

Chapter – I

INDO-ANGLIAN POETRY: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Not constancy nor charity nor fear.

But as it were, a preparation,

Willingness to come to this.

...

There is a way

Emerging from the heart of things

...

The end does not matter,

The way is every thing, (CP: 14)

Sir Thomas Roe's presentation as an English ambassador to the court of Mughal Emperor Jehanjir for trade permission was an epoch-making episode not only in the political history of India but also in the history of British education in the country.

The enlightened Indians went on spreading English education not only in Bengal but also in other parts of India. Educational and social changes went together in Bombay. The Prathana Swamaj was set up in Bombay. The young people under the influence of English education welcomed the liberal views and reformative zeal of the West. Anne Basant set up the theosophical society at Adyar in 1875. Basant and a few other native intellectuals promoted western thought and the English education in Madras. The Renaissance in the 19th century left an everlasting influence in India. Under the influence of the spirit of the Renaissance, Raja Rammohun Roy and Henry Vivian Derozio took active role to shake off the orthodox superstitions and spread English education. It was Derozio who advocated the setting up of a tradition in writing or composing poems in the English language. It was a new offshoot in the

channel of Indo-English literature. The fusion of Indian thought and European language is reflected in the following lines:

Expanding like the petals of young flowers,
 I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
 And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
 Your intellectual energies and powers,
 That stretch like young birds in soft summer hours
 Their wings to try their strength.¹

Under the leadership of Derozio the members of Young Bengal went on criticising the age-old tradition of India. The Academic Association fostered a new growth in progressive thought. The result was a revolution in thought. The Renaissance flourished as a result of a number of factors. The educated middle class came in contact with the western education and culture and adopted liberal views. The English education knocked down the barrier of the East and the West. The Indians lacked rationalism in their thought. The Indian culture lacked the liberal culture of the West. The educated class studied the writings of Bentham, Mill, Rousseau, and Voltaire and so they were led by an inquisitive search for knowledge. The clash between the orthodox Indians and the liberal Indians was inevitable. A group of educated Indians wanted to reform the Indian society in terms of her culture and social evils. The other group wanted to set up a progressive, new society by demolishing the old infrastructure. So it was a phase of clash and conflict—a phase of transition.

The Christian Missionaries went on launching attack on the Hindu religion and culture. The westernised India posed a challenge to the cultural tradition of India. A leading group of the Indians tried to save the Indian society from the direct impact of the western education. So the enlightened Indians were channelled differently. As a

result of cultural conflict, some took to the promotion of oriental learning; some devoted to the development of western education; some others devoted to the spread of religion.

Many British settlers in India like Sir William Jones, Edwin Arnold, Reginold Heber, David Hare, D.L. Richardson, H.H. Wilson, John Leyden started developing a type of literature called Indo-English literature. William Jones, Edwin Arnold tried to revive the glories of Sanskrit literature in English.

The Indian intellectuals imitated the spirit of the intellectual Englishmen. They aimed at setting up Indo-English literature (now-a-days called Indo-Anglian literature). The role of Raja Ram Mohan Roy for the promotion of English writings as well as western education was of no mean importance. The arrival of the English in India heralded the opening of the English education in the country:

It becomes us to state here that although the Anglo-Indian school is partly assisted by public contribution yet the greater portion of its expenses is paid by one of the most liberal and enlightened of native gentlemen—one whose name has been long before the world, whose talents are surpassed by his worth only and whose efforts to ameliorate the intellectual condition of his countrymen can never be too highly appreciated. As the founder of the institution, he takes an active interest in its proceedings and we know that he is not more desirous of any thing than of its success, as a means of effecting the more and intellectual regeneration of the Hindoos. We were sorry to learn that indisposition prevented his witnessing that success yesterday; but whatever may be stated; he must feel the satisfaction that every benevolent mind enjoys for having been useful to mankind—and it must always be to him a pleasing respect that when millions yet unborn shall hail the return of knowledge to this

country, they will associate that circumstances with the name of Ram Mohan Roy (Sinha.1987. 36.).

Thus the Indo-Anglian literature was going to blossom from the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, David Hare, Sir Edward Hyde East and Macaulay. Many factors were responsible for the successive growth and development of such literature. The Renaissance in the 19th century was a very vital factor. As a result of the Renaissance, the intelligentsia gave up the backdated mediaeval thought and welcomed the new thought. This search for the new indirectly laid the foundation of the Indo-Anglian literature.

Educated in English schools and colleges, the young educated class did not return to their native villages. They preferred the urban joys. They lost contact with the masses. They went on expressing themselves in English particularly in the field of English journalism. The English educated class wrote a number of essays in English. It is the zeal of self-expression that leads to the new branch of Indo-Anglian literature.

The great English literature was so vast and varied that it ignited the fire of new learning among the young Indian intellectuals. The influence of Shakespeare and Milton was too impressive on a number of families in Bengal. The culturally enriched families— like the Dutt family of Calcutta and the Ghosh family, went on imitating the western writers. So the petals of Indo-Anglian literature were gradually blossoming particularly in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry. Soon it became a prosperous field with the contributions of Derozio, Kasi Prasad and a host of other aspirants.

The contribution of the British people settled in India was a very important factor for the progress of Indo-Anglian literature. Sir William Jones, Edwin Arnold, David Hare, D.L. Richardson, John Leyden, H.M. Parkar, Warren Hastings were drawn to

the mythological store-house of the Sanskrit literature. Jones brought the wealth of the Upanishads and the Mahabharata to the western world by means of his erudite essays. The Asiatic Society of Bengal revived the glorious Indian literature in terms of English. Like William Jones, Sir Thomas Munro contributed heavily to the field concerned. He translated into English *Abhigyan-Shakuntalam* and *Hitopadesha*. His rendering of the great Kalidasa-drama was warmly appreciated in Europe. Thus the Indologists paved the way for Indo-English literature in a different way. They not only translated the great dramas of Sanskrit literature but also translated the great verses of Sanskrit Literature. H.H. Willson translated the Sanskrit verse into plain English. His English rendering of *Bhavabhuti*, had Miltonic fervor and metaphysical illumination. Thus the Britishers like William Francis Thompson in "The Jogi's address to the Ganges", William Jones in "ode to Narayan", Warren Hastings in "ode on Burke", H. H. Parker in "The Adjutant Bird", David Richardson in "Lines to the memory of David Hare", John Dunbar in "The Adjutant bird and the crow" contributed heavily to the growth of Indo-English poetry in particular and the Indo-Anglian literature in general.

Thus the Indo-Anglian literature was born and grown. It was streamed into different channels like poetry, drama and fiction. Drama and poetry flourished in the pre-Independence period, fiction went on developing in the post-Independence period. Since the paper hinges on "Nissim Ezekiel's images", it intends to confine its discussion to Indo-Anglian Poetry only. But soon it comes to light that the Indian writers writing in English were not "Indian in blood and colour" only but "English in taste in opinions, ... and intellect" also (Macaulay. 1968. 2.).

Historically speaking William Bentinck introduced English on 7th March 1835 as per Macaulay's Minutes (1835). But the English educated Indian gave vent to their

creative expression by imitating the English poets particularly Milton, Wordsworth, Browning. The Indo-Anglian Poets composed plenty of sonnets, elegies, ballads, and odes during the Period of 1820-70. Henry Derozio published his volume of poems in 1823. Thereafter in 1830 Kashi Prasad Ghosh published *The Shair and the other poems*.

Kashi Prasad Ghosh and Henry Derozio were the trendsetters in Indo-Anglian literature. They could not get rid of the Western Poets but their writings were illuminated with flashes of originality. Kashi Prasad Ghosh had acknowledged the haunting influence of English literature in an autobiographical note:

I have composed songs in Bengali but the greatest portion of my writings in verse is in English. I have always found it easier to express my sentiments in that language than in Bengali but whether it is because I prefer the associations, sentiments and thoughts which are to be found in English poems to those that are met with in Bengali Poetry, I cannot decide. I can only say that I have bestowed more time and attention upon English Books than any others (Sinha 1987. 108-9).

The poets during the period exercise traditional images and show wonderful technical perfection in terms of the employment of imagery. Moon has been expressed in terms of traditional images like —“liquid silver”, “Gem of night”, “orb of gentle light” etc. Images are heavily employed in “The Moon in September”, “Song of the Boat men to Ganga” and “Kali-Puja”.

A highly gifted poet of the genre was Derozio who took up death, futility, melancholy, love and other romantic affairs as his pet subjects. He had wonderful power of linking and transferring human feeling to the elements of nature. Like Mon Mohan Ghosh, Derozio could not avoid the inevitable influence of the Romantic

writers of the West but injected Indian spirit into the fabric of his writings. While going to set up a tradition, the influence of the predecessor is quite natural and Derozio could not resist that influence. Derozio's poems are bold and explicit. In "The Harp of India" he expresses symbolically the low state of the Indians under the British yoke. The harp symbolises the low slavish conditions of the Indians:

Thy music once was sweet— who hears it now?

Silence has bound thee with her fatal chain;

Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,

Like ruined monument on desert plain.²

Modern Indian scholars are rather sceptical about the literary merits of the poetical production of two pioneers. Shirish Chindhade writes, "Kashi Prasad is not even as Indian as Derozio. Both, however, fill the gap in literary history. This is what Indo-Anglian Poetry was like in its initial stage much inferior to and imitative of English poetry and purely puerile in spirit" (Chindhade. 1996. 21.).

Though imitative to some extent, Ghosh was not at all lacking originality in terms of employing powerful and rich imagery as expressed in the following lines:

Orb of gentle light!

For still resplendent moon! Whenever we see

Thy placid face and fondly gaze on thee

Its gentleness upon the wounded soul,

Everts a healing power and calm control.³

In the pre-Independence period the Anglo-Indian literature flourished mainly in the form of poetry and partly in the form of prose writings and fictions. Rich Indian cultural heritage helped Indian writers to write fictional works in volumes. Ramesh Chandra Dutt wrote *History of civilisation in Ancient India, Economic History of*

India and, India in the Victorian age. Aurobinda wrote *The Life Divine, Essays on the Gita, The synthesis of Yoga* in chaste English. Though thin and bare in the pre-Independence period, the Indo-Anglian fiction bore fruit abundantly in the hands of Sudhin Ghosh, Raja Rao, Nayantara Singhal, Sashi Despande, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Monohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Ahmed Ali, Vikram Seth, Shoba De. The major preoccupation of these writers was reality as experienced in India. They use the Indian heritage, culture, and the Indian milieu and exploit the same for evoking a typical Indian response. Very often nature provides for these writers background for their writings. Naturally their images are associated with flowers, breeze, sea, rain, water, plants, heavenly bodies, rural scene, natural surroundings, lights and colours. Even the Indian fiction writers have used forms of India for their image formation. In this connection Nancy William Rose has nicely observed, "When one closes the pages of the *Serpent and the Rope*, the image that comes to mind is that of a mighty river like the Ganges, along whose shores and in whose waters life and death meet and commingle in one eternal rhythmic continuity" (Rose. 1963: 1).

Thus the images in Indo-Anglian fiction are ever expanding. The Indo-Anglian poets did not lag far behind in this regard. English language got its moorings in the soil of Indian subcontinent. So the postcolonial Indo-Anglian poets like P.Lal, Kamla Das, R.Parthasarathy, A.K.Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Keki Daruwalla, Joyanta Mahapatra infused Indian sensibility in their writings and went on developing a new genre in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry. Though they have individual differences, they have some common features, which are reflected in the "Kavita Manifesto" published by P.Lal. They are as follows:

1. We affirm our faith in a vital language as sufficient to write in. A vital language may be in modern idiom or ancient but it must not be a total travesty of the current pattern of speech.
2. We think that poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience. That experience may be intellectual or emotional ... but it must be precise and lucid and tangibly expressed.
3. Poetry must be free from propaganda.
4. We claim that the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu.
5. We condemn all forms of imitation (Lal. 1958. 31).

One of the leading poets in the post-Independence period is Dom Moraes. As a prolific poet Dom Moraes has employed a number of techniques in his poetry and his influence on the postcolonial Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, is really deep and impressive. His poems are abstract by nature. There are plenty of common symbols in his poems like *The Island*, *The Visitor*, *The General*, and *A Man Dreaming*. He started the tradition of employing concrete images in Indo-Anglian poems.

P.Lal is the most illustrious writer of the period and is regarded as the voice of the postcolonial Indo-Anglian poetry. His poems are full of the descriptions of birds, bees, roses, flora and fauna. P.Lal admits that all art must come out of the natural milieu and they must flicker with a spirit of place. The poet admits, "It is essential that we write about life and values around us—what we see and what we feel, what gods and goddesses excite our conscious and subconscious. Toru Dutt...Sorojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo—whatever their weakness—have their great strength in common, though in varying degrees. They have Indian responses to life and things. What these responses consist of, I may not be able exactly to pin down but they are palpable

enough to be immediately recognizable. What a sense of myth is, is hard to define—but without it creative writing becomes thin and merely slick” (Iyengar. 1962. XXXVII.).

A.K.Ramanujan is a diasporic poet and his poems are true syntheses of the East and the West. His “Hindu mind” is only *spritius mundi* from where most of the images are born. His poetry manifests the quest of the modernist. In Ramanujan familial relations knit the fabric of the entire gamut of his poetic world. His images are amphibian by nature—though the Indian folklore and the Hindu tradition are always predominating.

Another illustrious writer of the period is Kamala Das. She is a nostalgic poetess. She is pathetic enough to register the unfathomable gulf between the rich and the poor. Her deep social concern is reflected in “the House Builders” and “the Fatalists on Stone Benches”. Her poetry grows as a sort of evolutionary process. Her emotional outburst and sexual adventures ultimately result in despair. The poetess is deeply aware of her role as a female writer and her mission of defining herself as a woman artist.

Gieve Patel says that the Indo-Anglian poets have ignored rural images. It is admittedly true. They are mainly concerned with urban themes and images. The fiction in Indo-Anglian literature is close to Indian reality. Surprisingly enough, most of the Indo-Anglian poets depend on the urban life. They sometime, stray into the world of nature but forget nature next time. This phase was almost like “a wagon hitched to the engine of English poetry” (Gokak 1970. 22.).

An outstanding poet of this period is Nissim Ezekiel who does not follow the English poet blindly. According to Mehrotra, Nissim Ezekiel is “the first modern poet” (Mehrotra 1992. 9.).

John B. Boston made an elaborate study on the works of Nissim Ezekiel. He made an analysis of Ezekiel's Poems. Bombay is the epicentre of his poems and India is the every *spiritus mundi* from where he gets the sustenance of his writings. Boston has mentioned the poet's own confession which clearly indicates Ezekiel's position in the Indo-Anglian tradition of Poetry:

I believe there is a distinct tradition of Indo-Anglian Poetry and that I've tried to relate myself to it critically, accepting what is useful and relevant in it, rejecting the rest. When I began during the Second World War, as a student, I was influenced by only one Indo-Anglian Poet and that was Armado Menezes. I outgrew that by 1947 when I did my M.A. In the years that followed, I was influenced only by English and American Poets and by some European Poets in English translation such as Rilke, Valery and Lorca.

In the 50s, Dom Moraes came along, and Ramanujan. I liked their work and I suppose I responded to it rather than was influenced. By the sixties and seventies there was much new and serious Indo-Anglian Poetry and I always kept myself related to it but also knew that I had to go my own way. The critics suggest how I fit in and relate. In my reviews of the new Indo-Anglian Poets and occasional articles, I was more concerned with describing and evaluating them than in showing where I belong in that company (Chindhade. 196. 156)

P.K.J. Kurup has done an exhaustive thematic analysis of Ezekiel's Poem in his research Paper entitled "Contemporary Indian Poetry in English". The poems contained in "A Time to Change" record the growth of the poet's sensibility in relation to the postcolonial India. Hope, despair, unrequited love reign supreme in these poems:

But who can say:

There shall be no more surprises,

Discovery of cities fresh as brides

Bright legends of a recent birth

New orchids or unimagined seas? (CP: 4)

Accordingly “Sixty Poems” deals with stark reality. The journey of the poetic self gets widened at this stage. The poet is with two polar dimensions in these poems. His quest for hard reality and metaphysical existence jostle each other leaving a peculiar tang in his poems. Bone and blood, body and soul run together. Man-woman relationship gets tinged with satire. Life stands enigmatic to the poet. So like a true voyager he goes on exploring further. Not only the “Sixty Poems” but also “The Third” is a record of such stormy voyage.

His poems present superstitious India and changing pattern of Postcolonial life in a graphic way. The Poet’s philosophy is not too deep for tears. Small, fragmented incidents are as important to him as the everlasting ones. Ezekiel’s voyage meets the harbour when he tests the religious reality in a mock-serious manner:

To tempt God and seek to

prove him is sheer folly.

If that’s what our fathers

Did, I’m sorry for them,

I suspect they merely voiced

A doubt or two, which our

Psalmist—exaggerates as usual (CP: 258).

Another scholar writes that Ezekiel meanders through the course of life to pick up divergent elements in his register. A close survey of his poems from “A Time to

Change” to “ Latter Day Psalms” shows that really speaking the poet “starts his journey from home in quest of meaning of life and poetry, takes different routes towards different selves, core of visible and tangible things and bewildered by them and bemused by the love for home returns back to the original abode where he started, as it were, he never started at all”(Mohanty 1982. 29.).

Ezekiel strives hard to present his self-image as a Jew in an alarming non-Jewish environment. Ezekiel has written a number of Indian Poems – perhaps to the general features of Swadeshi Angrezi. In spite of faulty use of indefinite article, using present continuous tense in place of simple present, he intends to set up Indian English rightly suitable for the common Indian people. English suited for Great Britain need not necessarily be suitable for the sub-continent. Some scholars say that “Very Indian Poems” composed by Nissim Ezekiel is meant for caricatures. But it is not actually so. Ezekiel intends to show flexibility of the language in India. The English language needs to be modified as per the milieu of India:

Pushpa miss never saying no

whatever I or anybody is asking

she is always saying yes.

And today she is going

To improve her prospectus

And we are wishing her bon voyage (CP: 191)

Paradoxes and inversions are the common modus operandi of Nissim Ezekiel. Traditional religions and faiths are put to question again and again. Even God has been humanised by him as expressed by Gieve Patel in his critical observation on the poet. His treatment to God as well as to man is ever changing. Vasant A-Shahane and

Chetan Karnani highlight these aspects of Nissim Ezekiel's verse-galore. The probe into the goldmine of Ezekiel is on and it is still going on.

From 1990 onwards a few scholars focused on the image-analysis of Ezekiel's Poem. K.D. Verma, of course made a partial survey of imagery in a critical reading entitled "Myth and Imagery in the Unfinished Man" which was published in Journal of South Asian Literature, spring-summer in 1976. The scholar has appreciated the value of image:

Whatever the enigma,
The passion of the blood
Grant me the metaphor
To make it human good. (CP: 122)

So according to the scholar, "The crucial part of the prayer appears in the last stanza of the poem where Ezekiel boldly defines the moral function of art: he asks for the gift of metaphor which will transmute the 'passion of the blood', man's untamed energy into human good" (Verma. 1976. 235.).

This piece-meal analysis does not correlate all the images which are woven in his poems. Besides Ezekiel has a number of poems other than *The Unfinished Man*. Though K.D. Verma hints at the images employed by Ezekiel a vast domain of images still remain unexplored in the poetry of Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel is, however, quite reticent about the images in his poetry. He has written a number of essays on poetry and its allied issues but he has not discussed elaborately anything on images. He has, however, admitted that there are a number of images in the domain of his poetry. In an introductory note to "Sixty Poems" the poet has confessed that there is in each line or phrase an idea or image which helps him to

maintain some sort of continuity in his life. And the creativity of Ezekiel is manifested in his poetic praxis.

The poems of Ezekiel are partly based on “flesh” and partly on “fancy”. They are also directly linked with the life of the poet. According to a critic, “The quest for a possible metaphysical truth and the harsh empirical reality jostle with each other in his poetry and gives his poetry its peculiar tang” (Sivaramakrishana. 1976. 11). So a probe into the two polarities of his poetic life is necessary. A study of images is of great help in this regard.

The poet cannot solve the tangle. He is, to some extent, puzzled in this regard:

I am tired,
of irony and paradox
of the bird in the hand
And the two in the bush
Of poetry direct and oblique
Of statement plain or symbolic
Of doctrine and dogma. (CP: 157)

In the opinion of Zoha Alam, Ezekiel records every tremor of experience like a seismograph. Since he makes an in-depth study of the image in Indian English language, he hardly gives an elaborate discussion on Nissim Ezekiel’s employment of images. He dwells on the attractive and concrete images of Ezekiel in truculent and unequivocal statements.

This work studies only familiar symbols like darkness and light as shown in the following couplet:

The darkness has its secrets
which light does not know. (CP: 223)

The author has primarily concentrated on three sets of images relating to “woman, city and nature” (Alam. 1994. 131.). Hence it is an incomplete survey of the wide spectrum of his images. A more elaborate analysis may open up a new horizon in the critical literature about Ezekiel. So the study of images is of absolute necessity. This dissertation is an attempt to focus on the universe of Ezekiel through the atom of imagery.

Notes And References

1. Chittaranjan Bandopadhyay. ed. *Learning English*. Calcutta: West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. 1998. 55.
2. Quoted by Shirish Chindhade in *Introduction to Five Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 1996. 20.
3. Quoted by Qaiser Zoha Alam in *The Dynamics of Imagery*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 1994. 120.

Works Cited

- Chindhade, Shirish. *Five Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 1996.
- Gokak ,Vinayak Krishna. ed. *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry. 1828-1965*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 1970.
- Iyenger, K.R.S. *Introduction to Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House. 1962
- Lal. P. *Kavita Manifesto*. Calcutta: Writers' Workshop. 1958.
- Macaulay, Thomas. “Minute on Indian Education”. Poona. University of Pune. 1968.

Mehrotra, A. K. *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
1992.

Mohanty, Nirranjan. "The Home Bound Pilgrim: A Study of Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry".
The Indian Journal of English Studies. IX. 1982.

Rose, Nancy William. "Poetry Review" *New York Times*. 7. April 1963.

Sinha, R.P.N. *Indo-Anglian Poetry*. New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House. 1987.

Sivaramakrishanan, M. ed. *Indian Poetry in English*. New Delhi: The Macmillan.
1976.

Verma, K.D. "Myth and Imagery in The Unfinished Man: A Critical Reading"
Journal of South Asian Literature. Spring-Summer. 1976.