us, he didn’t want to go on for his M.A. We said alright, we are not tyrants. My second son and daughter were doing well in their exams. And both are quite happy.” (DCS 17)

R. Raj Rao, a teacher and a noted writer in his biography entitled *Nissim Ezekiel: An Authorised Biography* comments that, “the constant supervision and guidance of their parents also help the children to shape their personalities” (Rao 125). Rao writes about Nissim’s father: “... But what Moses probably failed to realize as many parents tend to, is that by encouraging children to overreach themselves they are also exposing them to the dangers of psychological damage.”(Rao 20)

The arrangement of his marriage “in a different place, a very small town, with hardly any prospects for him,” is just an addition to his miseries. It is ‘very difficult’ for them to get a really fine girl for him’ and the son who visits them after two years doesn’t give any impression of his being ‘unhappy’. Mr. Nanda recalls “there were no quarrels between him and his wife, and in fact we liked her, though she was not even a matriculate.” (DCS 5) The repetition reinforces the cry of Mr. Nanda’s heart which dreamt of the bright future and well- settled life of his son.

Mr. Nanda is quite content with Hari, his other son, happily and comfortably settled without knowing the bitter truth- a terrific truth about his beastly temperament. Hari walks in the steps of his mother who ‘bosses the house’. None, not even Mr. Nanda has the courage to defy her orders, advice, whims etc. From the very beginning her dominance is felt everywhere and over everyone in the house. It is she, the inveterate, assimilating all the callous and unkind agencies of the society, who becomes the very cause of the first tragedy. Generally it is the mother who provides a shield moulded with love and affection to the child to defend itself from the indifferent institutions. It is she who emotionally equips her child to confront heroically the buffets of life. But Mrs. Nanda assumes the role of a strict disciplinarian and for this she keeps her children away even from their father apprehending that he may spoil them with his pampering. She does not endorse the views of P.B. Shelley who rebelled against the flogging system in the schools which follow the dictum, ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’. She does not spare even her husband and frowns on him who discusses his son’s death with an outsider. She is a pragmatic person who accepts life as it comes and urges her husband: “Come on we have to live a normal life, after all whatever may have happened in the past we have to think of our children and grand children... Life includes suffering but it is not all suffering. There is so much we have to be grateful for ... I am satisfied with my life as it is ...” (DCS 7)

Contrary to this Mr. Nanda is not satisfied with his life. He counters her argument saying, “I am not satisfied to be what I am, I am not satisfied with my life as it is.” (DCS 7) He makes an effort to reduce the threatening heaviness in the atmosphere of his family which shrouds the essential element of humanity under its weight but all in vain as the indifferent inhumanity of his family supersedes his atoning spirit. His dissatisfaction with the ways of his family indicates towards his accumulating pressure and despairing despondence and he decides, “I have to think of my faults and weakness, my limitations” and again confesses. “I am unhappy and dissatisfied for good reasons.” Thus the play becomes the tragedy of guilt and remorse.

Mrs. Nanda, who remained blind so far to the chaotic atmosphere prevalent in the house, senses some evil to happen and suggests, “I told you, if you don’t live a normal life, something very bad will happen to you, and that means something very bad for all of us.” (DCS 8) Irony makes its presence felt here as Mrs Nanda senses the imminent malady endangering her house but does not make an effort to prevent that ‘bad’ to happen.

Mr. Nanda is so much prevailed upon by this traumatic incident that he often talks to himself as usually a shattered person does. He affirms, "I never talked to myself before our son's suicide". The conscientious father is not able to reconcile to his predicament. He broods over his helplessness and submits to situation dejectedly, "There are lots of things in life about which we can't do anything. That's what makes it so sad." (DCS 10) It is Mrs. Nanda's insensitivity to her husband, inhumanity to her daughter-in-law and immunity to general ambience of the house that she becomes one of the causes and even aggravates the second tragedy. Nissim Ezekiel in a subtle and realistic way brings out the universally intricate relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law through the characters of Mrs. Nanda and Meeta. The inhuman in Mrs. Nanda comes to the fore to show its ugly face when Mrs. Nanda outrightly denies Meeta to spend some time or even to join family members at dinner despite the continuous pleadings by Mr. Nanda and by Meeta herself, "Nonsense! There will be no time afterwards, no time at all for Meeta to ..." (DCS 11).

Mr. Nanda's inability to repent, to atone by way of showing concern for Meeta, caring for her, treating her as a human being, and as a family member devours his soul, his self. His soul cries: "I would like Meeta to be one of us, even if she does the cooking and the serving and the washing up. I have been thinking about it, we should treat Meeta as a human being, She is a human being, too, you know." (DCS 12)

But Mrs. Nanda talks to him as an idiot child who is not valiant enough to retort. Showing an autocratic fondness of invulnerable person she speaks venom and leaves the room: "She has always been one of us, and she will always be one of us. It does not mean that the housework can be neglected. I am telling you, again, if you want Meeta to eat with us and talk with us, then I'll do the work or you do the work. (Mr. Nanda crumples. He bows his head, the picture of abject misery.)"(DCS 12)

This gesture magnifies the mental and emotional turmoil of Mr. Nanda who is heading towards the undesired and unexpected end. Mrs. Nanda keeps an alert vigil on Mr. Nanda and notices the disturbing impact of the visit of Mr. Sathe who is to visit again though she keeps her eyes closed to her own created malignant environment. Cautious Mrs. Nanda needs Hari's help to keep Mr. Sathe at a bay, "... already he has gone far in the wrong direction, we must save him. Tell Mr. Sathe to drop dead." (DCS 26) But it is inevitable and Mr. Sathe turns up, a month later, much to Mrs. Nanda's annoyance, and in spite of her admonitions, both the friends discuss, furtively the forbidden subject. Mrs. Nanda's warning "I am warning you, it is dangerous to keep repeating it, we have suffered enough," goes unheeded for. But the impending disaster is visualised by her but objectively, "... I can see you now heading for disaster, and I am telling you know, stop it, stop" (DCS 27), but no serious attempt is made to deter it. It is ironical that Mrs. Nanda is quite objective and not subjective in her perception, and filial bonds demand subjectivity as a cementing measure.

Ezekiel has a keen psychological perception of human nature and captures in his writings the internal strife effectively. Chetan Karnani comments on this skill of Nissim, "Ezekiel is a psychologist of sorts. He is rather fond of analyzing the devious ways in which the human mind works. Hence he has unusual interest in depicting the portraits of individual human beings. He often treats these as a method of returning to his own self"(Karnani 18). Nissim is a great psychologist who not only comprehends human psyche and oppressing situations but also weaves the measures of solutions in the fabric of his plots also.

Nissim resembles George Bernard Shaw when he presents Mr. Sathe as his spokesperson having authorial voice. Sathe analyses the incident showing Ezekiel's considerable psychological prowess and Mr. Sathe becomes his mouthpiece: in an attempt to analyse the possible causes for such malady rampant in the society: 'some people are entirely different from the rest of us...I mean ordinary people...We treat them in the same way . We take it for granted that they accept all those unpleasant and puzzling things in life which others accept.'" He further elaborates his point: "They have the same good qualities and bad qualities as others have, but here is something else at the source, some essential power that causes non-adjustment to things as they are. It makes many persons in this group feel hopeless and also sensitive to their own helplessness."(DCS 30)

Their plight urges one to learn something from them. Mr. Sathe does not blame the person for his failure "It may be his fault, but it may not be." Mr. Nanda is not convinced with this theory and asks for an explanation which Mr. Sathe gives as a psychiatrist: "Well, he may be temperamentally incapable of meeting society's standards of success. If those standards were more flexible, if they provided more space, you understand, for different temperaments, the so called failure would feel free to live his own life according to his own preferences, inclinations."(DCS 30)

For him space means 'tolerance, freedom', and 'understanding.' Acceptance of their temperament' without any term and condition might revive and revitalize their will to exist the way they are. Sympathising with these people may weaken their inner strength and reduce their confidence. Mr. Nanda is so much under the pressure of this explanation that he is not able to relate all this to his 'poor son' and understand the deeper meanings of Sathe's words. Sathe extends the explanation:

SATHE: He thought he was a failure, so he ... It seemed to him that a failure real or so called, had no right to live, by society's standards.

NANDA: I told you, we always treated him well helped him and so on.

SATHE: Yes, the way a failure is generally treated by kind people who sympathise with him, sympathise, Mr. Nanda, who have decided to treat him well to accept him , that's the same as loving acceptance, Mr. Nanda.

NANDA: Loving acceptance.

SATHE: Yes.

NANDA: It is too much to ask for.

SATHE: That's right. It is too much to ask for, and the kind of people I am describing, they know it. They know that they can never get it. So, sometimes, they ...

NANDA: (As realisation dawns) My poor son! (DCS 30-31)

These marginalized people do not need sympathy and kindness but loving acceptance' for their total personality, for their meagre or fecund achievements, and this loving acceptance works as a panacea for this fatal malady. A.K.Raju beautifully sums up the analysis of Mr. Sathe: 'Mr Sathe explains that kindness alone is not enough for sensitive underachievers like the eldest son. They must be positively accepted, not

charitably tolerated. When such acceptance is not forthcoming, they may destroy themselves in despair". (Raju x)

Earlier also Mr. Nanda was touched deeply by the humanitarian approach of Gopal, his son-in-law , about the way one blames oneself for putting up with the things they hate and Gopal finds "blaming oneself better than becoming insensitive to things around us shrugging our shoulders and saying to ourselves, "That's how things are." Mr. Nanda is overpowered and confesses, "I see, I feel that way, too, but I never defined it for myself...you have made it very clear...I gave up long time ago trying to do anything about such human problems."(DCS 22)

This sense of guilt, his helplessness, weakness in resolution, an acute awareness of his own incompatibility, easy giving in before dominance, a mute watch at the cruelty meted out to Meeta all result in an impasse for Mr. Nanda. As a paralytic he broods over all the time. Had he been an actively sensitive and taken some bold steps only as penance the second tragedy at least could have been avoided. Though Mrs. Nanda and others made persistent efforts to shroud the suicide of the eldest son, Mr. Sathe's concern and humanistic perception of the situation urge Mr. Nanda to introspect his responsibility as the head of the family to avert the first suicide. Like Hamlet Mr. Nanda is given to procrastination which ironically results in his own suicide. His pent up emotions and sense of remorse kept on amassing for long. After living with a sense of guilt and repentance for long he sought atonement in taking his own life as he, too, is an underachiever in the sense that despite his mumbling protests he could not achieve the desired human status for the left behind-- that is Meeta. The closed, immune, grim and suffocating atmosphere of the family did not allow the two sensitive members of the family to breathe freely and naturally, the absence of space and elasticity in the relations left a pressure on the victims and they went ahead to give vent to their suppressed emotions by withdrawing from life. Raj Rao finds Nissim Ezekiel too, going through some kind of guilt trip like Mr. Nanda. Gieve Patel recalls that Nissim is obsessed with the thought: "...that the universe is controlled by the devil"...but to Nissim it came across as a horrifying fact. This easily explains why he came so close to the notion of self destruction and suicide at this period as he has done from time to time."(Rao 372)

Indu K. Mallah finds it easier to write about normal, well adjusted people than "to write about off centre people, the psychological lame ducks' who are marginalized, because they do not or cannot conform to society's norms, require a sensitive and empathetic insight into the convoluted psyches of the world's fringe-inhabitants"(Mallah 28). Thus the play is not only a topical, but a deeply disturbing play which raises many questions and urges one to find the causes of the incident treated by the playwright. What is more disturbing and agonizing that similar tragedies are taking place every day, somewhere in any part of the world and they are being talked about with great details by eminent socialists and psychologists but is there any answer to the queries posed by Mallah, "Where do the rights of the individual end, and where the responsibility of the society begins? Whose life /death is it anyway? Should / should not there be a special dispensation for the lame-ducks of society?"(Mallah 28)

All pervasive morbidity of the play leaves the reader pensive, dejected, depressed, emotionally shattered and apprehensively disturbed, and it becomes all the more agonizing as the reader finds himself not at ease because of not experiencing catharsis at the end associated with tragedy. In a letter to Solomon, his friend, Nissim writes in

Dec. 1950: "I feel now that the inner must communicate with the outer at every stage and that leads to fulfilment of our nature. Harmony and reciprocation between microcosm and macrocosm can never result in negativity. Suicide is a cry for help and the help given well in time is truly meaningful and sincerely works." (Rao 88)

Ezekiel has a deep feeling for the mysteries of life, easily discernible even in the most trivial and ordinary occurrences but hard to understand and his plays have been an effort to explore the illusive mysteries and meanings of life. His plays deal with these realities realistically to touch, to stir the deeper chords of the soul of society as he reveals to Jubin Driver, "An authentic has to capture something within you." (Anklesaria 64-65)

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