

CHAPTER II

THE POETRY OF NISSIM EZEKIEL

CHAPTER II

THE POETRY OF NISSIM EZEKIEL

- 2.1 A Brief Biographical Sketch.
- 2.2 The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel.
- 2.3 Ezekiel's Views on Poetry and the Language of Poetry.
- 2.4 Justification for Selecting the Poet and His Specific Poems.

2.1 A Brief Biographical Sketch:

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most important Indian poets writing in English and he has attracted considerable critical attention from scholars both in India and abroad. He was born in December 1924 in Bombay of Jewish parents. He was educated at Antonio D'Souza High School and Wilson College, Bombay and Birbeck College, London. He graduated with an M.A. in English from Bombay University in 1947. For a year he taught English literature at Khosla College, Bombay and then in 1948 he moved to England where he lived for three-and-a-half years upto 1952. In England he took interest in the study of theatre, cinema, art, psychology and philosophy. There, his first book of poems A Time to Change was published by Fortune Press, London, in 1952.

In 1953, within a short time of his return to Bombay, Ezekiel published his second book of verse under the title Sixty Poems. It is followed by his another volume of verse, The Third in 1959. Soon after this book his another book of poems The Unfinished Man was brought out by the Writers Workshop, Calcutta. In 1961 he was appointed as a professor of English in Mittibhai College of Arts. The same year he founded the journal 'Imprint' and became the associate editor of the journal. He was a visiting professor at the University of Leeds in 1964 and taught a course on Indian Literature there. His fifth book of poems, The Exact Name was published by

Writers Workshop in 1965 and in the same year, the second edition of The Unfinished Man, with the introduction by Eunice de Souza was brought out by the Workshop. In 1967 he went on a lecture tour of America and recited his own poems at a number of universities and colleges. His Three Plays was published in 1969 by the Writers Workshop. In 1974 he was invited by the U.S. government under the International Visitors Programme and in 1975 he went to Australia as a Cultural Award Visitor. In the same year he undertook the job of poetry editor for 'Illustrated Weekly of India'. His another important book of poems, Hymns in Darkness was published by the Oxford University Press in the year 1976. In 1978, he read his poems at Rotterdam International Poetry Festival.

In 1982, Oxford University Press brought out his next book of poems under the title, Latter-Day Psalms which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983. He worked as a general editor of 'Bibliography of Indian Writing in English Series' published by Concept Publishing Company 1983. In the same year he wrote some poems under the title, The Edinburgh Interlude which are not yet published. On 26th January, 1988 he was honoured with 'Padmshri' by the Government of India. He also inaugurated the 37th All-India English Teachers' Conference held in November, 1988 at Kolhapur. Now he lives in Bombay after his retirement.

Nissim Ezekiel, though primarily a poet, his interests

are not confined to poetry alone. He is also a great critic and has a special skill for writing reviews. He has flirted with politics in the grab of cultural freedom and has also been in advertising for some time. He has frequently changed jobs and has played many roles, but primarily he has always been a poet.

Let us consider his poetical works.

2.2 The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel:

A Time to Change, Nissim Ezekiel's first book of poems, was published by the Fortune Press, London, in 1952. It was a time for him to change both literally and metaphorically. The young man in his early twenties was a student of philosophy discovered himself to be an authentic poet. He treated life as a journey where poetry would be the chief source of discovering and organizing one's self. He treated poetry as a way of life, a continuous flow, something which is an integral part of life. He, therefore, felt an urge to change over to poetry.

The title poem of the volume is a moral allegory using the journey and quest motif. All the five sections of the poem grow out of one another. The first section, which tells us about man's departure from the home, is deeply introspective in its tone. The second section expresses Ezekiel's frustration and his search

for identity. Redemption is to be sought not outside life but in it. The third section of the poem looks into the desired pattern for the future. This fulfilment in life was to come through two sources. Firstly, through marital bliss, and secondly, through human relationships. The personal ideal was contrasted with the social ideal. In the fourth section, Ezekiel says that a poet lives on dreams because "Flawless doctrines, certainly of a God / These are merely dreams" and he has to make poetry out of this stuff. As Chetan Karnani points out, "Poetry is the religion of the poet and just as the peasant, tilling the soil, produces fruits, so does a poet create his metaphors by God's grace".¹ The final section ends on a deeply introspective and penitential note where the subject is a mind tormented by awareness of following false gods, disgusted by continuing restlessness while desiring stability, discipline, purpose and order. While commenting on the poem, Bruce King says, "although 'A Time to Change' shifts abruptly, angularly among its multiplicity of themes and kinds of experience, it is characterized by clarity, precision, logic, statement, resolution and by concern with moral being as revealed through social conduct. It is a complex poem, part lament, part prayer".²

Many of the poems in this book concern conduct, judgement, behaviour or how, as in 'On an African Mask', 'Passion of mind or heart / Acquire the equilibrium of art'. Such equilibrium between body and soul, heart and mind is the desired state in contrast

to 'The Double Horror', a poem which begins 'I am corrupted by the world'. In this collection, 'Something to Pursue' is another important poem because here Ezekiel wanted to synthesize the secular and the religious elements. He pleaded for the rejection of the indefinite and the uncommitted man. According to Chetan Karnani, "'Something to Pursue' is an intriguing poem that tries to combine the themes of love and sex with poetry and prayer so as to establish some sort of improvised unity".³

Considering that A Time to Change was the first collection of Ezekiel, it was a promising achievement for the young man. He not only made many experiments with prose rhythms but also showed a fine sense of structure and metrical ability. But Ezekiel's problem here was to find an appropriate style for what is rather a poetry of a mind thinking about feelings than the expression of motion. Again, here, the influence of T.S. Eliot is obvious throughout the collection.

Sixty Poems (1953) consists of eighteen new poems written since, A Time to Change, along with two sets of earlier poems written during 1945-48 and 1950-51. The newer poems tend towards rhyme, regular rhythm and logical argumentation through metaphor and imagery. Thoughts and syntax are better phrased to fit the lines, which in turn expand into verse paragraphs. But unfortunately there is a fall in standards; the promise held out by the earlier volume

has not been kept. Karnani has rightly remarked about the poems in this book, "Most of these poems are only pleasant exercise in craftsmanship. If Ezekiel has a sharper critical sense at that time, some of the poems could have been safely destroyed".⁵ After the brilliance of the first volume, this collection comes as an anti-climax. In this collection, Ezekiel had yet to discover his own authentic voice.

'A visitor' provides a good illustration of Ezekiel as a verbal portraitist, who can bring a person alive through the use of ordinary or commonplace words. The poem written in a moralizing style tells us that it is easy to advise others but difficult to practise the same thing in one's own case. A similar device is employed in 'Portrait'. Rajeev Taranath and Meena Belliappa rightly point out that in this poem "The casual conversational tone links itself with an urban motif, which, incidentally, defines a modern stance".⁶

In her perceptive study of Indian English poetry, Linda Hess characterises Ezekiel as "a poet of the body: and an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious delvings and twistings of the ego, and the ceaseless attempt of man and poet to define himself, to find through all 'the myth and maze' away to honesty and love".⁷ He is indeed a psychologist who is also a poet of the body in Sixty Poems.

Thematically, the poem 'Situation' reveals the role woman assumes in the man-woman relationship, but stylistically it suffers because of an over-dependence on the iambic pentameter couplets, and is not redeemed even through the use of enjambment 'Marriage Poem' shows the simplicity and lyrical intensity of his later work. It is a paradox about sex that when one's desire is fulfilled, one feels that one needs it 'no longer'. In 'Creation' Ezekiel tries to depict the parallelism between the acts of God and those of the poet. The primordial act of creation is compared to the brushing forth of words in a vision which brings the dancing moment alive in all its richness.

The poems in this collection not only have a loose structure but they also have confused imagery. In the foreword, Ezekiel has given reasons for publishing these poems. He claims that they have given 'a sense of continuity' to his life. In this manner, Ezekiel has tended to regard each collection as something which helps him to resolve the problems which crop up with advancing age.

After a gap of over five years Ezekiel came out with his third volume of verses and called it simply The Third (1959). It shows more maturity than the previous collections. In this collection Ezekiel establishes a persona of mature wisdom, although at the time of its publication he was only thirty five years old. Commenting on the volume Bruce King remarks, "Ezekiel had developed

a personal if still somewhat limited manner, now based on balanced rhythms and rhyme while playing on cliches, idioms, and sayings".⁸ In his case the personal is distanced as the mind observes, generalizes, abstracts and judges; intellectual control is reflected in the regularity of rhyme and metre.

There are thirty six poems in this volume and they reveal Ezekiel's love and sympathy for the lower creatures of nature. 'Insectlore', 'Cur', 'Sparrows' and 'Aside' are the finest lyrics of this category. Sex is once again the predominant theme in this collection. In most poems on sex, he is naively honest as Yeats. The poems in this group are 'Pacan', 'Admission', 'Encounter', and 'Situation'. Again there are some poems that portray woman in the role of seductress. In 'Tonight' the persona compares the man-woman relationship to a captivity and describes the woman as one "who loves me till my world is waste". Two more poems 'For love's Record' and 'The Language of Lovers', present woman as a seductress who causes ruin. The description of the power that the woman in 'For Love's Record' enjoys over the men who associates with her is frightening:

*I watched the woman walked away with him.
And now I think of her as bold and kind,
Who gatherd men as shells and put them by,
No matter how they loved she put them by.*⁹

The persona keeps his distance from her in fear of her destructive

SAR. BALASAHEB KHARDEKAR LIBRARY
SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR.



power, which he thinks she possesses because she is 'sorceress'. This is echoed in his next poem, 'The Language of Lovers', for here the persona says,

*Poetry, Some foolish critic said,
Is the natural language of lovers --
Looking at her destroyed even my prose."*¹⁰

Two more poems on sex go in the opposite direction. While in 'Situation' Ezekiel expresses his inability to love, his frustration is caused by the fact that he wants to love, but cannot. Hence, in 'Encounter' he emphasizes the need for action here and now. He pleads for the 'giving' up of cowardice.

In this way, Ezekiel played many varied notes successfully in this collection. He was something more than 'a poet of the body'. With his broad sympathy for animals, psychological insights, intricate analysis of the matrix of desire, a hymn to Apollo side by side with a poem on 'prayer' he showed the widening range of his interests.

Bruce King rightly remarks: "The Third is stylistically more unified than the earlier books. Ezekiel appears to have learned from Yeats how to make poems about the self while standing at a distance; the stance is that of an observer intellectually discussing personal emotions and conduct in abstractions."¹¹ Besides the immense variety, a deepening psychological insights and widening of interests

this volume is remarkable for Ezekiel's command on language and versification.

The Unfinished Man (1960) has only ten poems which Ezekiel wrote during the year 1959. All the poems are brilliant and became very popular and brought name to the poet. This book runs into a second edition, with introduction and notes by Eunice de Souza in 1965. It also earned from Adil Jussawalla this encomium: "the most perfect book of poems written by an Indian ... ^{Ezekiel} at his most honest and lyrical best".¹² The poet has acquired perfect mastery over his craft. P. Lal in the introduction of this book says, "I do not think there is a bad line in The Unfinished Man. There are slow lines, and sly lines ('Our Love has formed like dew on summer nights') and wise ones ('Not all who fail are counted with the fake').¹³ All poems are written with rhythmical accuracy. The poems in this collection carry the mind away in one sweep with a sense of musical delight. In every poem, there is a different rhyme scheme used with great success, creating a fine fusion of subject matter and poetic form.

The title of The Unfinished Man comes from one of Yeats' greatest poems, 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul'; and the stanza from where the phrase is taken is given as the epigraph for the book. The title is an appropriate one; most of the poems are case studies of "The unfinished man and his pains / Brought face to face with

his own clumsiness".¹⁴ Ezekiel's use of Yeats' poem has significance because Yeats too was much concerned with the relationship between man and woman.

The urban theme appears in a number of poems and the life of Bombay with its ugliness, neurosis, loneliness and frustration is rendered in poems like 'Urban', 'A Morning Walk', 'Case Study', and 'Love Sonnet'. In 'Urban' the citizen artist feels uneasy in his actual environment, and for this reason 'He dreams of morning walk alone / And floating on a wave of sand'. Again he describes the city of Bombay with all its ugliness 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,
A child like masses, many tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.*¹⁵

Here Ezekiel's use of rigid metre with its complex rhyme-scheme (abc abca) is quite appropriate. The power of above lines owes not a little to the inflexible regularity of the metre. The total absence of foot - substitutions, the heavy iambic pulse and the mechanical movement are all deliberate; and used very effectively indeed.

'Enterprise' is another fine poem which shows Ezekiel's lyrical gift of expression. Written as a generalized allegory of the pilgrimage theme, it treats a journey as a metaphor for life. In 'Case Study' he expresses the dilemma of a weak-willed man. His 'Love Sonnet' has a fine setting. It looks as if two lovers went to the Malabar Hill and viewed the sea from the cafe there on top of the hill. The sea appears to them as 'a passionate and perpetual mystery'. The next poem 'Morning Prayer' is serious in its tone. In each stanza there is a different prayer. In 'Marriage' he uses iambic tetrameter in the first three stanzas with just a few variations. In its finish and flow, 'Marriage' moves with the ease and assurance of a great poem. This volume ends on a brilliant note with an evocative poem on 'Jamini Roy'. In this poem Ezekiel goes on to trace the evolution of an artist. Jamini Roy started as a conventional painter but the villagers of Bengal and Orissa gave him some idea of the new possibilities of folk art.

Thus The Unfinished Man has structural unity. It starts with the description of an urban poet whose mind is floating on a wave of sand. It ends with the description of an urban painter who learned the secret of communication by turning to the village, where he studied folk art and cultivated the folk style in all its sensuous richness.

Commenting on this book Bruce King says, The Unfinished

Man is remarkable in itself - scrutinizing psychology and polished craft. The volume moves from generalization towards the personal, from complaint to decision and ideal".¹⁶ The poems show the advantages of a formal, reflective manner in which images make their metaphoric point without calling attention to themselves and in which allegories and symbols are used without fuss and then dropped without causing a sense of incompleteness. It is an inspired work, prolific in its proper fruits. Ezekiel here showed a mastery ^{of} song which he was never to match again.

The Exact Name (1965) is Ezekiel's fifth volume of poems which has twenty poems. All these poems were written between 1960 and 1964 and published in 1965. In this connection he wanted to show the defining process of poetry. He used the lines from Juan Ramon Jimenez as an epigraph to this volume:

*Intelligence, give me
The exact name of things!
Let my word be
The thing itself,
Newly created by my soul.*

It is only in poetry where we attend to the sensory character of words that they become images too. To be a poet is to look at things with fresh wonder and to gain 'the right mastery of natural things'. He treats poetry as 'inspired mathematics' trying to find the precise image for his emotional complex. He tried to extend

the scope, and subject matter of his poetry. He sought poetry in the ordinary and the commonplace.

The volume continues Ezekiel's interest in the study of lower creatures of nature, particularly the birds. In 'Paradise Flycatcher' it is the juxtaposition of dream and reality which raises the prosaic and the commonplace to the level of poetry. 'The Visitor' shows Ezekiel's fine gift as a verbal portraitist. The poem starts with the folk belief that if a crow caws three times, the superstition proves itself true in the form of the arrival of a visitor. Ezekiel again shows his same human concern in 'Virginal' where he tries to create a picture of sympathy for one who has denied herself the play of her natural instincts.

'Night of the Scorpion' is a very brilliant poem in the collection. The poem has a tender family situation. The theme of the poet's mother, stung by a scorpion, is given multiple treatment, bringing in its sweep the world of magic and superstition, science and rationality, and maternal affection. Here the aim is to find poetry in ordinary reality as observed, known, felt experienced rather than as the intellect thinks it should be. About this poem Bruce King says, "The poem is a new direction, a vision of ordinary reality, especially of Indian life, unmediated by cold intellect".¹⁷ The poem is written in free verse because his aim is not to explain but to make real by naming, by saying 'common things'. Commenting

on the style Bruce King says, "The new purpose is seen in the poem's style, unrhymed, with line lengths shaped by natural syntactical units and rhythm created by the cadences of the speaking voice into a long verse paragraph, rather than the stanzaic structure used in earlier poems".¹⁸

'Art Lecture' shows Ezekiel's ability to make poetry out of everyday life. In this poem he pointed out various elements of a lecture - the data, the subtle episode or a turning phrase. Ezekiel proves that a poem need not deal with great statements or profound truths to be a good poem. This is the reason why he appeals to 'Simplicity' to come to his rescue. The exact name is found only in the presence of simplicity. It is this love of simplicity which has made Ezekiel write a poem called 'A Conjugation' which pleads for an end to pretence in a very unpretentious way. "It is written in the form of a grammatical conjugation illustrating a subject-verb concord - as a first year lesson to illustrate the use of verb"¹⁹ comments Karnani when he observes repetitive structures in the poem.

'Philosophy' is one of his tough poems with which this collection begins. this poem tries to contradistinguish the world of pure reasoning with that of poetry. The poet does believe in science and ruthless logic but there are words greater than this 'cold lucidity' where 'residues of meaning still remain'. This

is the world of poetry which alone gives the apocalyptic vision. Ezekiel used a similar view of poetry in the poem, 'In Restrospect'. He felt that "the invisible landscape of love" cannot be described precisely, it can only be suggested.

'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' is the best poem in this collection. It is remarkable for its association of ideas. Here Ezekiel shows that good poetry is also a process of long waiting like loving and bird-watching. The poet must also wait and watch for the right moment of inspiration and the right word like the lover and bird watcher. He rightly says, "the best poets wait for words" to signify that the poets do not compose poems but the poems are found, as an ornithologist, waiting by the hill side, suddenly stumbles upon a Paradise Flycatcher, or as the beloved, who, when she finds she is loved, surrenders to her lover. The poet is like the beloved because unless the body wakes to love or unless the spirit is moved, neither love nor poetry is possible. It is a persuasive poem with a fine flow and cogency of thought.

Thus The Exact Name tried successfully to recapture in poetic terms 'the ordinariness of most events'. This was done in the majority of twenty poems which appear in this collection.

After his break with the Writers Workshop Ezekiel did not publish a new volume of verse for eleven years although he continued

writing poems and publishing them in various journals and periodicals. It is, in 1976, he published Hymns in Darkness which has all types of poems. He included in this volume 'Passion Poems', 'Poster Poems', 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English', 'Hymns in Darkness' and other poems. The poems in this volume are not arranged chronologically and that is why it is difficult to comment on the nature, form and technique of the poems, "Hymns in Darkness' was a disappointment to me although it was difficult to find flaws in the poet's technique".²⁰ It is on account of content that the poetry from this book remains dissatisfying. It is disconcerting to find that the poet does not go about his business seriously but casually assumes, in turn, the masks of the poet.

'Background Casually' is an autobiographical poem in which he gives an account of his success and failure as a student, as a poet and as a lover. It is a poem much talked about, for readers find it a statement of something "often thought of but never so well expressed". The poet is not detached and impersonal classicist and once he starts with the story of his own part, trying to project himself as an adventurer, the common denominator runs the risk of being something very facile. It is a serious poem, something of a portrait of the artist as a young man. This is what the poet sets out to do when he opens poignantly with the assertion: 'A poet - rascal clown was born'. The second part of the poem completes his 'song of experience', and the third and final part is a statement

of the poet's final commitments to life.

The 'Poster Poems' seem to have only one purpose to display the poet's wit and technique. The choice of vocabulary, the handling of free verse, the abstractions indicating a narrative distance are attributes flourished here as objects of exhibit. This is the only sense in which the title 'Poster Poems' legitimately applies to such poems when they cease to be posters, but are published in book form. 'The Egoist's Prayers', 'Poster Poems' and by and large the 'Hymns in Darkness' as they lack the classicist's attitude become an academic exercise in poetic technique.

This book contains only two poems which are really good and these are the 'dramatic monologues' -- 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' and 'The Railway Clerk'. These two speak for the poet's understanding of his milieu. Here the wit is at its best, the irony extremely purposive and the comment a confirmation of the age-old values of sympathy and acceptance. In these two poems Ezekiel has been consciously Indian in his sensibility. He has not only tried to describe Indian culture but he had made good use of 'Babu Angreji' or Indian English. 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' is written in the form of a farewell speech because 'Miss Pushpa' is departing for foreign. Ezekiel tries to parody such speeches which are usually rambling. It is a satiric self-revelation of the speaker. The naive speaker is much alive; so is the Railway Clerk, and the Indian

landscape, seen through them, is brought to life in all its vivid colours. It is interesting here to note that the poet succeeds when he observes human specimen from a distance but he ails and fails when he comes closer to himself for introspection.

Latter-Day Psalms (1982) is Ezekiel's seventh collection of verse published by the Oxford University Press in 1982. It won the Sahitya Akademi Award for works in English in the year 1983. It includes the best known poems from two earlier books; eight poems from The Exact Name and six poems from The Unfinished Man. It also includes three 'Postcard poems', three 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English', four songs for Nandu Bhende' and seven other poems which were already published in the journals.

"There is nothing 'academic' in 'Latter-Day Psalms', though Ezekiel has been in the teaching profession for the past two decades."²¹ Being a rationalist, he did not have much patience with the political mysticism of Gandhi. He was involved in a number of non-literary activities, and some critics are convinced that these left him with little time for literature.

The poems which are taken from 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' and included in this collection are a good satire on the Indians' use of English. All the common errors - using the present continuous tense instead of the simple present tense, faulty use

of the indefinite article, the use of 'no' to enforce a point or turn a statement into a question, are made fun of. 'The Patriot' is a fine caricature of the Indian politician, fond of mouthing clichés he hardly understands:

*I am standing for peace and non-violence
Why World is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding,²²*

The usage 'I am standing' in place of 'I stand' or 'Why world is' instead of 'Why is the world' are very common Indian mistakes.

'Latter-Day Psalms' is a collection of ten poems that Ezekiel wrote in 1978 during a visit to Rotterdam at the invitation of the Arts Council of Rotterdam. The first nine Latter-Day Psalms correspond to nine of the 150 Old Testament Psalms. The tenth and concluding Latter-Day Psalm is a 'comment' on the previous nine, as well as on the 150 Old Testament Psalms. The Latter Day Psalms are among the most complex, yet the simplest of Ezekiel's poems.

'Nudes' 1978, the next group of poems, is entirely different in form. This collection of fourteen poems eschews rhyme altogether. The lines are of irregular length. With a touch of humour, they sensitively deal with nudity, sex and love. The fourteen-line poems take the form of the poet's encounters with various women. The

style is different from a poem like 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' which also uses the first person singular.

Thus the poems contained in 'Latter-Day Psalms' are representative examples of Ezekiel's art, with its wide ranging experiments in form and technique. The subjects range from sex to religion, from Jewish weddings to undertrial prisoners.

Besides above collections of poems Nissim Ezekiel has written a number of poems and published these in various journals like 'The Journal of Indian Writing in English', 'Indian Literature', 'The Literary Criterion', 'Quest', 'The Literary Half-Yearly', 'Journal of South Asian Literature', 'The Illustrated Weekly of India', 'The P.E.N.' and so on. Many of his poems are anthologized in a number of anthologies. 'The Edinburgh Interlude' is the latest collection of Ezekiel's poems which are written in 1983, yet unpublished.

2.3 Ezekiel's Views on Poetry and the Language of Poetry:

The attitudes, ideas, views and preferences of a writer may be explicit in his letters, critical essays and interviews, or implicit in his creative writings. Nissim Ezekiel, one of the major figures on the contemporary Indo-English literary scene, has offered valuable insights into literature and life in his letters, critical writings, and interviews. In his statements about literature,

Ezekiel takes what Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in Theory of Literature call the "extrinsic" approach that looks at literature in relation to society, ideas and the other arts as well as the "intrinsic" approach that is concerned with image, metaphor, technique etc.

Ezekiel stresses the need for a literature of cultural contact on global scale. Referring to Berdyaer's views on creativity and culture Ezekiel says that the poet should be "authentically a creator and not merely a cultural imitator. ... He must insist on the integrity, the uniqueness, the primacy of his experience in poetry".²³ While admitting that the poet may choose to play "Certain cultural roles" he feels that "these roles are secondary". Thus, for Ezekiel, poetry is essentially universal in its appeal.

In his creative writings Ezekiel stresses the centrality of man in the universe. In 'Morning Prayer', the poet prays:

*Whatever the enigma,
The passion of the blood,
Grant me the metaphor,
To make it human good.*²⁴

The greatness of poetry lies in its humanizing power. He thinks that poetry should deal with life but at the same time it should be for its own sake. In an interview I had with him Ezekiel says, "my tendency is to think in terms of poetry for the sake of life. But that does not mean it is not also for its own sake, as a wholly

satisfying and fulfilling activity. ... For me, the therapeutic urge is important, i.e., to write poems for the sake of making discoveries about one's self, other people, society, life in general".²⁵

In "Poetry as Knowledge" Ezekiel differentiates between the way poetry is taken by a poet as being purely "subjective" and the way it is taken by others including aestheticians as "data for generalization". He stresses the significance of the inner life, the journey into the interior. According to Ezekiel, "Poetry as propaganda is equally suspect" like "versified knowledge".²⁶ Knowledge in poetry is implicit and inseparable. It is not for its own sake but is integral. It is the knowledge of a certain mood. And he declares: "A poem empty of knowledge is a poem that merely skims the surface of life".²⁷

Ezekiel has written at length about the creative process and the nature of poetry. In a letter to D. Ramakrishna of 27 August, 1977 Ezekiel says, "I am particularly against extremist and dogmatic theories of how poetry is written".²⁸ In "Uncertain Certainties", he says that artistic flows past the "elusive void within us" or the "true self" which is close to our daily life: "The impulses that arise there are phantoms into realities so that we may cease to be haunted by them".²⁹

The poet is no mere "trader in paradoxes, ally of the

dialectic (Dilemma). He is a meticulous artist concerned with details like the "word", "image", etc. According to Ezekiel, what is involved in the very process of writing is "a progression from the known to the unknown through the medium of words".³⁰ In 'Poet, 'Lover', 'Bird-watcher' he says "The best poets wait for words". The word, the fundamental element of the poem, conveys meaning by means of suggestion and connotation. It stirs the reader's feelings through the enveloping atmosphere of associations. The poet is distinguished from the common people in the use of words.

In "Poetry as Knowledge", Ezekiel says: "Poetry that is not experienced as poetry but as thought is disappointing and frustrating".³¹ He recognizes the elusive nature of poetry: "... it is impossible to have a full and final view of the nature of poetry".³²

Poetry is something greater than a mere poem:

*A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two, but poetry
Is something more*³³

Poetry is elusive because it is the embodiment of the truth in its personal and universal aspects. According to him, poetic truth is not pseudo-truth and it may be located anywhere between the strictly personal and the universal.

In his Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth says, referring to the language of poetry, that "our elementary feelings co-exist

in a state of greater simplicity" and consequently may be "more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated." Ezekiel also advocates simplicity of thought and language in modern poetry. In "A Note on Form in Poetry" he extends the concept of simplicity to form in poetry. In rhythm he would aim at "the natural, the flowing, the direct and the informal or conversational". In "Art Lecture" he evokes simplicity in his desire to find the exact name. In "Credo" one of the "Postcard Poems", he hopes:

*to describe anguish
in a soft voice,
in the simplest statements
to body forth the passions.*³⁴

Ezekiel's aversion to obscurity is evident in his Poster Poems. Each prayer, emanating from the recesses of his inmost being, finds expression in simple diction: e.g., "Follies ... Fresh as Flowers" and the desire to self to "Fly with the sparrow".

About form Ezekiel comments: "The form is not a dress, manner or style but an organic, integrated growth, a basic mode of expression in which thinking is not separate from all the other elements that go into its making".³⁵ He also says that "the body of poetry is emotion"³⁶ and that the poetic illusion can be presented by means of metaphor. According to him poetry is a mode of human speech. It ought not to be considered only in relation to metre, metaphor, image, symbol, structure, texture, tension and so on.

2.4 Justification for Selecting the Poet and His Specific Poems:

I have selected Nissim Ezekiel for my study because Ezekiel is an important Indian poet of the present century. He is simple in his technique and in his use of poetic devices. He handles the language with utmost care and sensitivity, as he says in 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher', 'The best poets wait for words'. He thinks poetry as a process and to write poetry is not easy, one has to make deliberate attempts while writing a poem. About his poetry Shyamala Narayan says, "There is a feeling of something inevitable about the choice of words - one feels sure that no other words in any other arrangement would do, they are so exactly right".³⁷

Secondly Ezekiel has written a number of poems on various subjects. He has written poems on birds, on people in the society, their problems, worries, on cities and the life in city, on professional men and women, on superstitions, on human instincts and human tendencies, on his own life and experiences in life and so on. He has written poems in different style and technique. He has written some poems in traditional metre and form where he followed all rules of prosody. In some other poems he has done some experiments with language and technique. He has also written many poems in free verse, and showed his ability to handle the free-verse form very successfully. Again, some of his poems are in Indian English.

He has written these poems in Indian English only to make parody of Babu Angrezi or the English used by many Indians. He has also written some very short poems like 'Poster Poems' and 'Postcard Poems' which express a single idea or an emotion. We can see a variety of subjects in his poetry. I was fascinated when I read some of his poems in my college days. Besides, he has always been my favourite Indian poet. Thirdly, when I was trying with the idea of selecting a poet for my study, Ezekiel was honoured with 'Padmshri' by the Government of India. This occasion confirmed my choice of Ezekiel for this study.

Considering the scope of this dissertation it is not possible to analyse all the poems of the poet. For my stylistic analysis, therefore, I have selected six poems of Nissim Ezekiel representing three different phases in Ezekiel's poetic career. I have selected two poems: 'Morning Prayer', and 'Marriage' which Ezekiel wrote before 1960. Other two poems: 'Night of the Scorpion', and 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' were written between 1960-1965. The last two poems selected: 'The Railway Clerk', and 'Goodbye Party For Miss Pushpa T.S.' are written after 1965. I have not selected any poem from his first three books of poems because I thought that Ezekiel was still immature when he wrote these poems and was still finding voice to be an authentic poet.

The thematic consideration was one of my selection criteria.

'Morning Prayer' is a prayer where Ezekiel prays God to grant him the metaphor. 'Marriage' deals with the theme of love and sex. I have selected this poem as a representative poem of Ezekiel's love poems which deals with love, sex and man-woman relationship. Here we can see Ezekiel as 'the poet of body'. 'Night of the Scorpion' deals with the real incident in the life of villagers and Ezekiel, objectively states all the facts in the poem. 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' is a philosophical poem where Ezekiel compares the acts of writing a poem, catching a bird and wooing and points out similarities in all the three activities. 'The Railway Clerk' portrays the life of a railway clerk who is not happy in his life and complains about everything in his office and in his house. 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' deals with a simple incident of farewell.

Out of these six poems I have selected for my stylistic analysis, three poems which are written in traditional form. In these poems Ezekiel observed the rules of prosody and followed these rules accurately. I have selected one poem i.e., 'Night of the Scorpion' which is written in free-verse. The other two poems: 'The Railway Clerk' and 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' are written in Indian English. I have selected these two 'Very Indian Poems written in Indian English' to show how Ezekiel parodies the English used by Indians with all the mistakes of articles, tenses, formation of questions and their habit of imposing the rules of the mother-tongue on the use of English.

Finally, let me admit that the selection of poems has been influenced by the views by Ezekiel in the interview (vide Appendix-I). In this dissertation I have made an attempt to deal with a variety of poems as mentioned earlier in the following pages.

REFERENCES

- 1 Chetan Karnani, Nizzim Ezekiel (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1974), p.17.
- 2 Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987) pp. 92-93.
- 3 Chetan Karnani, Op.cit., p. 23.
- 4 N. Prabhakar Acharya, "Achievement and Failure in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry", The Journal of Indian Writing in English, Vol. 14, No. 2 (July, 1986). p. 73.
- 5 Chetan Karnani, Op.cit., p. 27.
- 6 Rajeev Taranath and Meena Belliapa, The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1966). pp.8-9.
- 7 Chetan Karnani, Op.cit., p. 34.
- 8 Bruce King, Op.cit., p. 95.
- 9 Nissim Ezekiel, The Third (Bombay: The Strand Book Shop, 1959). p. 33.
- 10 Ibid., p. 34.

- 11 Bruce King, Op.cit., p. 95.
- 12 Adil Jussawalla, In The Journal of Commonwealth Literature,
(July 1968) No. 5. p. 69.
- 13 P. Lal, In Introduction to The Unfinished Man (Calcutta:
Writers Workshop, 1960). p. 2.
- 14 The Unfinished Man Op.cit., Epigraph.
- 15 Nissim Ezekiel, "A Morning Walk" In The Unfinished Man.
Op.cit.
- 16 Bruce King, Op.cit., p. 98.
- 17 Ibid., p. 99.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Chetan Karnani, Op.cit., p. 85.
- 20 Charu Bhagwat, "Poet - Rascal Clown of Hymns in Darkness",
In The Journal of Indian Writing in English, Vol.
14 No. 2 (July 1986) p. 91.
- 21 Shyamala Narayan, "Nissim Ezekiel's 'Latter-Day Psalms:
A Study", In Bijoy Kumar Das (ed.) Contemporary Indo-
English Poetry (Bareilly: Prakash Book Dept, 1986)
p. 20.
- 22 Nissim Ezekiel, "The Patriot" In Latter-Day Psalms (Delhi:
Oxford University Press, 1982, 3rd imp. 1986). p.
22.

- 23 -----, "Poetry as Knowledge", Quest, 76 (May-June 1972)
pp. 43-44.
- 24 -----, "Morning Prayer", In The Unfinished Man, Op.cit.
- 25 -----, "An Interview with Nissim Ezekiel", Appendix to
this dissertation.
- 26 -----, "Poetry as Knowledge", Op.cit., p. 45.
- 27 Ibid., p. 48.
- 28 D. Ramkrishna, "Ezekiel's Credo", In The Journal of Indian
Writing in English, Vol. 14 No. 2 (July, 1986), p.
13.
- 29 Nissim Ezekiel, "Uncertain Certainties", Fulcrum, November-
December 1975, p. 19.
- 30 D. Ramkrishna, "Ezekiel's Credo" Op.cit., p. 10.
- 31 Nissim Ezekiel, "Poetry as Knowledge", Op.cit., p. 46.
- 32 Ibid., p. 48.
- 33 Nissim Ezekiel, "Poem".
- 34 -----, "Credo".
- 35 -----, "Poetry as Knowledge" Op cit. p. 46.
- 36 Ibid., p. 47.
- 37 Shyamala Narayan, Op.cit., p. 19.