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## NISSIM EZEKIEL'S CONCEPT OF POETIC ART

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Received: 15 June 2018,

Accepted: 15 July 2018,

Published on line: 15 Sep 2018

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### Abstract

There are so many poets in the world and the different poets of different languages have different opinions concerned to the poetic art. As all intellectuals can never be satisfied with what has been said about anything concerned to the field of poetry which is a unique literary art, has the capacity to communicate more meaning than the words in ordinary language carry their meaning at their back. Wordsworth called poetry spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings while Mathew Arnold called it the criticism of life .To some it is the worship of beauty and few regard it as a cognitive reality coming out of the inspired geniuses. When the poetic self is concentrated with cognitions, the poetry issuing from it acquires the quality of prophecy. Poetry is an expression of emotive experience. Nissim Ezekiel freed Indian English poetry from its typical slogans of nationalism, patriotism or other such things that crowded in the poetic writings of the poets before Independence. He made his poetry a true voice of his self. He treated life as a journey where poetry would be the chief source of discovering and organizing one's life. He believed in the force of ideas almost in the same manner as T.S. Eliot believed. Heart, mind and soul all fuse into one and the poetry of great psychological realism comes out. Nissim Ezekiel understands poetry as the record of the mind's growth. So, Nissim Ezekiel has given his own idea which is concerned to the enhanced poetic art. He fuses great emotion into his ideas of depth and wants to create poetry that must have longer impact on the minds of the readers. He speaks from within inner depths of his soul. Therefore, his poetry becomes a continuous search of his own self.

**KEYWORDS-** Endorsement, Existentialism, Empiricism, Philosophical, Transformation, Metaphysical.

### Introduction

Discussions about the concept of poetry and poetic art have always remained interesting items to those who have even the least interest in this art. There has been a unanimous endorsement that poetry is a unique literary art, a thing which has the capacity to communicate more meaning than the words in ordinary language carry their meaning at their back. The poets themselves and the critics of poetry have

always remained busy in explaining the true character of poetry. There are scattered opinions about the true vocation of the poet and their function of poetry. For the Greeks the poet was Vates, the master and creator and Aristotle discovered higher poetic truth in the mimetic art. Horace and Vida dwelt on the social function of the poetic art but for the Renaissance poetic geniuses it was the superior gift of man's imagination leading to divine delight of passion and beauty. If Wordsworth called poetry spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, Matthew Arnold was contended to call it criticism of life. To some it is the worship of beauty and few still regard it a cognitive reality coming out of the inspired geniuses. In the modern times, there are several questions of existentialism and empiricism discussed in defining the true vocation of the poet.

Nissim Ezekiel was a teacher of English literature and, therefore, he was very often concerned with the related questions about poetry and poetic art. When he took to writing poetry he must be having a definite mission of his poetic career. So, in the pure understanding of the poetic art he had higher notions and better missions. S.N. Prasad makes a study of cognitive self in Nissim Ezekiel and begins his article thus :

Great poetry is, in its essential significance loved with profound philosophical-metaphysical awareness or cognitions. In fact, the poetic self is basically a cognitive self. It is only when the poetic self is consecrated with cognitions that the poetry issuing from it acquires the quality of prophecy. But here we must needs enter a caveat and say that poetry cannot be cognitive just for the sake of being cognitive. Poetry is expression of emotive experience.<sup>1</sup>

Nissim Ezekiel shows great poetic dimensions than what could be visible on the scene of Indian English poetry. He fuses great emotion into his ideas of depths and wants to create poetry that must have longer impact on the minds of the readers. In a sense, it was he who for the first time brought as much force to the field of Indo-Anglian poetry as it was available in the British poetry. He freed Indian English poetry from its typical slogans of nationalism, patriotism or other such things that crowded in the poetic writings of the poets before Independence. He made his poetry a true voice of his self. His search for identity and the framing of the true image of the modern man's sensibility became his true poetic concerns.

Chetan Karnani argues that Nissim Ezekiel treated life as a journey where poetry would be the chief source of discovering and organizing one's life.<sup>2</sup>

A close study of the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and the related circumstances of his life reveals that the poet's poetic self was the result of cognitive self. He did not articulate his feelings to give an artificial shape to his ideas with a view to produce a conspired poetic line. He produced what his soul commanded and what his free will dictated. That is why, a major portion of his poetry becomes a kind of his spiritual autobiography. He speaks from within the inner depths of his soul. His poetry, therefore, becomes a

continuous search of his own self. The deep overtones coming from his inner-consciousness enrich his poetry and provide its true character. Even the autobiographical details into noble poetic idioms and they become peculiar expressions of a complex human being who suffered from several psychological questions of belongingness.

From a close study of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, one can see that the poetic self of Ezekiel has undergone a sort of consecration of cognitive level<sup>3</sup> are the words of S.N. Prasad and in the we find truth about the enhanced poetic concept of this great Indo-Anglian poet. Ezekiel himself explained his purpose and his vocation at several places. In his paper entitled Ideas and Modern Poetry he writes thus :

Perhaps it is true then that in good poetry ideas appear not as ideas but as the poet's experience of those ideas

..... In the best modern poetry we encounter ideas of this nature , often reflecting current ideas in the social, political and philosophical spheres, but expressing, as Eliot once put it, what it feels like to have those ideas.<sup>4</sup>

The mention of T.S. Eliot in the words of Nissim Ezekiel is sufficient evidence to convince us that Ezekiel believed in the force of ideas almost in the same manner as T.S. Eliot believed. Fusion of individual personality into the current of high tradition of noble ideas is the best method of producing the poetic talent of the highest order. Heart, mind and soul all fuse into one and the poetry of great psychological realism emerges.

Fusion of one into other i.e. the fusion of the acquired personality into the innate cult of soul opens new vistas at the cognitive level and the poetic self echoes messages from another shore. This higher notion of the echoing of the poetic self is present in the following lines of his poem , Poetry Reading :

An image fell  
Like silver coin upon the floor.  
We listened to its echo swell  
That message from another shore  
Where he released from worldly things,  
Was dumb before the right he saw.<sup>5</sup>

In his another poem, Philosophy also we can hear something about his heightened concept of poetic art. Let us mark the following lines to know more about Ezekiel's poetic vision and the force of ideas :

There is a place to which I often go,

Not by planning to, but a flow  
 Away from all existence, to a cold  
 Lucidity, whose will is uncontrolled.  
 Here, the mills of God are never slow.<sup>6</sup>

The poet goes to place not by planning but by a flow. It explains the true nature of philosophic realizations and transformation of philosophic truth into poetic truth. When he mentions to a cold lucidity it makes the supreme poetic realization. Ezekiel explains his own philosophical metaphysical awareness away from all existence. Entire perceptive reality is transformed into a noble-creation of highest order-to a cold lucidity.

Under the influence of W.B.Yeats, Ezekiel treats poetry as the method of discovering oneself at various stages in one's life. In other words, he understands poetry as the record of the mind's growth. When he published his Sixty poems, he was proud to note that these poems had interests personal note and most of them gave him personal importance. In several poems of this volume, he succeeded in making a search within himself and projecting the growth of his mind at various stages in his life.

It can be biographically learnt that Nissim Ezekiel was the art critic of Times of India for three years. He also performed his duty as an art critic to The Illustrated Weekly

.His taste for art and artistic creation reflected in each column he drafted. Of course, his love of clear colour and delicate line has enabled many people to understand the nature of art. It was his hobby to pay more and more attention to the things of art and to draw his deeply felt conclusions. When we study his poetry and views on poetry, we become more aware about his last line of thought. In his criticism of painting, Ezekiel has been interested in the same problems which occupy him in poetry. He remains honesty to his soul and does not hesitate in distaste if the same is felt by him within the clear flash of his soul. He expresses his own mind in the following words :

I exerted myself to be a critic, but not a patron, not an art organizer or encourager of artists and art appreciators. In these roles, when I played them at all, I underplayed, stopped early, withdrew. Within the world of the art, I am still, deliberately an outsider, an observer, a commentator. I keep a certain distance from all others in that world because that is how I see the function of a critic.<sup>7</sup>

Nissim Ezekiel's concept of poetic art also has the same frankness of his attitude. He disregards all inhibitions and comes forthright to speak what his soul commands. His regular emphasis on the honesty of soul and search for the self bring him very close to the basic Indian thought.

Ezekiel's views on poetry and severe criticism of Shri Aurobindo's views on poetry are daring steps on his part. He does not hesitate in noting down the infirmities and grotesqueness of Shri Aurobindo, although all others before him had high appreciation for this mystical genius of South India.

Nissim did not hesitate in dislodging the great literary monuments like Aurobindo's Savitri embarrassing bad outdated in language, emotionally inflated to the point of grotesqueness and confused in idea.<sup>8</sup>

It was not an ordinary thing to float a comment like this, particularly on that poetic genius who had already acquired his poetic fame in the glowing images of the Indian readers. But what is important to be noted here is that Nissim Ezekiel did not hesitate in giving open and frank expression to what his soul dictated above the real character of poetry. He remained uninfluenced by the already acquired fame of Aurobindo. A finer exposure of his views about poetry is contained in the following lines :

that peculiarly rapid and windy idiom which intoxicates many Indian students of English literature ..... Vision becomes a substitute for logic and analysis. The experience of poetry is replaced by ideology, in this case of, that of evolutionary mysticism.<sup>9</sup>

Nissim Ezekiel was never in favour of producing poetry about empty search for spirituality and sterility. He wanted poetry to be deeply rooted in experience. Even the mystic realizations should have such designs as may generate probable experience in the web of imagination. For this purpose, he was in favour of what W.B. Yeats had done in his poetry. It is clearly visible in the following words written by him in Ideas and Modern poetry :

When the traditional framework breakdowns, when for existence Christianity in Europe or America no longer provides a natural source of belief, such a poet as W.B. Yeats creates his own framework. He turns to magic and mysticism for his poetic mythology, drawing symbols from these for enriching his meanings. Even when none of his ideas are acceptable to the reader, he does not find it difficult to concede that the ideas strengthen the poetry , that they illuminate patterns of experience with which he is familiar, that they illuminate patterns of experience with which he is familiar, that they make the texture of poetry more interesting.<sup>10</sup>

Nissim Ezekiel had high appreciation for W.B. Yeats who according to him transmute ever crude ideas into poetry by the magical touch of imagination. Thus, Nissim Ezekiel faces all kinds of a kind authenticity of experience that reveals our emotion as reactions of the poet to the poignant conflicts between tradition and modernism and between superstition and scientific outlook. It was in this background that he could not appreciate the poetry of Aurobindo because it dwells on too much spirituality without caring for practical experience.

In his higher concept of poetry, Nissim Ezekiel wants to maintain a perfect rhythm between what comes from within the soul and what is experienced outside.

Pre-occupation with things and events in our modern world becomes raw material for the innerself of the poet making its flow in cold lucidity. He finds the presentation of rich ideas into real poetry in the

Indian classical texts of the Upanishads. He writes a poem Tribute to the Upanishads and the following lines reproduced from there will us realize about his basic ideas of poetry :

To feel that one is Somebody  
Is to drive oneself  
In a kind of hearse –  
The destination is obvious.  
I don't want to be  
The skin of the fruit  
Or the flesh  
Or even the seed  
Which only grows into another  
Wholesome fruit  
The secret locked within the seed  
Becomes my need, and so  
I shrink to the nothingness  
Within the seed.  
At first it is cold,  
I shiver there,  
Later comes a touch of truth,  
A ferment in the darkness  
Finally a teasing light.  
That I am free  
To be the self in me,  
Which is not Somebody –  
Not, at any rate,  
The mortal me,  
But the eye of the eye  
That is trying to see.<sup>11</sup>

He realizes a touch of truth in the groping darkness of worldly realizations. The light of truth has been called a teasing light which awakens the self in him. The experience of eye becomes the experience of cognitive and transcendental eye.

Thus, on the basis of what has been discussed in above foregoing paragraphs, it can fairly be asserted that Nissim Ezekiel is very serious in thinking about the true vocation of the poet. He is not a casual poet or a poet by chance. He knows his true destiny and real function. So, his poetic writings have a definite mission under his well thought-out schemes of writing poetry.

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