CONCLUSION

The variety and range of conflicts in Ezekiel’s poetry suffuses it with the uniqueness of complexity and richness of feelings and emotions. These conflicts assume different forms in different stages of Ezekiel’s poetic voyage. They range from conflicts between sex and spirituality, body and soul to conflicts and attachment between Ezekiel’s feelings of alienation with India as a result of his minority status, his rational outlook and his deeply ingrained Jewishness. The pressure of these conflicts makes the reading of his poetry a unique experience and it is the unifying thread that runs continually and regularly through his poetry linking up the disparate parts which would otherwise seem isolated and alien. Conflicts not only accord contiguity between the different phases of Ezekiel’s poetry but also impart his poetry with richness of experience. It is never stationary and stagnant as Ezekiel keeps bringing up more and more novel issues and tensions to present, analyse and if possible resolve. The feature of dialectics is palpably ever present in his poetry whereby there is perpetually a clash of thesis and anti-thesis followed by an attempt at resolving the contradictions and if this is not the case then there is a fresh re-appraisal of options. Thus dialectical progression from one form of conflict to another form shapes and determines the dynamics of Ezekiel’s poetry.

Ezekiel’s poetry consequently keeps growing and changing with his experiences of life. It expresses his inner struggles not only with himself but also with facts of the outer reality which continuously haunt him. As a man Ezekiel avidly desired to realize his ‘self’ or in other words to know himself, his motivating impulses and drives. He also wanted to attain happiness and derive ‘meaning’ in life. Ezekiel truly attempted to realize the ideal of ‘know thyself’ in pursuit of his quest and was thus always ready for challenges and conflicts in life.

Ezekiel’s quest to know the ‘self’ and to achieve success in life through poetry took him on the voyage to England in 1948. He was sorely tested when he found that it was impossible to subsist on the meager income that he earned by selling his poems to magazines. It goes to Ezekiel’s credit that he stuck it out for three and a half years in England without making compromises with his style and nature of verse. Most of the
poems of the volume *A Time to Change* were written in this period when Ezekiel stayed in his “basement room” with “Philosophy, Poverty and Poetry” as his companions (“Background Casually” 23-24, 25). It was during his stay in London itself that Ezekiel first displayed conflicting tendencies and drives. He was in fact a study in contradictions. If on the one hand he was artistic (as he undoubtedly was) then on the other he was impractical also. If he was focused and single minded in his devotion to poetry, then he was fickle and impulsive, too, in being unable to hold on to a good job.

The most important issue in these London days which even assumed the stature of a ‘crisis of faith’ was his sexuality. He was basically a religious person, who desired the comfort and consolation of religious observances and faith to keep him going in life with confidence and dedication. His own inability to hold on to his moral and religious convictions and observe celibacy caused him extreme anguish and torment as is testified by the poems written by him in his early phase. Ezekiel was literally torn asunder by opposite and contrary demands on his body and soul. Sexual passion and spiritual faith are anti-thetical emotions and to seek to accommodate both together in one’s ‘self’ is an impossible task. The dilemma which confronted Ezekiel was that he could not suppress his sexuality which in turn caused feelings of guilt in him. If he did manage to subdue and pacify his turbulent physical desires and affirm to prayer and celibacy it was not for long. Inside Ezekiel’s composite being there were contradictory yearnings which were in constant conflict with each other; they were for physical consummation on the one hand and for spiritual communion on the other. Debauchery and spirituality cannot co-exist, to affirm to one is to negate the other and as such there was no way out from these conflicting feelings. Since Ezekiel was basically a religious man fears of damnation arising out of his indulgence in immoral sex constantly haunted him throughout his life. The tussle between opposing wants and needs reduced Ezekiel to a state of agony and tension which did not abate even after he came back to India from London and got married. His quest for domestic bliss and an end to the inner conflict did not yield him success.

Even after being married, Ezekiel’s excessive sexual drive did not subside and allow him peace of mind as he kept up his illicit affairs. The first three volumes of Ezekiel’s poetry are a witness to this conflict of passion and prayer, of body and soul, lust
and morality where the Jew in Ezekiel longs to follow the dictates of his faith but the man in him desires to gratify and satiate his lust. This first phase is generally termed as Ezekiel’s romantic phase as he is here obsessed with love.

By the time Ezekiel’s third volume of poetry *The Third* was published he became conscious of a sterility in his vision as a poet. Simultaneously his restlessness caused by his inability to stick to a particular job for long and discord on the marital front, causes him anxiety and concern. Feeling disappointed and dejected on both counts as a poet as well as a man Ezekiel named his next volume of verse as *The Unfinished Man* making himself, his failures and the causes thereof the subject of the poems therein. The conflict in his mind with respect to his choices between sex and spirituality had neither ended nor been resolved. Though Ezekiel is aware of disintegration inside himself he is now concerned with another aspect and matter which now threatened him and his poetry. The new aspect which now becomes a matter of serious deliberation and dispute within Ezekiel’s ‘self’ is his habitat or locale.

In the middle stage, also termed as the realist phase, the two volumes *The Unfinished Man* and *The Exact Man* figure. In this phase Ezekiel is in a quest for identity and at the same time there is a division within himself with respect to his responses to his context or environment. He lives in the city but it repels him with its inhumaness, squalor and dirt as an alternate route he longs for the restorative ambience of the countryside or nature. In the middle stage, thus, there is again a dilemma before Ezekiel in which he is faced with a choice between conflicting forces and values. The city is his home and birthplace but he feels alienated as it is not only indifferent to him but also hostile. Ezekiel on the other hand is attracted and pulled towards nature which he bestows with a healing rejuvenating power. In Ezekiel’s sensibility the two environments, the urban and the pastoral are at opposite poles and their respective attributes or values stand in stark contrast to each other. The city is foul whereas nature is pure, the city is debased whereas nature is innocent and the city is evil and destructive, whereas nature is benign and constructive. This conflict between the urban / modern and the rural / primitive occupies Ezekiel throughout the middle phase. He is also pre-occupied with defining his relation with his city of Bombay which more or less designates and stands for India in his perspective. Ezekiel’s socio-cultural perspectives come into play and are reflected
through a dialectical equation and progression as his responses to the situation remain in
a flux. His sensibility continuously shifts, arranges and re-arranges itself keeping in view
his minority status as a Jew with an English background. There is patently a love and hate
equation or conflict inside him. The ambivalence of his response to the Indian situation is
a feature typical to him, as he is both an Indian as well as an outsider. N. Meena
Belliappa comments on this warring of two selves in Ezekiel as she say:

It is precisely the tension of sharing and of being separated that gives a sharp
point to his creative endeavours. His sense of being an outsider does not wither him but
works in his poetry as a positive stance and sensitivity to environment making available a
different vision: the much needed ‘other’ (203).

Ezekiel’s cultural outlook which is western, is, at times in conflict with the
traditional Indian ethos. He assumes a condescending and superior attitude towards many
aspects of Indian life from which he is distanced and thus he fails to appreciate them in
their true light. He hits out at godmen or “Guru’s”, the crowd that gathers at the monkey
shows and leave without paying (“Entertainment”) and even those who mistreat servants
(“Ganga”). In this middle phase a personal and private matter which, too, added to
Ezekiel’s woes and tensions was his marriage which was slowly but surely heading
towards the point of no return or break-up.

The last two volumes of Ezekiel namely *Hymns in Darkness and Latter-Day
Psalms* form the last phase of Ezekiel’s poet’s voyage which is generally termed as the
humanist phase. In the first poem of the volume *Hymns in Darkness*, entitled “Subject of
Change” Ezekiel again signals for a change of priorities and commitments. As his long
arduous poetic journey nears its destination there arises a desire in him to know the
ultimate ‘truths’ and to relate them in his poetry. Ezekiel’s desire was to discredit and
throw doubt on all those aspects of dogmatic religion which deny man his legitimate
pleasures. In this last phase there is patently a conflict between Ezekiel’s sceptic
sensibility and formal religious precepts. He shows scorn towards such ‘revealed truths’
as show man in a poor light or as sinful and weak. By this time Ezekiel’s vision had
matured and he was sorely disenchanted with the institution of religion as well as the
hypocritical social consciousness. In his vision humanistic concerns outweighed the
theological and so the last phase is marked by a conflict between his unorthodox sceptical/humanistic views and the traditional theistic values.

Ezekiel's modernist views are in direct opposition to the customary religious views and values. He exposes the sham and false standards of both the decadent value system of society as well as of the theistic order. His intention in reducing the credibility of the church and denigrating the prevalent social consciousness is to uphold and assert humanistic values. This he does at the cost of being called irreligious or even cynical.

The thread of conflict runs the entire length of Ezekiel's poetry right from the beginning to the end. In the first phase the conflict is highly individual and personal remaining inside his consciousness as a subjective state. In the middle phase the conflict emerges on to the objective world and engages itself with 'reality'. Finally in the last stage, Ezekiel's vision reaches the highest plane, that of the metaphysical and involves itself in refuting dogma and disputing false social observances like the doctrine of the 'Kal-Yuga'. Ezekiel is thus torn asunder and confounded right from the take-off point to the terminus by the presence of different opposing forces and streams which provide a unique richness and resilient quality to his poetry. Chetan Karnani rightly observes that the poet had "tensions to reconcile" (177) throughout his poetic career. The poet labours under the burden of not only his own contradictory self but is also simultaneously busy in interpreting and comprehending reality which is a task herculean in its dimensions. He thus desires and attempts at a reconciliation of such polarities as are there between his idealism and worldliness, and also between his desire to lead life as a loafer and desire for stability. The constant clash and conflict between religious and secular elements, the squalor of the city and the pristine beauty of nature, illusion and reality, flesh and soul, poetry and philosophy, science and superstition, dream and reality, alienation and involvement, action and meditation, aspiration and failure informs his poetry right from the beginning to the end.

The poet's odyssey commences from the volume *A Time to Change* and reaches its destination in *Latter-Day Psalms*. It is in his very first poem that his inner conflicts emerge from the depths of his consciousness and reach the surface prompting him to change the ways of his life and he names the poem "A Time to Change". The title itself is a manifestation of his desire to turn a new leaf and it also implies that he had gone astray.
Ezekiel’s condition is similar to that of the Jews in Babylon who had given up their ancient beliefs and had taken to worshipping new gods. They were thus without roots, without a history and without a future. Similarly, Ezekiel had given up his faith in religion and morality and started co-habiting with wanton women. In the manner of the ancient Jews his salvation only lay in re-affirming to his faith and giving up the unhealthy new ways. Ezekiel’s conflict is patently between the opposing needs of body and spirit. He feels like a betrayer who has betrayed the trust reposed in him. He wishes to return to the ‘house’ of the Lord which he has desecrated and deserted due to his licentiousness. His torment is unbearable and he resolves to seek commitment through domesticity and poetry to get over his debility. The way out of the physical and spiritual morass in which Ezekiel finds himself trapped is “To own a singing voice and a talking voice / A bit of land, a woman and a child or two” (46-47).

Ezekiel, despite his resolution, cannot hold his lust in check and his guilt returns to fill him with remorse. In the poem “A Time to Change” Ezekiel’s use of the epigraph from Revelation in the Bible evidences his religiosity and it was due to this faith that he was apprehensive of damnation for his wrongs. The condition does not improve, but remains more or less the same in the poem “Something to Pursue” where again Ezekiel alludes to the Bible to convey both his deep fervour and sense of wrong doing. Sex is again the cause of his guilt and he again portrays himself as a betrayer who longs for redemption by giving up his lustful ways and taking up “poetry and prayer” (75).

Ezekiel’s Jewish ancestry is largely responsible for the conflict raging inside him. This Jewish ‘self’ of Ezekiel is immensely influenced by the old Testament and Biblical precepts which prescribe a life of chastity and purity. Ezekiel’s belief in Jewish dogmatic assertions, say for example in the ‘Cardinal Sin’, makes him even more anxious and apprehensive about sex and woman. He believes in the orthodox views that lay the blame for man’s eviction from the ‘Garden of Eden’ on woman. Ezekiel cannot forgive woman for this lapse and so any contact or liaison with her causes him extreme mortification and self-disgust. In his estimation she is a base, deceitful creature but without whom he cannot think of life. As Ezekiel has deep spiritual inclinations, even the slightest contact with her causes him concern for his soul. He expresses contempt for her in “A Time to
Ezekiel’s concept of woman as ‘fallen’ comes in the way of accepting a relationship with her as normal and satisfying. The conflict between sex and spirituality in Ezekiel is directly evident in several other poems besides “A Time to Change” and “Something to Pursue”, in various other poems, such as “Two Nights of Love” and “Psalm 151” we find same conflict is directly portrayed. In numerous other poems the conflict is obliquely present in the form of desolation, anxiety, despair, all of which result from his aforesaid basic feelings of temptation and damnation. The following lines from “Nothingness” reveal how this feature has permeated into almost every poem in the first phase; “... Catch / Myself, hour after hour / Free from any need to live at all” (2-4).

In this poem Ezekiel’s extreme desolation is caused by nothing else but the clash that goes on inside him between morality or religion and degenerate desire. The dilemma facing Ezekiel was that despite his affirmations not to indulge in sinful sex he is not able to keep his commitment and so he despairs for himself and his soul. He wants not only to have complete faith in God but also in his own self and he cannot forgive himself when he fails in adhering to his resolve. He expresses both his desire for purity and expiation in “Something to Pursue” when he says, “Empty of faith in the comeliness of God / Empty of faith in the shapeliness of Man / ... /.. for such a man / There can be no redemption” (102-103, 105-106).

Ezekiel longs to be free of the burden of sin and guilt caused by breaking the moral code of celibacy. In fact he even calls on God to deliver him from this unenviable predicament in “Psalm 151” when he says, “Deliver me from evil Lord / Rouse me to essential good” (13-14). Michael Garman rightly asserts in the context of Ezekiel’s quest that for him “a passion beyond sex is the true commitment” (211). The passion that Ezekiel truly desires is of religious affirmation and commitment, but it is always out of his reach. Time and again, Ezekiel convinces himself of the necessity of keeping his faith and spirit intact from the incursions of sensuality and he even tries to take the assistance of Buddhist teachings. He determines to tread on the middle path avoiding extremes. In the poem “In Emptiness” he declares : “Broken by excesses or by / Lack of them, let me always feel / The presence of the golden mean” (22-24). The golden mean refers to the
middle path or the eight fold path of moderation. However, Ezekiel's declarations and resolutions are but futile, and cannot prevent him from falling into the fatal trap of immoral sex. Ultimately, he decides to bear with it, and use it for a creative purpose, i.e., for writing poetry. Ezekiel's conversion to the cult of sex in his third volume *The Third* is on the lines of Yeats's assertion in Crazy Jane poems. Thus in "Nakedness II" he states, "And let him understand that in the working / Of his mind the body takes a hand" (13-14).

Ezekiel's strategy to subdue his conflict and use sex for poetic creation is also a fiasco and he bewails his tragedy in "What Frightens Me" holding himself to blame for his state of disintegration, "Myself examined frightens me / ..../ I saw the image being formed / I saw it carnal in the arms of love" (1, 3-4). The constant conflict in Ezekiel between the "threshing things and breasts" ("Two Nights of Love" 2) and desire for "beatitude, achieved by few ?" ("Something to Pursue" 120) causes a shattering inside his psyche and also makes him long for wholeness. Bruce King aptly summarizes Ezekiel's predicament saying, "Ezekiel recapitulates the experience of the modern intellectual ... who lives during a time of increasing fragmentation when rationality has come to mean discontinuity, relativity, the truth of conflicting observations and the logic of the irrational" (Three Indian Poets 25). No one can fight against one's self and basic instincts cannot be repressed through an exercise of will and this is precisely the case with Ezekiel. Physical urges and passions cannot be suppressed without the fear of neurosis and if there is also a simultaneously present spiritual inclination in a person, then, such a condition will be positively dangerous for his emotional well being, as is the case with the poet. He hangs between two worlds, as in a limbo, belonging to neither.

Ezekiel's failure to find satiation and satisfaction for his passions through domesticity and marriage as enunciated by himself in "A Time to Change" plus the easy access to the flesh-pots of the city causes a tension inside him. He is now filled with trepidation and alarm. In this initial phase Ezekiel runs the complete gamut of emotions ranging from elation and exhilaration to despair and desolation. His passion thrills him as in "Paean" where he says, "The first baptism is not in water / But in fire...." (13-14). The poet is sick with sorrow when assailed by religious doubts as in "Mid-monsoon Madness" where he says, "I listen to my own madness / saying: smash it up and start
again” 14-15). Ezekiel’s poetry at this stage is completely dominated and determined by his twin pre-occupations, viz., of spirituality and of sexuality. Most of the poems of this stage with the exception of a very few on nature, childhood, or city, deal exclusively with this issue i.e., the clash between body and soul. Even Ezekiel’s vocabulary shows the influence of this conflict. The majority of the words have either religious connotations like prayer, redemption, God, Church, etc., or sexual ones like whore, mistresses, carnal, naked, etc. Some words also denote desolation and anguish which is the outcome of the conflict in question. The poems of the first phase are also considered as confessional as they genuinely relate to Ezekiel and his faults. S.C. Dwivedi comments in this respect: “He is subjective to the point of being described as a confessional poet.” (“To become a form and find my relevance” 190). Ezekiel’s Judaic / Christian beliefs come into the lime light due to the clash inside him between sex and religion along with the resultant feelings of penitence and remorse. The twists and turns that Ezekiel’s ‘self’ endures, in the process of remaining normal and going ahead is what makes his poetry seem relevant and interesting to the common reader. The improvisations and modulations that Ezekiel makes in his perspectives, vision and actions are a direct result of his conflict which involves the two things most dear to his heart, namely sex and prayer. This issue completely engulfed and preoccupied Ezekiel in his first phase which determined his scheme and order of things, priorities and thoughts.

As Ezekiel progressed to his middle age synonymous with his middle phase, he became conscious of being an ‘unfinished man’. He now disengages his attention from his ‘inner self’ and focuses on the reality surrounding him. He realizes with a start that, this environment of his, the objective reality, is highly uncongenial and thus detrimental to his well being both as a poet, and as a man. In this middle period Ezekiel is faced with the spectre of the corrupt city and its sterile influence. If the early stage was a quest of the ‘self’ and through it harmony the middle stage is connected with Ezekiel’s quest for identity. This quest for roots can be properly followed and comprehended when the roles of the city and nature are understood as conflicting and anti-thetical to each other. The city’s noise and dull routines act like an addictive drug on Ezekiel and he feels impotent and powerless in its grip. He is repelled and disgusted by its cold, inhumaness and likens it to a putrid marsh where even the sunlight does not permeate. The poet wishes to
associate with the innocent, pristine glory of nature and shun the tainted city which suffocates him. He, however, is unable to make the required "leap" and renounce his nightmarish habitat. His will has been destroyed by the incessant hustle and bustle that he is subjected to, night and day. He has become more or less a robot who mechanically goes about his chores, having no independent will or purpose. He looks at the wretched existence of the hordes of people who live on the streets of Bombay in desperation and despair, longing hopelessly for deliverance. It is through the delineation of opposites between the putridness of the city and the freshness and purity of nature which stimulate opposing sentiments within Ezekiel himself that he is able to universalize his own personal experience and strike a chord in the readers who are themselves mostly urbanites. It is only when the city and nature are understood and recognized as conflicting forces that Ezekiel's poems like "Urban", "A Morning Walk", "Love Sonnet", "Enterprise", "Island", etc. are revealed in their true dimensions and colour.

Ezekiel's sensibility finds the city to be hellish and nature to be a veritable 'Garden of Eden', innocent and pure. Through these implied images Ezekiel's Judaic / Christian antecedents and beliefs are also revealed. It is with great dexterity and expertise that Ezekiel weaves a pattern of conflict through the opposing ambiances of the city and the pastoral order. When confronted with the city's putridness he feels uneasy, tense and dull; on the other hand nature's beauty and serenity elate and thrill him acting as an antidote to the city's poison.

Corresponding and auxiliary to Ezekiel's depiction of the city and nature is his delineation of his love / hate relationship with his country i.e. India. This too is part of his quest for identity and roots. He suffers from a marginalisation complex or syndrome and finds it almost impossible to relate fully with his country. Mita Biswas aptly observes of Ezekiel in this context that, "In his articulation about India scene he is honest but he is sometimes torn by his inner conflict and conscience" (95). There are vast cultural and racial differences that come in the way of Ezekiel becoming one with Indians, especially the Hindus. At times he is apologetic about his Indianness and at other times he is equally assertive and emphatic about it. This is what he himself has to say, "India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India." (S.P. 99)
In this middle phase on the one hand Ezekiel’s use of nature imagery and words like hills, river, sky, sun etc. convey states of tranquility and solace and on the other hand, images and words expressive of city existence convey disgust, horror and ennui. For the city and its atmosphere Ezekiel uses words like clamour, barbaric, beggars, marsh, corruption, etc. which reveal his abhorrence of it. It was due to the awareness of the city’s negative effect on him that Ezekiel desired to find roots in the countryside or in rural traditions like the painter “Jamini Roy” of whom he talks in the poem of the same name. K.P. Ramachandran Nair too has observed Ezekiel’s conflicting state whereby he “longs for a quiet habitation away from the “kindred clamour” of the wild city” (121). This desire of escaping from the city is correctly understood only when the factor of conflict in Ezekiel is properly understood. His vision both as a poet and as a man was distorted and hampered by the city life and, thus he longed for the primal quiescence of the pastoral order to restore, revive and even resurrect his ailing mind and spirit. The consciousness of the conflicts that were disintegrating him from inside was the factor which made him long for ‘the exact name’ whereby he could state his dilemma. It is in this volume *The Exact Name* that Ezekiel makes a discernible attempt to synthesize conflicting strands in himself as of a ‘lover’, a ‘nature lover’ and a ‘poet’ in the poem “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher”. He even imagines and projects himself as a Ganesha who can cure and heal the impaired through his verse.

As Ezekiel grows in age, matures and reaches the last phase of his poetic journey he aspires to attain the ultimate truth of life. The volume *Hymns in Darkness*, (1976) came eleven years after the preceding volume *The Exact Name* was written in 1965. During this period Ezekiel’s vision had undergone a drastic change. Both his parents had died and he lived all alone, having finally separated from his wife and children after a long period of disagreement and maladjustment. At this time Ezekiel used to read English translations of some Vedic literature in the evenings. His mood, naturally used to be of loneliness, despair and disillusionment. He had given up his past illusions in respect of religion, its necessity and efficacy. He had become more or less a sceptic with liberalistic humanist inclinations. While reading the Vedic lore he read about the Sat-Yuga in which holiness had prevailed and such holy literature was composed. Ezekiel made a comparison of that age of purity and light with the present age of fallenness rightly
termed as ‘Kal-Yuga’ or age of darkness. He had desires to write his own brand of 'Shlokas' or hymns and decided to do so. However, he did not wish to sing in praise of virtue, goodness, light or even God as these concepts were nowhere visible to him, neither in the reality outside his mind, nor inside. He thus decided to sing in praise of the ‘fallen’ or the dark and named his poem “Hymns in Darkness”. His ironic vision both denigrates the lack of moral consciousness in society and also makes his individual comment through the city persona, who is a weakling as well as a hedonist given to pleasure seeking. Ezekiel’s own personal experience of life has revealed to him the sham, hypocrisy and double-dealing of society as now, in old age he finds himself alone and bereft of comfort and company. His experiences, as a man, from a minuscule minority have also contributed towards making him disillusioned. The “Hymns in Darkness” are thus not merely poetic creations but also an outcome of the poet’s personal bitter experiences in life. At this stage his desire is to tell the truth through his poetry and thereby heal himself and others too. In the “Hymns in Darkness” his sceptical and permissive (liberal) attitude is in conflict with false social, moral and religious values and standards. He portrays a man who is a product of his times, a vain, egoistical shallow creature who however is materially successful. His success is not due to hard work or perseverance but through cunning and deceit. What is remarkable is that though he lacks faith and virtue he makes good in life. Ezekiel’s protagonist is not a hero who would fight against the injustice and exploitation of the ‘Kal-Yuga’ but one who is a self-seeker and who, too, joins in the indecent pursuit of wealth and position indulged in by the others. Ezekiel’s vision is thus negative as against the affirmations of the Vedic hymns. The Vedic hero as depicted in the Vedic lore was a real heroic figure who would never indulge in such shoddiness and caprice as does Ezekiel’s non-hero. Ezekiel in these collection of poems even attacks God calling him an enemy, “The Enemy is God” (“XI” 1) fully revealing his conflicting sensibility.

In another collection of poems in this volume *Hymns in Darkness* called “The Egoist’s Prayers” Ezekiel caricatures and parodies prayers making fun of God in the most unconventional way. His scornful, insolent attitude reflects impiety and irreverence towards not only holy rituals but also God. His sensibility is highly non conformist and irreligious which clashes with the accepted beliefs, usages and norms. His sceptic,
conflicting attitude is fully exposed when in one such preudo-prayer he impertinently addresses God asking him to “Do thy duty Lord” (“II” 8). Ezekiel’s contradictory attitude reflects his modernistic pragmatism which places little trust in the efficacy of prayer or even the ‘Grace’ of God. Ezekiel as a sceptical Jew is an exception as Jews are among the most devout and God-fearing people of the world. His scepticism is a result of his extreme intellectuality, varied and bitter experiences and also because of his rationalistic way of thinking which accords precedence to empiricism as against blind faith. He is no more concerned with concepts and issues of sin, penitence and redemption as he was in the early phase of his poetic voyage. In “Latter-Day Psalms” he critiques the dogmatic Biblical teachings and assertions. In these poems which form a part of the volume of the same name Ezekiel’s sceptical, humanistic sensibility is in open and direct conflict with the ‘gospel truths’ and God.

The basic cause for Ezekiel’s open clash with Biblical beliefs and assertions and God in the “Latter-Day Psalms” is his racial pride which is sorely aggrieved and hurt at the fact that God did not stand by his “chosen people” the Jews, during their hour of utmost need, i.e., during the ‘Holocaust’. The Jews were massacred and tortured in large numbers during the Second World War. Ezekiel’s contention is that, the Biblical Psalms are no longer relevant in modern times as the tales recounted in them no longer have the efficacy and power to inspire people to do good or prevent them from doing wrong. Ezekiel’s desire is to update and modify the Biblical Psalms in the light of his own experience of life to make them relevant to modern times and modern consciousness, and this is what he does in “Latter-Day Psalms”.

Ezekiel’s ideas reflect pragmatism which is an attitude that decries dogmatism and adherence to superstition. Ezekiel shows his disbelief of the Biblical stories and the lessons that accrue from them. His common sensical attitude is sceptical of the age-old wisdoms which were handed down from generation to generation through readings of the Bible and implicitly believed in. He discards such faith and conservatism and boldly asks, “In the Lord my shepherd ? / Shall I not want ?” (“IV” 1-2). Ezekiel’s ironical tone in context of ‘revealed truths’ keenly shows his anti-theistic stance. He has become a rationalist who believes that man has come out of the darkness of ignorance and backwardness through dint of his own hardwork, earnestness and intelligence and not
through any divine intervention or inspiration. He, in no way, feels obliged to God or the Church and even believes that they are ineffectual and inefficacious. In the modern age the Church’s impotency is clearly revealed in its inability to successfully counter the preachings of doctrines like atheism, Nihilism, Communism, Anarchy etc., which preach the destruction of order, values, society and even religion. In the most recent times terrible happenings like the “Holocaust” have taken place, which the Church and even God could not prevent and this has shaken the very foundations of faith. Ezekiel thus justifies his own lack of faith and anti-religion stance. Shakuntala Bharvani comments both on Ezekiel’s conflicting attitude as well as humanism in the “Latter-Day Psalms” saying, “Ezekiel’s imitation and inversion of the Psalms so as to overturn and deflate their meaning affirms his humanity and his tolerance” (81). Ezekiel’s poetry of the last phase is a far cry from the poetry of his early phase, when he desperately yearned for spiritual revelations and anchors. This is an Ezekiel who has shaken free from the shackles of religion and achieved a higher truth than that offered by it.

In this last phase Ezekiel uses a large number of words with religious implications as, heaven, God, evil, angels, Lord, sin, blessed etc., which show the drift of his consciousness. He also uses irony more frequently and it is generally directed at religion and God which shows his conflict with them.

Throughout Ezekiel’s three phases the feature of conflict is ever present. His life and poetry are completely intertwined and through poetry he tries to resolve his tensions and conflicts and in this way it is therapeutic for him. The division of Ezekiel’s poetry into phases is a unique feature and it is the factor of conflict which determines the parameters of each phase. As Ezekiel matures, delves deeper into reality and into his subconscious mind, newer and newer configurations keep coming up. There are always new tensions and conflicts, or resolutions which gives Ezekiel’s poetry its variety of subjects and treatment. He has himself adumbrated the dialectical process which operates in his poetry in the poem “Poetry” where “.... the savage and singular / The gentle, familiar / Are all dissolved” (15-17). This feature of conflict is thus all important to Ezekiel’s poetry it being its inspiration and principle of progression. These conflicts help him to define his own self and rediscover himself. It is only through the clash of opposites that Ezekiel’s true sensibility comes out and his priorities become known. It is patently, his
perspective or poetic vision which gives birth to the contradictions in him which in turn assume the dimensions of conflicts. His philosophy of life, too, is in turn given shape by his conflicts which are never trivial or contrived; rather they come from deep inside his perception and soul. Ezekiel generally viewed life as a duality in which every thing had its opposite. Thus love was at the cost of spirituality, the city had nature its opposite and even religion could be countered with scepticism. The factors of conflict determined Ezekiel’s choice of words and diction too. In his initial stage where he was to a large extent uninvolved in larger issues and was mainly concerned with his own self, and passions, his poetry is, direct, simple and lyrical. As he learns more about the world losing his naivette and getting involved in more complex and contradictory issues, his poetry becomes, oblique, ironical and satiric. The conflicts that Ezekiel experienced through out his poetic career made deep impressions on him and impacted his poetry in a peculiarly significant way. By the time Ezekiel reached the last phase of his poetic voyage he had realized that his conflicts would never subside totally and so he gave up all his attempts to unify his shattered self. Bruce King pertinently observes that:

The earlier attempts at self-integration had failed and the many parts of Ezekiel’s life had failed to fuse into a unity... His poems increasingly reflect a number of distinct lives he led which, while often parallel, sometimes diverge (Modern Indian Poetry 102).

Since the source and substance of Ezekiel’s poetry lie in his tensions, contradictions and conflicts, every important aspect, which relates to his life is taken up as a subject of poetry in them. An important factor which related to his personal self and was the prime source of unending conflicts in the poet was his Jewishness. This Jewishness had many facets to it, when seen in the context of its religiosity, it caused shame and guilt in Ezekiel when he indulged in sensuality when seen from the angle of socio-cultural beliefs, it was the factor which made him militate against the indigenous set-up. The Jewishness of Ezekiel was to a large extent responsible for his contradictory responses and this factor became all the more apparent when the nature and variety of different conflicts are studied in relation to his poetry and life. The study of Ezekiel’s poetry via the schema and configuration of conflicts reveals details which would otherwise escape attention. Several aspects gain relevance and come to attention only when seen in the context of conflict otherwise they might well be viewed as insignificant.
The poet's progress in life is measured by his conflicts which start with his first poem "A Time to Change". It is only when the complete saga of Ezekiel's conflicts unfolds right from his first volume to the last one that his perspective and vision become comprehensible. It is also through the study of conflicts that we gain important insights into the growth of Ezekiel both as a man and a poet.
WORK CITED


