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Ezekiel's Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher

- A Poem about Poetic Experience

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Abstract:

In the field of literature, poetry is always considered as the best and finest medium to express personal feelings and thoughts. Since the ages, poetry has remained favourite form for the many great minds to reveal inner expression in a delightful way. However, nobody is able to tell exactly what is poetry? Or how a poem comes into existence? The question what is poetry is as difficult as writing a poem itself. The present paper is an attempt to study the creative process of writing a poem with the reference to Nissim Ezekiel's poem, *Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher*. Nissim Ezekiel is regarded as a versatile poet and a Man of letters who has enriched Indian English poetry through his poetic creation. The selected poem *Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher* provides beautiful description to understand the mechanics of crafting a poem and creative process. This present paper will focus on Nissim Ezekiel's views on creative process of writing a poem and to recognize Ezekiel's contribution in the development of Modern Indian English poetry.

Key words: Creative process, craftsmanship, poetry,



Nissim Ezekiel is known as significant and prominent figure in the tradition of Modern Indian English poetry. His writing reflects individual, social and cultural contexts of the post-Independence Indian society. Ezekiel's long literary career shows that he was completely dedicated to creative writing and at the result his experience flows from his pan in the form remarkable poetry. His major poetic collections include *Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems*(1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Snakeskin and Other Poems* (1974), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982), and *Collected Poems 1952-88* (1989). Along with A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel immensely contributed to take Indian English verse in the new direction and new horizon. In fact, Ezekiel turned the entire fashion of writing poetry and became the pioneer to establish new trend in Indian English poetry. Mallikarjun rightly observes "What Thomas Hardy was to England in the early twentieth century, Ezekiel is to India in the post-Independence era. In fact he is a great spirit to Indian poets in English for several decades". His unique style, simplicity, exactness of choosing words to symbolize contemporary Indian temperament makes him different than other poets of his generation. Commenting on Ezekiel's contribution to develop modern English poetry Bruce King appropriately writes:

Of the group of poets—attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as the leader who advised others, set standards and created places of publication Ezekiel brought a sense of discipline, self-criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry. He was the first Indian poet to have such a professional attitude (qtd. in Kalyani. 120)

As a poet Ezekiel is a conscious who considers writing poetry as a serious business. Therefore, he puts lots efforts to shape his experience in the form of poetry. Besides all other issues, Nissim Ezekiel's views on creativity and poetic process make him a serious critic of poetry. His poetic sense emphasises on creativity and considers natural flow of writing a poem which requires passions and contemplation. Commenting on creative process in his poems, he states;



I have written poems in different ways but I don't rely on any one method. In a particular case, I could analyse the "Creative process" whether it was quickly over or very prolonged but I have not decided that in advance. If a poem seems to take long in writing, I give it all the time it requires, unless I lose faith in it. If it comes quickly, I don't hesitate to let it come that way, though I may reject the poem later, when I judge it. What matters is all that I do to keep poetry in the centre of my life, reading it, thinking about it, occasionally trying to write it. A mixture of memory, observation and imagination finally make a poem what it is. I sense it coming from the depths or realise that it won't and so it's unlikely to be successful. (Chindhade 155)

Ezekiel poetry moves around common people and their routine lifestyle that belong to modern Indian society. Moreover, a close study of Ezekiel's poetry reveals his proficiency to use poetic devices. Ezekiel's incomparable craftsmanship and mastery over technical skills makes him one of the founding fathers of modern Indian English verse. Ezekiel poetry has a unique style, simple diction, colloquial idioms and melodious effects immediately touch heart of the reader. M.K Naik describes poetic art of Ezekiel in the following words:

Ezekiel's poetry reveals technical skills of a high order. Except in his latter work where his choice of an open form sometimes makes for looseness, he has always written verse which is extremely tightly constructed. His mastery of the colloquial idiom is matched by a sure command of rhythm and rhyme. Happy uses of understatement and lapidary quality have made him one of the most quotable poets of his generation. (qtd.in J. Dodiya 249)

Ezekiel's *Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher* is a short poem which deals with the creative process of writing a poem. It is a simple yet significant poem written in two stanzas of ten lines each. The rhyme scheme of the poem is abbaa cdcd in which Ezekiel compares a



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poet with lover and birdwatcher. The poem provides beautiful description to understand the period in which a poem comes into existence. The poem captures journey of poet, lover and birdwatcher to reach their final destination. Though their pathways are different but have close connection in their search of words, love and birds. In the beginning of the poem, Ezekiel clarifies that the act of watching birds and to win the heart of beloved is a natural process and not a forceful activity. As the poem starts, "To force the pace and never to be still/Is not the way of those who study birds/Or women..." it indicates that those who examine the habits of birds or a lover to win the heart of beloved have to work with patience. The poet advises not to make any haste if they naturally want to succeed in their act otherwise they may lose what they are going to have. Similarly, a poet when he composes a poem has to wait for appropriate words. A poet also requires deep patience and inner inspiration to frame his emotions in a beautiful poem. Ezekiel rightly states "The best poets wait for words". The best poem is an outcome of constant inner struggle to find the words. In the state of quietness where silence becomes meaningful and all other things disappear slowly when a piece of art is created.

Essentially, Ezekiel is a poet with a brilliant sense of poetry. He better understands the role of poet and therefore he tries to describe the poet in terms of lover and the birdwatcher. In the texture of the poem Ezekiel does not separately describe all the three but interwoven within the same frame and all the three becomes one in spirit. At one point, the poem represents different imagery but the poem itself unites them in a single form. In the state of contemplation where the time does not allow any action or exercise of will, only in those frozen moments the patient waiting becomes a finest strategy to attain the goal. The close resemblance in poet, lover and birdwatcher is their efforts to attend and excitement to wait the final stage of their pursuit. According to Ezekiel, the poet has to be authentic in his inspiration and utters nothing "before his spirit moved". Those moments after a considerable waiting turn into cheerful memory which is nicely described by the poet in the following words:



The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing;
Until the one who knows that she is loved
No longer waits but risks surrendering -
In this the poet finds his moral proved
Who never spoke before his spirit moved.

In fact, the approach suggested by the poet seems slow but has a strong effect. To achieve their goal like lover and birdwatcher, a poet also has to encounter numbers of problems. To watch rare birds, a birdwatcher has to take long journey somewhere at remote place or seating in silence around the river or “near the source”. A lover’s waiting till the beloved “slowly turn around” and willingly surrender herself to the lover. The physical waiting turns into spiritual awakening when a birdwatcher travels “deserted lanes” to watch rare birds and a lover passes “heart’s dark floor” and discovers her beloved more than physical entity but “myths of light”. Here, a birdwatcher and lover functions as frame work for the poet. A good poem is a result of poet’s long search and patiently waiting. In order to attend meaningful medium, a poet has to travel unknown lanes of his psyche and awakes poetic muse from flowing rivers of his consciousness. In the moments of stillness unless the spirit is moved from the deep corner of heart where imagination slowly shapes in the form of poem. Such poetry has strong effect and healing power so, the deaf can hear and the blind can see. Interestingly, the end of the poem is suggestive that widen reader’s vision and sense of poetry.

With darkness at the core, and sense is found
But poets lost in crooked, restless flight,
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.



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Poet, Lover and Birdwatcher provides meaningful insights to understand and experience the creative process. Through the medium of this poem, Ezekiel tries to portrait psychological and inner struggle of a poet while composing a poem. He also brings in our attention that poet's task is not as easy as it seems. A poet wanders one to another place, closely observes nature or around of his being to find inspiration for his creative impulse. As the poem rightly indicates that a poet must wait patiently for the right moment unless he discovers a sense. In other words, A poet should have birdwatcher's eye and lover's thirst to make his poem meaningful medium of communication. Finally, Ezekiel nicely illustrates the poetic process and also proposes certain qualities that a poet must possess before articulating his imagination into words.



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