

Understanding Nissim Ezekiel's "Enterprise" in Panchakosha Theory of Indian Knowledge Systems

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Abstract:

Nissim Ezekiel is an important Indian English poet whose works represent an amalgamation of the Indian and Abrahamic traditions. This paper is an attempt to understand his poem in the Panchakosha theory of Indian knowledge systems. With foundations in Upanishadic thoughts, Panchakosha theory is a way to understand the world. In this paper, an attempt has been made to use the Panchakosha theory for understanding poetry – more specifically a poem entitled "Enterprise" of Nissim Ezekiel. In this sense, it is a novel experiment to apply some philosophical ideas from the Indian knowledge traditions to understand a creative literary text in the genre 'poetry'.

Keywords: Nissim Ezekiel, poem, Panchakosha theory, literary analysis

Nissim Ezekiel is an important poet from the Indian subcontinent who is considered to be the pioneer of the Indian English Poetry (Dulai 2000). His poems represent a new sensibility as they express the Indian thought through a new language which has been by and large 'foreign' to the Indian ways of thinking. In this sense, his poems are almost 'cultural translations' (Garcia 2004) of the Indian thought processes. As a representative writer of the Indian thought processes, it may be interesting to understand his poem with the help of an Indian theory for understanding the world as it might help us comprehend Ezekiel's poems in new perspectives.

For the present study, the poem "Enterprise" has been selected as it is one of the representative poems of Ezekiel and also as it presents before us the journey of 'self' as representative of the human life. The basic ideas of "Enterprise" itself can be understood as the various ups and downs in the life of a human being and how the life itself becomes almost like the notion of an 'enterprise' undertaken in form of our 'life' in this world. In this sense, "Enterprise" presents a world view and hence we have tried to understand this in the context of the Panchakosha theory as explained in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. I have tried to understand this theory with the help of the Shankaracharya's commentary on *Taittiriya Upanishad*. (<https://archive.org/details/TaittiriyaUpanishadGitaPressGorakhpur/page/n5/mode/2up>)

The idea of such an explanation of a text with the help of Indian literary theories originated while reading texts of Kapil Kapoor entitled *Literary Theory: Indian Conceptual Framework and Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition*. Though there may not be any direct citations, the idea of analysis

in these frameworks owes a lot to these two texts and several lectures of Prof. Kapil Kapoor. In this effort to analyse the poem, I have undertaken the analysis of the poem line by line and tried to indicate the Kosha in which the dominant idea of that particular verse may be placed. This might help us comprehensively understand the poem verse by verse and then an overall understanding of the “Enterprise” can be understood in the context of the Panchakosha Siddhanta. Contextually, it may be noted here that Panchakosha theory is a theory mainly advanced by the Advaitins and thus rejects the ritualistic aspects of religion. “Enterprise” by Nissim Ezekiel is also known for its rejection of the ritualistic aspects of religio-social aspects of life.

We (in this context by the use of ‘we’, I understand ‘myself’ and the ‘reader’ here) will first briefly enumerate and explain the five Koshas in the context of the Panchakosha Siddhanta. There are five levels of a person’s self and each level owes to different types of experiences. These five levels are called the Panchkosha also. These five levels are:

1. Annamaya Kosha : This is the level of gross physical being, where the body does not indulge in action and just receives the impressions passively.
2. Praanamaya kosha : This is the level of the action of the five senses. (senses of action)
3. Manomaya Kosha: This is the level of the action of the senses of knowledge or the senses of receiving impressions.
4. Vijnanamaya Kosha: This is the level of intellection, where the experience processed in the above three stages is related to our own self.
5. Aanandamaya Kosha: This is the ultimate level of oneself, which is shaped by the experiences in the above four levels. And some deeply felt experiences, which become the permanent part of ourselves are stored in this level of experiencing self.

Now if we apply this Panchakosha theory on the poem “Enterprise”, we can see that the poems begins on the first level and ends on the fifth one, thus passing through all other stages in between. I will analyse the poem line by line. In order to facilitate the referencing of each line, I have given the poem at the end as an Addendum.

Line1: (First level) Although the verb ‘start’ is there to denote action, yet the beginning of the enterprise “as a pilgrimage” is on the very first level, as for the persons starting for the enterprise, it is just a state of being.

Line 2-3: “Exalting minds and making all/ The burden light” is the fourth level of self, where the experience is coming from the first level to be related to the self. (‘Exalting’ as an adjective here is the product of the poet’s intellect”)

Line 3-4: “The second stage/Explored but did not test the call”.

It goes on the second as well as the third level; the verb ‘explored’ and ‘test’ are related to the senses of action and ‘call’ brings into play the aural perception.

Line 5: Because of the verb ‘beat down’, it goes to the fourth level, as it is the poet’s intellection, which is enabling him to compare the beating down of the sun to his ‘rage’.

Line 6: It goes on the first level. Although the verbs ‘stood’ and ‘thought’ are present, yet they are not the verbs of action here and are rather denoting the state of being only.

Line 7-8: The experience in these two lines goes on the second level, due to the presence of verbs of action.

Line 9: It is the first level, as the body is receiving the impressions passively and is not indulged in action.

Line 10: Due to the presence of the verb ‘taught’, which is here a verb of action, the experience goes to the second level.

Line 11: The “differences arose” between the friends and this being a state of mind, the experience goes to the level of intellection, that is, the fourth level.

Line 12: The verb of action ‘cross’ simply takes the experience to the second level.

Lines 13-14: Loosing a friend, is the experience, which goes to the fourth level.

Line 15: The shadow ‘falling’ and ‘growing’ is a state of action, thus the second level. However, the whole impact of this action is imprinted on the mind and hence it goes to the fourth level thereby.

Lines 16-17: The verb ‘reached’, and ‘lost’ are however, conveying not the state of action, but the state of mind. Although the verb ‘attacked’ is a verb of action, yet the whole impact of the experience goes to the fourth level of self.

Lines 18-19: The acting senses come into play in these lines and hence they go to the second level.

Line 20: The experience of leader ‘smelling’ the sea inevitably goes to the third level.

Line 21 : Seeing the verb ‘noticed’ and ‘went’, we can say that it is the second level but the whole impact of experience is a state of being where they ‘noticed nothing as they (we) went’, and hence the first level.

Line 22: With the adjective ‘straggling’, the impact of the whole line, where the ‘straggling crowd’ is having the ‘little hope’, goes to the fourth level.

Line 23: ‘Thunder’ brings into play the aural perception, but the whole line portrays a state of mind, and hence goes to the fourth level.

Line 24: It is just the first level depicting the state of being of the gross physical body.

Line 25: ‘Some merely bent’ can be the first level, but ‘some were broke’ goes to the fourth level, as the state of being ‘broken’ is a state of mind, although it can be a state of being also, if some part of the body is shown to be broken. But as the broken thing is not visible, physically, so it is not the first but the fourth level. In the same way, the state of being ‘bent’ also can remain on the first level and can go on the fourth level also. However, ‘broken and ‘bent’ being adjectives and thus the produce of poet’s intellect, the experience would go to the fourth level.

Line 26: Through the verb ‘reached’, the experience goes to the second level.

Line 27: The line is depicting a state of mind and hence goes to the fourth level.

Lines 28-29: It can be the fourth level, as the whole experience of the trip has brought them to this level, and the bitterness of experience and uselessness of the enterprise becomes related to their self. It can go to the fifth level also, as the ‘darkness’ of the ‘face’ and the realisation of their deeds not being ‘great’ or ‘rare’, is forever imprinted on their mind and becomes a part of their self, thus to always make them cautious of not going on the useless enterprises.

Line 30: It is clearly the fifth level, as the whole enterprise ends in ‘wisdom’ that ‘home is where we have to gather grace’. Hence the knowledge as ‘wisdom’ processed through all the four stages, and the experiences of the poet while on the enterprise goes to the fifth level, that is, ‘Aanandamaya Kosha’ and becomes a permanent part of it.

In a sense, the whole last stanza can be taken as going to the fifth level as it is telling about the realisation of the poet, and the realisation is such which is stored forever in the Aanandamaya Kosha of his self, thereby always reminding him of the fact that ‘home is where we have to gather grace’.

We can thus see that the poem begins with the enthusiasm of the poet and his friends, who are ready to go on a trip. Then there are different stages of different types of experiences. It can be said while reading the poem that by and large, all the experiences are bitter. And then the poem ends in knowledge or wisdom. And this is the stage which comes after the realisation of the truths and harshness of the journey. We, the readers, thus parallel all the poet's experiences and go through all the stages, thus coming to the ultimate state of knowledge. And it is through the language imparted by the poet that we get the evidence of this progressive cognition of the experience. The poem and the poetic satire can be well comprehended with the help of an Indian theory of the worldview. This is just a preliminary attempt and we need to further take up such studies so as to understand the comparative world views and also to comprehend the world through the Indian thought systems.

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