CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION - WITHIN AND WITHOUT TRADITION

... Only connect...

(E.M. Forster)

"The future, the promise lies in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, R.Parthasarathy and A.K. Ramanujan" - William Walsh's prediction of the early seventies has come true not merely in the world-wide recognition of these three poets but also in the creative efflorescence of Indian Poetry in English after the fifties. While it is true that no poet - classic of Nobel Prize calibre is yet discernible, there has been tremendous freedom in the creative use of the English language. Poets and novelists are no longer constrained to use English for edifying the ruler or for recreating the lore of India for his pleasure. Further, the absence of inhibiting national causes has given them free reins to write on diverse themes, deploying the riches of the language to suit their creative impulses. The resultant poetry is fragmented, with flashes of brilliance and cloudy imitations but the distinct 'voice' is heard and not the loud or muffled 'echo'.

1 Readings in Commonwealth Literature, p.xviii.
2 M.K. Naik, 'Echo and Voice in Indian Poetry in English', Indian Writing To-day, 4, No.1, Jan-Mar, 1970, pp.32-41.
the significant contribution of these poets of mature vision, Indian Poetry in English has truly come of age.

The tradition that these poets have helped to forge is the realistic mode as against the romantic that dominated the literature of the nineteenth century. Ezekiel's *A Time to Change* (1952) can be said to mark the beginning of the new poetry, a striking departure from the symbolic and complex poetry of the Aurobindo school in which poetry is primarily the handmaid of philosophy. While some poems indicate the vestiges of romanticism, the volume clearly reveals the definitive movement towards the realistic in keeping with the trends of the twentieth century poetic tradition in English. While the three poets are highly individualistic in their attitude to life and their technical virtuosity, their commonalty lies in their orientation towards man almost in the manner of Pope that 'the proper study of mankind is man' and in their scrupulous pursuit of excellence in craft.

Of the three, Nissim Ezekiel is the poet of telling statement. The simple direct line that he pursues with dedication in his best pieces reflects his mastery over the idiom. He needs no embellishment to strengthen his idea. The 'statement' suggests all, it is not the bald prosaic line but the crisp, syntactical unit which is rich in ambiguity. He has a sensitive ear to the manly rhythms of the language, in traditional and free verse. There is no romantic extravagance in the use of diction or image. The rare image that he deploys in the form of simile or metaphor is both
functional and structurally integrated. His statement is almost always ironic in nature, the poetry being a product of intellection rather than of emotion.

The irony is manifest in the treatment of both situations and individuals. Very often, it is self-directed and even the distancing through the use of the third person in 'Hymns in Darkness' does not serve to camouflage the self-irony. 'The Egoist's Prayers' is an excellent example of both self-irony and situational. These are accentuated by the brilliant use of verbal paradox which contributes to the humour in the poem. In fact, Ezekiel alone among contemporary Indian Poets in English has vestiges of humour in his poems. The egoist prays which is in itself an ironic situation for by nature he cannot get out of himself to pray. However his prayer is all for his own benefit and he becomes a comic figure when he talks so intimately with God. Very rarely does Ezekiel (only 'In India') become a satirist. He is basically a sympathetic observer of men and matters trying to accommodate himself to the situation without protest.

Parthasarathy is also a realistic poet in his use of irony but has obvious leanings towards romantic postures. His brooding melancholy, and his insistent preoccupation with self, as seen in the gaze into the mirror for self-scrutiny makes him something of a romantic. However, his quest for discipline, order and control in the formal patterning of his poetry as evidenced in the constant revisions of his
poem makes a comparison with Pope possible.\textsuperscript{1} While Pope perfected the two-lined rhymed couplet crafted with meticulous care, in Parthasarathy's case it is the terse three-lined stanza with a rare inversion of syntax and which is characterised by symmetry and balance. It is a reflection of the three-tier pattern that he has evolved in his poetic composition, the passage has three phases - Exile, Love and Homecoming.

In this tightly controlled pattern is the interweaving of images which are structurally indispensable. Walsh's observation that he can be compared to the Imagists is justified as seen in his power to vivify thought through metaphor and simile.\textsuperscript{2} The predominant imagistic motif is that of 'glass' intricately and intimately woven into the texture of his poem. Parthasarathy has exploited every suggestive shade of meaning that is associated with it. The leit-motif of glass begins with the poet-self gazing into the mirror for self-recognition in the reflection. It extends to describe the love-experience as being fragile as glass and moves to the most forceful image of the self being a glass-house:

\begin{quote}
I crashed a glass house
hit by the stone of father's death.
\end{quote}

The image combines not merely the aural and visual impact but the shattering of the individual morale which is captured in

\textsuperscript{1} The poem, 'Lines to a Photograph' has as many as thirteen versions to it.

\textsuperscript{2} William Walsh, 'Two Indian Poets', \textit{ Literary Criterion}, 2, No.3, 1974, pp.1-16.
the onomatopoeia of 'crashed'. The fragility of life-experience is here underscored in the narration of the tragic loss which is irrevocable even as a glasshouse cannot be rebuilt from the smithereens. The glass image serves to hold the poem together, the link having been forged with brilliant imagination tempered by superb control at every point and makes Rough Passage more a single poem than a collection of poems.

The felicity of image does not exclude the intellectual and critical stance with its concomitant ironic overtones. This predilection for irony is a shared characteristic of the three poets. However Parthasarathy does not subject love to ironic treatment as Ramanujan or Ezekiel do. It is his own self, his inability to come to terms with himself and his environs that forms the staple of his self-disparaging irony. The image of the 'balloon' in 'Homecoming 8' is a rare fusion of metaphor and irony:

... The balloon

of poetry has grown red in the face
with repeated blowings...

The latter is more characteristic of the tonal shades of the poems and does not usually enter the region of metaphor or pure poetry. The balloon blown red in the face and almost bursting thereafter symbolizes the embarrassment suffered by man and artist with no achievement to his credit. Irony is the characteristic feature of 'Homecoming' and is underscored as a poetic mode in the context of its absence in the poems of nostalgia.
If Ezekiel's forte is the ironic statement and
Parthasarathy's, the image, Ramanujan's is the felicitous use
of words. His poetry amazes the reader by the graceful ease
with which words explode into place and the syntax rushes
onward with torrential force. Using epithets or supplementary
phrases to give the impression of objectivity, the poet makes
the descriptive or narrative mode his forte and cleverly
avoids direct comment. But the selection of detail and the
choice of epithet are enough to reveal the poet's critical
and ironic attitude towards life. For example, the 'Great
House' is great even in its pottiness, the snake becomes a
sausage rope in death. In describing his mother's ancestral
house, every epithet brings with it a rush of associations of
great emotional impact—especially the present loneliness
and desolation as compared with the past magnificence.

The three poets share a common dedication to craft and
can be singled out for their imaginative use of English.
This only complements their attitudinal variations to the
age-old themes of alienation, love and community. The fact
that there are few points of convergence among them is ample
testimony to the highly diversified body of literature that
post-Independence poetry in English is. No school, or
group movement is discernible. The poets maintain their
precious autonomy and steadfastly refuse to be part of a
coterie. This is a major difficulty in trying to study them
together for at every point it is necessary to reiterate
their individuality.
However, certain generalisations are still valid. The first is the superb control that these poets have over their medium, which is both an asset and a drawback. Their poems are built on the bedrock of intellecution and criticalness and hence they are sparing in their art. In their epigrammatic terseness they are like the Augustans and impose the discipline and order of form on their themes which thereby gain in depth. The flaw anti-realist detect in such poetry is the killing of emotion. That Parthasarathy's constant revisions of his poems have taken away from the emotional intensity is an argument that can be countered by the fact that every line is packed with suggestion. The poems reduced to fine objective expressions serve to heighten the emotions felt through superb control. It is only a refining of emotion not an anaesthetizing or killing of it. The art of these poets exemplifies in a vivid manner, the harmonious interaction of controlled emotions and mature intellecution.

Secondly is the poetry of the self, it has nothing of the neurosis traditionally associated with the confessional mode. The world is a private world which has the human self at its centre. But it is a self in quest of order, pattern and perfection. Since it believes in this from the beginning of the journey, there is a deliberate eschewal of violence in mood, mode and thought. This is a striking contrast to the frequent violent poetic postures of Kamala Das or Prithish Nandy.
If their individuality has been stressed both in terms of thematic motifs and technical skills, the tradition that is behind them has to be clearly defined to show not merely their allegiance to it but their deviations from it to herald the so-called 'new poetry'. Parthasarathy's criticism is a fruitful starting point. The only saving grace is that he does not slam the door against this body of writing as B.Bose has done in describing it as a 'curio shop and a blind alley'.

In spite of there being a history of Indians writing verse in English for over a hundred and fifty years, Indian English verse has no tradition to speak of. In fact, the history of Indian English verse is the history of lost opportunities. None of the poets took up its challenge seriously and attempted to write verse that was authentically Indian in inspiration and was also at the same time artistically viable.

The statement with its range and sweep suggests that history and tradition are mutually exclusive and unconnected. Tradition has a history behind it and history creates a tradition. Indian writing has the traditions of Indian culture, English culture, in fact the whole world culture in Eliotian terms to inspire it. In the nineteenth century the poets took an imaginative leap into the Vedic and epic past to recover Indian myth and lore as in Toru Dutt's poems in ballad style or to depict the rich cultural heritage as

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3 See Chapter I.
in Sarojini Naidu's portrayal of the Indian scene with
romantic touches. It suited their poetic urge and they were
following the principle of artistic selection. So does Sri
Aurobindo, who has endeavoured to re-interpret the mystical
past in terms of his personal vision. It cannot therefore be
a 'history of lost opportunities'—history is built on what
has been done, rather than on what has not been achieved. In
fact, all Indian poets have consciously or unconsciously
confronted the problem of 'Indian' and 'English' and it is
not as if they have lost creative opportunities. The inherent
complexity of the assimilation and amalgamation of cross-
cultural references, concepts and ideas has been in the way
of greater achievement.

In the past or in the present, these creative artists
have not given up India or English which is 'not merely in
their brains but in their blood and bones'. The hybrid
nature of the writing is responsible for the attempts to
undermine any status that it commands. Apologies, defences
and attacks abound, which take the extreme stance of either
totally denying any status to it, or claiming that literature
in English is the best of its kind in India. The stance
of examining the poetry in depth and isolating its universal
dimensions and regional inspiration (if one has to assign
nationality and the sense of place to literature) is ignored.

1 Times Literary Supplement, October 5, 1964, p.646. While it is argued that English is rooted in the soil of
New Zealand or Australia, in contrast with this it is stated
that English is perhaps in the brain of the Indian but not in
his blood and bones.

2 See Chapter I.
What animates any literature is the belief in a common humanity even in the literature of protest. The language is the artist's choice whether it is the mother-tongue or an alien one. These poets have their roots here though their 'critical' attitudes tend to alienate them from the Indian scene. Their poetry is an ideal example of not merely the tensions of their peculiar situation but also of the resolution and the achievement of a balance between isolation and community that has made them creatively self-sufficient. These artists have moved from a posture of alienation to that of community, establishing a rapport with themselves and with the world. In fact, their alienation is the result of the felt need for communication, and the poetry becomes the medium. This is illustrated in their attempts to become bilingual poets—even if it is through translation from the mother tongue to English.¹

In Ezekiel's poem, 'And I reject the Indian noise', the desire to reject India is overcome in the final acceptance with the realisation that rejection is impossible.² Irony is the keynote of the poem as there is no real rejection at the end. The attempt to reject India is abortive: he tries to drown it in his 'inner silence', to shut it out 'with symphonies not meant to be heard' and even 'plays the ogre in fairy tale'.

² Indian Poetry in English Today, ed. Prithish Nandy, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1973, p.64,
fashion, striding out to 'crush the vulgar source'. But all in vain:

. . . This does the job at last - but only in my imagination.

The conclusion establishes beyond doubt that rejection is impossible: one has to live with the irritants which stimulate the imagination.

Ramanujan's attempt to reject relations and Ezekiel's to reject 'Indian noise' only succeed in becoming a gesture of acceptance. In critically examining the Indian situation they have moved so close to it that they cannot escape from it. India is the source of their inspiration - be it the barbaric city with slums or mother's turmeric days at Nanjanguad or the river which becomes poetic twice a year. The Indian tradition is no refuge for the artists to avoid confrontation with the immediate milieu. They have no doubt turned inwards and made their poetry, the art of introspection and intellection. And they have expressed their moments of anguish and joy in English with grace and felicity. In their superb mastery over the language, they do not really show the cleavage that some of them speak of between inner and outer forms between intellectual and emotional dichotomies.¹

The total and unequivocal acceptance of English and the resultant cross-cultural dilemmas of the artist, have invested their poetry with sincerity which in recent times has become a yardstick for assessing artistic achievement. They

¹ See Chapter I.
exemplify David Perkins' view of artistic sincerity. They possess to an admirable degree what he calls the first gesture of sincerity namely divestment, the quality of seeking the truth in terms of their own immediate experience grasped as it is and rejecting interpretations from without as they struggle to see life with directness and clarity not clouded by the film of conventions. In this endeavour, they have poetically recreated their personal past not with anger as the men of the twenties or with ivory tower escapist intentions but with an earnest effort to recover a knowledge, truth, a way of seeing that is fundamental. This results in a meditative strain more obvious in Ezekiel's and Parthasarathy's poetry than in Ramanujan's. His perceptions are more objective and go back to a pure source, "an attempt to seize experience before it has been interpreted but which gets meaning from the subtle variations of tone". His muse depends on the stimulus of a concrete object, perception or situation even if it is only KMnO₄ in grandfather's shaving cup realised in vivid detail and immediacy. The poems are built on a moment of insight with all inferences to be drawn from outside.

Their sincerity of purpose and authentic representation of life are significant factors in their universality of appeal. Their human concerns transcendent parochial or regional

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2 Perkins, p.22.
3 Perkins, p.22.
insularities. For example, Parthasarathy's brooding sense of exile and his disenchantment with life and home has a parallel in the bleak patterns of contemporary living, Ramanujan's elegies in terms of losses and his criticalness of the family are living realities and Ezekiel's supreme sense of accommodation as the panacea for the ills of the dissatisfied ego remains a Tantalus dream. However, they are rooted to India - the birdmen, fortune-tellers and hawkers, the ex-Maharajah and the rickshaw-wallah, mother with silver rings on her toes, virginities of Tirupati dolls, father droning the 'Four thousand' and the choultry family reunions with the nostalgic recollection of rice-and-pickle afternoons and climbing tamarind trees. The orientation is towards a convincing universal dimension of creative activity seen even in the description of 'hair' in Ramanujan's 'Snakes' contrasted with 'Shiv Kumar's epithet Mississippi-long' which has a mark of the academic and 'America-returned' where Ramanujan's is vibrant and all-appealing in spite of its Indian roots:

Sister ties her braids,
with a knot of tassel,
But the weave of her knee-long braid has scales
Their gleaming held by a score of clean new pins,
I look till I see her hair again.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger's observation relating poet, audience and country is true of their art and situation:

A poet cannot do without a country, the finding of an audience at home is the condition of finding an audience abroad. The immediate human drama must be comprehended before any universality can
As true interpreters of the contemporary scene with reference to the complex cross-cultural Indian-English stance, they are gifted poets. They have achieved a breadth of vision and fit into the mainstream of literature even while preserving their individuality. Imbibing the influences of East and West, of their urban predicament and of their rural past and of the world of academia, they are poets within in and without tradition. They are within it because they have used its themes and techniques, and outside it as they have reacted to the excessive reliance on a mythical or mystical and historical past and have broken away from the time-worn fatters of traditional verse forms. The focus is on the contemporary and personal with the emphasis on the realistic potential of art. Hence they move from the posture of alienation to community after experiencing the bitter-sweet taste of love in their journey through life. This journey is not smooth - it has its ups and downs, its breaks - a symbol of the fragmentation of modern living. The discontinuities seen in the unrelated titles of the poems in


2 'Within Tradition', IACLALS, No. 5, 1979, pp. 5-21.

3 All three poets have dealt with alienation and love in many of their poems. Community as fellowship or society is secondary to the others but its significance is realised. In Ezekiel's case the awareness of community is marked in the later poems.
the collections serve to heighten the significance of 'continuity' seen in the discovery of these age-old sources in so diversified a body of literature.

To the three poets, poetry is a serious vocation pursued with dedication. It is this careful attention to craft that is their major contribution to influence later poetic trends. Their critical and ironic stance coupled with their intellect makes them part of the 'ironic harvest' of the English tradition. Their controlled and refined use of irony has heralded the movement towards satire so evident in the poetry of Daruwalla and Kolatkar. The happy mastery over theme and technique, over content and form seen in the attempt to reconcile tradition and individual expression that is a hallmark of their poetry, has made them significant names in the map of modernist English verse.
APPENDIX

PART A

EZEKIEL'S REPLY TO QUERIES

(Nissim Ezekiel has replied to many queries posed through letters regarding his poems. This is taken from his letter of April, 1930.)

Q. Are both your parents and your wife Bené-Israel?
   (Bené-Israel you say don't intermarry with other Jews)
A. Yes, both my parents were Bené-Israel. And so were their parents and the parents of the parents for as long as is known. My wife is Bené-Israel too.

Q. Did you study in your mother's school and father's college?
A. No, I didn't study in my mother's school. I got my B.A. and M.A. at Wilson College, Bombay, where my father was a Professor of Botany and Zoology.

Q. How would you describe parental influence on you?
(Unlike A.K. Ramanujan or even R.Parthasarathy very rarely do you call up a familial past)
A. My father's influence was mainly intellectual, in a general way. He insisted on all the five children reading every evening, from sunset to 9.30 p.m. or so when we dined. "I don't insist on your studying the school texts," he would say, "but read you must." All of us have become voracious readers. My mother's influence was wider and deeper and more subtle. She stressed sensitivity and service, and serenity and harmony and living with a purpose. Her idealism affected all of us. She wanted us to be successful and to make a contribution, so to speak, to aim high and to be very human. Her values were and are our values to this
day. She was very proud of us, and decisively influenced our ways of thinking and feeling.

I have two daughters. Kavitha (25) is a Lecturer in English, Kalpana (22) is a Lecturer in Psychology about to get married. My son Elkana at 15, is about to enter college.

Q. What influences on you do you think helped to shape you - in short responsible for what you are?

A. Too many influences: I would need to write an essay. Among personalities, the major ones were M.N.Roy and E.Alkazi (I can’t really cope with this question.) The thinker who has influenced me most is the Russian emigre Christian Existentialist Nicolas Berduau (except for his Christianity.)

Q. What are your present political leanings if any? (influence of M.N.Roy in the past)

A. If I had to use labels, I would call myself a radical liberal democrat, opposed to communism but with no sympathy for the Right conservatives, none for Gandhism or any form of Indian revivalism in religion or social thought.

Q. What do your constant shifts in career indicate?
   i. spirit of adventure ii. restlessness iii. frustration.

A. My shifts in career ended in 1962 when I returned to college teaching (I had a year of that in 1947-48 after completion of my M.A.) I don’t think the earlier shifts were caused by a spirit of adventure, restlessness or frustration. I think now lack of self-knowledge was the main reason.

Q. Any other details regarding family, religious faith etc.?

A. I love family life, domesticity, a home but am reluctantly reconciled to getting it all in small, regulated doses.

   The religious faith story is a very long one. I was an atheist from 1942 or so till 1967 when my first L.S.D. experience in New York made my essential view of the world religious-metaphysical. But no religious person would accept my "religion" because it is sceptical of all doctrine and against all the organised religions.
Q. Are any of your poems purely autobiographical?
   (Jewish Wedding Day, Background, Casually, In India, How the English Lessons Ended...)
A. All my poems are essentially autobiographical but I never hesitate to deviate from the facts when the "logic of the poem" needs it. 'Jewish Wedding; 'Background Casually' and 'In India' are autobiographical. 'How the English Lessons Ended' is pure fiction, except for the fact that I am an English Teacher, and my neighbours are Muslim.

Q. Is your poetry, the poetry of (personal) experience?
   Yes, I suppose my poetry is the poetry of personal experience. But I'm not interested in the confessional mode. I like to shape and resolve the experience.

Q. You have been writing poetry for more than thirty years.
   What significant changes do you see in (i) your own poetry
   (ii) the Indian poetic scene?
A. I don't think much of The Third but I may be mistaken.
   A Time to Change was a good start, with four or five poems worth preserving. Sixty Poems is important only because it provides continuity. The dedicatory poem and two or three others are still readable. From the later books, selections can be made which I would stand by, including the manuscript of Latter-Day Psalms which is with Oxford University Press.
   I feel I've grown and matured but, not changed very drastically. The Indian poetry scene now has ten or more good poets not around when I started.

Q. The poets of to-day are existential and positivist it is said, with no poetry of the soul. Comment.
A. The good, serious poets of today have as much "soul" as the poets of the past. It is the dated outlook which is blind to their soul, because, the idiom is different, the values are different.

Q. How do you react to your being compared with Larkin?
A. Only some of my work in the fifties and sixties can be compared to Larkin's. The later work is very different from his. There is nothing by Larkin which can be compared with in Darkness and Latter-Day Psalms.
Q. Is your poetry, the poetry of statement?
A. Yes, it's all poetry of statement.

Q. Why are images, metaphors so rare in your poetry?
A. Rarity of images and metaphors is the major weakness of my poetry. I think I would if I could, that's all I can say about it.

Q. Is your simplicity also a reaction against the complexity and obscurity that passes for poetry?
A. My real or alleged simplicity is not a reaction, it's part of my real poetic self. I would like to be complex, but I think I would eliminate all obscurity from my verse. I don't care for the Aurobindo school of poetry - I believe they're just bad poets and bad philosophers.

Q. Do you consider yourself and the poets of to-day socially uncommitted?
A. My poetry has its own commitments and so has the poetry of other Indo-English poets today. We are not committed to an ideology but we are committed to society and its welfare.

Q. How would you react to the label 'confessional'?
A. I am not a confessional poet, but I am personal and autobiographical.

Q. Is it correct to say that an ironic urbanity and not satire constitutes the warp and woof of your poetry?
A. Yes, I'm ironic as a rule rather than satiric. I am too skeptical about my own position to write effective satire. About the urbanity, I don't see it in my poetry but most observers, do. I don't aim at urbanity but that's the way my utterances seem to crystallize.

Q. Your "Indian Poems" are more attempts to parody the Indian's glib, incorrect use of the language than banners for the cause of Indian English. (which exists only at the phonological level) Comment.
A. In addition to poking fun at Indian English, I've tried to present typical Indian characters and values. I'd like to write more poems in Indian English where the language is less funny and more revelatory.
Q. Any other statement you would like to make.
A. I want to write better poems than any I've written so far, in new styles and modes.

(\text{The following is an edited version of a recorded interview with Nissim Ezekiel on October 29, 1980. He answered questions relating to the problem of alienation and commitment as poetic themes. He also gave his views on the poetry of self, the poetry of suggestion and statement and the problem of bilingualism. The interview ended with his opinion on critical terms like 'myth', archetype and neutral tones to describe contemporary poetry.)

According to Ezekiel, many of his poems have not found a place in the published volumes when the time came to collect the poems, he selected what he could find. If all of them had been available, there was enough material for three or four books. He had to make some sort of choice. Once one kind of poem was selected if there are three or four of the same kind, roughly the same tone like the Indian English poems, two are taken, the others are automatically out. If there are one or two strong confessional type others are excluded. Again poems were not excluded because they were bad but others were already complete or easily available.

While the slenderness of the volumes depends on the publisher, in terms of quality the poet says that he would not think of preserving all. "In fact, as time passes, one would think of reducing the quality."

To problems of alienation, non-belonging, cultural displacement as reflected in the poetry, Ezekiel thinks that each poet is trying to define his own position, to that extent, there cannot be a formula which is applicable to everyone when alienated or does not belong or is related as an outsider. All these have possibilities. Much depends
on what is made of it by the person concerned.' Personally, if I meet an Indian writer and if he appears to be and says that he is completely alienated from the Indian setting, I've no objection to that position on his part. But I would be interested to find out what he makes of it. Does he talk in one way and behave in another? In that case, I won't take his alienation very seriously. Or does he try to practise what he claims to feel and therefore suffers, then I respect him for it. I don't offer him some easy way out, it is up to him to make what he can out of those experiences. So there is no fixed position: if you say alienation at one end, total alienation, total adaptation at the other. Each has its weaknesses. This can be only partially practised. So everything depends on the product - not only in terms of poetry but in terms of one's life - what one does, what one says, what movement or institution one supports, or doesn't. According to me, quite a complicated series of choices and decisions that the individual makes."

Ezekiel thinks that everyone is occupying various positions on the spectrum and that also may vary a great deal. "The problem is really to make it genuine. That's how I always see the problem - not only for the artist but for all sorts of other people. "He sees resistance and the sense of not being quite at home but pretending to be so, for the sake of social and other obligations." There's a little unease as expressed in the poetry of Jussawalla, Ramanujan and others, mine as well". In 'Island', he says he expresses a dissatisfaction in the city. If the city had been different, one's own life in it would have been different to that extent.

He does not think that his stand is more mature than other poets. Nor is it protest as "protest is a comparatively simple attitude to take." Protest to him is over-simplified and he is emphatic in this: "I don't write protest poetry."

To him, 'Exile', involves certain very strong attitudes and choices and he wouldn't use it in his poetry. (as Parthasarathy has done) He states: "I've not been thrown
out of the country. I've chosen to be isolated in the country. I may feel like an exile, but it's not the same as being one. Exile is a powerful idea, for instance James Joyce is a real exile." He admits that it's there in the works and not an idea imposed by critics. He feels it has to be examined - what is it, what are its implications, images, how strong are the feelings. 'There's danger of using it as a label - alienation, adaptation, exile.' The strength of the feeling is important: one may be happy with oneself but not with one's environment.

He sees political commitment as the most simplified form of commitment. He adds: "If you have arrived at it you are entitled to it. But you have to earn these things. Not by taking stances, it becomes pretension. In other words, write a political poem or two and say I am a committed political poet. Where is the commitment? Where is the sacrifice? What is the price you have paid for your release? One should not use the word unless one is willing to take the price that is involved at crucial and dangerous points. To me that is commitment. Courage is not a sign of commitment but the struggle must be portrayed somehow in the life and writings. You must get some feeling that this is not something external, it actually involves some sacrifice that is made for a cause." To say this is only commitment is narrowing down the whole problem to technical questions. His stand is that the poet must be related to the particular poems, to a whole body of work which must be examined.

Ezekiel distinguishes between poetry of the self and selfish poetry, between which there is one little thin line which can be very easily crossed. Then he would say the poetry suffers some diminishing of stature. Originally the poet was trying to find out what his self was because, unless he finds that he cannot take major decisions in his life. It will soon become an indulgence. Poetry of the self has a certain attraction because other people also
have the same problems of self that he has. That is why they read the poetry and respond to it. The poet need not bother about other political, social, and economic problems. But the fact is, the subject can get exhausted. After the conflict is resolved, there is nothing to write about. Other conflicts have to be faced. "It then becomes a psychological question."

To Birje - Patil's criticism of a "socially committed poet", his answer is that the critic does not accept the class of poems to which a poem like "The Truth About the Floods" belongs. The moment a particular kind of poetry is attempted, it has to be good of its kind, it should not have all the intricacies of the other kind.

To the descriptions that his poetry is the poetry of the existential self and even that his prayer poems are secular, the poet agrees but says that it is very difficult for the poet to be his own critic in relation to how these things appear in his body of poetry. The critic is the best person to deal with them. He states that he does not belong to any particular religious camp and confesses that he can be neither at home with the non-believers nor believers as his is an individual stance. To the use of self - irony in "The Egoist's Prayers", he asserts that when most people pray they are not conscious of the fact that their ego is in the prayer. In that sense, the prayer can be egoistic.

When asked if the poems are autobiographical, he replied: "All the poems have some contact with autobiography." But adds: "I don't feel bound the way the confessional poets do to tell only what is regarded as truth about my life. In developing the poem or writing a poem some things have to go into it that strengthen or enrich it. They are not purely autobiographical but have personal experience as a starting point."

To the frequent use of words like 'myth' and 'archetype' to describe poetry, he avers that it is the
choice of the critic. However, he feels that the same thing can be put in other terms: For instance, the poet can be searching for something. He can also be involved in the myth of the search. When asked about the critical essay 'Myth and Archetype in The Unfinished Man', he denies that he has any myth in his poetry as Yeats had.

When asked about the neutral tones of contemporary poetry, he avers that he has no faith in formulas and such a description cannot be used for the poetry the world over. At some stage in his career, the poet generally has a neutral tone or commonsensical tone, the ordinary tone, the comparatively placid which arises when the writer aschews extremes. The poetry can be romantic or a cry of despair during adolescence. The mature poet feels that this is nonsense and writes something cooler and quieter. The poet must go deeper into the experience. If the feeling is genuine, it must be given the context. It should not appear only with the works. The vocabulary by itself does not convince. Both the context must be clear and the reader must feel that this poet is using words which are related to rhythm, which is related to images and images related to the whole poem. Ezekiel also feels that there can be no well-defined line between the poetry of statement and the poetry of suggestion and irony can be a characteristic of both poetry.

He seems to think that similes are absent in his poetry though he would like to use metaphors but finds that he cannot get one easily. His poetry does contain images not identified as metaphor or simile. He also says that this is his weakness.

To the question of writing in English being "a mental transplant" and the criticism that sincerity is absent, Ezekiel sees it as the choice of the individual and this linguistic ideology is needless. But the question he says, will come up everytime. As for himself, he does not feel equally at home in Marathi and English like Kolatkar or
Dilip Chitre and feels that he can write best in English which is both the language of intellect and emotion.

On the question of the tradition influencing his love poems, he avers that he considers the influenced by all the traditions and particularly the twentieth century experience.