

...the subject matter. Ezekiel has, as Jussawala says, "sought to make controlled, meaningful statements, avoiding extremes of thought and expression."

5. NISSIM EZEKIEL'S POETIC TECHNIQUE AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

OR

NISSIM EZEKIEL'S IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

OR

NISSIM EZEKIEL'S LANGUAGE, DICTION AND VERSIFICATION

Nissim Ezekiel, the most versatile poet in the country, "experiment endlessly with form and craft. At his best, craft and insight fuse together as in *Subject to Change* where the cosmos itself is caught in the narrowing concentrics of a vision which is apocalyptic, and the correlation of the cosmos with the eye becomes truly memorable."

The people walk and eat. The waves
Rise and fall like nightmare graves
That cannot hold their dead. The sky
Is smaller than the open eye.

2

William Walsh accords a high place to Ezekiel's poetry which he calls "fastidious poetry, at once controlled and spontaneous." K.R.S. Iyengar remarks: "There is a tautness and austerity in Ezekiel's best verse, although the thorn of irony pricks now and then, the total effect is cathartic." Ezekiel is a modern poetic craftsman. The austerity of his style, the simplicity and conversational ease of his language, the economy and exactness in the use of words, the condensation of his style, the impressiveness of his imagery, the sharpness of his wit and irony, the suggestiveness and evocative force of his verse, the sharpness of his wit and irony, the contemporaneity of his subject—matters; all these render him a modern poet of great poetic merit and significance.

Language and Diction: Ezekiel has a high conception of poetry which combines both inspiration and painstaking effort. "The best poet waits for words." To him poetry is the use of right words at the right moment. Ezekiel is a skilful artist who uses apt and suggestive words for his purpose from a rich stock. Words are carefully chosen both for their reference to their sense and their sound. He aims at avoiding superfluous and at achieving terseness, economy and condensation. His style has epigrammatic and proverbial force and many of his lines are easily remembered: "Home is where we have to gather grace", "the city like a passion burns", "The unfinished man and his pain/Brought face to face with his own clumsiness", "The pattern will remain, unless you break it with a sudden jerk", "My backward place is where I am", "A certain felicity would be to die," etc.

Ezekiel is economical in the use of language but he is never obscure. He is able to achieve conversational directness and ease without losing himself in discursiveness. Obscurity and mere angularity are carefully avoided, and beauty and bareness of statement are often wedded together; as in the following lines:

God grant me privacy.....
God grant me certainty
In kinship with the sky,
Air, earth, fire, sea—
And the fresh inward eye.

Ezekiel has contributed a creative, critical and forthright approach to poetry. He is frank. He does not mince words. He is not afraid to set down his convictions in clear cut terms. He cuts down trivialities and goes straight to the deeper issues. The following lines from "The Visitor" illustrate this point:

It was not like that at all
His hands were empty, his need:
Only to kill a little time,
Between his good intentions
And my sympathy the cigarette smoke
Was more substantial than our talk,

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"Truth about Dhanya" etc. K. N. Daruwalla rightly points out: "Nissim Ezekiel was the first Indian poet to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom."

Ezekiel creates humour not only by using Indian English but also by exhibiting the wit that depends upon the concise juxtaposition of the traditional thought or idea with a rather irreverent, tongue-in-cheek attitude, as in the following lines from "The Egotist's Prayer":

No, Lord,
not the fruit of action
is my motive,
But do you really mind
half a bite of it?
It tastes so sweet
and I'm so hungry

Mark the light-hearted tone in the following lines:

Confiscate, my passport, Lord
I don't want to go abroad.
Let me find my song
Where I belong.

3

Symbols and Images: Ezekiel uses symbols and imagery in strictly functional sense and not for decoration. Through his symbols and images he makes the abstract concrete. In "Enterprise" journey symbolises journey of life and it also stands for the voyage into one's inner self, the voyage of self-exploration. "Home" symbolises the place where one lives, as also one's inner self. "Night of the Scorpion" is a symbolic juxtaposition of the forces of darkness and light. Darkness gives way to evil in the form of scorpion:

Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice
parting with his poison-flash
of diabolic tall in the dark room
he risked the rain again.

The continuous rain stands for hope and regeneration. But the evil, having fulfilled its part, departs. Other hurdles come in:

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours
more insects, and the endless rain
My mother twisted through and through
groaning on a mat.

See the accurate placing of words, evoking the symbols of light and darkness – "Candles"/"lanterns" – "neighbours"/"insects", and "the rain" again. But the force of life gains an upper hand over the evil and life is restored once again:

After twenty hours
it lost its sting.

The images of natural objects—hills, rivers, winds, skies, sun and rain are set in opposition to the images of the city. The images, derived from the world of nature the archetypal life symbols. In the words of D. Verma : "They project a pastoral vision of a fully refulgent and harmonious life, a pattern in which man enters into sacred communion with his cosmos including objects of nature as a metaphoric condition of his integrated humanity and of his desire to foster a community of beings." Nature imagery is juxtaposed to the image of the barbaric city in "Urban", "Morning Walk" and "Morning Prayer".

Ezekiel skilfully evokes graphic pictures of human life with the help of apt images and symbols, derived from nature :

Shall I be
driven before them
like a maddened
dog or horse. ("Furies")

and again :

I am like a pelican of the wild—
erness, like an owl of the de-
sert, like a sparrow alone
upon the house top—but not in
misery. ("Latter Day Psalms", 8)

Versification : Ezekiel's early poetry is noticeable for the skilful use of conventional metres and stanza forms. He makes many experiments with prose rhythms and shows a fine sense of metrical ability in *A Time to Change*, his first anthology. *The Double Horror*, a carefully structured poem in his first volume, testifies to his skill for using rhyme, which is strong, supple and flowing. Starting as a bird's eye view of corruption in the other world, the poem turns inwards and ends with the full knowledge of the give and take of corruption, mutually infective, between the individual and his environment.

Corrupted by the world I must infect the world
With my corruption. This double horror holds me
Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake, denounced
Only by myself, to others harmless, hero,
Sage, poet, conversationalist, connoisseur
Of coffee, guide to modern Indian Art
Or Greek antiquities. Only being what I am
Hurts, and hurts the world although it does now know.
Between the world and me there is a frightful
Equipoise, as infected I corrupt the world.

In "The Unfinished Man", he makes effective use of rhyme. All the poems in this volume are written with remarkable rhythmical accuracy. Ezekiel successfully uses a different rhyme scheme in every poem with great success. Ezekiel says : "In rhythm I am at the flowing, the direct, the informal or conversational."

In his recent poetry Ezekiel has given up the traditional verse forms and the singing line. He has tended more and more to use free verse and has also written some prose poems. The "Night of the Scorpion" is a fine example of free verse. The poet deftly varies rhythm which helps him to achieve different effects. C. Paul Verghese remarks: "Ezekiel's use of free verse is not an escape from the restraints imposed by a fixed form. He is well versed in the handling of metrical verse. In his free verse we find a rhythm that suits the emotional mood of the poem; the poet seeks a stricter discipline and arrives at what according to Marjorie Boulton is the third kind of free verse—verse with a more colloquial style, suitable for the expression of difficult thought or sometimes of cynicism, of the man of the world attitude."

Ezekiel is the first Indian poet consistently to show that craftsmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter. What distinguishes him as a front-rank poet in Indian English Poetry is "the exquisite craftsmanship; the rich, supple rhythm capable of subtle modulations; the wry ironic tone which can change, easily and naturally, into the impassioned; mastery over a variety of styles and modes; the poise and precision of language."

6. CURATIVE OR HEALING PURPOSE IN NISSIM EZEKIEL'S POETRY

"Some of my poems," Nissim Ezekiel says, "are obviously written for personal therapeutic purposes." Therapeutic means connected with healing or having a good general effect on the body or the mind. Ezekiel like some eminent poets, wrote some of his outstanding poems stating in explicit terms or by implication his personal problems or predicaments with the aim of obtaining some sort of emotional relief. R. Parthasarthy points out that Ezekiel's poetry is the work of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore, and communicate, on a personal level, feelings of loss and deprivation. Thus, his poetry performs a cathartic purpose, "Case Study", "Enterprise", "Background Casually", "A Time to Change", "Encounter" etc. are some of his famous poems which have a therapeutic significance.

"Case Study" is truly a study of unfinished man who in all probability is the poet himself. It is the portrait of a man who could not really make up his mind about his career or his mission in life.

Beginning with a foolish love affair
After common school and rotten college,
He had the patient will put not the flair
To climb with quick assault the envied stair;
Messed around instead with useless knowledge,
And staked on politics a fatal pledge.
He was endowed with a fickle and wavering mind and could not follow
the example of his teachers who never failed in their assessment of their
deeds.