



Eliot and Ezekiel: An Artistic Alliance between Two Modern Poetic Voices through their Philosophies

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Abstract:

T.S Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* had always influenced the poets across the globe and Indian poetry in English is no exception. The poet like Nissim Ezekiel has left certain imprints that mark his inclination and closeness towards the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Ezekiel's poem "Enterprise" is about a failed endeavour which was started by a group with full enthusiasm like a pilgrimage but turned out to be a trifling tour that ends after reaching a place of no worth. The destination of such pursuit becomes devoid of depth and meaning just like they have reached a waste land that seems so stagnant and stereotyped to offer any solace to those who desired. They are instead turned into a bunch of bewildered folk who feel less bothered for their goal though their paths were full of thorns and thunders. So they remain intensely indifferent to what the thunder meant or said and their deprivation do no longer incite them to any kind of disgust or protest. But it brings a feeling of disillusionment and disenchantment that the world is no more a place for of adventures but an arid arena that leads to get entangled like a labyrinth instead of liberating. But the poet like his literary masters finds the relief possibly at his home, a rich Indian source of knowledge and heritage to be the sole saviour from the present predicament of a subliminal stasis.

Keywords: Indian, endeavor, stagnant, disillusionment, disenchantment etc.

T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land and Other Poems* first published in 1922 had always influenced the poets across the globe and Indian poetry in English is no exception. A poem like *The Waste Land* though started with its setting of a Western waste land where April seems to be the cruelest, an anti-romantic attitude pervades throughout with a sense of disintegration and death devoid of any linear link to the fragmented parts and personalities but still connects them through the use of symbols, unusual conceits and contradictory allusions drawn from diverse resources. And such break away from the conventional romantic tradition with its heroes and their heroic adventures appear ridiculous and foolish in modern poetry where multiplicity of voices and lack of coherence or consistency predominate. But such a state of destructuredness and

degradation is never akin to pessimism rather it is an outcome of a war-ridden world where every individual should take part at least to set his fragmented lands in order through a spiritual reawakening found to be most desired at the end of the poem. And such looking at one's own resources for solace and sustenance make Eliot's poem more relevant and resonating for analyzing some significant poems by the Indian poet Nissim Ezekiel also. The Anglo-Indian poet Nissim Ezekiel is to a great extent was inspired by the ideals of Western modernism a literary movement that rejects old tradition and suggests something new and experimental in the of theme and technique of literary composition.

Ezekiel has left certain imprints that mark his inclination and closeness towards various English poets like Rilke, W. B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and many others. Such influences shaped the creative as well as the critical writings of Ezekiel over five decades particularly some of his poetry collections like *A Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymn in Darkness* (1976), *Later -day Psalms* (1982) and the poems like *The Night of the Scorpion*, *Urban*, *Enterprise* *A Morning Walk*, *Poet*, *Lover*, *Bird Watcher*, *Background* *Casualty* etc. are well-known and highly esteemed. Ezekiel was one of the most significant poets among the representatives of Indian modernism in English. While speaking about the influences upon his poetry, essays and other critical writings several interviews and observations are taken into consideration first. In one such interview by Suresh Kohli when asked about the influences upon his poetic corpus Ezekiel tries to make it clear: "Some of my early poetry was influenced by Rilke. I did not succeed in assimilating this and eventually discarded it. I have imitated Eliot, Pound, Yeats and others, but never very well. My own voice has often been muffled or confused by random and temporary influences. That is the main weakness of my verse... A clear influence is no proof of a poem's merit. Quite the contrary, I was not influenced by Yeats after *The Unfinished Man* , nor by Eliot and Pound after *Sixty Poems*. I don't feel I make the grade to talk of influences at all" (Kohli: 1972)..

Ezekiel's early poetry collections *A Time to Change* (1952) and *Sixty Poems* (1953) bear the strong influence of Rilke but he never intends to be a blind imitator of Rilke " Ah, but in these poems in an early book there are echoes of Rilke and Eliot, I would agree. This does not mean that I produced a whole poem which is nothing but Rilke" (*Selected Poems*) The influence of W.B Yeats is also traceable in his early poetry where he uses images and symbols to represent his poetic thoughts and the title of his fourth volume *The Unfinished Man* is derived from Yeats's poem *A Dialogue with Self and Soul*":

The ignominy of boyhood; the distress

Of boyhood changing into man;

The unfinished man and his pain

Brought face to face with his own clumsiness...(Collected Poems)

But the influence of T.S Eliot he never denies rather admits in his obituary on Eliot:

Eliot's poetry from 1917 to 1943 is like the Himalayan mountains, with the Everest of *The Waste Land* several al but inaccessible peaks, a score or so of attractive but treacherous ranges (*A Song For Simeon* , Marina et al.) and a miscellany of small , steep hills obscured in the mist. The Quartets form a spacious, high plateau among the clouds. The air is rarefied but gracing, the winds are strong and chilly. The temptation to

remain in this mountain-scape and to accept it as the only sovereign territory of poetry was irresistible to several generation of readers. (Ezekiel, 1989)

If T.S Eliot is considered as one of the founding father in post-war Western modern with his urban imagery and the barren landscape the alienated individual with multiple voices becomes the poetic persona in many of Eliot's poems. His early poem like "Love song of J Alfred Prufrock" is all about a middle aged, thin and bald headed urban fellow who suffers from a Hamlet like indecisiveness and procrastination within the banal atmosphere in which he struggles to communicate his feelings:

Let us go then you and I
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table...
.....
It is impossible say just what I mean!
That is not it at all
That is not what I meant at all
(Prufrock 1-10)

It provides a glimpse of city life to travel through "the half deserted streets" to spend "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels" and visit the "sawdust restaurants" and observe the lonely "streets that follow like a tedious argument". The inability of the speaker to give vent his feelings to the outside world in a "fix formulated phrase" which turns him a victim of physical and psychological stagnation and such isolated self becomes recurrent in modern poetry of Eliot and Ezekiel as well. In *The Waste Land* such decaying images turn more profound, poignant and philosophical in presenting the poetic truths.

In case of Ezekiel's early poetry also the same kind of urban setting manifests the miserable alienated life of a city dweller:

The hills are always far away
He knows the broken roads, and moves and moves
in circles tracked within his head.
Before he wakes and has his say,
The river which he claims he loves is dry,
And all the winds lie dead.
... The city like a passion burns" (Urban: *The Unfinished Man*)

Ezekiel basically a Bombay based poet has created in his poems an image as a victim of urban isolation that is further intensified for his struggle with a Jewish background. He has tried throughout his life to search the relevance of his own existence and the actual home he belongs to. Even his life as an expatriate could not bring any solace for him that he beautifully depicts in the poem "Background, Casually" from Hymn in Darkness:

"Twenty-two: time to go abroad.
First, the decision, and then a friend
To pay the fare. Philosophy,
Poverty and Poetry, three
Companions shared my basement room."

Ezekiel like Eliot does not shy away from showing the savage image of a modern wasteland that becomes ironic to trigger the satirical dig on post-Independence India. He narrates in “The Morning Walk” first published in *The Unfinished Man*(1960):

“Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums...”

Modern poetry abounds in dealing with the issue of sexuality and Ezekiel becomes bold enough to treat sexual encounter as powerful motif in his poetry. In the final part of his poem “In India” tells how an English boss attempts to seduce his Indian secretary from the standards of Indian morality and it reminds us the story of the typist girl and her sexual battle with a small house agents clerk depicted in “The Fire Sermon” of *The Waste Land*.

“Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference” (The Fire Sermon, TWL 240-243)

At the second meeting
In the large apartment.
After cold beer and the music on,
She sat in disarray.
The struggle had been hard
And not altogether successful,
Certainly the blouse
Would not be used again,
But with true British courtesy
He lent her a safety pin
Before she took the elevator down. (In India, from *The Exact Name*)

Ezekiel’s another poem “Enterprise” is about a failed venture which was started by a group with full enthusiasm like a pilgrimage but turned out to be a trifling tour that ends after reaching a place of no worth. The destination of such pursuit becomes devoid of depth and meaning just like they have reached a waste land that seems so stagnant and stereotyped to offer any solace to those who desired. They are instead turned into a bunch of bewildered and fragmented folk who feel less bothered for their goal though their paths were full of thorns and thunders. So they remain intensely indifferent to what the thunder meant or said and even their deprivation of daily need like a soap no longer incites them to show any kind of disgust or protest. But it brings a feeling of disillusionment and disenchantment that the world is no more a place full of adventures but an arid arena that leads to get entangled like a labyrinth instead of liberating. But the poet like his literary masters finds the relief possibly at his home, a rich Indian source of knowledge and heritage to be the sole saviour from the present predicament of a subliminal stasis in a similar manner Eliot takes resort for a relief or rescue from the modern crisis at the end of his poem *The Waste Land*:

When, finally, we reached the place,
We hardly know why we were there.
The trip had darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to gather grace. (Enterprise: Ezekiel)

Ezekiel poetry expresses his dissatisfaction at the loss of faith and human relationship in modern India as Eliot identifies English derailment from ethics, morality and social values. Ezekiel discovers that the collapse of harmonious relationships among humans in modern era as the sense of alienation looms large among the individuals. Still both the poets are enthusiastic and quite optimistic to search for a solution to combat such moral and social isolation either by making an attempt to make it reorganized for personal redemption (“Shall I at least set my lands in order?” *TWL*) through the great knowledge treasure found in *Upanishads* like T.S. Eliot. The Indian poet Ezekiel seeks the reformation through the ethos of Indian values, peace and Gandhian non-violence. Revolting against a tradition of a long romantic and mystic association in Indian poetry. Ezekiel as a devout follower of Western modernism gives a break and begins a new canon of Indian English poetry that continues to change and coexist with European modernism in great puissance.

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