

God is a presence here
and his people are real
I see their sins, I hear
His anger,
Now I am through with
the Psalms they are
part of my flesh

B.N. Prasad writes : "This awareness of a mythical pattern adds a new dimension to Ezekiel's poetry..... Ezekiel has used his creative spade to unearth material from a fresh quarry, and perhaps we may hope to get from him a latter day Song of Songs or a Job."

(iv) *Poems (1983-88)* : These miscellaneous poems have been collected in *Collected Poems 1952-88* (O. U. P. 1989).

The early and later phases of Ezekiel's poetry show a slow transition. His early poetry is characterised by a total immersion of existential reality, and by a noticeable preference for stable metrical patterns. He is fully involved in the Indian situation. He does not examine experience in an ideological framework. He was "painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing flirtations with the mind. In his later poetry, however, there is revealed a more careful craftsmanship, a more marked restraint and a colder, a more conscious intellectuality" than in the early poetry.

4. EZEKIEL AS A POET

OR

EZEKIEL'S POETRY : A GENERAL ESTIMATE

OR

THEMES AND TECHNIQUE IN EZEKIEL'S POETRY

OR

ACHIEVEMENT OF EZEKIEL AS A POET

Nissim Ezekiel, one of the most notable poets in the Indian English tradition, has published six collections of verse. His poems have appeared in several journals and he is well represented in many anthologies. He is the most versatile poet in the country. He experiments endlessly with form and craft. In his best poetry form and craft and deftly fused together. Versatility is the outstanding characteristic of Ezekiel's poetry. Linda Hesse says : "He is a poet of the city, Bombay, a poet of the body; and an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious delving and twisting of the ego, and the ceaseless attempt of man and poet to define himself and to find through all 'the myth and maze a way of honesty and love'. What distinguishes his poetry is the note of informality and frankness, the authenticity of expression and flawless craftsmanship.

2

Gieva Patel rightly remarks: "The result is a continuity between the life lived and the poetry written, the same thread unravelled from flesh and blood on to the page, in formal measure. It is a very natural thing, then, utterly personal details rub shoulders with impersonal ones, with no sub-conscious boundary between the two". Ezekiel is a poet who pursues the profession of poetry with a sense of commitment.

An Urban Poet: The urban theme dominates Ezekiel's poetry. He is a poet of the city Bombay. He does not mince words to expose the ugliness, dirt, wickedness, inhumanity and squalor of the metropolis. Wading through Bombay is a mortifying experience for the poet in "A Morning Walk".

Barbaric city, sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains.
Its hawkers, beggars, iron lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

poorly urbanic condition

Such a city has a baneful influence on the poet. The trees look like ghosts and lose their personal identity: "The more he stored the less he saw/Among the individual trees". They look like "petals on a wet, black bough". This state of mind leads to an introspective questioning attitude: "Has he done something sensible or just marked his time while half his life is over." This thought is put in the following lines:

The middle of his journey nears.
Is he among the men of straw
Who think they go which way they please?

The city reduces human personality to a zero. The idea of all individuals getting suffocated in a narrow space is expressed through a fine image. "Constricting as his formal dress. The pain of his fragmented View". In "A Morning Walk", Ezekiel clearly reveals the differences between dream and reality, and the wide gulf between what he wants and what he actually is. But he cannot get away from it. Hence, this stilted atmosphere creates confusion in his own sub-conscious:

The garden on the hill is cool,
Its hedges cut to look like birds
Or mythic beasts are still asleep,
His past is like a muddy pool
From which he cannot hope for words
The city makes, where fame is cheap,
And he belongs, an active fool.

It is characteristic of Ezekiel that he finds most Bombaywallas rootless. That busy man, changing trains, belongs only to the city's vulgar turmoil, hence, he seems to the poet like "an active fool".

Bombay, the symbol of any modern city, is the theme in a large number of his poems. The dehumanising influence of the city on human individuality is described in "Urban":

The city like a passion burns,
He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand.
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand;

The city dweller in this poem is closely attached to the city and its worn-out tracks of custom and habit. He is always at a considerable distance "from the hills which symbolise loftiness of spirit. His river of life is dry, and the winds lie dead in his path, meaning that he is devoid of the creative breath which has the power of regeneration.....There is no place for the sun and the rain in his closed system, indicating that he lacks light or warmth, as well as the fertilising power of creativity."

What hope does Ezekiel envisage for man, cabined within the ramparts of urban disillusion?prayer, observance. He suggests "Prayer and poetry, poetry and prayer":

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

K. R. S. Iyengar says, "The recurring note in Ezekiel's recent poems is the hurt that urban civilization inflicts on modern man, (dehumanizing him, and subjecting his verities to pollution and devaluation."

Indian Sensibility: Ezekiel's entire poetry is suffused with Indianness. His commitment to India and to Bombay which is his chosen home, is total. In his famous poem "Background Casually", he clearly reveals his commitment to and attachment with India:

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,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place
My backward place is where I am.

Ezekiel says that the major themes of his poetry are "Love, personal integration, the Indian contemporary scene, modern urban life, spiritual values". Ezekiel, as we have already discussed, is a poet of Indian urban life. K. N. Daruwalla remarks: "He seeks his identity in the country and

Kretika
thyagi

noisaas
B.S. Oms
B.S. Oms
B.S. Oms
etc

its inc
his ve
lie de
India,
of the
be ar
consi
poet
and u

In th
"the
and
pain:
their

In th
who
enjo

In
of
tri

48

How one gunda fellow
Throws stones at Indra Behin.

The man is also quietly hopeful that everything in India is coming slowly – “regeneration, remuneration, contraception”.

In “Good Bye Party for Miss Pushpa”, which is written in the form of a farewell speech because Miss Pushpa is “departing for foreign”, is a good dig at those Indians who suffer from Xenophobia. In it the syntactical peculiarities of Indian English – particularly the use of present continuous tense for simple present – is indicative of the thought processes of Indians. The typical Indian habit of the speaker's going far away from the main subject without bothering about it is revealed in “The Professor”.

You won't believe I have eleven grandchildren.
How many issues you have ? Three ?
That is good. These are days of family planning.
I am not against. We have to change with times.
Whole world is changing. In India also
We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing.
Old values are going, new values are coming,
Everything is happening with leaps and bounds.

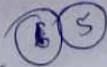
Ezekiel, thus, succeeds in creating the authentic atmosphere of the place by the peculiar flavour of language. In this case, his use of Indian English as used by the lower middle classes is eminently successful.

The acceptance of the Indian reality is an important characteristic of Ezekiel's poetry. He is not critical of the Indian scene like Nirad C. Chaudhuri. His poetry portrays the social aspect of India with a humanistic strain.

Love and Sex : Love and sex occupy a conspicuous place in Ezekiel's poetry. “The themes of departure and voyage, both spiritual and physical, the one complimenting the other, and his rodent-like explorations of the various aspects of love –”, writes K. N. Daruwalla, “the celebration of flesh, breakdown of married love, the transmutation of sex to blessedness, are recurring motifs in Ezekiel's poetry.”

Ezekiel has dealt with love and sex in all its variety – expression, meeting, indulgence, mating, fulfilment, consummation, fear, possessiveness, passion, surrender, misgiving, waiting, separation, wistfulness, yearning, praise, offering, thrill, joy, excitement and impatience. Ezekiel is a poet of the body, an endless explorer into the labyrinths of the flesh and desire. He has a strong poetic talent for delineating picturesquely the feminine physical features in a number of ways :

I will begin – but how should I begin ?
with hair, your hair,
remembered hair.
touched, smelt, lying silent there
upon your head, beneath your arms,



burning up self-consciousness
in friend and timely lover
or even startled stranger
Solid fare—She said
and ordered more.

(Appetite)

Ezekiel refers to the union of bodies as "scheduled flight", "bumpy ride" and "perfect landing" in "Flight".

Although Ezekiel does not reject the claims of the body, there is constant urge to transcend to rise and to travel beyond the mere physical in his poetry. He, at last, realises that a passion beyond sex is the true commitment. Ezekiel emphatically negates absorption in sex which he confirms in "Conclusion".

The true business of living is seeing, touching, kissing.
The epic walking in the street and loving on the bed.

Ezekiel forcefully reveals his ideal of man-woman relationship in "Sparrows".

I fancy this, and then I face
The facts,—the mating and the nest—
Primeval root of all the rest.

Ezekiel suggests through the images of sparrow and nest the importance of marital relationship and the significance of home, the centre of real felicity. In "A Time to Change" he yearns.

To own a singing voice and a talking voice,
A bit of land, a woman and a child or two,
Accommodated to their needs and changing moods
And patiently to build a life with these.

Marital, Family and Human Relationship : Ezekiel is a poet of ordinary human situations and common human relationships. He has composed some very fine poems out of common and ordinary characters and situations. Ezekiel has centred his attention most on family relationship—the interaction between the poet and his immediate family—wife, children and parents. All these three categories find adequate place in his confessional poetry. No Indian English poet has written so copiously and so nicely on family relationship as Ezekiel. Family life is the source from which one derives warm humanism and compassion for all. Ezekiel has written dispassionately about the bruises and balm, hurt and healing, rewards and pains of family life. His family poems are pervaded with gentle humour, wit and irony.

Marriage, the most enduring of all human relationships finds prominent place in his poetry. In "Marriage" he describes the two main stages of marital life. In the first stage the newly married lovers find ecstasy :

Lovers, when they marry, face
Eternity with touching grace,