

Nissim Ezekiel: A Study of Realistic Perspective in the Select Poetry

Nitin Kacharu Jadhav

Research Student
Shiv Colony, Jalgaon, Maharashtra, India

Abstract: Nissim Ezekiel (1924 – 2004) was one of the greatest modern Indian English poets. Ezekiel attracted considerable critical attention from scholars both in India and abroad for his free style and content in his corpus. His corpus of poetry is marked by reality abundantly. The research study focuses on social realism, one of the facets of realism, in the select poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. The main purpose and objective of this research work is to focus critical attention on different motifs and to point out how the rich and varied symbols and images used by Nissim Ezekiel in his poetry attract one's attention and carry a treasure of thoughts, ideas and beliefs. The study, however, views Ezekiel as an Indian poet writing in English and expressing his experience, observation of the man and society through traditional and non-traditional, abstract and concrete images and symbols in his poetry. He concentrated on concrete imagery to express a new kind of consciousness effectively in his poetic works. The present work is based on Ezekiel's collections entitled *The Unfinished Man*, *The Exact Name* and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) having in *Collected Poems* as the basic primary source. Ezekiel's functional imagery and symbols remind the works of famous poets in different phases like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas etc. manifestly in the corpus of his poetic works.

Keywords: Realistic perspective, social realism, free style, motifs, abstract, concrete, rich and varied symbols and images.

1. Introduction

The post-Independence Indian English poetry differs widely from pre-Independence Indian poetry in English for Indian sensibilities, themes, manners of expression, innovation, ambiguity, experimentation, style etc. All these things could happen mostly by virtue of the western influence, which was still there. In fact, the modernist phase in Indian English poetry influenced by some western poets like Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Hopkins, W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas etc. and critics like I. A. Richard, E. R. Leavis etc. and movements like Imagism, Symbolism etc. All these factors brought about considerable changes in their way of thinking, style and content. They took the art seriously by realizing that easy writing or mere imitation cannot make good poetry. They rejected romanticism, Romantic-Victorian tradition, idealism and religious beliefs of their predecessors. Among the modernists, Nissim Ezekiel did a praiseworthy contribution in the development of Indian English Poetry. Thereby, L. S. R. Krishna praised him by saying –

One of the important names in Modern Indian Poetry in English, Nissim Ezekiel is perhaps the most widely known among our poets whose work reveals a consistent commitment to the craft, authenticity of articulation and sincerity of purpose. (Dodiya 235)

He was a prolific writer. As a poet, his collections of poems entitled *A Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day-Psalms* (1982), *Collected Poems* (1989) are outstanding and unforgettable works in Post-Independence Indian English Poetry. Nissim Ezekiel was also honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award for *Latter- Day Psalms* in 1983 and the Padma Shri for criticism in 1988. He was influenced by R. M. Rilke, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, D. H. Lawrence, MaC Neice etc. in his literary career. Nissim Ezekiel turned out the source of inspiration for the successors like Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel etc.

Ezekiel's style of writing poetry is totally different from his predecessors. One can find variations in his form and style. He preferred lyric form (in *Enterprise*), prosaic style (in *A Poem of Dedication*) romantic style, experimental style and conversational style (in *Night of the Scorpion*) in his poetic works. He believed in the dialectical unity of form and content. In a word, Ezekiel's poetic works bestow an idea of the versatility of his genius. The true discovery with the perfection of form and style started in the fifties. His poetry is a mirror of social realism. Realism is a literary movement which offers a truthful descriptions of the issues related to human life. For it is a revolt against Romanticism.

“Realism is a literary movement that portrays everyday life exactly how it is.” (PSL online)

The study contains some issues that are reflected in the select poetry of Nissim Ezekiel with the help of pertinent symbols and images. They can be studied as below:

2. Realistic Themes in Ezekiel's Poetry

In the realist phase, Ezekiel brought out the genuine and the authentic facets of human life such as dark and bright, bitter and sweet, ugly and beautiful etc. in his poetry. The phase contains three collections entitled *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965) and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). Ezekiel deals with realistic themes in these volumes such as city life, superstition, contradictory worlds, family bondage, marital relationship, love, failure, poverty, death, excessive materialism etc. These themes can be discussed as below:

2.1 City Life

Being a city poet, Ezekiel depicted city dwellers' harsh life, evils of urban existence, coldness, brutality etc. realistically and graphically in a witty and satirical vein in the anthologies of poems namely *The Unfinished Man* such as *Urban*, *Enterprise*, *A*

Morning Walk, *Love Sonnet* and *The Exact Name* like *In India* etc. Ezekiel seems a regional poet like W.B. Yeats for the depiction of Bombay city in his poetic universe. Therefore, Linda Hess says that - Ezekiel is a poet of the city – Bombay; a poet of the body; and an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious dewings and twistings of the ego, and the ceaseless attempts of man and poet to define himself to find through all the myth and maze, a way to honesty and love. (Nair and Patel 250)

Even Rajeev Taranath and Meena Beliappa assert “that the urban theme forms an important strain in Ezekiel’s poetry.” (Tilak and Gupta 28) Ezekiel’s poetry is marked by various facets of city life viz. ugliness, dirt and wickedness of Mumbai. Thus, the urban motif runs through his some poems which can be discussed as below:

In *Urban (The Unfinished Man)*, Ezekiel gives a somewhat depressing and gloomy picture of city life. It is composed in the third person method of narration. Ezekiel depicted not physical but mental sickness of a city dweller. The poem shows the inner struggle of the city - dweller between the pull of the city and the desire to escape its vociferation, urban chaos, habitual actions of the protagonist leading a routine existence. Ezekiel describes the urban sensibility and a city-dweller’s passive reaction to Nature in the poem as –

At dawn he never sees the skies
Which, silently, are born again.
Nor feels the shadows of the night
Recline their fingers on his eyes.
He welcomes neither sun nor rain.
His landscape has no depth or height. (CP 117)

The city dweller neither sees the beauty of the morning sky nor feels the mystery and darkness of the approaching night. Likewise, the protagonist welcomes neither the sun nor the rains and thus, leads meaningless existence in his closed system. It indicates that the city-dweller lacks light or warmth and fertilizing power of creativity and becomes cold like stone. Ezekiel tries to create a picture of a man who wants to run away from the city’s turmoil, but does not know where he should go. The protagonist gets accustomed to its vulgar noises and escapes it only by day-dreaming about ‘beach and stone and tree’. The poem also refers to Ready Money Mansion or Mazda Mansion where Ezekiel lived was a relatively small building complex from where he could see neither the sky, nor experience a sense of depth or height. The poet himself sounds the protagonist of the poem.

In *A Morning Walk*, the unfinished and clumsy state of the city man seems highlighted further. He stands away from the world of imaginative reality. From the dream world, he falls back to the “city, cold and dim” where hawkers, beggars, processions and million purgatorial lanes oppress his sensibility. In it, Ezekiel described Bombay city as a living hell –

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. (CP 119)

The poem brings out the whole cosmopolitan atmosphere that reminds Dante’s *Inferno* for the cyclic renewals of life and change in the poem. Such a city affected the poet’s perception. Ezekiel described most Bombaywallahs rootless but busy like “an active fool”. Ezekiel seems out and out a censor of the city life since he finds Bombay to be noisy and polluted by calling it a ‘barbaric city’, full of slums, deprived of seasons, having dirty and narrow streets. The city people lead miserable life that do not get solace, comfort peace of mind etc. in Bombay. Their lives sound good for nothing who remained just as “men of straw” i.e. cold. They look like “petals on a wet, black bough”. The poem is made up of six stanzas of seven lines each. It is a pictorial and reflective poem. Michael German says, “*Urban*, *A Morning Walk* and *Love Sonnet* become poems which reinforce the appeal to the city as the purgatory before blessedness.” (Kurup 56)

Likewise, Ezekiel’s poem entitled *In India* having in the anthology of *The Exact Name* betrays the chaos and gloomy picture of the Indian city graphically and realistically as –

Always, in the sun’s eye,
Here among the beggars,
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and gods,
Burnt-out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal,
All in noisy silence
Suffering the place and time,
I ride my elephant of thought,
A Cézanne slung around my neck. (CP 131)

The poet shows unbearable and touching picture of city life in the poem, which makes on ponder over the different social issues. The poem seems a satire on the society for violence in the city. It also gives miserable picture of some city dwellers- beggars,

hawkers, pavement-sleepers and others. It is a long poem divided into three sections. The poem contains both shorter and longer lines. It seems a narrative one.

2.2 Superstitions

Nissim Ezekiel was aware of the common human situations of day-to-day Indian life. He depicted the different ways of living, thinking and working of common Indian man in his poems. Such man is deceived for his ignorance. Many people, especially living in village, believed in superstitious things, practices and thoughts. Ezekiel exposed such superstitious people and their deeds in his poems like *Night of the Scorpion*, *The Visitor* etc. in *The Exact Name*, a collection of poems.

In *Night of the Scorpion*, Ezekiel exposes false beliefs of village people. A scorpion stung the speaker's mother on a rainy night. The peasants come 'like swarms of flies' into the speaker's house to do what they could in the circumstances. They chanted and 'buzzed the Name of God a hundred times' to decrease the pains of scorpion biting. They searched the scorpion "with candles and with lanterns", but it disappeared at once as Satan. They seem ignorant and superstitious minded people believing that if the scorpion moved, its poison would also move in the blood of the mother. But if it remains still, the poison also would not flow. When they fail, "they click their tongues" in their disappointment and sit around the mother muttering their prayers, casting spells, with "the peace of understanding" on their faces. Some village people also express their superstitious views on such tearful event in the poem as –

May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said. (CP 130)

They believed in superstitious things like 'previous birth' and 'rebirth' of the man. The poet evokes superstitious practices from a group of superstitious people who believe that the sins of the previous birth will be burnt away as a result of the effect of the poison. The poem is a satire on such people, their ways of life and closes world. It depicts the reality of life manifestly. Bruce King remarks in *Modern Indian Poetry in English* as to - The poem is a new direction, a vision of ordinary reality, especially of Indian life, unmediated by cold intellect. (30)

The poem centers round a scorpion-bite, which is used as a touchstone. It was famous for Indian sensibility, which further used as a study material in Indian and British schools. Even R. Parthasarthy says about the poem as –

'Night of the Scorpion' evokes superstitious practices we haven't still outgrown. It enacts an impressive ritual in which the mother's reaction, towards the end, to her own suffering ironically cancels out earlier responses, both primitive and sophisticated. (Tilak and Gupta 54)

It is a brilliant narrative poem without any break or division into stanzas, which is having, in prosaic and conversational style. The speaker might be the poet himself or an imagined persona who speaks in the first person. The syntax and grammar of the lines of the poem are straightforward.

Ezekiel's poem entitled *The Visitor* also exposes blind and false belief about crow's cawing, which is implanted on the minds of Indian people as –

Three times the crow has cawed
At the window, baleful eyes fixed
On mine, wings slightly raised
In sinister poise, body tense
And neck craned like a nagging woman's,
Filling the room with voice and presence. (CP 117)

The poem begins with the folk belief that if a crow caws early in the morning past one's house, there would be the arrival of the unexpected visitor in the course of the day. It is a common enough superstition among Indian people. The crow cawed thrice at the window and fixed its 'baleful eyes' on the poet. It raised its wing slightly as if something sinister about to be happened. The poet begins day-dream of all sorts of possibilities i.e. whether he would be an Angel or Satan. But the guest turns to be an ordinary man whose intention is 'only to kill a little time'. The poetic persona regrets the time wasted and laments as –

I see how wrong I was
Not to foresee precisely this:
Outside the miracles of mind,
The figure in the carpet blazing,
Ebb-flow of sex and the seasons,
The ordinariness of most events. (CP 138)

As far as the form of the poem is concerned, it sounds lyric, which is composed of five stanzas containing six lines each.

2.3 Materialism

Nissim Ezekiel betrays every aspect of human life in his poetry. He observed modern man's excessive interest in material things who has no time to behold natural beauty around him. His poems in *The Unfinished Man* like *Urban*, *A Morning Walk* etc. depict the same misery and plight of modern man like *Prufrock* in Elliot's poem having entitled *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In *Urban*, he says that –

At dawn he never sees the skies...
He welcomes neither sun nor rain.
His landscape has no depth or height. (CP 117)

The protagonist keeps himself busy in his own material world which is devoid of delight, love, light, peace of mind, humanity etc. He runs after what is not. In fact, he runs after such things, which are fruitless and short-lived. The poem reminds William

Wordsworth's poem, *The World Is Too Much With Us* and Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*. The same theme can be found in the poem entitled *A Morning Walk* in which the poet relates modern man's state and world as -

He turned away. The morning breeze
Released no secrets to his ears.

The more he stared the less he saw
Among the individual trees.

The middle of his journey nears.

Is he among the men of straw

Who think they go which way they please? (CP 119)

The poet shows that the protagonist is too busy in his worldly affairs to pay attention to the world of Nature. He does not feel the dimension of the morning breeze for being cold and listen the call of Nature since he saw other fellow as the 'men of straw'. His world sounds full of noise, violence, depression, sorrows etc. He has to struggle to survive in such world of hustle and bustle. In these poems, Ezekiel strongly criticized the material world of modern man in which man became out and out materialist rather than spiritualist.

2.4 Family Bondage

Family bondage seems at the centre of Ezekielian poetry. He revealed highly realistic outlook about it. Ezekiel tried to present every facet of family bondage in his poetry such as mother's affection, relationship between man and woman etc. Ezekiel's poems like *Marriage (The Unfinished Man)* and *Night of the Scorpion (The Exact Name)* are outstanding poems in this respect.

Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion* is universally admired for the warmth of human love and mother's affection to her child. When the speaker's mother was stung by a scorpion on one rainy night, the neighboring people sat around her and prayed for her collectively.

In the pain of the scorpion-biting, mother uttered-

Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children. (CP 131)

Her words denote deep affection towards her children in the poem. Such thread of affection keeps family members one with one another. One realizes Indianans and family bondage profusely in the poem.

On the other hand, the woman no longer remains a fairy but becomes a creature of flesh and blood in the poem, *Marriage*. The wife seems different from bride and beloved. The speaker considers himself as a 'wedding guest' for marriage and says at the end of the poem as -

Why should I ruin the mystery

By harping on the suffering rest,

Myself a frequent wedding guest? (CP 124)

In Indian culture and tradition, marriage is a pious ceremony in which mutual understanding is a key to its success. But the marriage turns out to be a paradox, which makes the speaker sad in the poem. Ezekiel also points out the dark side of the marriage realistically.

The poem is a lyric, which is made up of five stanzas containing four lines each.

2.5 Failure

Nissim Ezekiel deals with failure as bitter truth of life in his poems like *Enterprise, Marriage* etc. in *The Unfinished Man* and *Night of the Scorpion, The Visitor* etc. in *The Exact Name*. The theme of failure and frustration can be found in Ezekiel's poem *Enterprise*. A group of city-dwellers undertakes a journey with 'exalting minds', novel ideas, ideals and noble aspirations to some romantic and primitive hinterland. But their journey further turns into failure for their faulty nature and human limitations. Some differences among the pilgrims come about over the question - "how to cross a desert patch...." (CP 118)

They are divided into some groups and each group attacks the other one. They lose their ways viz. forget their noble aspirations. They encounter unbearable problems, separation etc. and say that - "A shadow falls on us - and grows." (CP 118) They realize that they remained mere 'a straggling crowd of a little hope' whose 'deeds were neither great nor rare.' (CP 118)

The poem entitled *Marriage* is also about the failure. Ezekiel presents marital failure in a different way and authentically in the poem. In the beginning of the poem, the poet says that -

Lovers, when they marry, face

Eternity with touching grace. (CP 123)

As time passes on, romance is replaced by harsh reality in which there is lover's fall from his romantic paradise like 'Adam's Fall' from the paradise. The speaker faces frustration and describes dejected state as -

However, many times we came

Apart, we came together. The same

Thing over and over again.

Then suddenly the mark of Cain. (CP 124)

The above lines of the poem betray that their relationship now marred by a feeling and repentance and remorse similar to that which was experienced by Cain, a biblical figure, who murders his brother, Abel, in a fit of anger and then spent many years of regret and repentance by wandering aimlessly life. On the other hand, the poet asserts that - 'His marriage was the worst mistake of all' (CP 125) in a fit of failure and bad experience of marriage in the poem, *Case Study*. Failure seems a vital motif in these poems of Nissim Ezekiel.

2.6 Death

Death is the bitterest truth of life, which Nissim Ezekiel presents, in different facets in his poems like *Enterprise, Love Sonnet, In India* etc. In *Enterprise*, some city dwellers undertake a journey with high spirit to do something great and rare. But in the course of the journey, their condition becomes miserable. They seem physically alive but mentally dead. Such city-dwellers agree with one thing at the end of the poem and murmur that - "The trip had darkened every face...." (CP 118) They encounter the death during their journey when they were twice attacked from some unknown forces or people.

Similarly, Ezekiel presents death like condition of some city-dwellers in the poem, *In India* having in the anthology of poems named *The Exact Name*. It seems a touching poem which brings out 'Dead souls of men and gods, Burnt-out mothers, frightened Virgins, wasted child And tortured animal' (CP 131) in the city. It means that men live in the city but, they have sold their souls and hearts to material things as in Wordsworth's poem, *The World is Too Much With Us*. In consequence, they sound dead for the lack of humanity, virtues etc. Man has become beast since Satan captured his soul and he then, burnt out even mothers furiously. Such horror and terror of death is presented in these poems realistically.

Ezekiel's *Love Sonnet* is about two lovers who go to the Malabar Hill and view the sea from the cafe there on the top of the hill and meditate on their own fate as –

Floating down the hill, as on a cloud,
Proud as lovers are, inarticulate,
We lose ourselves in mingling with the crowd,
Not unafraid of this ambiguous fate.
We look inquiringly at road and sky,
A certain happiness would be - to die. (CP 121)

In the above lines of the poem, there seems ambiguity about the word, 'ambiguous'. The lovers desire to be separate from the crowd so that they can take the bliss of love. But they cannot get away from that existence. And having arrived at the peak experience of love, they would not mind 'dying'. Such dying reminds poems of metaphysical poets like John Donne's *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning* in the seventeenth century in which 'to die' was often used in the sense 'to make love'. It is this sense that Belinda wants to die in Alexander Pope's poem, *The Rape of the Lock*. Nissim Ezekiel has used it as a pun relating no physical death.

Thus, the phase sounds outstanding for the realistic themes, mature thoughts, style, clarity of expression, condensation of words and phrases. Nissim Ezekiel presented very realistic and graphic picture of modern themes like city life, superstitions, materialism, violence, oppression, poverty, death, alienation etc. in his poetic works such as *Urban, A Morning Walk, Enterprise, Love sonnet, Marriage, Night of the Scorpion, In India, and The Visitor*. Ezekiel, thus, seems a realist and satirist like T. S. Eliot in the realist phase.

3. Symbols and Images in Ezekiel's poems

3.1 Symbols and images related to city life

Nissim Ezekiel used symbols and images to explore the harsh realities of human life in the city. Though he belonged to Bombay, he did not glorify it in his poetic works. His collections entitled *The Unfinished Man, The Exact Name* and *Hymns in the Darkness* reflect complexity of modern man's life which Ezekiel presents realistically through symbols and images in his poems like *Urban, Enterprise, A Morning Walk, Commitment, In India, The Visitor, The Truth about Dhanya, Notes, Island, The Railway Clerk, Poem of the Separation* etc. Even Linda Hess says about his used image of the city as –

In *The Unfinished Man* and *The Exact Name*, we find that the city has moved forward to a prominent position in the poet's consciousness. (Mukherjee 31)

Ezekiel used abundant symbols and images in the poetry of this phase regarding city life, which can be discussed as below:

In the poem entitled *Urban*, Ezekiel bestows the image of 'a city man' as 'lost', 'disillusioned' and 'bewildered'. It is because the city man neither sees the skies nor feels the shadows of the night nor welcomes sun and rain. His useless life is suggested symbolically in the poem. Nature imagery is used to symbolize the innocence, freedom and depth of vision not found among the distractions of the city. The protagonist says –

The river which he claims he loves
Is dry, and all the winds lie dead. (CP 117)

The image 'dry river' symbolizes the plight of the city-dweller. Likewise, the image of 'river' also reminds A. K. Ramanujan's poem, *A River* in which Madurai was once a holy city, but now it turned into a dirty city. The city images also denote helpless and tiresome ways of living in the following lines of the poem:

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. (CP 117)

The city sounds "like a passion burns". The images like "city" and "passion" sound concrete and abstract images respectively in the poem suggesting miserable condition of city-dwellers. Instead of leaving the city, his mind turns to 'kindred clamour close at hand'. The three images like 'beach', 'tree', and 'stone' represent three cherished domains of human involvement. The image, 'beach' reminds of Ulysses's enchanted love with sea creatures and life. The term 'tree' symbolizes natural flora. The image 'stone' in the form of temple represents communal life in the city in which man has become cold like stone. The city-dweller's alienation denotes his doom from love, nature and religion.

The images like 'cold and dim', 'barbaric' and 'marsh' suggest city in the poem, *A Morning Walk*. The image 'cold' suggests the nature of city-dweller and 'marsh' symbolizes chaos in the city. The poet describes the city as –

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. (CP 119)

In the above lines of the poem, the graphic and realistic picture of city life and city dwellers is betrayed with images - slums, hawkers, beggars, processions, drums and purgatorial lanes. The description of city life reminds T. S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in which Eliot says - "Streets that follow like a tedious argument". (Rahman 53) One may find echo of the poetry of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden in Ezekiel's image of city. The images like slums, hawkers and beggars show disgusting and tearful life of city-dwellers realistically in the poem. These images also denote poverty and gulf between rich and poor in the city. Such poverty and city life can be found in Ezekiel's poem, *In India*. The poet describes the city life realistically as –

Always, in the sun's eye,
Here among the beggars,
Hawkers, pavement sleepers
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and gods,
Burnt-out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal... (CP 131)

The opening section gives a rather wretched picture of India, a county populated by the images - beggars, hawkers, pavement sleepers and hutment dwellers. In the poem, the imagery sounds not only vivid but also kaleidoscopic. The poet presents almost complete and realistic scene of the city with different images. The image of 'dead souls of men' suggests coldness of city-dwellers who lack humanity. The image of 'burnt-out mothers' shows tearful condition, tragedy of women and violence in the city life. The images like 'frightened', 'wasted' and 'tortured' convey social evils and mentality of city dwellers reflecting modern India. The daily routine of city life is shown with the images - the party, table, cold beer, western music etc. The luxurious life of city dwellers is betrayed in the poem as –

The men are quite at home
among the foreign styles. (CP 133)

In *The Visitor*, the image of 'muddy clothes' signifies poverty in the city and 'cigarette smoke' relates of luxurious and addicted life of the city dweller which is also shown in the poem, *The Truth about Dhanya* with the image of 'smoking'. Even Ezekiel's poem, *Notes* presents the image of city as 'the barren city' which reflects T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*.

3.2 Symbols and Images of superstition

Nissim Ezekiel exposes false beliefs of Indian people through symbols and images in his poems like *Night of the Scorpion*, *The Visitor* etc. In *Night of the Scorpion*, imagery sounds graphic and varied. The 'scorpion' seems a symbol of 'evil' for it stung to the speaker's mother in the poem. Superstitious neighbours regarded the scorpion as the "Evil One". It also sounds an agent of Satan. Symbolically, the poet satirizes superstition as evil in the society. The image of 'flash' denotes light; but this light is diabolic; and the real light shines when the peasants come with candles and lanterns to find out the scorpion or Evil one, but they failed. Here 'candle' is a symbol of 'light' and 'knowledge'. The peasants light the candles and lanterns to see the 'Evil one' and to destroy darkness. But they fail to destroy the darkness in their minds, which is remained there in the form of superstitions and ignorance. 'The dark room' symbolizes the darkness in their minds. The image of 'darkness' can be seen in Jayant Mahapatra's poem, *Steps in the Dark*.

The image of the 'holy man' represents a 'superstitious person' and 'hypocrite' for he performs his rites with spell to lessen the effect of poison. The speaker's father stands for a rationalist since he preferred scientific method for the treatment on scorpion biting.

The poem, *The Visitor* also contains some symbols and images related to superstitions. Concrete imagery can be found in the beginning of the poem as –

Three times the crow has cawed
At the window, baleful eyes fixed
On mine, wings slightly raised
In sinister poise, body tense
And neck craned like a nagging woman's,
Filling the room with voice and presence. (CP 137)

'Crow' is regarded as a symbol of ill omen like owl in Indian society. Its 'thrice cawing' at the window of the speaker symbolizes the arrival of the guest to him in the poem. The image of 'the baleful eyes of the crow' makes the poet think of all sorts of possibilities regarding the visitor.

Thus, Ezekiel used animal and bird images like scorpion and crow in these poems as he might have considered that the birds and animals are human than the typical corrupted city-dwellers. The birds and beasts appear as they are, but man assumes many masks in the society.

3.3 Symbols and Images of material life

As an urban poet, Ezekiel has delved into the heart of Bombay. Ezekiel had the first-hand experience of hustle and bustle in the city. He noticed man's excessive interest in material things like William Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Robert Frost etc. and presented the same through symbols and images effectively in his poems such as *A Morning Walk*, *In India*, *After Reading a Prediction* etc.

The image 'darkened room' in *Marriage* denotes happy, comfortable, material and closed life of the city-dwellers. The image 'the large apartment' in the fourth section of the poem, *In India*, suggests the abode of some rich people, the closed world of modern man and the way of living life. The image of 'Burnt out mothers' also denotes violence and city man's excessive madness for material things viz. money and dowry. In the poem entitled *In India*, the material life of some city dwellers is symbolized as –

The men are quite at home among the foreign styles
 (what fun the flirting is !)
 I myself, decorously,
 press a thigh or two in sly innocence,
 The party is a great success. (CP 133)

Men live in the city physically, but not mentally. They lead meaningless and mechanical life in their own world. The image of 'domestic life' viz. 'home' is symbolized as 'a kind of hell' in *After Reading a Prediction*. On the other hand, the same image carries profound and philosophical meaning in the poem, *Enterprise* in which the poet says – "Home is where we have to earn our grace." (CP 118)

Ezekiel implies here that 'grace' can be obtained through life in the very act of living in the world. Thus, Ezekiel suggests abstract and hidden sense with the concrete image of the 'home'.

3.4 Symbols and Images related to family bondage

Nissim Ezekiel conveyed the warmth of human love and affection through symbols and images in his poems like *Marriage*, *Night of the Scorpion*, *In Indian*, *Love Poem* etc. In these poems, family members are shown in different roles. Woman appears in different forms and images in Ezekiel's poems. In the poem entitled *Night of the Scorpion*, the image of woman as mother is presented realistically. She is symbolized as "sacrificing mother" as per the Indian culture and tradition. It is because she says at the end of the poem as –

Thank God the scorpion picked on me
 and spared my children. (CP 131)

The woman image sounds 'lovable' and 'ideal' who preserves the family bondage for her eternal values like sacrifice, affection, endurance and what not. While in the poem entitled *In India*, the images like 'burnt-out mothers' and 'frightened virgins' betray oppressed mothers and insecure virgins in the city. The women appear as 'the wives of India' and 'wooden wives' who neither drink nor talk and kiss in the party. They seem ideal Indian women who follow and observe Indian culture by heart and willingly for family bondage. The great critic named Anisur Rahman comments on the images used by Ezekiel in the book entitled *Form and Value in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel* as –

In sum, Nissim Ezekiel is essentially occupied with the image and creation of a world chaste, pure, simple and passionate. The images of woman, city and nature, birds and animals and common persons and the basement room have basic unity about them. The poet appears to be concerned with the discovery of the spirit or let us say with the image of man in the broadest sense of the term. (84)

In the poem, *Night of the Scorpion*, the speaker's father represents a 'rationalist' and 'cosmopolite' for his scientific attitude and ways of treatment on scorpion biting. Symbolically, it denotes that the father may destroy the darkness and ignorance in the minds of village peasants and assert the dimension of literacy. The father sounds out and out cosmopolite in the sense that he regards the whole universe as his family and the people living in it as family members. He shows a genuine path of life to the superstitious people and protects the family from going astray.

3.5 Symbols and Imagery of death

Nissim Ezekiel conveyed death and its different facets manifestly through symbols and images in his poems like *Urban*, *Enterprise*, *A Morning Walk*, *Commitment*, *Night of the Scorpion*, *In India*, *The Visitor*, *The Truth about Dhanya*, *After Reading a Prediction* etc. In the poem entitled *Enterprise*, the 'journey' seems symbolic in which all human beings on the mortal earth are the pilgrims who undertake voyage to His eternal and permanent Home. The 'earth' seems a symbol of their sojourn. Such a pilgrimage may lead one from the physical to the spiritual world. The image of 'journey' reminds. T. S. Eliot's poem entitled *The Journey of Magi*.

The image of 'cold and dim' suggests tearful death like situation of some city-dwellers in the poem entitled *A Morning Walk*. The image of 'mythic beasts' in the last stanza of the poem denotes destruction and death. It also reminds the poem of W. B. Yeats entitled *The Second Coming*. The poem, *Commitment* also shows 'martyrdom' as an image of spiritual salvation of a saint. The image of 'bridges burnt' signifies decadence of man's material world in the poem. In *Marriage*, the image of 'Primal Fall' suggests death like situation of a couple like Cain, a biblical figure.

'The dark room' is a symbol of Satan's i.e. scorpion's abode in the poem entitled *Night of the Scorpion*. The images like 'the cigarette smoke' in *The Visitor* and 'smoking' in *The Truth about Dhanya* imply forthcoming death of some diseased city-dwellers. The 'hell' is a symbol of the place of dead souls, torturing room, sinner's place for Bible, which is a traditional symbol. His symbols and imagery related to death signify his bitter experience of life like Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, Anne Sexton, Kamala Das etc.

Thus, Nissim Ezekiel relates profound and deep meanings through symbols and images in his poems which suggest burning problems of modern man realistically such as brutality, inhumanity, poverty, coldness, violence, superstitions, ignorance, money-mania, decay of human values and virtues, alienation, separation, death etc. These symbols and images sound functional and effective.

Conclusion

Ezekiel's images and symbols in the poems of the realist phase denote his success for the expression of complex situation in modern life. He uses sensuous, concrete and abstract images like scorpion, stone, night, apartment, cold beer, western music etc. to convey his suppressed and hidden things in his poems. He turned simple words into metaphors, abstract images and symbols into concrete ones as per need in his poetic works. Ezekiel sounds to be successful in producing "the harmonious total impression" on the mind of the readers for his "subtly related images".

The "city" seems the dominant metaphor in the poems like *Urban*, *A Morning Walk*, *Case Study*, *In India* etc. It also offers ample images of human beings with their vices and virtues like 'marsh', 'men of straw' in the poem entitled *A Morning Walk*.

Likewise, 'a wave of sand' symbolizes city-dweller's fruitless life and mental state. All these images and symbols point out strong influence of T.S. Eliot's poetic works like *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* on Nissim Ezekiel.

He succeeded in exposing ignorance and false beliefs of Indian people through symbols and images in the poems like *Night of the Scorpion*, *The Visitor* etc. Ezekiel implied indirectly the dimension of education and scientific attitudes for the development of the person and the country. Here, Ezekiel appears as a genuine cosmopolite. Still the country is facing these problems and could not vanish for good.

Pompous and material world of modern man is also criticized and exposed through various images and symbols like apartment, table, cold beer, party etc. in Ezekiel's poems entitled *In India*, *A Morning Walk* etc. The frustration of the city-dwellers in *Enterprise* is shown as the failure of modern man in life symbolically. The typical woman in *Night of the Scorpion* symbolizes a linker factor of family bondage, sacrificing and sentimental mother. The woman believes in emotion rather than reason.

Ezekiel used personal and general, traditional and modern images and symbols in his poems. The 'night' is a traditional image of 'death' which is used as death like experience for the speaker's mother in the poem, *Night of the Scorpion*. The image also reminds Dylan Thomas's poem entitled *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night*. His death images are nerve-shattering like 'Burnt-out mothers' and 'frightened virgins' in the poem entitled *In India* signifying brutal oppression and deaths of a weaker section of the society and half dead and half alive tearful condition of some virgins in the city respectively. He, thus, sounds death poet like Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson etc.

Ezekiel infuses sound into sense skilfully. For instance, the 'k' sound in 'kindred', 'clamour' and 'close' produces music in *A Morning Walk* which sounds sad. He, thus, conveys the sense through the rhyme and rhythm of his verse. He preferred conversational style in the poems like *Night of the Scorpion*, *The Visitor* etc.

This is how, he sounds like Samuel Johnson for purity of diction, in making a limited and precise use of metaphor. He is also close to Dryden in respect of his majesty of tone and ironic control. There is clarity in his poems that sounds the jewel and virtue of the poem since he detested heavy vocabulary. Ezekiel avoided the Romantic excesses in these collections. He does not sound too obscure for his images and symbols in these poems. He adopted a novel poetic tool of symbols and imagery in modern Indian English poetry which conveys maximum sense and things in minimum words. His imagery and symbols seem traditional, undecorated, authentic and functional in these collections.

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