Chapter - V

*Spiritual Images*
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Chapter - V

SPIRITUAL IMAGES

The fifth chapter of the study explains the nature and significance of Ezekiel's Spiritual Images with illustrations. The focus is directed at Ezekiel's shaping of the moral being and his spiritual journey and the images concerning these aspects of his poetry. Ezekiel's poetry is strong with spiritual images. As Satyanarayan Singh (In Shahane V.M. and Shivramkrishna. M, 1980: 58) rightly says,

"Ezekiel's subsequent poetry in its marked orientation towards spiritual themes has grown in vitality and strength, such a trend may have the effect of attenuating his appetite for varieties of experience and restrict the range and score of his interest in life."

The poet makes himself aware of the diverse problem related to spiritualism and morality. His pre-occupation with religious experience may tend to distance him from the pressures and tensions of his time and place, and from the joys and woe of existence around him. In technique and workmanship his forte lies not in realising himself through images or symbols or in employing conventional artistic devices, but through a precise and imaginative articulation of experience in words when the poet says that best poets wait for words.
5.1 Lost at Sea

5.1.1

Ezekiel's poems bear a testimony of the struggle in the 'primeval jungle' and a painful equilibrium of the opposing forces. The poet starts his spiritual voyages and with him the dawn of post colonial era begins which mirrors the image and identifies with the educated Indian masses. According to the poet the art is the outcome of secular, moral conscience, its hopes and desires. As the poet says:

For hours and days
the singing voice
to utter praise
A bit of land
A woman too
Grapes or figs
And metaphors
Insight illumination
secret faults concealed no more.

(Ezekiel, 1989: 6)

The spiritual images in the above lines convey the poet's spiritual journey amidst the 'primeval jungle'. As the hours and days creep, he establishes a kinship with humanity, as he grows more and more secular, moral and he expresses a desire to have some minimum hopes and obligations. He doesn't want to keep anything secret.

What is special about Ezekiel is that he doesn't avoid the facts. His choice of images brings out the poetic reality. As S.C. Narula (1986: 181) rightly says:

“What gives a distinct character to the poetic reality in each is his choice of images, the vehicle for the emotional and cerebral spin-off of the experience of the living, and which they develop from poem to poem so that they become conductor of thought and emotion.”

When we consider Ezekiel’s spiritual quest and spiritual images; he was not metaphysical in the special sense. But these images are based on the poet’s vision of life. As V.S. Seturaman (in M.K. Naik, 1976: 182) has aptly made his stance clear as to which poet should be called a spiritual poet:

“Shri Aurobindo’s images, like Shankara’s images, are metaphysical. They are based on a vision of life which synthesizes the ‘para’ and ‘Apara’ ‘Vidya’ and ‘Avidya’; The higher and lower. It is this quality that makes Savitri ‘The right correlate to the practical drive towards earth-transformation by the mightiest master of spirituality’.

5.1.2

Ezekiel’s person expresses his rage against the God. He thinks God as his enemy:

The enemy is God
as the unchanging one
all forms of God
and The God in all forms.

The oppressor who worships God
and the oppressed who worship God
are victims of the enemy.

(Ezekiel, 1952: 59)
5.1.3

Ezekiel has mentioned most persistently the corruption and depravity of human relationship but gradually he has succeeded attaining in spiritual quest. Makarand R. Paranjape (1988: 201) has rightly said, "Through all the corruption and depravity of human relationship that Ezekiel explores in his later poems, the spiritual theme-Persists, resurfacing every now and then." Ezekiel's poetry reveals his primary concern with understanding the meaning of his life and attaining self-realization. Poetry seems to be the means to this goal. In the process of pursuing his quest, he is acutely conscious of his own failings and self deceptions yet he finds himself preserved again and again. Somewhere along the way he stumbles upon his truth in its pristine form, the secret principles that govern the universe are divulged to him and he finds the answer to the mystery of his life. Having once grasped this secret, be it for a single moment, his life is changed completely. This appears to be the essence of the poet's mysticism.

5.1.4

In critical writings of most of Ezekiel's critics we find frequent references to Ezekiel's attempt at self-discovery and self-analysis. Ezekiel's picture of city life shows his self-smothering nature. The same realistic pictures and its details acquire symbolic resonance. The spiritual images he employees give the poet's emotional involvement with what he describes. There is an identification of the self with the scene. But It is not a self which analyses and reflects or
possesses a vision of an alternative social order or state of things. At any rate, such a dynamic vision is not revealed in the poetry itself. The images of sordidness and deprivation evoke in the poet a mood of tiredness, self-pity and devotion rather than protest or revolt:

To save myself
from what the city had made of me, I returned
As intended to the city I had known,
Pity for myself suggested this
And pity for the world.”

(Ezekiel, 1989: 19)

5.1.5

The image of bitterness is added to the disillusionment in ‘Hymns in Darkness’ although the feeling is now impersonalised:

He said:
In a single day
I’m forced to listen
to a dozen film songs
to see
a score of beggars
to touch
uncounted strangers
to smell
unsmellable smells
to taste
my bitter native city.

(Ibid, 224)

The futility, bitterness and strangeness of city life are experienced through various senses. But the terseness of expression and the controlled imagery suggest an apartness of the self from the external reality which is apprehended through the senses.
5.1.6

Ezekiel’s poems dealing with marriage reflect a self-consciously sceptical attitude which withholds the poetic self. Using subtle irony Ezekiel brings out the images of failure and discontent in the conjugal life:

Short of tearing her clothes
he’s using all his force
soon, he’s had what he wanted
soft, warm and round
wasn’t it Blake who said
that the nakedness of woman is the work of God.
If only he could love the bitch.

(Ibid, 221)

5.1.7

The Biblical images of man’s self-defeating wickedness-are beautifully presented in ‘Latter Day Psalms’:

Come let us make a joyful noise
into him with Psalms
And a different noise with
Latter day Psalms,
The sea is his; we may drown
in it. He formed the dry land
on which many millions thirst
to no end.
We are the people of his
pasture, we are the sheep
of his hand. Ba Baa Black sheep.

(Ibid, 258)

In fact, the equilibrium between body and soul, heart and mind becomes the expected state in contrast to ‘The Double Horror’ a poem which begins with ‘I am corrupted by the world’ and sums up with ‘infected I corrupt the world’.
5.1.8

The poem *A Time to Change* conveys the images of redemption and rebirth in Hindu custom. The search for divine wholeness manifests love, religion, poetry and style of life.

5.1.9

Ezekiel expresses the dilemma of a weak-minded person afflicted by self-pity. His poem *The Way It Went* presents a faithful description of his married life. Even in his love affair he fails miserably. He desires some sort of spiritual experience and ecstasy in love which his counterpart fails to understand. Thus, his sense of alienation partly comes from his inability to communicate and partly from the absence of meaningful faith. The image of a balanced human being which the desired is evoked in the following lines:

I want a human balance humanly acquired, fruitful in the common hour.

(Ibid, 40)

In his spiritual march sometimes the poet becomes restless. At such times, he recollects his childhood. It proves to be a balm to his spirit which is rather tormented. As a child he knew the certain joy of mud and toys. We find the same child who had wept to see a rat destroyed, secretly rejoice when fifty thousand Chinese were killed. When he grows up, he himself is corrupted by the world and is now infecting the world with his corruption in return.
5.1.10

Therefore, he desires to be a man and enter a world of simplicities. In the poem 'Commitment' he observes:

Truly, I wish to be a man: Alone
Or in the crowd this is my only guide.

(Ibid, 26)

5.1.11

Amidst the crowd he feels lonely as he says in the poem 'The recluse':

In these haunts of entertainment
I am sad, unawakened
By the clouds of drum emotion.
Not sharing with the crowd.

(Ibid, 80)

5.1.12

This kind of alienation divides his self into fragments. There is a naked self which lies hidden deep within. There are several masks which he wears to suit the occasions. The division of his self creates doubts and uncertainty which frightens him. This is clearly stated in 'What Frightens Me'. In this poem, Ezekiel writes:

I have heard the endless silent dialogue
Between the self protective self
And the self naked.
I have seen the mask
And the secret behind the mask.

(Ibid, 106)

This capacity for self-analysis does not help him to overcome his crisis or faith. The scrutiny of his self by himself frightens him.
We know that he is keenly interested in Philosophy and this philosophic turn of his mind leads him to ponder over himself, as he judges himself in relation to love and God. But his experiences are mostly physical and carnal. Therefore, the poet remembers how his self, in the arms of love, is crossbred, compromised and consummated and he realizes his powerful sexual desire as a hidden weakness which is revealed at night fall and noon.

5.1.13

The second section begins with an awareness of his sin which he always rationalized. And yet his self is divided because. One is protective and the other is masked. So there is a conflict within his self. The poet seems to be tormented by his own self-the protected and the Naked. There is an image of the poet who is mystified by the intricate mould of human desire. The poem 'What Frightens Me' evokes the above image very effectively:

I have felt the mystery of the image being born
Establishing its dim but definite
Identity I have realized it final shape
Is probably uncertainty
this it is which frightens me.

(Ibid, p. 106)

5.1.14

Ezekiel's images of God are inseparable from his exploration of the theme of love. Both love and God are metaphors of freedom. Both these are in search of the 'Secretive privacy', and inaccessibility of the soul. Both call for participation in the process of love and God define a dialectic that is against alienation-of the
spirit. As Gieve Patel (In Ezekiel Nissim, 1989: Intro., p.XVII) rightly says:

“The reiteration in poem after poem of the desire to break out of self regarding loneliness ends in Ezekiel throwing himself into what’s around him: India, Bombay more specifically, the here and now.”

Though the poet is not committed to any particular system of thought or religion, the religious discourse provides him a mode of progression and a way of ordering his thoughts. This awareness of the surrounding milieu brings feeling of loss and deprivation. There is also a quest for metaphysical truth which leads him to psalms and hymns. These make the poet’s spiritual quest more remarkable.

5.1.15

We observe that the poem ‘Prayer’ is an example of the religious attitude of the poem-yet the poet has succeeded in showing that it is not just the monopoly of religious minded alone. Every sinner yearns for forgiveness. Such an yearning is seen in this poem, ‘Theological’ when the poet almost cries:

Lord, I am tired
of being wrong.

(Ibid, 156)

5.1.16

The image of existential predicament is evoked through the poem ‘Episode’ where the poet finds himself caught between his beloved and the common beggars. The poem describes the scene in the park where the poet and his beloved are engaged in

The three beggars stand there in a pitiable condition and distort the very purpose of their love making.

Thus ended what was ill begun
she lied to be with me
I lied to myself
We sought romantic restfulness
God sent three beggars
We went back to our separate bonds.

(Ibid, 99)

The picture of the three beggars suggests not only poverty but the question of existence in the city where genuine love is constantly threatened in the middle of horrors.

5.1.17

The dog's unuttered cry, 'I too am life' in the further section is evocative of metaphorical representation of the dehumanized self of the city dwellers. The poet experiences disgust or nausea at the rotten body of the dog. He tried to escape. This becomes typical when the gesture is described in the following lines:

I cross the road, I dribble past
The challenge to a small cafe,
I light a cigarette
And think of horrors less remote.

(Ibid, p.95)

5.1.18

There developed a sense of being confined to a trapped space of the earth. The same feeling is conveyed through the image of 'Room':

........The door
is always open
but I cannot leave.

(Ibid, 206)
5.1.19

A sense of being trapped is converged through the room image. The room has dominated him so much that his very existence is at stake. A sense of inadequacy in coping with the world is conveyed through the following lines:

There are too many contradictions and books
Too much love and not enough love
The attempt to dance
Without learning to walk.

(Ibid, 206)

5.1.20

Ezekiel's 'Hymns in Darkness' and 'Foster Prayers' explore his distinctive spiritual themes. Beyond the merely economic, moral and biological man, these poems explore the science of being. Although a keen student of religion, Ezekiel is too humanistic to be an adherent to any particular creed. He would most willingly submit to experience uninhibited by set opinions or dogmas and his way to real knowledge.

He would rather court follies and mistakes, learn from experience, and forge ahead zealously in the adventure of living than play safe.

5.1.21

In the existential arena of the world man is essentially a lonesome being pitted against unknown adversaries. He has to face new challenges, drawing upon his own inner reserves of strength. Rather than assiduously research for solutions to life's problems in
scriptural texts, or depend upon the ready reckoners supplied by the Priests or Gurus, he would be ‘a man withdrawn into himself,’ developing the energy and resilience to choose his course of action. In the poem ‘Island’, he brings out the existential helplessness of the human beings.

Sometimes I Cry for help’
but mostly keep my own counsel’
(Ibid, 182)

5.1.22

In the poem ‘A Small Summit’, the poet expresses the sense of alienation:

If nothing else I’ll keep my nerve
refuse the company of priests
professors, commentators, moralists
be my own guest in my own
one-man lunatic asylum.

(Ibid, 153)

The image of ‘one man lunatic asylum’ is expressive of a deep sense of isolation from people who are insensitive to individual needs and responses. Ezekiel thinks that he cannot call the world as his home. The single room is the only home of his affections. The abstract ideal of universal brotherhood fails to move him. Ultimately the poet has to come to terms keeping his limitations and capacities. He decides not to strike attitude and takes resort in escapist aesthetics.
5.1.23

The poet's rebirth is quietly to take the next step without much fuss and have the courage to accept the consequences of his action.

Ezekiel's poetry shows a constant struggle between the iron cast framework of organized opinion and his quest for the deeper fulfilments. In other words the struggle is between the institutionalized religion and the yearning for the spiritual growth. He seems to be more genuine. That is why he averts the sham and hypocrisy in the field of art. The image of High priest is a means of the spiritual sense and is brought here in tender fashion.

Ezekiel denounces all sorts of self romanticizing fits and shows a critical self awareness in a typical style of his own. He thinks that art is not a medium for such self romanticisation. Such a talent may be required as a 'minor' talent.

5.1.24

The poet gradually comes to the spiritual knowledge that poetry doesn't consist merely in exhibiting one's linguistic skills, or in sedulously shaping popular imagist patterns, or in formal virtuosity and seamanship without 'The shudder of jasmine feeling'

I am tried
of irony and paradox
of the bird in the hand
and the two in the bush
of poetry direct and oblique
of statement plain or symbolic
of doctrine and dogma.

(Ibid, 157)
The poet shows in the above lines of the poem 'Theological' a sort of spiritual discontent with the matters of poetic vacation. He experiences a sharp contrast between poetic faith and actual life.

5.1.25

He seems troubled by an inherent sense of inadequacy while making firm decisions in the context of life. Such images are employed in his poems.

5.1.26

The poet seems disgusted with the spiritual suffocation of this kind. He cannot be free like the natural elements. He seems to have lost his spontaneity. He experiences himself like a slave. The image of general insufficiency of the mankind is evoked, through the following lines, of the poem 'Transparently':

Compared to my mind,
rocks are reasonable
clouds are clear
It makes me mad
but that is how it is.
How many times
have I felt free?
How many times
spontaneous?
It’s fantastic
what a slave
a man can be
who has nobody
to oppress him
except himself.

(Ibid, 149)
5.1.27

Man is the victim of his own indecisions. The poet says that his own oppressor is his own self. The same oppressing self is his source of poetry. The poet seems to struggle to control the 'To be or not to be' dilemma. He wants to achieve a' golden mean by resolving it in the concluding lines of 'Transparently':

All I want now is the recognition of dilemma
And the quickest means of resolving it
within my limit.

(Ibid, 150)

It is harmony for which, it seems, Ezekiel strives in his own limited way. The impossible mountains of the poet's troubled dreams symbolize a failure to like the spiritual life. Such images many evoke a sense of a longing of a fragmented man to transcend himself and correlate the laws of his being. The Unfinished Man, written in third person though he projects his self using first person, is not a division of self, but the unification of self.

5.1.28

In the poem 'Event' the poet's absence of genuine communication makes, their relationship superficial. This casual relationship gives rise to a simple self questioning attitude:

Time offers this ironic gift
As in the middle of the way
They feel its flow become a drift
And lost the will to act or pray.

(Ibid, 122)
5.2 Struggling Against Odds

5.2.1

Some critics have treated Ezekiel's poetry as a 'Journey into self' 'a metaphorical journey into the roots of one's self on being which embodies both mythical and existential dimensions of life. Like an existential poet he confesses:

"I have made my commitments
now this is one to stay where I am
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place
My backward place is where I am."

(Ezekiel, 1989: 181)

5.2.2

The images in the above lines convey a tough choice one has to face while dealing with the problems of life. Ezekiel's poetry is the battle field for the clash of opposites. There are two opposite sects in his poetry-life as a pilgrimage away from home and actual milieu. Thus the image of home receives many spiritual connotations in his poetry. In the poem 'Enterprise' the pilgrimage begins with a hope to lighten the burden. Some differences of the pilgrims are revealed when they face some troubles on the way. But some how they proceed and reach the next phase. The poet says:

Another phase was reached when we
Were twice attacked, and lost our way
A section claimed its liberty
To leave the group. I tried to pray
Our leader said he smelt the sea."

(Ibid. 118)
This metaphoric journey remained an enterprise. It is just a casual journey into his own self. His pilgrimage begins with a hope to lighten the burden. It remained a journey amidst many ups and downs. But the poet marched in the direction of the 'ray of hope'. As the poet mentions:

"We noticed nothing as we went
A struggling crowd of little hope
Ignoring what the thunder meant
Deprived of common, needs like soap
Some were broken, some merely bent."

(Ezekiel Nissim, 1989: 118)

5.2.3

The poet further says:

Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to earn our grace.

(Ibid)

5.2.3

Time journey described in the poem is taken as a metaphor for life. The difficulties encountered during the journey symbolize the difficulties, failures and frustrations one comes across in one's life. Even when it seems to be purposeless and meaningless one must live it. For this what is needed is the peace of mind. The 'home' image symbolize the peace and gets. Poet conveys that home is the starting point of many things.

5.2.4

This shows that poetry and philosophy are the integral parts of Ezekiel's life. In the poem 'philosophy' Ezekiel shows the
relationship between poetry and philosophy. According to the poet philosophy brings a man closer to God. Ezekiel's spiritual quest is as deep as that of Sarojini Naidu or Aurobindo. As Manwar B. Twinkle (2000: 261) rightly says:

"Ezekiel is not other worldly or even concerned with a spiritual trial, he is describing a literary endeavour invested with moral life."

5.2.5

The image of 'Room' evokes various senses in Ezekiel's poems 'Room' in the poem 'London' is such an image, that develops into a recurring metaphor for his mind engaged in an 'intense' for his mind engaged in an 'intense-speculation' of creative activity withdrawn into itself. Abstracted from the process of living 'The room of the mind' like an atomic reactor ferments in preparation of actual production. The 'Room' described in the 'Hymns in Darkness', however undefined or shadowy, is of significance to the poet as a strand that shall contribute to the shaping design. The room image begins as "that basement room' in the poem, 'London', marking 'a true place/in my chronology' it is a watershed in the Path of development, for the mind face to face with itself must decide upon the direction it shall take. This basement room has become:

a permanent and proud metaphor of struggle
for and against the same creative, self-destructive self.

(Ezekiel, 1989: 199)
5.2.6

The 'room image' culminates and then finally in the poem, 'The Room', in which the poet accepts the inevitability of the 'fever and exaggeration' to develop in the room of mind in course of coming to terms with the perpetual questions of life. The ready cash both of 'doctrine and deliberation' is not enough to see him through them. Besides as we have noticed earlier, that he does not believe in running away from any situation. There is nothing to stop him, of course:

'The door
is always open
but I cannot leave.

(Ibid, 206)

His poetic journey covers different phases as he moves to new modus operandi and kinds of creativity like 'Poster', 'Post Card' and 'Passion Poems' between 1972 and 1975. There is a consistency in the desire for perpetual younghood to remain young at the heart of attraction of sex. The self-satisfied, confused cosiness of 'The professor' does not move towards the satisfaction and somehow something else is demanded to calm the mind, to satisfy the spirit. Ezekiel's 'Hymns' are 'in darkness' suggesting their deconstructive relationship to the Sanskrit classics. There are not hymns epitomizing the spiritual unknowable darkness. These are tough and terse, epigrammatic songs of the modern spirit unable to express any ultimate reality beyond the life it experiences:

All you have
Is the sense of reality
unfathomable
as it yields
its secrets
slowly
one
by
one.

(Ibid, 225)

Intellectually or spiritually Ezekiel does not locate the terra incognita but he is quite unable to get him self free from emotional pitch and plethora'

5.2.7

Ezekiel’s journey into the self is made glorious by his openness to experience. He is the poet of the common man and the feelings of common man are recorded in his poetry with utmost care. As a poet Ezekiel is not content to record the surface details of the experience. The theme of alienation is at the core of Ezekiel’s poetry. It is to be seen in the larger context of the human struggle to survive in the urban environment. In one of his early poems ‘History’ he says:

It all comes back to individual man
And what he chooses, always, some-how
A failure, and knowing all he can
Accepts the mob or worships snake and cow.

Consorting gunmen hold the fine fuse,
But by the hard unwelcome stone a dream
Of angles sings the abstract right to choose
And starts from rocks an unexpected stream.

(Ibid, 12-13)
The image of ultimate hope is beautifully evoked by Ezekiel in the above lines. The poet's humanism is liberal humanism. The survival of the individual is central to Ezekiel's credo. The alienation of the individual is a factor which contributes towards the dehumanisation of the individual. But however 'unexpected stream' of hope springs upward from the rock of humanity.

5.2.8

In the poem 'Fruit' he tells us about his indifference to good and evil in symbolic terms:

The sour grapes were just as firm
And round as those I loved, smooth skin
reflecting light, flesh soft within.

(Ibid, p.143)

5.3 Beginning to Change

5.3.1

There is a union of opposites in his poetry. The word 'prayer' occurs many times in his poetry. His philosophical humanism is revealed in the following prayer:

If I could pray the gist of my
Demanding would be simply this:
Quietude the ordered mind.
Erasure of the inner lie,
And only love in every kiss.”

(Ezekiel, 1989: 54)

Thus Ezekiel conveys his secular and religious stand through various images. He believes in the balanced or ordered mind, on a mind with the sense of right and wrong which has a capacity to
Erase the inner lie. His address to God is rather indirect. He never deviates from the plane of reality or morality but his eyes are fixed on God. He hates neither the world nor flesh. The image of God in his poetry is rather potent but the poet seems to be detached ironically again. His poetry combines many traditions of love, philosophy and religion of Judaism, Hinduism and Christianism in ‘Psalm 151’ he says:

Deliver me from evil, Lord
Rouse me to essential good
Change the drink for me, O Lord
Lead me from the wailing wood.

(Ibid, 73)

5.3.2

Some times Ezekiel wants to comprehend the meaning of life. His ridiculing and mucking at the traditional theistic order is quite earnest and serious in this sense. He takes life as a total tragedy that is why he says:

How much love do you expect from whores?
How much truth from failures
who cannot hold on to a wife or job?
Come, confess, and do not talk of God.
Your vanity is not as wretched as your style.

(Ibid, 234)

5.3.3

The image of room has developed, as we have observed, from being ‘The basement room’, ‘The drawing room’ ‘The shabby room’, to finally just ‘the room’, most appropriately, without an epithet, for now it stands for the mind which has freed itself from
the bounds of time and place. Whatever the existence may mean or bring in the passage of time, the mind should not boggle. So, the turmoil in the room of mind finally resolves in deciding priorities sometimes the resolution does not come out and dried served on the platter, and remains in terms of signs, and symbols vaguely understood and even if not understood must be accepted and continued to live:

Arranged and rearranged,
the room is always the same
Its shadows shift about restlessly
and fall into different patterns:
the light is unsteady thin and flat
Yet some events are to happen here.

(Ibid, 207)

It can be claimed that all has been said about the image of room of mind in Ezekiel's poetry, but a lot in this poetry becomes clear if approached following the signpost of the image that has become 'permanent and proud metaphor for him'.

5.3.4

Ezekiel's meditative self-explanations become more effective through his alienation games. The feeling of alienation compels him to come to terms with himself. His mind explores, at a personal level, emotions of loss and loneliness which are analyzed with ironic detachment. Unlike Eliot, he commits himself to his native environment to overpower this sense of alienation finally it seems that the poet comes to terms. The image of reconciliation is observed in the following lines:
I have made my commitments now
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place
my back ward place is where I am.

(Ibid, 181)

5.3.5

He realizes that his roots lie deep in Indian soil. For his poetic resources, he turns to the urban environment which offers him ample material. An image of ultimate commitment is evoked through the following lines:

I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong.

(Ibid, 182)

Thus he comes to the terms that he is Indian. He gladly accepts the odds like squalor, slums, heartlessness, brutality and destruction of human potential. Ezekiel turns to 'Hymns' and 'psalms', although his approach to God is different from that of traditional man of religion. It is surprising. There seems a coming to terms of the poet in every aspect. His poem 'Night of scorpion' helps us to define, the humanist element in his poetry. The mother in this poem is superstitious, and hence religious and deeply concerned with the well being of her children. Ezekiel's evoking of the image of the rural reaction to the incident of the scorpion bite or the like is interesting. The ironic detachment of the scene makes it typical Indian in response and theme. The image of the basic struggle of the individual is evoked when the individual remains human and is concerned with other's suffering. The poem receives

a pleasant stroke of humanism with the mother’s response to the incident. The poem evokes the image of mother who cares for her kids at the cost of her life:

Thank God! The scorpion picked on me and spared my children.

(Ibid, 131)

5.3.6

Ezekiel comes out with the meaning of prayer in the poem ‘Prayer’. The outburst is recorded as follows:

‘Prayer is transcendental speech.’ (Ibid, p.100)

This opening line itself seems like a definition or a statement. In the next part he explains the word ‘transcendental’, which is to go beyond. This is the metaphysical interpretation. He thinks prayer as something that he has not known. Thus he becomes more philosophical and reflective in these opening lines. For Ezekiel, the meaning of prayer is to be alone and cultivate an inner state of nakedness and simplicity. This encounter with the inner self further parts all these attributes of human attitude towards life and they at last lead to the freedom of the individual. The poet’s inner music of the soul seems to offer him real or genuine peace. The poet still has a faith in meditation and solitude.

5.3.7

The poet’s prayer to god is a plea to the god to save him from indifference because he assumes that it alone is unredeemable. Ezekiel strives for the opposite that is a concern which, according to

him, is a way of his life. Either concern for his own well being or the society’s welfare; the prayers voice forth belief and truth.

5.3.8

In the twin poems ‘Prayer I and Prayer II’ in the prayer, we find his restless soul searching for a resort under the dictum from ‘Dhammapada’: ‘Blessed is the tamed mind’. He hankers for ‘The ordered mind’ and ‘quietude’ Ezekiel uses the images of ‘eunuchs’ and ‘broken wheels’ which refer to express his rage against himself. He maintains that his past is revealed. In poetic words it is nothing but ‘Eunuchs of the deed’. This is again compared with broken wheels because life and art are crushed and bogged in crudity. He believes in the fact that a tamed mind only can mend his self and transform the urban environment into the Holy city where people can walk like the trees. The image of trees suggests both dignity and shelter as the poet puts it:

Compounded of reality
Are individuals idiocies
Which, mind-blessed is the tamed mind.
Can mend, and build the Holy city
Till people seem to walk, like trees
And man is measure of mankind.

(Ibid, 55)

5.3.9

Ezekiel is straightforward and informal, friendly in his approach to God. Gieve Patel is right when he thinks “Ezekiel’s God has a much more common unpaired denomination to him in his presence as a kill-all cure-all, pop God, metropolitan Bombay God,
Ezekiel's poetry deals with the complexities of the human situation in the urban environment. His poetry shows some traces of existential philosophy, the insecurity and the loneliness of the man in the city life. Ezekiel's quest for this quietude leads one to think that he is influenced by the existential philosophy. The poem 'Lawn' brings it out effectively.

Before I am awake
a back is bent
across a brown
and barren
patch of earth
the soil
requiring
not only water
and the seed
but patience at the root—
the gentle art
of leaving things alone.

(Ibid, 161)

An image of creative transformation is brought out through the above lines. According to the poet lawn is man made, domestical piece of nature. It exists in contrast to the nature. The poet's observation goes a little further and he further realises that the barren patch of earth requires not only water and root. Because one must have patience until the grass grows. The poet sublimates the patience as an art, gentle art, which is to leave things alone. The
Image of creative transformation shows that poet's inclination towards peace of mind amidst the chaos and noise of the city life.

5.3.12

As the poet gets nearer to his true self, he gets nearer his fellowmen. It is in one's awareness of being and in the realization of the personal power of self that the multiplicity of lights get fused into a 'steadfast radiation' and the apparent diversities and contradictions are resolved into harmony. Ezekiel aspires for commitment to this ideal, setting the way for the pilgrim's progress.

I close the door and sit alone
in kinship with the world
I am near everybody
being near myself alone.

(Ibid, 164)

5.3.13

The images of individual characteristics are shown by Ezekiel in various poems. The image of a self-centred middle aged, city dweller is portrayed in the poem in a number of ways in 'Hymns in Darkness'.

5.3.14

The image of a desirous man is brought out in the second section. He seems succeeded in his affairs but actually he is self deceived: "Self deception is a fact of being. How, then, to be undeceived?"
In the next part of the poem the persona plays different roles in the social drama of existence. He is a disciple and he is a guru, a father and a husband also. Like other men he believes in destiny. The fifth section of this poem conveys the image of the city dweller grovelling in spiritual darkness and his social life is a mere misnomer:

So much light in total darkness!
So much courage given, beside the abyss!

(Ibid, 219)

The persona is helped and forgiven in his darkness.

The paradoxical close of the section 'Home' brings the basic insight into spiritual understanding. This is also the message of the Gita. That God is realized through absolute surrender to him, not in reasoning. The Eighth section speaks of the poet persona as a modern man, whose 'self love' stands in the way of his spiritual realization? He is the victim of 'self' and thus he prays for material accomplishment. The poet ironically tells us that his prayers are answered because 'The Gods are kind'. In fact, he becomes a slave to his desires. His looking out of the window and contemplating the sources of his life may suggest his unbound desires and the means to attain them. This, in itself, is a great hindrance to spiritual union. The real task is to transcend one's self and merge it with the divine.
Another hindrance to the divine realization is indulgence in sex. This has been nicely told in the ninth section. The woman, although she pretends, does not make a sex play. 'Connives all the same' to force the man to sexual union. The poet ridicules Blake for calling the nakedness of woman the work of God. He believes that a man could never be peaceful on earth. So he ironically tells us that a man could be happy in hell which is 'a pretty lively place'. The poet further generalizes that man is man. The rest is unimportant. Age, physical appearance, material status, profession, social position, all are no pointers to understand the nature of man. His speech is important. In other words, the realization of the divine is independent of man's position, age etc. and other aspects of his personality and career. The poet also makes a mention of ignorance and knowledge in terms of familiar symbols of darkness and light. But the paradox in this section is overplayed. Darkness is said to have a kind of perfection, which light does not have.

It is said that it is easier to get a spiritual vision in ignorance than in knowledge, for knowledge is prone to reason. It is significant in the context of Ezekiel's sensibility that the prophet of Ezekiel's the Old Testament experienced a vision of the glory of the hard. The poet also expresses the innermost faults. This, he thinks, is the mean to be one with the absolute. The poet requests the God to

offer him a vision or a new insight which will cleanse his spirit. This is perhaps the spiritual regeneration.

5.3.19

Ezekiel qualifies speech as an expression that obeys that word of God in the poem ‘Speech and Silence’:

- Integral with the inner self
- Becomes the public spoken word,
- Emerging from a silence which
- Is not inarticulation,
- But rather speech that needs no words.
- Being obedience to the word.

(Ibid, 54)

5.4 Getting Transformed

5.4.1 (a)

A striking image of truth being the lamp on the path of life is conveyed through most of his poems.

Nissim Ezekiel is not a mystical poet in the traditional sense of the term. Almost none of his poems is directly about the mystical experience yet. Several critics have pointed out that there is an undertaking of spiritual quest in his poetry. As the poet himself says:

“'I am not a religious or even moral person in any conventional sense. Yet, I’ve always felt myself to be religious and moral in some sense. The gap between these two statements is the existential sphere of my poetry.”

(Kher Inder Nath, 1976: 5)
Nissim Ezekiel turned out to be a great poet on account of this craftsmanship, critical sensibility, a sense of discipline and devotion and mastery over the Indian English idiom. He is a keen practitioner of modern poetry with modernistic attitudes, he has rejected the old fashioned facets of poetic text and context.

Ezekiel deals with the themes of city life, sexuality, problems of marriage, the need to overcome alienation etc. In fact his poetry is endowed with irony, critical self consciousness, strong intellectual purpose, a multiplicity of tones and timbers. There is a highly balanced artistic distancing of emotion and expression. There is a new personality expressed and explained in the voice, theme, theory and technique of his poems. Life as portrayed in his poetry seems a quest for self realization, a spiritual Voyage:

"Life is visualized and realized as a quest for wholeness, for intellectual and spiritual saturation. Though the leitmotif is enlightenment of the spirit from distractions and obsessions, it is deeply grounded in the physical and social. The poetic quest fundamentally concerns how to live happily, harmoniously, ethically as an integrated human beings."

(Gajendrakumar, 2001: 154)

In this fundamental quest for life, the poet makes a subtle use of irony. His use of irony is not a third person attitude but an irony generated through the deep rooted affection for the general Indian scenario in its Virgin form. His irony is generated through a great reformatory zeal of the poet. As Michael Garman (In Naik M.K. 1968: 106) rightly points out Ezekiel's creative personage:
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"He brings to the established traditions of love, religion and the passing hour a modern attitude of the need for a commitment, an existential plunge into life, and of cold analytic disgust, becoming more detached and ironical as he develops."

The author's spiritual journey is not a general matter; it is strictly personal. It is not the part of the material world. It transcends the material world. It is a journey from physical to metaphysical; from the world of known to the unknown; from the concrete to the abstract. Through this the author establishes a relationship with the subconscious. He creates a counter world to the existing one. The poet's personal experiences are the major source of spiritual images. We tend to apprehend it but cannot become one with the author's perception. We cannot even enjoy the heavenly bliss as the author can. The poet remains in the dialogue with the absolute which is the creation of his own making. The poet's quest in this matter is always for the absolute. Even if it may be for truth, God, beauty ultimately he strives for the absolute. Gandhiji has identified himself with truth to God. The ideas employed by Nissim Ezekiel are elevated to that status. The poet reaches a state where he claims to be in union with the ideal he has chosen. The spirituality exists beyond the level of perception. It may be abstract but it is an enticing experience. The mystics generally lie beyond the deep rooted religious impulse, from the human heart find its initiation and end. Love may be a mind's experience or physical experience or metaphysical experience. Ezekiel's poetry reveals this primary concern with understanding the meaning of his life and attaining self realization. Poetry seems to be the means to
this goal. In the process of pursuing his quest, he is acutely conscious of his own failings and self deceptions, yet he finds himself preserved again and again. Some times he stumbles upon truth. He wonders at the secret principles that govern the universe and he tries to answer the mystery of life. Ezekiel seems in earnest with the search of truth. Makarand Paranjape (1988: 201) has rightly observed:

"Though Ezekiel explores the corruption and depravity of human relationship, the spiritual theme persists, resurfacing every now and then. It is as if the poet, who has edged himself close enough to truth so as to have glimpsed its face, always remains attached to it."

Ezekiel's poetic composition is a supreme synthesis: In his poetic cosmos departure, journey, sea voyage or ventures are the key spiritual images.

There seems a commonality in the images of 'hope' in the poetry of Ezekiel and T.S. Eliot. The shadow of the moral degeneration or spiritual chaos is there in Ezekiel but he ands it with the hope of redemption. Though his characters like Prufrock breathe, the air of despair, there is a ray of hope that Eliot shows to his protagonists. As S.Z.H. ABIDI (In Joshi R.A., Bhatnagar O.P., 1982: 22) has rightly said,

"The images of hope are present in a most despairing poem like 'Gerontion'."
5.4.1 (b)

Ezekiel’s ‘Enterprise’ seems to annul all difficulties as the poet says:

“When, finally, we reached the place
We hardly knew why we were there
The trip had darkened every face
Our deeds were neither great nor rare
Home is where we have to earn grace.”

(Ezekiel, 1989: 118)

There seems an indomitable faith of the poet in the home and there is a ray of hope that he is to gather grace in his native domain. The journey described in the poem is taken as a metaphor for life.

Home, in his poetry, is the metaphor for ‘self’. The poet could achieve redemption through one’s ‘psyche’. According to the poet, these two realms, outer and inner, are essential for the achievement of ultimate goal in life. As Manwar B., Twinkle, (2000: 261) says.

“Both these realms -outer and inner are essential to human growth and fulfilment. Such a pilgrimage leads from the outer to the inner, from the physical to the spiritual, from the intellectual discussion to the inner illumination and from the disintegration and chaos to order, discipline and self control.”

Ezekiel’s later poems, such as ‘Hymns in Darkness’ and ‘Foster Poems’ show his meditative religious philosophical concerns. He is not committed to any particular system of thought or religion, but he is always satisfied to be a man or God. His religion is the religion of love and charity which every religion cherishes and preaches. He had a contemplative blend of mind and thought deeply on the problems of sun and salvation. He is neither
a Saint who rates sensual pleasures nor a 'Yogi' who leaves the society and meditates in a thick forest to attain light but he is a man of the world who belongs to life and shares its joys and sorrows. Ezekiel makes his stand clear when he says that if he wrote a religious poem, the next poem is likely to be very secular, sceptical. He says that he attaches a great deal of importance to the worldliness of the world.

The images of reverence to God, or submission are evoked everywhere in his poetry. But there seems no 'escape' or 'negation' of life in his attitude. The image of God in a humanised form is found in Ezekiel's poetry. He speaks to God informally like a friend and often addresses him with banter and irony.

Though Ezekiel is serious in making his commitment, he does not seem committed to any ideology. Ezekiel's world is not without God. It is governed by the supernatural power. God has a supreme place in Ezekiel's world.

5.4.2

Life is a strange amalgam where one has to choose one course out of the multitude and resolve. The human beings are wiser than the dead because life means action. The poet succeeds in creating a commonplace situation and juxtaposes it with the spiritual side of the human beings. The poem 'Commitment' is the best example of its technical perfection where the poet takes resort to various spiritual images:
When, with sudden smile, the vision come
Inviting us to sweet disaster,
we envy saints their martyrdom
And press the accelerator.
At once we know that we must leap
Although we have not looked ahead,
Lake falsely calm and mountain steep
But we are wiser than the dead.

(Ezekiel, 1989: 121)

The poet persona seems disgusted with the static nature of
God. He seems oppressed by the God’s mysterious judgement
where both ‘oppressor’ and the ‘oppressed’ are victims. Ezekiel
seems waging a war against the God like an atheist. However it is
ture that the man in Ezekelian poetry is a God fearing man, despite
his critical and ironical views. Surprisingly, Ezekiel does not use
capital letters for God in second person. But he shows rather
submissive to the authority. The poet learns the truth that without
completely surrendering to God, according to the poet, there is no
possibility of learning simple truths of life:

Kick me around
a bit more, O Lord,
I see at last
there is no other way
for me to learn
your simple truths.

(Ibid, 212)

5.4.3

Ezekiel’s poetry almost always moves on the ‘ethical’ level
and not on the ‘aesthetic’ plane. His attitude is not religiously
Christian or purely religious even, as there is not ‘the leap of faith’.
The poet Persona makes a prayer to the God:
Do not choose me, O Lord,
to carry out thy purposes.
I'm quite worthy, of course,
but I've my own' purposes.
You've plenty of volunteers
to choose from, Lord.
Why pick on me, the selfish one?
O well, if you insist,
I'll do your will.
Please try to make it coincide with mine.

(Ibid)

The poet expresses a need for humility and sincerity and application of the questioning mind. This shows the poet is a man bearing scientific temperament. An image of unfathomable reality that remains undisturbed at any convulsion is evoked in the following lines:

You are master
neither of death nor of life
Belief will not save you,
nor unbelief
All you have
is the sense of reality
unfathomable
as it yields its secrets
slowly
one
by
one."

(Ezekiel, 1989: 225)

The poet feels that salvation doesn't depend upon belief or unbelief. As man is subject to life and mortality, he must discover the reality and its mystery.

5.4.4

'To a certain Lady' suggests that while 'Change is permanent' and perfect. 'The dancing moments of a kiss/Are real too'. Life
demands ‘Contact with the unknown and the strange/A feeling for the mystery’. Love sharpens ‘Our responses to the colours of creation’. His work of art deals with the ethical intelligence trying to get coherence between various demands and desires. His poems describe how to have saintliness and morality in the secular cosmos. In Ezekiel’s world of creativity personal and impersonal turn into command. The poet’s attention had changed from the quest for integration to an acceptance of the realities and the simplicity of life. The senses, sensibilities, survival and earthly awards became worthy of attention. Language plays a major role in his poetry to unlock the speaker’s mind and social context. Symbols, images are among the devices used to signify hypocrisy, pretence, limited opportunities and confusion. The previous attempts of attaining self integration has got failure and Ezekiel himself did not fuse into harmony. Sexual passion, love, family, politics, philosophy, poetry, the spiritual all have become independent and would not be coherent again.

5.4.5

The same feeling of existential encounter is evoked in the poem ‘The Cur’ with the horror of life in the form of:

A vicions crawl
Gangrenous in a vital limb
And drawn by some disorder of the brain.

(Ibid, 95)
5.4.6

This sight of physical decay highlights the contingency of the existence. The scene awakens the poet to the essential crisis of human existence which cannot be easily analyzed or described.

Beyond the data of the senses
Beyond the large inductions of the mind
Beyond illuminations,
Beyond the sensual certitudes
Which shine upon the abstract heart
Is such a dog-day sight as this I stumble on.

(Ibid)

5.4.7

The ultimate quest of the poet is for the inner stability and strength where the poet learns and cultivate, "The gentle art of leaving things alone". The image of the tranquil process of creativity and growth is beautifully employed in the poem 'Lawn':

a silence in depth
a stir of growth
an upward thrust
a transformation
botanic turmoil
in the heart of earth.

(Ibid, 162)

5.4.8

To achieve a complete self exposure one must give up all falsities and pretensions as seen in the lines of 'Tribute to the Upanishads':

At first it is cold,
I shiver there,
Later comes a tough of truth,
a ferment in the darkness,
finally a teasing light.

(Ibid, 206)
The seed must not die for new life, it must break its identity in order to sprout and bloom into sapling. One must come out from the trappings of egoism. The self should become mature to receive truth. The poet evokes this idea in the erotic metaphor of the lover's consummation in his poem *The Sensuality of Truth*:

5.4.9

The poet's search for identity becomes so strong that he merges with self, family, and society. He transcends one after the other boundaries of self, family, and society. Thus, his spiritual march becomes inward into the centre of his being as expressed in the lines of the poem *Tribute to the Upanishads*:

I don't want to be
the skin of the fruit
or the flesh
or even the seed,
which only grows into another
wholesome fruit

(Ezekiel, 1989: 205)

5.4.10

He seems to be a confused man without any vision of life in the first section of *Hymns in Darkness*.

The noise of the city is matched by the noise in his spirit.

(Ibid, 217)

The persona here has no definite goal in life. There is no limit to human desire for 'it multiplies like a candle in the eyes of a drunkard' but the first line of the 3rd section 'He has seen the signs but not been faithful to them', speaks of the clue to spiritual vision.
which he had glimpsed but unfortunately missed. He is unable to comprehend truth because it is his illusion that looks at the nakedness of truth in the spirit of a peeping tom.

5.4.11

The poem ‘Enterprise’ is remarkable for its lyrical gift of expression. It is an allegory of the Pilgrimage theme, it treats journey as a metaphor for life. This journey is compared with Eliot’s ‘Journey of the Magi’ which leads to spiritual transformation or regeneration. The urge and the enthusiasm for the inner meaning wear out:

We noticed nothing as we went,
A straggling crowd of little hope,
Ignoring what the thunder meant,
Deprived of common needs, like soap.

(Ibid, 118).

5.4.12

In the Book ‘The Exact Name’ here is a fine image from the poem ‘Two Images’ which suggests the fresh arrival of inspiration:

From the long dark tunnel
of that afternoon, crouching, humped,
waiting for the promised land,
I peeped out like a startled animal.
and saw a friend flapping his angelic wings.
I welcomed him.

(Ibid, 143)

Here he treats poetry as ‘inspired mathematics’, trying to find the precise image for his emotional complexity. Just as in the
second image, he says that has become results and was swept away by any stray emotion like 'fish-soul in that silent pool'

5.4.13

'Redemption' for the wicked is possible only through repentance and prayer, not indifference. Faith, belief and truth become then the goals of prayer as in the poem 'Prayer':

'Guard my tongue from evil'
Is a prayer within the reach
Of evil tongues. Indifference
Alone is unredeemable.
The rest is faith, belief and the truth
Pursued, at any rate, in prayer.
This is all I know of prayer.

(Ibid, 101)

The poet establishes a close communion with God where in he discovers that God is not a distant, ominous being to be propitiated, but contiguous to his inner spirit, a friend with whom he can joke. Ezekiel justifies his apparent atheistic stance not as an attitude expressing disbelief in God altogether, but in a visualization of God, as a right disciplinarian enforcing his rules.

5.4.14

According to Ezekiel conventionality is obviously a greater sin than ungodliness. A mind that is prepared to understand the sources or the roots of scrod is blessed one. Hinduism believes more in action than the meditation. A believer and non-believer are unworthy of their true potential.

Blessed is the man that Walketh
not in the counsel of the conventional
and is at home with
sin as with a wife.
He shall listen patiently to the scornful,
and understand the sources of their scorn.

(Ibid, 252)

5.4.15

In the further part Ezekiel descries God's benevolence to him
in making him lie down in green pastures. God restores his soul and
leads him in the path of righteousness.

Is the lord my Shepherd?
Shall I not want?
I lie down in green pastures, beside
the still waters. Lead me
away from these into thy
work.
When my soul is restored,
I walk the part of
self righteousness
I do fear evil they rod
And they staff do comfort
Me.

(Ibid, 255)

5.4.16

For Ezekiel God is a deity that bestows consolation, comfort
and encouragement in times of trial. He treated life as journey
where poetry would be the main source of discovering and
organizing one's own self. In one sense poetry to Ezekiel became a
way for self realization. He calls life a texture of poetry. He identifies
himself with poetry:

A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two, but poetry
Is something more. It is the why

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The how, the what, the flow
From which a poem comes.
In which the savage and the singular
The gentle, familiar,
Are all dissolved, the residue.
Is what you read, as a poem, the rest
Flows and is poetry.

(Ibid, 13)

In the second section of the poem Ezekiel expresses his
disappointment and shows his search for an identity in poetry. In
'The Third' he devises two ways for worldly fulfilment first through
material bliss and second through human relationships. Poetry to
Ezekiel appears to be a religion. He thinks that poetry should
breathe life. It should envisage the impulses. Suka Joshva (In
Kundu Rama, 2003: 55) rightly says, "If poetry should be related to
life's impulses, the poet must understand his own self first. A good
judgment of one's self can be made not in isolation but in the
context of his environment."

5.4.17

Ezekiel's images take multiple dimensions sometimes. The
images are physical and spiritual at one and the same time. The
poet thinks that 'grace' or 'redemption' can be obtained through
life, in the very act of living in the world. Both the realness of the
outer and inner are essential to human growth and fulfilment
Ezekiel uses, art images in 'Love Sonnet' when lovers love each
other in 'body and soul':

........................................You and I wait for words
Our love has formed like dew on summer nights.
The wind has ruffled up your hair:

We took in consort at the distant sea,
And feel it turbulent and salty there,
A passionate and perpetual mystery.
Floating down, the hill, as on a cloud,
Proud as lovers are, in articulate
We lose ourselves mingling with the crowd.

(Ezekiel, 1989: 120)

Not unafraid of this ambiguous fate Ezekiel shows a real relationship between the urban and the primitive the worldly and the spiritual, the lovers in a state of perfect harmony look down from the hill 'at the distant sea' which they perceive as a 'Passionate and perpetual mystery.' The sea 'imagery brings to our mind the flux between life and death. The lovers imbued with a sense of imaginative awareness descend the hill in the manner of floating on a cloud and their mingling with humanity is achieved without any dissonance. Though they express fear at their obscure destiny this fear or terror facades the heart of creation itself.

5.4.18

'Urban' contrasts the distant hills, image of purity and relief, with the city's routine street, traffic and noise, which is associated with the 'clamour' of his family:

The hills are always far away
He knows the broken roads, and moves
In circles tracked within his head
..............................................
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand.

(Ibid, 117)
5.5 Attaining Spiritual Regeneration

The basic human instincts are violent. It is rightly said by Freud that the violent tendencies cannot be suppressed: On the contrary these tendencies should be transformed into better actions.

5.5.1

The ‘Morning Prayer’ is a poem where poet comes with somewhat serious tone. He expresses the need for escaping from the basic instincts and establishing a kinship with the elements like ‘Sky, Air, earth, fire and sea. He desires a spiritual regeneration by means of ‘a fresh outlook’ with his conscience. Despite the passion of the blood and the enigma of elements he wants to be a good human being. The images of a hopeful spiritual regeneration are at the core of the poem ‘Morning Prayer’:

God grant me certainty
In kinship with the sky,
Air, earth, fire, sea
And the fresh inward eye
Whatever the enigma,
The passion of the blood,
Grant me the metaphor
To make it human good.”

(Ibid, 122)

The poet wants to achieve an enigmatic spiritual regeneration in which the elements merge with the spirit. He wants a total spiritual change and desires to work at the world with ‘a fresh inward eye’. The images like ‘a fresh inward eye’ convey the poet’s mystical spiritual quest; thought it may be the passion of blood...
resulting into the ultimate good of the human kind. Thus the poet's attitude is rather like a saint who believes in the ultimate power of the elements.

5.5.2

Ezekiel has a thorough belief in humanism. With the spiritual images in his poems, he expresses his deep concern for humanity and tries to find out what ails mankind and how to get out of it. His poetry is a unique combination of his personal feelings and the knowledge which imposes a pattern. He is good at recreating characters. His characters are life like. Ezekiel makes a subtle parody of the people who easily work out the game of injustice:

5.5.3

Ezekiel's spiritual quest includes the commonplace situation of discriminating man and man on the basis of knowledge and power in society. What is needed is the humanity that understands people. Ezekiel has insight into human nature and is aware of man's predicament in the world. He tells us about man's helplessness and suggests a way out of it. He says:

You are master
neither of death nor of life
Belief will not save you,
no unbelief
All you have
is the sense of reality.

(Ibid, 225)

The diction, imagery and the verse movement here are markedly different from those of Ezekiel's earlier poems. There has
been no self transformation, no self expansion integrating into the elements of mystical. Ezekiel sometimes comes with an insight of self revelation. This typical insight in Ezekiel is very rarely found.

5.5.4

Ezekiel's poetry bears the testimony of a constant under current or awareness of the manifold dimensions of the mystery. The image of God's grandeur and sublimity is conveyed through the following lines:

I've stripped off a hundred veils  
and still there are more  
that cover your Creation.

(Ibid, 156)

Ezekiel's spiritual images spring from the great diversity of ideals. An ideal itself exists as the object of their quest. The ideals may be personal or impersonal, Theistic or agnostic, or even atheistic. His poetic works reflect conduct, character and behaviour. 'On an African Mask' deals with the 'passion of mind or heart/ Acquire the equilibrium of art'.

Ezekiel is wise with experience that any sexual being is good enough for his purpose. This newly acquired wisdom mocks his former chaste self because he realizes that sex, like food, is hunger and a basic human instinct that needs satisfaction. In 'Love Poem' Ezekiel tries to celebrate spiritual transformation caused by love:

..........................Your gentle hands  
Were eloquent, your eyes were bright  
You wondered why you feared the night  
So many years in barren lands.

(Ibid, 142)
As a result of the spiritual change the poet persona perceives women in a dual form i.e. as a ‘beast of sex’ and ‘myth and dream’. Finding that sex is as well a source of blessedness. The poem ends on a note of erotic ecstasy:

The long and partly lyric view
The self renewing warmth, the voice,
To indicate decisive choice,
And storms of love I wish for you.

(Ibid, p.142)

Thus, the poet’s beliefs, his shaping of the moral being, his preoccupation with the spiritual life, religious experiences form the basis of Ezekiel’s poetic journey. The allied images evoke Ezekiel’s spiritual word and give new dimensions to his poetry.