CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION
One of the well-known Indian poets in English, Nissim Ezekiel has attracted considerable critical attention from scholars both from India and abroad. Not only does he stand out as a humanist poet in the whole gamut of post-independence Indian poetry in English but is also unsurpassed in depth of sensibility. Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry has been read throughout the country among the academic circles and his poetry attracted nationwide attention. Saleem Peradina claims:

Ezekiel can be said to be the first important Indian poet. In terms of significant output he can still be counted as one of the best.

Ezekiel is a poet who has dominated the landscape of post-independence Indian English poetry. His poems are created from the experiences of his own life and they reflect realities of life. Nissim Ezekiel is a poet who has been consistently concerned with the human aspects of life. The mark of humanism present in six volumes of his poems namely, *A Time to Change* (1952) *Sixty*
Poems (1953), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), Hymns in Darkness (1973) and Latter-Day Psalms (1982). Besides the poem, three of his plays—Marriage Poem (1969), Nalini (1969) and Don’t Call It Suicide (1993) are to be studied in the present thesis. Nissim Ezekiel is concerned about man and his relationship with others. Nissim Ezekiel believes in humanism. He expresses his concern for humanity in poem after poem and tries to find out what ails humankind.

Nissim Ezekiel does not believe in mysticism and supernatural being. He trusts in honest work. He counts sincerity and dedication to one’s profession as a means to acquire holiness. Nissim Ezekiel does not long for a celestial home nor does he want living an exotic life. But his concern for the common man gives his poetry a kind of authenticity and liveliness which at once distinguish him from others. His awareness of the need of a common person is vividly seen in the very first poem, which, incidentally, has the same title with that of the volume called A Time to Change (1952). Nissim Ezekiel writes:

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? ²

Thus, Nissim Ezekiel has aroused the curiosity of the readers and the critics to prop further into the underlying themes of his poetry. Chetan Karnani is a well-known critic on Nissim Ezekiel. In his book Nissim Ezekiel (1974), Karnani has elaborately stated the place of Nissim Ezekiel as a poet in the realm of Indian Poetry in English. Even though Karnani made a Critical study of the volumes of poems from A Time to Change to The Exact Name and the Three Plays Nalini, Marriage Poem and The Sleepwalkers he has left the humanism of
the poet unexplored. In the poem ‘Case Study’, “he shopped /Around for dreams and projects later dropped”^3, is an obvious ironic reference to himself for his frequent change of his jobs. But he permanently remained a dedicated poet all through his life. His unceasing dedication to poetry placed him in a position of considerable importance in the post-Independent Indian English Literature.

In 1976, the *Journal of South Asian Literature* Published a Special number on Nissim Ezekiel. Nine eminent critics from India, England and America paid a richly deserved tribute to Nissim Ezekiel in this issue. Christopher Wiseman wrote a brilliant article on the technique of Ezekiel’s poetry while Prof. V.A Shahane has penned down an excellent article on the intellectual element in his poetry. The articles paid to him in this issue well gauged the range of Nissim’s achievement as a poet.

*The Journal of Indian Writing in English* in July 1986 brought out a *Special Number: Nissim Ezekiel* comprising of fourteen critical essays. The compilation of the essays into a Special Number is a mark of attribute offered to Nissim Ezekiel in his profession by *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*. However, none of the contributors has written an article on the Humanistic elements in Ezekiel’s poetry.

Suresh Chandra Dwivedi had edited another book entitled *Perspectives on Nissim Ezekiel* (1989), *Essays in Honour of Rosemary C. Wilkinson* that contains a brilliant Collection of twenty-one papers on the poetry and drama of Nissim Ezekiel. The Contributors are the eminent critics and poets and all their essays are captivating. The book indeed is a great source of Knowledge for readers and scholars who opted to go for a proper understanding of Nissim Ezekiel’s work. The book critically assesses Nissim Ezekiel’s works and it is of great value to me in my research. The book contains some articles that reflect the
humanism of Nissim Ezekiel here and there. Vasant A Shahane asserts Nissim Ezekiel’s constant stress on humanism as his basic belief in his essay, “The Religious Philosophical Strain in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. However, other essays in the book have not discussed exhaustively, the humanism of Nissim Ezekiel.

Bruce King in his book *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (1987) devoted a chapter on “Ezekiel and His Influence” where he briefly explains Nissim Ezekiel’s works. King Writes:

> Whereas previously Indian English verse was a hobby, something done in spare moments, Ezekiel made it central to his life. Others wrote poems, he wrote poetry.  

Bijay Kumar Das’s *The Horizon of Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry* (1995) is an important book on Nissim Ezekiel. Das has made a humble attempt to interpret Nissim Ezekiel’s poetic career such as the making of the poet, the attainment and the development of technique. Das, in the essay “The Making of the Poet” has highlighted the gist of humanism but he does not give the exegesis of humanism in any of the essays in his book. *Contemporary Indian Literature in English: A Humanistic Perspective* (1999) edited by Mithilesh K. Pandey is a book in which Sanjit Mishra contributed an essay on the *Humanistic Aspect of Nissim Ezekiel’s Recent Poetry*. The essay briefly deals with the last two volumes of Ezekiel’s poetry viz-*Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter Day Psalms* as such it is limited and not dependable entirely for a proper study of his humanism.

Another notable book is Surya Nath Pandey’s edited book, entitled *Nissim Ezekiel: Dimensions of a Poetic Genius* (1999) containing fourteen remarkable essays discussing the basic constituents of Nissim Ezekiel’s poetic oeuvre. Of the fourteen essays, six essays are included in section B, which are
specifically written for this volume and they view the whole gamut of Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry in its totality. The conspicuous humanistic aspect of Nissim Ezekiel has been taken care of in an independent piece by P.R Kher as “Neo-Humanism in Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry.” Kher has appropriately quoted Migue de Unamuno’s philosophical framework to explain Ezekiel’s humanistic concern:

I would choose neither “the human” nor “humanity”, neither the simple adjective nor the substantivized adjective, but the concrete substantive: man, the man of flesh and blood, the man who is born, suffers and dies -- above all, who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and loves.  

Another important book on Nissim Ezekiel is R. Raj Rao’s Nissim Ezekiel: The Authorized Biography published by Penguin books in 2000. R Raj Rao had started working on it from 1994. The book is a captivating biography that opens a readers’ mind to comprehend the poet’s life and works. The book is indeed a well-organized biography. The valuable information available in the book could enlighten the readers in understanding the poet. Rao writes Nissim Ezekiel still as a man of influence in 1990. However, the middle of nineties had shown the decline of his memory, so is his fame. The book even though, a well written biography, is devoid of the real study of Nissim Ezekiel’s humanism as it had emphasized mainly on the experiences of Ezekiel’s life. Sanjit Mishra has made a wider coverage of themes with an analysis of the volumes of poetry in his book The Poetic Art of Nissim Ezekiel (2001). Mishra has evaluated the expanding poetic sensibility of Nissim in its totality to place him in the galaxy of modern Indian poets. This book gives an account of Nissim Ezekiel’s poetic personality in all its complexity and seeks to fill in a serious gap in his Scholarship. . Divided in six Chapters, Mishra devoted a whole Chapter on the
Humanist Phase, which would be of great value to the study on Ezekiel's humanism. Chetan Karnani, though an influential critic of Nissim Ezekiel, obviously excludes *Hymns in Darkness* (1973) and *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982) in his book *Nissim Ezekiel* (1974) for they were published later.

In the introduction of his book, *The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel* (2002), A. Raghu comments on Ezekiel as 'Tall and fair and handsome, he appeared to me a god-like figure.' A. Raghu says that the book's primary aim is to focus on the critical attention on the totality of the thematic and stylistic contents of Ezekiel's poetic corpus. Raghu has briefly outlined the life of Nissim Ezekiel and discusses the major factors influencing him as a poet. Though the book is a befitting critical study source on Nissim Ezekiel, the author has skipped most of the elements of humanism. Chetan Karnani, in his another book, *Indian Writing in English* (1995) writes:

Like another distinguished writer, R.K Narayan, he is unpretentious yet discipline. Also like Narayan, he avoids the *dilettanism and Philistinism* of Mulk Raj Anand, and the pretentiousness and pose of Raj Rao. No intricate symbolism or far-fetched mythology burdens Ezekiel's work and yet the poetry clicks. He believes neither in the bogus repetition of P.Lal nor in the shock tactics of A.K. Ramanujan, yet he creates an authentic effect. His poetry is simple, introspective and analytical.

David McCutcheon has pointed out:

Ezekiel belongs with Thom Gunn, R.S. Thomas, Elizabeth Jennings, Anthony Thwaite and others like them. He has their cautions, discriminating style, precise analytical, with its conscious rejection of the heroic and the passionate as also of the sentimental and cosy.
Addressed to be the Godfather of Indo-Anglian Poetry, Nissim Ezekiel does not need to feel that sense of tough competition that other poets faced in some parts of the world. No particular dogma or ideology fascinated Nissim Ezekiel whether in religion or in politics. He tends to use the various traditions of Judaism, Hinduism, and Christianity as his intellectual framework otherwise; he has maintained freedom from any rigidity or orthodoxy in his beliefs.

Nissim Ezekiel was born on 16 December 1924 to Moses Talker and Diana of a Bene Israel. He becomes a legend in his lifetime. Nissim is a Hebrew word which means ‘justice’. Though he did hold many prominent places in various fields, Nissim Ezekiel will however, be remembered primarily as a poet. He published eight volumes of poems during his poetic odyssey, which spanned over a period of half a century. Nissim’s first book *A Time to Change* (1952) introduced both the modernist as well the humanist elements in Indian poetry in English. The succeeding volumes include *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1958), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1973) and *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982). The last volume has won him the Sahitya Akademi Award. His plays are *Marriage Poem* (1969), *Nalini* (1969) and *The Sleepwalkers* (1969) and *Don’t Call It Suicide* (1993). His *Collected Poems* published by Oxford University Press in 1989 remained his last published poetical work. A winner of several coveted laurels including the prestigious Padma Shri for his contribution to ‘Indian Literature in English’ Nissim Ezekiel becomes a celebrated poet in the later half of the twentieth century.

In the beginning of the 1930s, Nissim Ezekiel started his schooling at convent of Jesus and Mary, run by Christian missionaries. Nissim Ezekiel shifted to the Antonio D’ Souza High School and got admitted to the third standard in 1934 where he remained until 1941. The students belonged to all the major
communities - Hindu, Muslim and Christians. His childhood experience in his school is reflected in his biographical poem, 'Background Casually' where he refers himself as 'a mugging Jew among the wolves'. He writes:

I went to Roman Catholic school  
A mugging Jew among the wolves.  
They told me I had killed the Christ,  
That year I won the scripture prize.  
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.

I grew in terror of the strong;  
But undernourished Hindu lads,  

[Collected Poems, p.179]

During his school days from the third to the seventh standard, the year between 1934 and 1940, Nissim Ezekiel participated in all the games and sports played in the School. The games included cricket, football, hockey and basketball. R Raj Rao in his biography says that, Ezekiel was bad at all the games. He could never represent his class in any of the games played at local competitions. The same is with athletic sports like race, high and long jump. In race, he was usually the last to arrive. He never won a prize. It frustrated him greatly. Realizing games and sports were not his forte he turned to arts and took part in dramas. However, here too he failed terribly, forgetting his lines while on the stage. Consequently, the spectators in the auditorium, mostly fellow-pupils and their parents and the staff of the School would burst out with laughter. After his introspection of his own life, Nissim Ezekiel says he has experienced a series of failures on which he could perhaps write an entire book! Being so much convinced over his failures, he said if ever he writes his autobiography, he will call it 'A Thousand Failure'.

During his boyhood, Nissim Ezekiel frequently suffered from severe headaches, which kept him absent from school. This ailment, which stayed with him for quite a long time was 'miraculously' cured by following the instruction
of a psychology book he read from the libraries in London. The writer of that article on headaches claimed that people who blamed on others for their trouble suffered from headaches. It tells that headaches would automatically disappear if one learns to blame oneself instead of putting the blame on others. This was because taking the responsibility for one's actions released the anger and tension in one's system and prevented a headache from setting in. Since then he resolved to blame himself for his woes rather than taking it out on others. Being impressed with the wisdom of the article, Nissim Ezekiel describes it as 'one of the major events in my life'.

Even though he was not good in physical activities like games and sports and acting on the stage, he had developed a taste for writing poetry at his early stage. In his interview to the critic and academician John B. Beston, Nissim Ezekiel stated that he actually started out writing fairy tales in imitation of what he read, and then gained perfection to poetry around the age of twelve. Perhaps he wrote his first complete poem in 1936. However, in his interview with Behram Contractor, Ezekiel suggested that he wrote his first poem when he was barely nine or ten years old which seems less likely.

How Nissim Ezekiel's first poem was received in his own class has a lasting effect on his mind. One of his classmates to whom he first recited his poem had shown it to a woman teacher, who exclaimed, 'Ah, ha, listen all of you; we have a poet in the class.' After this remark Nissim Ezekiel says: 'I decided at that moment, whatever happens, I am going to write poetry, good, bad or indifferent.' Unfortunately, the poem and the name of the woman teacher that was responsible for shaping not only of Nissim Ezekiel as a poet but the course of Indian English poetry is not available. Nissim Ezekiel's first piece was published in *Social Welfare* (1942), which was later on reprinted in his college

Nissim Ezekiel, having pulled through his school life in this way, took his matriculation in 1941, when he was less than seventeen. Nissim Ezekiel did well. The Ezekiel’s family changed their residence around 1941. They shifted into an apartment, which was part of a colony of bungalows, known as The Retreat. It is the perfect name for the poet’s house as he would always returned to live first with other members of the family, then by himself.

In 1943, Nissim Ezekiel passed his Inter Arts. He was doing his BA between the year 1943 and 1945. During these years, he first seriously acquainted himself with all the great masters of the western literary world starting from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot. The ideas and the writings of Eliot and Pound had special influence upon him. Nissim Ezekiel passed his BA with a First class in 1945. His examination result motivated him to register for his MA in English literature at Wilson College. Throughout his BA course for four years, he had won a Scholarship. He again enjoyed a monthly Stipend of Rs.40 by becoming a Fellow of Wilson College for two years, from June 1945 to June 1947. He took tutorial classes for the first year and Inter Arts students of the college. At the same time, he began teaching at Vile Parle, which fetched him a small income. But, Wilson College objected his teaching at Hansraj Morarji School because of his being a Fellow of their College thereby he had to leave his job. The Fellowship at his college and his teaching at Hansraj Morarji School gave him the privilege of having a taste of teaching, and he loved it. He realized the wonderful thing about teaching profession that one learns while one teaches.
He was thrilled to study Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Yeats in more advanced level. They were the authors who had fascinated him during his BA lasses. In 1947, Nissim Ezekiel passed his MA with a high Second class, topped the university, and won a coveted prize, the R.K. Lagu Prize. On completion of his MA, his fellowship too ended. Nissim Ezekiel appeared in an interview for lectureship at Khalsa College and got the job before the declaration of his MA result. Nissim Ezekiel spent a brief stint as a teacher of English literature at Khalsa College until he grew restless in his job and resigned after working just for a year from June 1947 to June 1948. He spent the rest of 1948, wandering aimlessly; writing poetry, free-lancing for newspapers and magazines like the *Times of India*, *Free Press Journal* and *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Journal*, and worked for the Radical Democratic Party. He went on with these works until November that year, when 'an unexpected thing happened' to him. This unexpected thing was a real turning point in Nissim Ezekiel’s literary career when unbelievably fortune favored Ezekiel by sending an elderly friend Ebrahim Alkazi, a man of arts, with a strong interest in painting and theatre. He invited him to accompany him to London.

Ebrahim Alkazi in many ways was a father figure to him. Nissim Ezekiel had a deeper urge to see beyond the Indian horizons possibly goaded by a typical colonial mentality tempting him to visit England. The way Alkazi arrived into his life shocked and surprised Nissim Ezekiel and so do his departure from him. It was before Nissim could recover his shock from the offer to go to London that he was handed a steamer ticket, which cost Rs. 620. He was then taken to a secondhand clothes shop in Bhendi Bazaar to buy a warm wear. Alkazi sailed a month before him so Nissim Ezekiel voyaged himself by the *Jal Azad* where he had to face the prospect of a twenty-six-days voyage at sea via the Suez Canal, with barely ten pounds in his pocket.
Nissim Ezekiel initially stayed with Alkazi when he reached London in November 1948. Then he took up a clerical post in the Internal Affairs Department of the Indian High Commission through the help of its Commissioner Krishna Menon and thus he could partially meet his living expenses. Alkazi and Nissim Ezekiel regularly visited all the 'hideouts' especially on weekends, and had a rollicking time. They discovered that London was a cultural oasis, full of museums, art galleries and theatres. Nissim Ezekiel now feels that he had acquired the quality of a true educated man, the kind of feeling, which is common among Indians who go to England for the first time. His office was at Aldwych, where he commuted by bus, as he did back in Bombay, which he continued almost throughout his life. Nissim Ezekiel's special gifts as a writer was realized and Menon assigned him to edit the newsletter, a responsibility he loved to carry out even in later of his life, though mostly gratis.

In course of time, he discovered the existence of the City Literary Institute that offered academic courses of interest. It was located barely five to seven minutes walking distance from India House. He enrolled himself for evening classes in Chinese and Western Philosophy, Art Appreciation and a couple of other subjects. The Institute was partially funded by the government of UK so the fees are 'rock bottom'. The fees were comparatively less and he merely paid seven to ten shillings for each three-month course. He, at the same time registered for a B.A. in philosophy at Birbeck College, affiliated to the University of London and studied under the legendary philosopher C.E.M Joad, about Plato, Aristotle and the Existentialists. He, however, could not complete the course for lack of time. Nissim Ezekiel benefited from both of the courses at the City Literary Institute and Birbeck College, though he could not complete his B.A. The courses he underwent in both the institutions changed his ideas on rationalism, and he was able to see life anew. Earlier while in India, he was a
follower of M.N Roy. He now discarded the Royist idea. The courses in London were all intellectually enriching and he never regretted about these courses he underwent. One of the famous episodes of his life occurred here. He resigned from his job in India House. He said to V. C. Harris:

My experience in England, studying, working, shutting myself up in an underground room for hours together and thinking and writing poems. Yes, that’s when I take a drastic decision: I resign the job[ at India House] and take to full-time writing earning a pound here and a pound there.14

In the Bombay magazine interview, he Claims he grew tired of the ‘Soullessness’ of the job at India House. After he resigned from this job he sent and reviewed poems to the editors of the Britain journals like the Strand Magazine, and The Illustrated weekly of India, ‘delivering Christmas mail, selling masalas in basements and grabbing any means of livelihood that came on his way. According to Behram Contractor, Nissim Ezekiel’s “life was tough, he sat in a cellar, starved and wrote, living on whatever little money he could garner from reviews and articles”.15 Moreover, Alkazi had asked Ezekiel to make way for his wife Roshenara who came to visit him in London. Nissim Ezekiel then accommodated himself in the basement room of the same building where Alkazi stayed. This was the least expensive room he could find in London. Alkazi had completed his course at the Royal Academy and returned with his wife to Bombay without inviting Nissim Ezekiel to go with them.

Nissim Ezekiel now forcibly shut himself in his room to read and write a —sort of ‘a self-imposed exile’. He immortalized it in his autobiographical poem ‘Background Casually’ where he sang philosophy, poverty and poetry as the three companions that shared his basement room. Having no one to depend on he
started writing to his friend Krishna Paigankar in India, and asked him to come to England. Paigankar really reached England and got a job at the India House to support himself and Nissim Ezekiel. Paigankar earned money, did the shopping like a ‘husband’ but had to be assured of a meal whenever he came home. Nissim Ezekiel did the cooking whenever he was not involved with writing poetry.

Even though life in London gained him with artistic and intellectual talents, he was pressed with financial constraint. The money he earned from the newspapers and magazines in addition to what his brother Joe sent from Bombay was insufficient. Yet despite financial stringencies, Nissim Ezekiel’s love for poetry remained predominant in his London sojourn leading to the blossom of *A Time to Change*. At the same time, Krishna Paigankar began getting letters from home giving him news of his mother’s illness.

They had no other alternative, but to think of returning to Bombay. Both of them were penniless. Nissim Ezekiel now had no one to offer him a voyage ticket. Ebrahim Alkazi, the generous man who brought him to England was nowhere on the scene. Paigankar, having made an inquiry learned that a warship whose sailors being on strike desperately looked for staff to join them in the voyage. The two were faced with no other option so they approached for the job at the warship. They arranged a return passage by accepting a menial job on a cargo ship bound for Indo-China. They had to do a mean job the ‘lowest of low’ jobs like washing decks, stoking coal and wiping furniture. They board their ship from Dover in March 1952 and reached India in May 1952. Indeed, the work in the ship was hard and laborious which went on for eight hours a day. Yet Nissim Ezekiel not even once thought that the work was too degrading for a man of his education and talents. He possessed some kind of his ancestors’ stamina and their sense of dignity in his bones, which gave him the determination to keep going. Nissim Ezekiel was awarded the certificate of ‘Able seaman’, for his honest and
impressive work on board. He cherished this ‘honour’ as much as all the literary awards he won during his lifetime. Commenting on it, a well-known poet, Vilas Sarang calls:

Nissim Ezekiel a transitional poet who was an “able seaman” but not a “Captain” of poetry.¹⁶

Amidst the physical stress, there happened a mind-blowing thing. Nissim Ezekiel, to his surprise received copies of *A Time to Change* (1952) at Marseilles, while the ship had docked. The Fortune Press people were kind enough to send him the books by parcel to whom he had left his itinerary. The news astonished everyone who boards the ship that they travel with a poet of their own compatriot. The sailors felt delighted, although few of them were equipped to understand the niceties of poetry. The ship owners changed their attitude and were extra kind to Nissim Ezekiel and Paigankar. They were marveled to see a poet toiling away; scrubbing decks like any humble person after his interview appeared along with his photograph on the front page of the local *Tabloid* newspaper.

*A Time to Change* (1952) is the first published work of Nissim Ezekiel in London. A student of philosophy, who gradually discovered himself to be an authentic poet and with single minded dedication devote himself to writing an impressive poetry. To him life is a journey where poetry would be the chief source of discovering and organizing one’s self. Ezekiel treated poetry as a way of life, as a continuous flow and as something, which is inextricably related to existence.

When he returned to Bombay Nissim Ezekiel was completely a changed man having lost his complete faith in Royism. Immediately after his return from England in May 1952, Nissim Ezekiel joined *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, as
a sub-editor. He served there for two years. He also worked in the All India Radio for ten years (1952-1962) as a broadcaster on art and literature. The year 1952 became eventful and remarkable year for Nissim Ezekiel. He returned to India after three years of his stay in England and began associating with *The Illustrated Weekly*. On 23 November 1952, Nissim Ezekiel and Daisy were married at the Magen David Synagogue. Ezekiel’s family lived in The Retreat at the time of Nissim’s marriage. His marriage of course remained a personal affair and with great reluctance he described it as a ‘compromising’ marriage’ and a ‘semi-love marriage’ in course of time the ‘compromising marriage’ turned into uncompromising marriage making the couple live separately till their death.

Nissim Ezekiel started going to Alkazi’s Place in Colaba to resume his theatre relationship with him although a little disharmony had developed between them in England. Nissim Ezekiel decided to let bygones be bygones. However, different ideas cropped up between Alkazi and other members of the Theatre Group. Alkazi wanted the production of only serious plays like Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Beckett while other members wanted the addition of popular plays as well. Thus, a rift soon took place among the members of Theatre Group. Alkazi had asked Nissim Ezekiel to resign with him. Alkazi and Nissim Ezekiel shocked the committee by their decision to resign from the Theatre group when after a different ideas cropped up between Alkazi and other members. Alyque Padamsee, a committee member of Theatre Group joined them and they formed the Theater Unit. Nissim got involved so much in the activity of the newly formed Theatre Unit that he reached home late evening. Thus, the first seeds of discord between him and his wife had been sown. In the meanwhile, his literary credentials got him appointed as the first editor of the *Quest* in 1955. Despite the efforts of Alkazi, Nissim Ezekiel and Alyque Padamsee, the Theatre Unit came to an abrupt end. According to Alkazi the hired actors were not
committed to theatre so the Theatre Unit ends. While on one hand the actors were not pleased with Alkazi’s attitude shown to them. Nissim Ezekiel tries to reason out the complaints of the actors. But Alkazi was not willing to discuss the matter. Having had no option, Ezekiel brought up the matter in a committee meeting, but Nissim Ezekiel walked out of the meeting, as Alkazi put the blame on him. Meanwhile, Alkazi obtained a job at the National School of Drama and shifted to Delhi. The Theatre Unit collapsed with his exodus.

On the other hand, Ezekiel got monotonous to his job at the Weekly. He applied to the advertisement issued by an advertising agency known as Shilpi, run by the Sarabhais, based in Ahmedabad. However, the post he applied was for Bombay. Ezekiel appeared in the interview and accepted copywriting job from Gira Sarabhai, the one who was the in charge of the Shilpi. The Sarabhais liked him for his intelligence and his sincerity and of course for his work ethics. After almost his completion of two years at Shilpi in 1956, he explored for the possibility of resigning from his job. But he was unexpectedly offered the post of the manager which was the top administrative post. Luck still favored Ezekiel with another surprising offer. He visited America and stayed there for six months as the manager of the Shilpi to learn more about advertising’s hard sell.

In Bombay magazine Nissim Ezekiel wrote that, he learnt more about art and other related things in America, than he did about advertising. He was committed to the Sarabhais by a sort of bend, having enjoyed their hospitality in America. But, he knew he would have to give up advertising as it was simply not his domain of expertise. He could pull through it, as he was good at human relations and had abundant common sense.

In the 50’s Nissim Ezekiel was occupied with the poetry of aspiring poets and paved a way for a life-long association with the PEN. (Poets, Essayists,
Novelists) He took over as the editor of the journal when Madame Sophiya, the founder and the editor died in April 1986. Having chucked his job at Shilpi, Nissim Ezekiel joined the post of the General Manager for picture-frame in Gandhi's Manufacturing Company, Chemould where he wrote all the poems of *The Unfinished Man* in a single year. After leaving, Chemould Nissim Ezekiel immediately worked as a manager in *Design Magazine*, but stayed with them hardly for three months. Nissim Ezekiel edited *Quest* a scholarly journal founded by A.B shah between 1955 and 1957. In 1958, Nissim published his volume *The Third*. It was self-published, but of course like *Sixty Poems*, distributed by the Strand Bookshop of Bombay owned by his friend Shanbhag. He became an associate editor in-charge of the reviews section of the *Imprint* in 1961 and worked for seven years. The same year in June, he shifted back to the academics by accepting lectureship with the Headship of English Department in Mithibai College of Arts, Vile Parle Bombay and remained there for eleven years. Besides teaching, he worked as an art critic of the *Times of India* (1964-66).

*The Third* (1958) was dedicated to Krishnanath whose identity remains a mystery. The thirty-six poems in this volume were written between 1954 and 1958. Nissim Ezekiel wore a third-person mask to disguise himself in several poems, and deflected suspicion that the poems might be about the conflicts he was going through as a real person.

His “Letter from Rangoon” is the only travel poem in *The Third* and possibly in his entire body of work. This poem is based on his impression of Burma’s capital city Rangoon that he probably had visited when he was a Royist. Nissim Ezekiel’s period of his uncertain life ended at the end of the ‘50s. This was especially concerned with his job and his poetic career. Nissim Ezekiel enjoyed his teaching job at Mithibai College in comparison with all other jobs he had done earlier. He told R Raj Rao:
When I went back to college teaching, I felt this was an important change in my life [for the better]. I made up my mind never to go back to any other kind of job, even if it meant more money. 18

He enjoyed teaching immensely, he could do teaching much more simply, and naturally in comparison with all the earlier jobs he had done. Nissim Ezekiel got another opportunity to go abroad for the third time in 1964, in England at the behest of Prof. Jeffares who invited him to be a visiting professor at the University of Leeds and delivered lectures on Indian Writing in English in the University. The British Council in India gave him a travel grant. Nissim Ezekiel took Daisy with him and used the airfare he received to travel by sea in order to cover the expenses of both of them. Nissim Ezekiel and Daisy left Bombay by the first half of December 1963 by steamer. He returned to Mithibai College in Bombay to resume his duties in June 1964. Nissim Ezekiel visited America for the second time in March 1967 and stayed with A.K. Ramanujan at the University of Chicago. He held his sessions of poetry and delivered lectures in various universities on Indian Writing in English. April 1967 marked a significant milestone in his life as he took L.S.D trips for the first time having a far-reaching impact on his poetry, which he put it “a starting point for a self-transforming process.” 19 He worked as the Poetry editor of The Illustrated Weekly from 1969 to 1971. He shifted on to the University of Bombay as Reader in American Literature in 1972 and subsequently upgraded to Professorship in 1978, a position he held until his superannuation in 1985. Between the years 1973 and 1978, he worked as a Radio and T.V. Columnist. In 1974, he, in collaboration with Vrinda Nabar translated into English the Marathi work, Snake-Skin and Other Poems of Indra Sant. He visited America the same year on a Cultural Exchange Programme of the Government of the United States and
gave readings from his works besides attending seminars at various universities. In 1976, Oxford University Press brought out his sixth poetic volume *Hymns in Darkness*. Nissim had achieved fame at international level as a contemporary poet and the American periodical, *Journal of South Asian Literature* (1976) brought out a Special Issue on him. The same year he attended the International Colloquium on the Inter-cultural Encounters in Literature at the East-West centre, Hawaii, as a delegate with a Professional Associate Award. On the 30 April 1976, he was honoured with the Excellence Award for his Contribution to poetry. The imposition of the Emergency in the mid- seventies banished the publication of his journal *Quest* and he started editing *Freedom First*, a fortnightly devoted to literary and intellectual pursuits in 1977. He was present at the Edinburgh Arts Festival and read his poems at poetry reading sessions in 1983. He went to Salzburg in 1985 and a year later attended the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany. He visited several other German cities and indulge himself in reading poems and participating in the discussions. In the year 1986, he chaired the international panels of judges for *Commonwealth International Poetry Award*. The same year in 14 February, the *Journal of Indian Writing in English* brought out its special issue on *Nissim Ezekiel*. He was at Canada in 1987 to attend the conference ‘India Forty Years after Independence’ and visited Hong Kong the same year. In 1988, the Government of India honored him with the coveted Padma Shri Award. The award was awarded to him for his ‘contribution to Literature in English’. This very year he was at the New Zealand International Festival of Arts and lectured at the Adelaide Book Fair, Australia and Wellington. He got invitation to be poet-in-residence at the National University of Singapore from December 1988 to March 1989. His unpublished Poems in ‘Singapore Sequence’ are the product of this South-Asian experience. Oxford University Press brought out his *Collected Poems* (1952-1988) in 1989. In 1992, Nissim Ezekiel’s *Selected Prose* appeared as the product of his prose writings.
The next year in February, he took sixteen-day tour of England as a guest of the Arts Council of Great Britain. He was for two weeks in the States for an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee event in December. He had the privilege of delivering a lecture at the Professor Vikramaditya Rai Memorial Lecture on ‘The Infinite Aspects of Critical Writing’ at the Banaras Hindu University on 6-7 September 1994. His play Don’t Call It Suicide appeared in 1994. The Sunday Times on 29 June, 1997 published one of Ezekiel’s last articles called ‘Poetry in the Time of Tempests’.20

Nissim Ezekiel was like a father-figure, a friend-figure to poets and writers. Nikhil Lakshman once referred him as the ‘Big daddy of Indian English poetry’.21 Nissim even published Gieve’s first collection of poetry. Nissim Ezekiel’s The Unfinished Man (1960) was published by the Calcutta based writers workshop in 1960. He dedicated his The Unfinished Man (1960) to Laeeq and Zafar (Futehally). Nissim Ezekiel was deeply influenced by W.H. Auden. T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Yeats. The Epigraph of The Unfinished Man is from a poem by W.B. Yeats.22

While he was alive, Nissim Ezekiel had enjoyed two kinds of relationship with the opposite sex. He had Platonic relationship with some women namely Toni Patel, Minakshi Raja and Gauri Deshpande. These three women respected his privacy and were not curious about his personal life. The declaration of Gauri Deshpande on Ezekiel runs:

I could still churn turn out Indian English poems by the bushel; but I began to see, thanks to Nissim (Ezekiel) that what I have is a knack, a talent, not a calling. My calling is narrative fiction, mostly in Marathi, and thanks to Nissim, I discovered it.23
Another woman who came in the life of Nissim Ezekiel is Tara. Nissim Ezekiel was a substitute father to her because she finds her own father in Malaysia insensitive and unsympathetic who forced her to migrate to Bombay.

No doubt, Nissim Ezekiel seems to enjoy extra-marital affairs with some women. One of them is Linda Hess who was an American of German-Jewish descent. His affairs with Hess perhaps caused rift of a huge crack to his family. But Vrinda Nabar described Nissim Ezekiel:

> He was susceptible to women but I didn’t think he was a womanizer in the sense of the unpleasant connotations. He wouldn’t make a nuisance of himself and I say this not just in relation to myself. He wouldn’t chase a skirt.”

*The Exact Name*, the fifth volume of verse by Nissim Ezekiel was published in 1965. Nissim Ezekiel dedicated the book to R. Parthasarathy and Adil Jussawalla. The volume contains twenty poems published by P.Lal’s Writer’s Workshop. One of his well-known poems ‘Night of the scorpion’ is supposed to have been written at the request of students and faculty at Leeds in order to capture them with the essence of India while he was a visiting professor there. In 1969, P.Lal’s Writers Workshop, Calcutta, published Nissim Ezekiel’s book of plays, entitled *The Three Plays*.

Nissim Ezekiel’s sixth volume of poems, *Hymns in Darkness*, published in 1976 was dedicated to Keku and Khorshed Gandhy. Oxford University Press published it. This volume consists of twenty-seven poems, and the title of the books is drawn from the last poem “Hymns in Darkness.” Ezekiel composed the poems in this volume after his parents had passed away and he wrote them while
he lived alone. Actually, *Hymns in Darkness* was literally written in darkness in that sense. Ezekiel in his interview to S. Sreenivasan says:

*Hymns in Darkness* were written, first of all, about two years earlier, my father died and that always means the end of one major chapter in one’s life. And then, just about one year later, within the year of my father’s death my mother died.

*Latter-Day Psalms* was his last volume of poems published by Oxford University Press in 1982. He surprisingly dedicated this book to his wife Daisy and children Kavita, Kalpana and Elkana. *Latter-Day Psalms* fetched him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983. Nissim Ezekiel wrote this volume out of an accidental idea. He traveled to Rotterdam in response to an invitation for poetry reading. He took no book with him in order to give himself a chance to see and hear. However, when he reached his hotel, he was struck by the complete silence of the place. He was tempted to read something and the only available book was the *Gideon Bible*. He read some of his favorite verses from the book of *Jonah* and *Job* and turned to the book of *Psalms*. It is in Rotterdam that he formed the idea and wrote nine of the *Latter-Day Psalms*.

Nissim Ezekiel became a star in the late 70’s. Nevertheless, not everything was well. He was deprived of happiness. His rift with Daisy had an effect on him now. There was no woman; neither mother nor wife around him when he needed a woman to look after him, to do the cooking, washing and housekeeping. He could successfully mask his messy home by forbidding people to visit him at his home, including his closest friends. In this way, he protected his privacy. However, some of his close friends did manage to sneak into the hallowed precincts of The Retreat under one pretext or another. Tara was shocked to find Nissim Ezekiel’s condition and described:
He was living after a recluse, with no one to look after him. There were dirty bed sheets on the floor. There were hundreds of books all over the place. I picked up a couple and took them away—Nissim is not possessive when it comes to books, and this is something about him that I appreciate very much. The kitchen was filthy. I offered to help him, to clean up the place for him. I did so once or twice, and then I stopped going. Whenever I asked him if he wanted me at The Retreat, he said no. I came to love him in a daughterly sort of way, and I would tell myself that if I were his daughter, I wouldn't let him live like that. I found it very strange that his wife and children did not come to help him. He has a very insensitive family.27

Nissim Ezekiel collapsed at an American Jewish Distribution Committee (AJJDC) meeting in August 1998. He was hospitalized at the Shushrusha Nursing Home at Dadar. He was diagnosed here as suffered from Alzheimer's disease. His health degraded terribly and he was almost deprived of his memory. If poetry, poverty and philosophy were his basement room in London, in his youth, rats’ cockroaches, scorpion, cat and pigeon were his fellow companion in his room in the Retreat in May of 1998. Nissim was shifted to the A. J. Dias Nursing Home at Turner Road, Bandra from the Shushrusha Nursing Home., Rejected by his wife who had earlier felt betrayed and abandoned, he lived alone, when he needed some one to attend to him. An internationally famous literary figure, Nissim Ezekiel was impoverished, poorly dressed, smelled badly and live in filth. He avoided physical cares, medical doctors and health cares until he collapsed at AJJDC meeting in August 1998. Nissim died at the age of 79, on 9 January 2004 in Mumbai. He was buried at the Jewish Cemetery Worli.28

By the time of his death, Nissim Ezekiel had established himself on the solid foundation as a great contributor and founder of Indian English poetry. The
obituaries, reminiscences, and homage spoke of him affirms his position in Indian English literature. Nissim Ezekiel was one of the oldest and most reputed post-Independence Indian poets in English. Mallikarjun Patil writes:

Ezekiel is not only a good poet in the post-Independence India, but he is also a cause of good poetry in others. Many poets including P. Lal and Dom Moraes have admitted the fact that Nissim Ezekiel was their poetic father. What W.H. Auden and Philip Larkin think of Thomas Hardy as a poet, P. Lal and Dom Moraes think of Nissim Ezekiel the doyans of English poetry in India. Ezekiel has nurtured many genuine poetic talents. Dom Moraes acknowledges him as his Guru, for he learnt the art of versification from him. When Ezekiel spoke to me of his views on poetry, it was as though he had unlocked a box full of unheard whispers. The other poets of younger generation think that Ezekiel is perhaps the first Indian poets consistently to show Indian readers that craftsmanship is as important to poem as its subject matter. He guided the young in craft and attitude. His suggestion to A.K. Ramanujan and Keki Daruwalla were very effective. He approves of Arvin Krishna Mahrotra and Salem Peeradina, because of their capacity for sharp perception of environment and forthright statement. So Ezekiel is not only a great poet but an influential critic as well. What Thomas Hardy was to England in the early twentieth century, Ezekiel is to India in the post-Independence era.29

In fact, Ezekiel has been a “law-giver to Indian English poetry”30. He wrote with a tone of authority. Ezekiel was both a leading poet and an influential critic. According to Chetan Karnani:

No other Indian English poet has shown the ability to organize his experience into words as competently as Ezekiel has done. The remarkable aspect of his poetry is his sincerity and individuality. His poems generalise his
own intimately felt experience. It is neither repetitive nor shocking, but it is simple, introspective and analytical.

He treats poetry as a first hand record of the growth of his mind.\textsuperscript{31}

Nissim Ezekiel treated poetry as the records of the mind's growth, as Yeats said, "It is myself that I remake."\textsuperscript{32} As in Yeats, so in Ezekiel, the constant re-enacting of the self lends dramatic significance to the poetry. He consented to the Publication of his \textit{Sixty Poems} because they had 'personal importance' and they gave his life 'a sense of continuity.'

His faith in the realities of the worldly experience, practical work, social communication, public activity and sexual exploration is confirmed in \textit{The Third}. But his commitment to them is fluctuating as it is seen in his poems. But the one thing that has remained constant with Ezekiel is his dedication to poetry. Chetan Karnani describes him, "At the centre was that sincere devoted mind that wanted to discover itself. In the process, he managed to forge a unique achievement of his own."\textsuperscript{33} Like Hardy, Ezekiel called poetry a lofty vocation and he thought that Poetry was a way of life. Poetry to Nissim Ezekiel is perhaps something more than a way of life and it is a way of self-realization as poesy is the main source of discovering and organizing one's own self. Ezekiel calls life 'a texture of poetry.'\textsuperscript{34} Michael Garman makes a comment on Ezekiel:

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 purely biological fact (Existence).\textsuperscript{35}

Chetan Karnani finds his poetry as a "first-hand record of life's growth,"\textsuperscript{36} There is a puzzling question to the Indian readers on how to approach Nissim Ezekiel's poetry when he particularly had shown a double impulse of being a native and
alien at the same time. He is a natural citizen of India, but the sense of ‘alienness’ abides as he is an Indian Jew of Bene Israel origin. Nissim Ezekiel is aware of this dilemma in his life. In an interview given to J.B. Beston in December 1975, Ezekiel replies in the following to the query whether his question of identity created any difficulty:

Yes! it did create a problem. I did have a feeling of things loaded against myself, with no prospect of getting strength and confidence, my background did make an outsider; but it’s too easy to talk of being an outsider. I don’t want to remain negative: I feel I have to connect and turn the situation to the positive.  

The dilemma that Ezekiel had in life does not escape the notice of the critics. William Walsh rightly observes:

One is aware of a double impulse in the poet, which, on the one hand, keeps him at a distance from his environment as he clutches to his private history and aspirations and which on the other, by means of a free and painful act of will, reconciles him to his environment.

Nissim Ezekiel affirms the question of his belongingness to India in general and Bombay in particular in three of his important poems apart from his declaration in an interview:

This is the place
Where I was born, I know it well  [After reading prediction]
I have made my commitments now,
This is one to stay where I am  [Background Casually]

I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong  [Island]
He identifies himself with Modern India, particularly the city of Bombay, as he is being culturally distant from India’s heritage. However, the above three Quotations show and express Nissim Ezekiel’s deep rootedness in the Indian soil. The images of India pervades all through his poetry. Daruwalla says, “Ezekiel was a poet of the heart, of failure, of doubt, of the unquiet mind, the emptiness within.” The preoccupation with the human condition pervades all through Nissim’s poetry. In an interview to Dr. Frank Birbal Singh, Nissim Ezekiel states:

I do not think everything I write or say or do should absolutely and unconditionally have what I have discovered to be my identity... I would prefer to claim that nine times out of my being human is more important than anything else in the whole world.

This statement affirms as to how Nissim Ezekiel places the supremacy of ‘human value’ than any other achievement in his life such as fame, power and money. Nissim Ezekiel has been often charged and condemned for his ‘urbanize’ theme. Most of the critics who describe and dismiss him with this phrase live in the cities. Whereas an objective examination of his poems reveal that Ezekiel takes a very comprehensive view of human issues and life, making a penetrating analysis. The failure to recognize this most dominant note in his poems have led critics to make a remark that Nissim Ezekiel’s subject is too strictly limited by being restricted to the educated, urban environment of modern India.

What Ezekiel believes is that the big cities are not devoid of the rural masses and rustic elements. To assume that everyone living in the urban area is educated, rich and speaks English would be wrong. Nissim vividly shows that a real urban area in India is a composite society where varied kinds of people live together. The proletariat cannot be left out and then from the lower class to the
bourgeoisie, we find various other classes and groups, including the poorest of the poor as the rural masses. They too struggle for survival. They have responses, which are very human. Nissim Ezekiel is amazed to see people living on the pavement, enjoying their life with laughter. One may draw any idea or even a false conclusion from that, but to Ezekiel it does suggest one mode of survival.

It is true that Nissim Ezekiel's poetry emanates from life. He is sharply aware of the poverty, squalor and superstitions that motivate the poor man's thought. He knows that art enables us to realize ourselves as human beings more than anything else does. Ezekiel regards sex an essential part of life. But he rejects the predominance of sex. He treats sexuality as part of the human condition.

As a true humanist, he only shares his true feeling with his characters towards the pain and suffering or their innocence. Reading his poetry is like watching an actor who enacts his tragic-comic play in all its facets—love, sex, politics, religion and contemporary reality on the stage. An objective assessment of Nissim Ezekiel's poems reveals that there is humour and irony.

A large chunk of critics on Nissim Ezekiel agree with the view that Nissim Ezekiel is an urban poet, a poet of the city, a poet of the body and a poet of the self. He is the one who tries to come to terms with himself as well with his environment. Some of the recurrent themes of his early poetry are the desire to overcome 'alienness' to consummate love, and fulfill physical passion, and of course the attempt to discover self are also found implicitly sometimes and at other times in a big way as in 'Passion Poems'. However, nobody has so far explored the humanism of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry in depth. Many critics indeed have missed the elements of humanism in Nissim as such the present thesis pays
an in-depth attention to this aspect of his writing. Nissim Ezekiel excels most of his contemporaries in this aspect of humanism.

In the present work of this research, the elements of humanism reflected in Nissim Ezekiel’s poems would be investigated exhaustively. His compassion for all humanity, perfection being ruled out in human affairs and imperfection being the law of human nature in the general human situation in his poems would be examined thoroughly.

The present thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces Nissim Ezekiel’s life and works. It does give an account of his literary, social and cultural background in detail. His role and contribution to the post-independence Indian English poetry is also highlighted.

The second chapter mainly focuses on the background of Indian English Poetry. This chapter examines the growth of Indian Writing in English. The contribution of Nissim Ezekiel in the Post-Independence Indian English Poetry is investigated in this chapter.

The third chapter in the thesis is wholly devoted to the aspects and study of humanism. It explains the various concepts of humanism. This chapter mentions the moving philosophy of Nissim Ezekiel’s humanism.

The fourth chapter analyses the poems of Nissim Ezekiel’s different themes under humanism. It examines the poems of Nissim Ezekiel, which have been selected from different volumes. The textual study and the analysis of the poems of Ezekiel provide a deeper understanding of his humanism. Here, some of the best humanist poems are selected and studied in chronological order so
that a better understanding of the development of his poetic theory could be achieved.

The fifth chapter is focused on the studies of his plays in the light of his ideas of Humanism. This chapter underlines the ramifications of Nissim Ezekiel's sense of humanism, which is not confined to his poetry only.

The sixth and last chapter gives the summary of the whole finding in the thesis. A judgment of the entire analysis done during the research is presented at this chapter, which may open a new vista for further research in the works of Nissim Ezekiel.
Notes


4 Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.91.


12 Sanjit Mishra, The poetic Art of Nissim Ezekiel, p.8.

13 R.Raj Rao, Nissim Ezekiel: The Authorized Biography, p.44.

14 R.Raj Rao, Ibid, p.72

15 R.Raj Rao, Ibid.


28 Bruce King, (Ed.) *Three Indian Poets: Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, A.K Ramanujan*, p.44.


32 Ramakrishna, “Ezekiel’s Credo”, *Journal of Indian Writing in English, Special Number: Nissim Ezekiel*, p.7.


36 Emmanuel Narendra Lall, *Ibid*.


