

INTRODUCTION

My inspiration behind this humble dissertation is a small poem, "Beauty" composed by Nissim Ezekiel. Both the theme and its imagery moved me so much that I began to think whether in future I could work on Ezekiel.

Meanwhile I read a good number of his poems and had correspondences with him exchanging my views and ideas on some of them. The more I read him, the more I was drawn to his poetry. Hence stands this present dissertation.

The Indian writers writing in English, are traditionally looked down upon. Maccutchion observes, "There is little that is specially Indian in the background and imagery; the rivers and mountains are all generalized, and international flowers are preferred ... The predilection for apples, which few Indians can see growing, let alone live with, also suggests literary sources. The themes and attitudes too are modern European. Alienation and resentment, hatred of a machine age ... This is the modern world... increasingly standarised in every country. It is understandable that Krishana and Rama, so overplayed, find no place here but much more significant than that, the great God Shiva, so Indian and still so alive receives no more than a passing reference" (Mccutchion. 1969.97).

Groping in the socalled arena of darkness, it seems to me that the Indian writers writing in English are neither imitative "Pygmies" nor Matthew Arnold in saree! A. K. Ramanujan throws illuminating halo in the area of darkness, "I don't know whether Indian English poetry has a distinct tradition or not. There is not enough of it. For us to speak about its tradition is wrong. We are trying to write instant history. I think we can wait. I think we need poets with a whole body of poetry. I think Nissim Ezekiel has built a body of poetry. It is a great thing". (Jha: 1980:20)

Ezekiel forsakes the influence of Cubism, Futurism, Impressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism and gradually stands on his own feet. He has a commitment to fulfil, “Miles to go” and “promises to keep”. The poet acknowledges:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes,

I have become a part of it.

To be observed by foreigners.

They say that I am singular

Their letters overstate the case

I have made my commitments now.

This is one: to stay where I am. (CP: 181)

Such commitments, such emboldened steps naturally draw me to explore the mine of gold. The intricate nuances of poetry lie locked in the images of a poem. In this regard Ezekielian imagery is highly potential and akin to the images employed by the Sanskrit poets. He is candid about his poetic obligation to the Sanskrit poets:

How freely they mention

Breasts and buttocks.

They are my poetic ancestors.

Why am I so inhibited? (CP: 214)

The paper aims at showing the revival of ancient Indian imagery by the poet. The Ezekielian imagery evolves through a particular route by assimilating the Indian sensibility; incorporating the Western impressionism; Sanskrit aesthetics and unearthing the cave of his thought. His is a world, vast and voluminous. So a broad chapter wise division is worthwhile.

1. INDO-ANGLIAN POETRY: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

2. BACKGROUND REVIEW.
3. NISSIM EZEKIEL: A BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW.
4. EZEKIEL'S WORLD OF IMAGERY:
 - A. EARLY PHASE.
 - B. MIDDLE PHASE.
 - C. PHASE OF MATURATION
5. EZEKIEL AND OTHER INDO-ANGLIAN POETS: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH IN IMAGERY.

The first chapter introduces the objective of my thesis. It studies the historical account of Indo-Anglian poetry vis-à-vis Ezekiel's poetry. This study shows that the images in the Indo-Anglian poetry stem from metaphysical concepts and hinge on physical planes. Nissim Ezekiel spearheads the new Indian poetry in English. It is Ezekiel who has wielded his influences over the new Indo-Anglian poets. He laid emphasis on both the images of sensation as well as the images of perception. He revealed the Jekyll and Hyde functioning of the cognitive machinery of human beings.

Regarding the nature of Nissim Ezekiel's images, Qaiser Zoha Alam in his book *The Dynamics of Imagery* states that the images of Nissim Ezekiel are attractive and concrete:

I ride the elephant of thought

A cezanne slung around my neck. (CP: 131)

The second chapter informs the world of the scholarly work on Nissim Ezekiel's creative oeuvre. They are exhaustive and innovative. Linda Hess, Birje Patil, Gieve Patel, P.K.J. Kurup have surveyed the various facets of the poet. Even special emphasis is given on the domain of Ezekielian imagery by P. Narendra Lal and Anisur Rahaman.

They made subjective and partial study of the imagery of Ezekiel. But the structural developments of such images are not focused properly. This thesis shows the lacuna in this regard and calls for a deeper probe. The poet primarily depends on his milieu and the large social atmosphere in and around him. Life and art are deeply knit and a poet is an antenatal body sucking his sustenance through the umbilical cord of the surrounding life. A hunt for the images is on and Ramanujan traces the origin of imagery in the following way:

Images consult

One

Another,

a conscience –

stricken

jury

and come

slowly

to a sentence¹.

The poet shuns a settled life and oscillates between fact and fancy. His addiction to narcotics, his private life of romance-cum-reality, Linda-Daisy conflict, make their inroads in the *spiritus mundi* of Ezekiel. These images come up from the vast domain of his experience enriched with innumerable episodes in his life. Caroline Spurgeon feels that the images mould the personality of the poet, his “innermost likes and dislikes, observations and interests, associations of thought, attitudes of mind and beliefs”. (Spurgeon. 1935.4)

Ezekielian imagery has been thoroughly scrutinized both thematically and structurally in third chapter. The images are discussed period wise. The images

spanning the period between 1952-1960 (*A Time to Change*, *Sixty Poems*, *The Third*) dwell on man, woman, created creatures of the world, doubt and confusion in maker's set-up and they are finally coloured by autobiographical images.

The images ranging between the period 1960-1980 (*The Unfinished Man*, *The Exact name*, poems, poems written in 1974, *Hymns in Darkness*) are Bombay-oriented in particular and India-oriented in general. Far-fetched images like the metaphysical poets are also observed in the poems included in *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). Suspicion, interrogation, sensory or extra-sensory experience reign supreme in these images.

The images covering the period between 1982-98 (*Latter Day Psalms*, poems 1983-88) are partly experimental and partly sublime. The poetic pilgrimage culminates in the Biblical as well as the Upanishadic images after modifications. His outlook as a symbolist and an impressionist, fosters the depiction of hostile forces of positive and negative elements in the paradoxical world around him.

The concluding chapter deals with a comparative study of images employed by different contemporary writers like A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra and R. Parthasarathy. Nissim Ezekiel claims that the contemporary writers influenced him least. But on a closer scrutiny, it is revealed that the Indian writers make a tradition of Indian images jointly. Hence the recurring images found in them, are often common.

Most of the modern poems are psycho poems. In order to reach the epi-centre of a poem, one has to peel the layers off frequently. The poet's mind often lies locked in symbols and images. Ezekiel's experimentation on common images like "rock", "marrow", "basement room", is vast, varied and changing by nature. In his mature phase Ezekiel is seen at his best to deal with double-string-of images.

At one stage there is a cluster of imagery revealing a particular idea and on the other side there is reverse idea. Thus reverse polarisation in imagery has given his poetry a peculiar status.

Ramanujan adopts an expressive device in the handling of imagery but Ezekiel deals with them to some extent in a different way. Ezekiel's forte, in the domain of imagery, is of a multiforked linear development. His recurring images hinge on love, social reality, Indian milieu, self-search and philosophical meditations. What Ezekiel says about his creative process stands equally true in the context of imagery, "what matters is all that I do to keep poetry in the centre of my life, reading it, thinking about it, occasionally trying to write it. A mixture of memory, observation and imagination finally make a poem what it is. I sense it coming from the depths or realize that it won't and so it's unlikely to be successful". (Chindhade. 1996.155)

Finally for Notes and References, Works Cited and Bibliography, the instructions given in the latest MLA hand book are strictly adhered to.

Note: and Reference

Kittika Ramanujan.ed. *The collected poems of A.K. Ramanujan*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1995. 142.

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