

Ornateness in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel

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ABSTRACT:

In this nondescript evolving genre of Indian English Literature, very few poets came to give a new dimension, a new shape, a new verve and vigour to this literature in the post war period specially post 80's. And among them Nissim Ezekiel is classified as the representative and flagship poet among Indian English poets. He is really a very valuable, substantial and significant poet. It is very true that no other English poet has given the image of various facets of life, nature, rural life, metropolitan life than Ezekiel. His range of images varies in different level and aspects. Apart from images and pictorial elements, his poetry also carries a musical rhythm and sound elements through his use of alliteration in his verse. In this paper, I want to highlight the ornateness that we come across in some of the everlasting poems of Nissim Ezekiel.

KEYWORDS: Nature; Water; Fire; Light; Alliteration

INTRODUCTION:

“Time, space, sound, light, the human body, dream, movement- imagery of all these make up

much of the fabric of Ezekiel's verse. This is not to suggest that these are not only images in Ezekiel's poetry: in fact, a striking aspect of Ezekiel's poetry is its breadth of imagery.” (Raghu, 105)

Really I agree totally with Raghu regarding the imagery and pictorial elements in his poetry. Nissim Ezekiel, the father of post-independence Indian English Poetry is often considered as the trend setter of modern Indian poetry written in English. His selection of themes, his lucid conversational style, his collaboration of modernity with urbanity are really praise worthy. In order to discover his own poetic talent and creativity, he actually managed to achieve a unique place and position in Indian English Literature. His poetry deals with so many images drawn from emotional and intellectual point of view in keeping with mind the contemporary Indian society and time in general. By using metaphor, simile, space, water, fire and dream he wants to convey the more clear picture than external reality. In the same time he uses other rhetorical device to create a sound rhythm in his poetry. And he deals with all these mainly in ‘The Unfinished Man’, Lattar- Day

Psalm' and 'Hymns in Darkness' in a more strict, sparing and judicious way.

"Imagery is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense eruption referred to in poem or other work of literature whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the vehicle of its similies and metaphors." (Abram, 121)

The above said lines are very true in case of Nissim Ezekiel. Apart from these, what Ezra Pound said about the fundamental aspects of images, Ezekiel too some extent follows all these. He uses common speech and exact word to show images. He also uses free verse to give freedom and individuality in his poems and he never copied old rhymes. Regarding his choice of subject, he shoes absolute freedom and he presents images to avoid vague generalities. His images are clear and free of blurred and infinite thoughts. In this connection it can be said that what C.Day Lewis said about imagery goes perfectly with Ezekiel: "An epithet, a metaphor, a simile may create an image, or an image may be presented to us in a phrase or a passage on the face of it purely descriptive, but conveying to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality." (Lewis,4)

So many themes are present in his imagery and Nature is one of them. He sees nature as a medium through which one can attain the essential truth and he believes that nature is a manifestation of greatness and glory

of God. He presents nature in comparison with defiled city, In his 'Urban' he shows:

*"The hills are always far away.
He knows the broken roads, and
moves
In circles tracked with in his head."
(Urban)*

Images of river, skies, wind, sun, moon and rain can be seen also in his poetry. As he takes all the elements that are prevalent in nature and he always want to attach himself with nature. As he says in 'Morning Prayer':

*"God grant me certainty
In kinship with the sky
Air, earth, fire, sea
and the fresh inward eye. (CP, 122)*

Often we find images of space, fire, light and darkness in his poetry. Imagery of space can be seen in his 'Jewish Weeding in Bombay':

*"Still later
we lay on floor-mattress in the kitchen
of
My wife's family apartment and though it
was past
Midnight, she kept saying let's do it
darling let's do it
Darling
We did it." (CP, 235)*

Imagery of light are found in 'A Time to change'. Apart from it, in poems like 'Occupation', 'Scriptures', 'Two Adolescents' and 'Morning Prayers' deal with imagery of light. The concluding lines of 'Morning



Prayers' show his fractionation in creating image with the touch of light. He uses it in many senses and one such is:

*“Light, light, light
Unveil, expose, expound
Your metaphors of meaning
And let the know lucidity.
White wings of morning.” (CP,
20)*

Actually pictorial elements in Ezekiel's poetry are never static. Not only lights but also darkness can be seen in his poems like 'The Latter', 'The Crowns', 'Occupation', 'Two Nights of Love', 'Perspective' and 'The Fisherman'. Few lines from 'The Fisherman' can show how he creates the image of darkness in his poetry:

*“It comes to meet at last
as the darkness falls upon the
sleepy waters
Fish in the darkness comes to me at
last.” (CP, 69)*

Dream and water also find a new way in the hands of Ezekiel. In his 'A Time to Change', he shows the dream in various way like in morning, in heart broken condition and also at night also. As in 'To A Certain Lady', he describes the nightmares in the following lines:

*“And nightmares whisper to our
sleep
of terrors past and yet to be
These merely contribute to our
symbology.” (CP,27)*

In his 'Love Sonnet', 'Speech and Silence', 'I told the Thames', 'Song of Desolation' and 'Occupation', we find the imagery of water. 'In Penilence', he used so many water images and some following lines clearly illustrate this:

*“I will be penitent
My heart, and carve
No more impulse
Of a wave
But I am till a sea
And hold with in
The muffled tumult
Of a sin.” (CP,71)*

Ezekiel's evocative power of thought process and imaginative skill are shown in 'Latter-Day Psalms'. In a poem of that series he uses a number of visible objects with in a single setting:

*“Hills, valleys, swelling river-banks,
all those landscape images
praise of breasts and buttocks
seen as fruit thighs as tree-trunks;
flower, moon, fire, bird
of desire, fish of sex
remotely tell a small
fragmented part of the story.” (LDP,
249)*

Images of a basement room are also shown in various poems. And in each of those images, he shows the condition of room and his continuous quest for introspection and artistic creation even at the cost of present health. Also this basement room helps him to create and reflect his thought from new and fresh perspectives. It

works for him as a shelter which is free from din and bustle of external world. As he says in London:

*“The basement room
remains a true place
in my chronology
cold and bare, it held
a rare turbulence
in check, for growth.” (London)*

Ezekiel considers time as the greatest destroyer which can put an end to all human efforts in now time. But in the hands of Ezekiel time is shown as curative properties also. His images of time are shown in ‘On Meeting a Pendant’, ‘After Rain’, ‘Poems of Separation’ and in ‘In Retrospect’. In every poem his thought regarding the same image changes. As in ‘Process’, he says:

*“Just when you give up
the whole process
begins again
and you are as pure*

*Imagine what it would do
with a little assistance from you.”*
(CP 164-5)

Images of city life, its mechanical movements and its inhabitant’s action are also shown in Ezekiel’s poetry. In his ‘Urban’, he portrays a clear lucid graphic picture of the city life:

*“The city like a passion burns
He dreams of morning walks, alone*

and floating on a wave of sand.”
(CP, 117)

Disillusionment and disenchantment of the city life and condition of Bombay city are shown in many of his poems. As in ‘A Morning Walk’, he shows the city and its influence upon its inhabitants including the poets of that period:

*“Cold and dim
Where only human hands sell
cheap
It is a barbaric city sick with slums
deprived of seasons.” (CP, 120)*

Often his pictorial elements are related with the human body specially woman. In ‘Nudes 1978’, he shows the woman’s sensuality, nakedness and nudity in a vivid way:

*“Yes, this is me as I am,
naked seen, seeing nakedness,
named, flamed in detail,
womanly and vulnerable.” (LDP,
252)*

Simile, metaphor, concrete, sensuous and functional imagery are also shown in Ezekiel’s ‘Latter – Day Psalms’. He uses figurative expressions in such a way that it becomes unique in its own way. An example of simile is found in ‘Squirrel’. Here the comparison is found in between the squirrel and a thought:

*“An agile flick of grey and browns
And he is gone, like a thought.”*
(CP, 62)

Metaphor is also used in 'The Shore of Memory' and 'The fevers of a future night'. These images are figurative, objective and provocative. In 'The fever of a future night', the comparison is very appropriate and relevant in the context:

*"The waves
Rise and fall like nightmare graves
That cannot hold their dead. The
sky
is smaller than this open eye." (HD,
177)*

The discussion of ornateness in Ezekiel's poetry will be incomplete without the discussion of musical elements and sound pattern in his poetry. He creates a beautiful rhythmic sound with the use of repetition of letters and words. Alliteration is found in his poems and it is also true that Ezekiel has not used it extensively. In his poem for Satish Gujral he uses it:

*"What does one do?
Whose loss
And liability
Loom as large as this? (JSAL, ix-3-4,
108)*

In his 'Poster Poems', repetition of letters are found. In the following last three lines, the consonant 'F' occurs four times. Here are the lines:

*"In bone, flesh, and form
flowing line
and flexibility." (Poster Poems)*

Actually by repetition words and in some cases lines lines, he adds a

peculiar music and rhythm in his poetry. Repetition of 'F' is again found in 'Nudes 1978'. Here he says:

*"Flower, fire, bird or desire, fish of
sex." (Nudes 1978)*

CONCLUSION:

To sum up it can be said that Nissim Ezekiel has put stress on the primary significance of imagination in all creative thought process and activities. He shows many structural forms, classical and modern forms of free verse in his poetry. His images on a level can be found connected with one another. Although his musical elements are not found on a large scale but his pictorial elements and imagery are really praiseworthy. And I agree totally with what Paul Smith remarked on Ezekiel: "Imagery clearly focuses on Ezekiel aim It is better to present an image in lifetime than to produce voluminous works and by now we know that Ezekiel has created more than one image of lasting worth to make himself immortal in the annals of contemporary Indian English Poetry." (Smith, 87)

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