CHAPTER – III

SENSUOUS EZEKIEL

Nissim Ezekiel is definitely a versatile and multifaceted poet who has written on varied subjects ranging from a squirrel to platonic love. He deals with equal facility with all the subjects, be it poems about love, sexuality, domestic life, social encounters, or spirituality. One understands an author’s temperament from his works. A poet like Ezekiel who has expressed himself extensively in the form of editorials, essays, and letters in addition to interviews that he gave to various individuals reveals his views explicitly in them at the same time he reveals himself implicitly in the poems he has written. A study of his poems is also equally important because Ezekiel has shown remarkable candour and honesty in his poetry also. The picture one get of Ezekiel in his poems is in sync with the man one finds in his prose writings. It is a picture of a man who constantly struggles to achieve equilibrium in life as in verse, a man who is sensitive to the life around him. Whether he writes about his love encounters or about his domestic life, whether he writes about his poetry or about his quest for a meaning and a purpose in life, whether he writes about the life around him or about his explorations within; he is always the same Ezekiel that comes across to us. What is significant about Ezekiel is that Ezekiel, the man and Ezekiel, the poet are almost in harmony with each other. Michael Garman observes, “He is a poet of whom it is not trivial to say that his poetry and his life are inextricable, and whose purpose in writing is to make a harmony (life, poetry) out of a purely biological fact (existence).” (210)

Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry reveals him as a sensual and sensitive individual drawing our attention to the poet’s constant struggle to understand fully the workings
of the sensual desires and to grope fully with the power of them. He is a sensualist
frankly and minutely recording the wonders of the senses. In poem after poem Ezekiel
sings the glory of the senses and unhesitatingly confesses his recognition of the
pressures of the senses. In *On Meeting a Pedant* the poet wishes to ‘Send out songs’
(*CP9*) and advises his heart to ‘rest or ride / Superbly with the senses.’ (*CP9*) The
poet wishes to be spared of words ‘as cold as print’ (*CP9*) and says, ‘Give me touch
of men and give me smell of / Fornication, pregnancy and spices.’ (*CP09*) In another
poem titled *Conclusion* he says, ‘The true business of living is seeing, touching,
kissing, / The epic of walking in the street and loving on the bed.’(*CP97*)

For Ezekiel life with its manifold blessings is a gift to man. He almost
religiously preaches the religion of unadulterated Epicureanism and, if read
exclusively, his poems of sensual nature give us an impression of unbridled hedonism.
He candidly confesses his faith in the ‘comeliness of God’ (*CP 17*) and in the
‘shapeliness of man’ (*CP17*). In the poem *Conclusion* the poet says:

That women, trees, tables, waves and birds,
Buildings, stones, steamrollers,
Cats and clocks
Are to be enjoyed. (*CP96*)

Faith in *Joie de vivre* or the simple primeval things of existence and ability to accept
them without any friction or qualms of conscience is the creed that Ezekiel believes
in. Yet another poem, *Sparrow*, records:

...their single aim,
Which is to fly and then to mate,
Aroused to build with twig and leaf,
A nest sufficient for the need—
Open, warm, and planned to give
A truly bird’s-eye view of things. (CP103)

The artists, philosophers, and statesmen, says the poet, with their pretentious erudition miss the simple fact that ‘…the mating and the nest— [is the] Primeval root of all the rest’. (CP104) This candid and no-nonsense expression of sensuality is not an expression of blatant hedonism rather it is an expression of the poet’s faith in the power of love as a life force. Man can reach the state of grace only when he unquestioningly accepts the power of that cosmic energy that runs the universe. In the private country of his mind he has to silence no one but himself. If the dragon of desires is lurking beneath the outward peace, the soul is sure to be doomed. His love poems are poems of sexual love. After a long drawn battle between the spiritual and the sensual the poet seems to have come to terms with the demands of the senses. He seems to have realized that it is futile to constantly wage a war with the élan of desires. He does not believe in the romantic or platonic love. Love devoid of sexual relationship is not glorified in Ezekiel. Incidentally, he has a poem entitled Platonic in which he becomes rather sarcastic. His most passionate convictions about love are expressed in poems of sexual love. In another poem, entitled Aside he says, ‘Love is the ultimate reparation’ (CP 93) and not surprisingly this poem also deals not with love but with ‘making love’. For Ezekiel love is almost synonymous with making love. Sexual love is not a taboo or something that is looked down upon jeeringly. The poet in fact acknowledges the importance of sexual relationship in cementing the bond of love. In At Fifty the poet admits that, ‘I am ageing’ (CP 170) but hurries to add, ‘I do not want the ashes / of the old fire but the flame itself.’ (CP 170) and makes a candid pronouncement of his creed, “I’m making hay while the sun shines, / and remain, as always, / a muddy peasant of the good life.” (CP 170)
Sex, for Ezekiel, is not just for gratification of carnal desires, though he is not apologetic about that. Sex is more than that for Ezekiel. Sex is instrumental in reaching beyond body; a device to transcend body and reach up to soul. It would be worthwhile to quote his short poem, Cry in full:

Breathe
My breath
And let me
Breathe yours,
Bodies
Savouring
Phenomena,
Sifting
Passion
To the fine
Point
Of penetration,
Obscene
Noumena,
Breath
Of my
Breath of my
Being. (*CP* 178)

In the above poem the desire is to transcend the limits of body that is phenomena and to unearth the depths of the soul that is noumena. According to Kant, it is vital always to distinguish between the distinct realms of phenomena and noumena. Phenomena are the appearances, which constitute our
experience; noumena are the (presumed) things themselves, which constitute reality.

Ezekiel's cry is to transcend the body by not rejecting it but by surrendering to it. For Ezekiel sex is a way to reach up to the soul. He is aware about the demands of the senses and the pull of the spiritual. So in *And God Revealed* he says:

> We are not made for love alone, my Love,
> Although our flesh and bones would it so.
> A thousand small intricacies of brain
> Hold my blood-streams captive, which will not flow
> Freely to serve the ends of love, until
> They know the various ways of men
> The soul in solitude and God revealed. (*CP25*)

In the same poem the poet says:

> As lover, Love, you know that I am lost
> In continents of thoughts, and every urge
> To see, know, hear, touch, and praise the earth
> Is concentrated on your lips and thighs –
> The strange mysterious way of earthly love. (*CP 25*)

Ezekiel knows that earthly love and spiritual quest cannot be separated. Again in *Two Nights of Love*, the poet juxtaposes the God and love in the two stanzas. The physical aspect of love depicted with ‘thrashing thighs’ (*CP 47*) and ‘singing breasts’ (*CP 47*) leads to exhaustion and fresh desire. The poet dreams of love unconfined to the physical and wants ‘to be bound / Within a freedom fresh as God’s name / Through all the centuries of Godlessness.’ (*CP 47*) In the second stanza the poet turns to love after a night of love and desires ‘it again / Within the freedom old as earth / And fresh as God’s name, through all / The centuries of darkened loveliness’. (*CP 47*) The tone here is confessional and the poet submits to the power of the carnal desire.
deliberate juxtaposition of God and sexuality in the poem is reminiscent of the poet’s constant quest of a balance between the sensual and the spiritual. In *Transmutation* the poet says:

Do not, in your vanity, the tenuous thread
Of difference flaunt, but be
Asserted in the common dance. . . .

Sense-explosions, agitations
Of the mind and marrow, merge
Into a wider, warmer meaning.

Holiness reveals itself in everything. (*CP* 56)

The dualism or dichotomy of sense and spirit, mind and heart, spiritual and sensual, emotion and reason, sacred and profane are to be resolved because only then the dissolution of ‘all the equipage of doubt and dissipation’ (*CP* 56) is possible.

In *Lamentation* the poet laments the state of desolation and barrenness in which he finds himself. An acute sense of futility and meaninglessness wrecks havoc with the poet persona. He finds himself withered. He says, ‘Desire postponed is death to me’ (*CP*72) but if ‘Pursued it rots the bowels’ (*CP*72). This irresistible desire for indulgence and resultant frustration owing to its insatiability is a recurring feature of his poetry. The poet laments this state of being and prays to give him vision and ‘let my leaf be green with love and let me live’ (*CP* 72). The inscrutable workings of desire are a recurring theme in Ezekiel’s poetry. As K. R. S. Iyengar observes: “He was painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind” (657). In yet another poem, *Nocturne*, the poet
is perplexed by the overpowering force of desire. The brief poem is an example of the poet’s tendency to analyze things rationally.

Desire
Labyrinthine,
The sweet smell of false desire
Labyrinthine;
A little wine
A darkened room
And it is spent,
The hour now a heap of sand
Lent
To nakedness.
And is this all the Truth
Of desire
Labyrinthine?
All the strain and stress of youth
Merely fire
Divided into thine and mine,
Or something less,
Desire
Labyrinthine?
And all to win
The sour taste of sin?

Even so,
Let it go, let it go. (CP 74-75)
The final ‘let it go, let it go’ (CP75) summarizes the poet’s attitude to claims of the flesh: a sense of total submission through genuine acceptance of the calls of the body. The assumption is to transcend the body but not by negating it but by accepting it even if it means tasting ‘the sour taste of sin’. Michael Garman writes about the role of the compulsions of body in the following words:

Sexual encounters abound in the poems of all the volumes and the poet now appeals to them as evidence of the involvement of the body, and now rejects them as incomplete. The final view (rather, a persistent and unanswered view) seems to be that charity, absorption of body and mind, a passion beyond sex, is the true commitment.” (212)

Ezekiel’s faith in the instinctive demands of body is reflected in Paean when he says:

Always the body knows its nakedness.
The first baptism is not in water
But in fire. The limbs are shaped to lock
And love, the eyes – they say – show a strange light,
And lives are welded which exist part. (CP 92)

Love, that is making love, is a song which saves lovers from too much of separation and works as a reparation, as he says in Aside. Ezekiel does not mince words when he accepts the sovereignty and supremacy of the heart. In Declaration, he warns against the perils of denying the animal instinct:

The sensual form may serve to calm
The senses and keep the darkness pure.

Certain vases and women, however expensive,
Fill the animal heart with wonder and warmth,
And deprivation is desolation.
No moral law can fill the void
Deaf and blind to all is appetite. \((CP 93-94)\)

Or again in the poem titled *In the Queue* Ezekiel expresses his credo with straightforward unclandestine frankness. Even in a queue waiting for the bus, the author realizes the impregnable mystery of the power of the senses:

- Insatiate the carnal sense
- Behind its stiff sartorial fence,
- Though manners play the gentleman,
- A passing bosom lifts the ban. \((CP 96)\)

Watching a woman in the street, the author’s fancy takes a flight:

- Now savage red, now mildly pink,
- Are thoughts I cannot help but think:
- Exposed to mountain air or sea,
- Her unashamed anatomy;
- I turn to kiss, the sun goes down
- Her skin is warm and golden brown – \((CP 96)\)

His one more poem, *Encounter*, is again a professed confession of a person who believes in genuine love. The poet talks here about an encounter with a woman and after the experience declares that:

- I knew that love is always right;
- The might-have-been
- Is worse than errors of the creed,
- For in denying, still desires the deed. \((CP 100)\)

This struggle with the irresistible force of desire is a recurring theme in his poems. When sated, it leaves the mind tranquil but when the experience is not fruitful, the
agony is indeed heavy. Ezekiel has expressed the despair of such an outcome in his poem *Situation*:

- The upshot of their meeting was a quiet despair
- She never spoke her mind. He looked beyond her eyes.
- The fading light of evening gathered round her hair.
- She lied to be with him. He had his stock of lies. (*CP* 109)

The atmosphere of despair and gloom can be sensed even in the style and tone of the poem. It’s monotonous and listless. It lacks the characteristic Ezekiel liveliness that is easily perceptible in his poems. Even the diction of the poem has negativity about it. The words implicitly suggesting negative emotion in the poem are: despair, fading, lies, banal, illusion, eclipse, guiltily, reluctantly, dragged. The word ‘lie’ is used five times; the word ‘despair’ is used four times. The first line of each of the four stanzas ends with despair; the second line with eyes, the third line with hair, and the last line of each stanza ends with lies. This repetitive use of the same words to rhyme with each other adds to the monotony of the poem and gives it a gloomy undertone. An accomplished and conscious poet like Ezekiel would not write like this without any intention in mind. In fact, the poem is an example of Ezekiel’s craftsmanship where he deftly employs repetitive and monotonous structure to highlight the frustration and despair resulting from an unfulfilled desire.

Ezekiel’s idea of equilibrium or balance is inclusive of a sated mind. A perturbed mind devastated by the tumult of passion is not fit to achieve salvation. The spiritual quest will not succeed if the mind is not divested of the haunting desires. The goal is not to negate the desire or to repress it. Ezekiel envisages a balanced life in which the natural urges are reconciled with the spiritual urges. In *Virginal*, the poet advises the lonely woman not to live a life of deprivation. When you breathe the bitter
air of loneliness and pretend that you are happy in your world of loneliness and live as if you do not care for the normal human contact, the resultant sense of loss, though not admitted, slowly rusts the soul. The poet says:

You were not made to live like this, although
Your face suggests that you are reconciled,
Its gentle sadness as it slowly grew
And crushed your liveliness, oppresses me too.
The universe is much too small to hold
Your longing for a lover and a child (CP 139)

Ezekiel is a poet of the ordinariness. His poetry and his life has undertone of unassuming self effacement. There is a presence of a seeker who wishes to lead a life that is poised between spiritual and sensual. The salvation is to be achieved living a normal life, by taking a plunge in life and not by running away from life. The body is a powerful force that must propel man to spiritual height. It is not a burden, not even a necessary evil, it is a manifestation of the same divine power which is life force which controls everything and which has an aim and design in everything.

About his motives in sexual matters he writes in *Motives*. He candidly expresses his motives without mincing words:

It’s easy to remember
your body in its nakedness.
I dwell on it
as on a landscape
or a beloved painting.
Not the total form only
But the details interest me.
My motives are sexual,
aesthetic and friendly

in that order, adding up

to bed with you. (CP 154)

Then the poet goes on talking about the woman and says that your skin is white but black or grey would do as well. The poet says that the shape, size or colour doesn’t matter. He also says that there are certain things that he expects aesthetically which the woman does not possess like she does not speak or looks away, but he says ‘I adjust myself’ (CP 154). The poem ends in the assertion of the poet that ‘the friendly motive absorbs the other two’ (CP 155).

A desire to achieve equilibrium is constantly present in Ezekiel’s poetry. He fails time and again and the quest continues. The female is a haunting presence in his poetry. It is a beast that he cannot accept and cannot escape from. One of the reasons why Ezekiel’s poetry is essentially confessional is because of his constant struggle to find a holistic way to deal with the persistent pressures of the body. Most of the time he is reconciled and accepts the demands of the body as natural but there are times when he has a sense of sin and is acutely aware about his sense of failure. He has recognised his limitations and wants to find an answer with his limits. In Transparently, the poet says:

All I want now

is the recognition

of dilemma

and the quickest means

of resolving it

within my limits. (CP 150)
This view of indulgence in sensual pleasure as essentially normal and even divine is reflected in *Happening*. The poem reflects Ezekiel’s belief in the philosophy of life which has healthy acceptance of sensuality and love of mankind. Ezekiel claimed to be atheist and religion was never a very significant factor in his life. He writes in *Happening*:

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We have lost
the language of dreams.
We have forgotten
everything but knowledge.
We grope among
the signs and symbols
for the source
of signs and symbols.
In making love
upon this bed
I am dependent on
a fire from heaven.
The food I eat
Cannot nourish me
unless I love the human face.
I close the door and sit alone
in kinship with the world.
I am near everybody
being near myself alone. (CP 163)
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The fire that burns like a flame of desire is ‘a fire from heaven’ (CP 164). It is important for Ezekiel that his absorption in the common humanity is preserved. Niranjan Mohanty says:

What in fact Ezekiel does in his poetry is nothing but reading out aloud the epic of walking along the streets of life which makes him celebrate the commonness, the ordinary, so that he becomes one with them or identifies himself with them. This is one of the ways which strengthens Ezekiel to establish a rapport with the society or community he lives in. (87)

Ezekiel’s faith in love is complete because one can achieve truest love only in making love. In The Couple he writes, “Her false love became infused / with truest love / only in making love” (CP 183).

Ezekiel’s idea of love is sensitively presented in Poem of the Separation. The first three stanzas depict the course of their love through how it started and developed. It is a good example of how poetry can be created even while narrating the course of events. The poet successfully evokes the emotions of the beginning of love. Mood of nostalgia, memories of the beloved, sincerity of feelings, and natural flow of expression coupled with lines of sheer poetry make the poem a remarkable one. The poet’s reference to time in the form of events in Kashmir is poet’s way of juxtaposing love and bloodshed and how individual feelings gain primacy over general feelings. The poet says:

when the bombs burst in Kashmir;
my life had burst
and merged in yours
The war did not matter
though we tried to care (CP 195)
The third stanza tells about how their love developed in the buses, on the cafe on the beaches, and on the benches in the park. The poet says that it is here that ‘our music was made’. But like all music it comes to an end. The poet wishes it to continue and live in its echoes but he knows that it cannot happen. The moment of separation is exquisitely depicted by the poet:

I ask you to pause
and to hear it again,
but you sweep ahead to hear
another music.

It’s true we cannot live on echoes. (CP 195)

The separation is painful and lives the poet persona with an acute sense of helplessness. The poem depicts an acute tension between the realisation that one cannot live on the echoes and the desire to hear the same music again, the irrevocability of the past and the desire to return to past. The separation does not end the relationship. The contact from thousands of miles turns the person into a sensory perception. The poet writes in the next stanza:

Ten thousand mile away,
you become a shower of letters,
a photograph, a newspaper cutting
underlined, with pencilled comments
and a smell at night. (CP 195)

However, what is significant is that the acute sense of longing for the beloved is accentuated with sexual passion. Even in a poem delineating exquisite feeling of love in separation, the desire to end separation reverberates with sexual longing:

I want you back
with the rough happiness you lightly wear,
supported by your shoulders,

breasts and thighs. (CP 196)

This is precisely the animal instinct Ezekiel believes in. In relationships he looks for that robust, untameable animal spark which is a faith for Ezekiel. In Tone Poem the poet writes: “. . .I feel / I am / not in pursuit / of anything / except / animal faith / with the mysteries / of love / dissolved in it.” (CP 203-4) His Passion Poems are a celebration of this primeval desire and he captures here moments of passion in short pieces of poetry. These brief poems are like photographs in which the moments are captured highlighting the emotions in those moments. One of these poems is titled The Sanskrit Poets. The brief poem runs like this:

How freely they mention
breasts and buttocks.
They are my poetic ancestors.
Why am I so inhabited? (CP 214)

The brief poems are concretising the ethereal and ephemeral moments of intense passion in a snapshot. In another poem, titled Names, the poet writes:

I remember
nothing
except that she
uttered my name
over and over again.
And I,
hers. (CP 215)

Ezekiel deals with this compelling desire for sensual pleasure and the paradox of indulging and resisting runs throughout his poetry. In Hymns in Darkness XI the poet says that:
There’s one thing to be said for hell:

it's a pretty lively place.

A man could be happy there. (CP 221)

Ezekiel's love poems compel the readers to look at his attitude to woman. There are two pictures of woman revealed in the poems of Ezekiel. One is that of a domestic woman, woman as a caring mother or a loving wife. The other is that of a beloved. He looks upon woman as an object of desire, as a powerful temptation, as a profound and unfathomable mystery. His attitude is that of awe and wonder. She is an object of desire and an object of fear. She appears to him ‘untamable’ (CP 216) and ‘willing to be tamed’ (CP 216). There is the desire to possess and the fear of the possession also. She haunts him in his dreams and leaves him restless. His attitude to woman is very complex. Woman appears to him as an enigma and a mystery, as intensely irresistible yet frightful in her mystery. In ‘Passion Poems’ No VIII, ‘The Loss’ he says,

Did I create this woman,
untameable and yet
willing to be tamed? (CP 216)

Ezekiel then unpretentiously adds,

Only Shiva, meditating,
could be immovable
in her moving presence.
As for me,
I hardly meditate at all. (CP 216)

If woman is a mystery and a temptation, she is also an integral part of Ezekiel’s scheme of things. In A Time to Change Ezekiel says:

A bit of land, a woman and a child or two
Accommodated to their needs and changing moods
Practicing a singing and a talking voice

Is all the creed a man of god requires. (CP4)

He has ‘patiently to build a life with these’ (CP 4). She is an integral part of a man’s life and this picture of woman as a domestic companion to man is equally fascinating for Ezekiel. The poem, Birth, gives a delicate expression of the bond between the man and wife when the woman gives birth to their child. In To a Certain Lady, again the poet sings about the bliss of marital love. It is not an idealized picture but a real one nonetheless. The poet insists that:

Life can be kept alive
By contact with the unknown and the strange
A feeling for the mystery
Of man and woman joined, exhaustion
At the act, desire for it again;
By contact with the commonplace
A feeling for the touch of wood and water
The sight of pictures on the wall,
Books, carpets, curtains, glass,
The simple things that make a home (CP 28)

The domestic love is for Ezekiel something that can and should be renewed time and again. Life goes on and love rises again like a phoenix. During the nuptial togetherness, quarrels and indifferences suck life out of wedded love. The poet abhors the state of being together without love which has to be redeemed. Man and wife have to work together to make a life. He says:

Destroying or creating, moving on or standing still,
Always we must be lovers,
Man and wife at work upon the hard
Mass of material which is the world.
Related all the time to one another and to life,

Teach us, Love, above all things, fidelity to music,
Sharpen our responses to the colours of creation,
Lead us undeceptively to what comes after passion,
And let us die, Love, as though we choose to, for a reason (CP 30)

Ezekiel is aware about the contempt bred by familiarity which kills the conjugal bliss. The ordinariness and repetitiveness of routine interaction between man and wife create a sense of monotony and people tend to take each other for granted. The fourth part of the same poem reminds us of Eliot for its conversational style but the humorous depiction of the interaction between the nagging wife and tired husband reveal the poet’s attitude to marriage which is of genuine acceptance in spite of the toll it takes. In yet another poem, Marriage Poem, the poet says:

Between the acts of wedded love
A quieter passion flows,
Which keeps the nuptial pattern firm
As passion comes and goes,
And in the soil of wedded love
Rears a white rose. (CP 46)

Though Ezekiel has candidly expressed his own frustration and bitterness in his personal domestic life, he is aware of the fact that in spite of that the institution of marriage is not just indispensable but essential in one’s sense of fulfillment. In Enterprise the poet says: ‘Home is where we have to earn grace’ (CP 118). This solemn realization that domestic life needs voluntary and deliberate efforts on the part of man and wife is central to Ezekiel’s idea of nuptial joy.
Ezekiel’s another poem, *Marriage*, depicts the course through which wedded love passes. The first phase is that of ecstasy and joy:

Lovers when they marry face  
Eternity with touching grace.  
Complacent at being fated  
Never to be separated. (CP 123)

Newlywed couples start their marital journey with a complacence that comes from the romantic idea that since they are wedded, they are now inseparable. The sheer physicality of passion is the driving force and the couple feels ‘immortal as the breeze’ (CP 124). And then comes the period of disillusionment resulting from the reality of day to day life. The poet confesses:

However, many times we came  
Apart, we came together. The same  
Thing over and over again.  
Then suddenly the mark of Cain  
Began to show on her and me. (CP 124)

Ezekiel refers to the mark of Cain in a confessional mode and accepts his fair share of guilt for the troubles of wedded love. On the whole, Ezekiel’s attitude to woman as domestic companion is paradoxical. His own marriage not being free from troubled moments, Ezekiel considers wife both a companion in the man’s spiritual journey and a companionship that takes its toll on man. However, what is most striking about Ezekiel’s depiction of woman in domestic context is his candour and honesty about his own troubled marriage.

Ezekiel’s distrust of marriage and the apprehension about an impending debacle in marriage makes him look at marriage with an ironic humorous way.
Ezekiel returned to the theme of marriage at regular intervals and the picture portrayed of woman as wife is coloured with powerful strokes of grey. In *Song to be Shouted Out* Ezekiel again gives the picture of the nagging wife:

I come home in the evening  
and my wife shouts at me  
Did you post that letter?  
Did you make that telephone call?  
Did you pay that bill?  
What do you do all day? (*CP* 241)

The poet’s response, though, amusing, reveals his attitude to woman as a wife:

Shout at me, woman!  
Pull me up for this or that  
You are right and I’m wrong  
This is not an excuse,  
it's only a song.  
It’s good for my soul  
to be shouted at.  
Shout at me, woman!  
What else are wives for? (*CP* 242)

Anisur Rahman observes in this regard:

Marital failure is as much the theme of the poet as his other failures experienced from time to time. . . . Neither marriage succeeds nor love and the choice to live alone is not good either. There is confirmation of the need of love and its quest even if one fails (22).

The other picture of woman is as a mother. The most celebrated poem of Ezekiel, *Night of the Scorpion*, is about his mother. Ezekiel’s portrayal of mother is full of love
and tender affection. The poem is a beautiful dramatic narrative of an incident when his mother was stung by a scorpion. The whole incident vividly brings before our eyes a traditional scene in which a picture of India emerges which is authentic and realistic:

I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice. (CP 130)
The poem then vividly portrays the superstitions and beliefs of the illiterate Indians and the scepticism of the poet’s father who is rational and scientific in his attitude:

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.
With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the sun-baked walls
they searched for him: he was not found.
They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother’s blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said.
May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May your sufferings decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
May the sum of evil
balanced in the unreal world
against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain (CP 130)

The ritualistic superstitions of the peasants are juxtaposed against the scientific efforts of the father:

My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured some paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it. (CP131)

The poet’s master stroke comes at the end of the poem when the mother is cured of the scorpion bite:

After twenty hours
it lost its sting
My mother only said:
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children (CP 131)

To put the whole argument in a nutshell, one can propose that Ezekiel’s treatment of sex, love and marriage in his poems create a picture of woman who is a temptation, a mystery and a powerful force to realize the full potential of man’s personal and universal quest. Ezekiel's poetry suggests that his journey for a balanced life includes the sensual aspect of his personality. A healthy and balanced life does not exclude the world of sense.
REFERENCES


