CHAPTER – 1
INTRODUCTION

Subsequent to Independence, Indian English poetry underwent a drastic change. This change was not in terms of ideology but in terms of style and content. Modernism had arrived in India and it replaced the romantic and mystical tradition which had been in vogue. It was Nissim Ezekiel who heralded the advent of modernism in India with the publication of his first volume of verse *A Time to Change* (1952). The beginnings of Indian English poetry however were made nearly a century and a half before.

The first authentic Indian English poet was Henry Vivian Derozio (1809-31). His most notable work was “The Faqir of Jungheera”. Derozio was influenced by the British romantic poets like Walter Scott and George Gordon Byron but his most unique feature was his burning patriotism, although he was not even fully Indian, his father being Indo-Portuguese and his mother English. Derozio was a promising poet but could not realize his potential fully as he died very young. M.K. Naik aptly remarks that Derozio’s poems “reveal an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic zeal which stamps Derozio as a true son of the soil” (*Indian English Poetry* 10).

Though the credit of being the first poet in Indian English goes to Derozio, however the first Indian English poet to publish a volume of verse was Kashi Prosad Ghose with his *The Shair or Ministrel and Other Poems*. The difference between him and Derozio was that he was fully Indian. He too followed the examples of English poets like Scott and Byron like Derozio. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks that Ghose’ poetry was “derivative and imitative poetry, made up mainly of conventional descriptions and tedious moralizing, but it is a tedium brightened up by odd flashes of originality” (37).

Michael Madhusudan Dutt followed Kashi Prosad Ghose and though he was better known for his works in Bengali yet he wrote some poems in English too which were well received. Next to follow were the Dutt brothers namely Govin Chunder, Har Chunder and Greece who with their nephew Omesh Chunder produced the volume of verse *The Dutt Family Album* (1870). They were upper caste Bengalis who had embraced
Christianity and thus felt an obligation to write in English. Their works, too were derivative of the English masters and were thus only pastiches of the originals.

Toru Dutt, the daughter of Govin Chunder Dutt, was the first Indian woman to write poetry in English. Her verse was authentic but she too like Derozio did not live long enough to find her true voice and win full acclaim. She translated works of some French poets into English and her translations were remarkable for their correctness and felicity of expression. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar feels that “her achievement was little short of the miraculous” (62). Toru Dutt also studied Sanskrit after her return from England to India, and in the later part of her short life wrote and translated poems with classical Indian themes and subject matter. These poems were compiled in the volume *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. She was the first Indian poet to write about Indian myths and ancient beliefs and showed an intuitive knowledge about concepts like ‘Maya’, ‘Pantheism’ and ‘Karma’ which are integral to, and important in Hinduism.

Romesh Chunder Dutt, a cousin of Toru Dutt, is known for his translations from Sanskrit to English. He even translated *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* to English from the original Sanskrit. Ramesh Chunder’s poetic translations – other than those, of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are compiled in the book *Lays of Ancient India*.

As the nineteenth century draw to a close another poet who made his mark on Indian – Anglian poetry was Manmohan Ghose, the elder brother of Sri Aurobindo. Man Mohan was brought up in England completely in the English tradition so much so, that when he returned to India he was completely alienated and lost in his new surroundings. Man Mohan’s poems were even published in England in the volume *Primavera* which had Lawrence Binyon and Stephen Philips, poets of the decadent school of poetry, as its co-authors. Some of Man Mohan Ghose’s poems are genuine and poignant expressions of personal pain and grief which he felt at his wife’s illness and are imbued with the true romantic spirit. His poetry remained limited to the 1890s models of decadent aestheticism which had become unpopular by the beginning of the 20th century. He compensated for his lack of originality in subject matter with his expertise in technique. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, too comments in this respect, saying “Always, whether in his late lyrics or his earliest, Man Mohan could give a technical finish to his verse” (87). Man Mohan was
unable to adapt to Indian tradition and themes and was thus impeded in his further growth and development as a poet.

What Man Mohan Ghose was himself unable to achieve was left to his younger brother Aurobindo Ghose to do, and that too in a unique manner. Aurobindo Ghose is the Indian who can be accepted as the foremost in the field of Indian English writing as far as bulk or quantity and even variety is concerned. He was a poet, a prose writer as well as a playwright. Though Tagore was awarded with the Nobel prize, he was basically a writer in Bengali, whereas, Sri Aurobindo wrote primarily in English.

Sri Aurobindo was not only a poet, but also a Yogi or mystic, a patriot and also a philosopher saint. His outstanding prose work is *The Life Divine*. In poetry he is known for his epic *Savitri* and also for his poems like “Urvasie” and “Love and Death”. Besides these long poems he had also written a number of short poems. Sri Aurobindo had his early schooling in England and English was thus almost a mother tongue with him. He had a brilliant mind and even qualified for the most coveted Indian Civil Service but somehow he could not join it as fate willed it otherwise. Sri Aurobindo had patriotic leanings and on his return to India he fell foul of the British authorities for his inflammatory writings in the daily *Bande Mataram*. Aurobindo Ghose was put to trial but let off. He renounced politics and retired to Pondicherry to become a Yogi and a poet and a philosopher.

Sri Aurobindo’s verse is replete with mysticism and relates to his attempts for a merging of his soul with a higher consciousness or God. He also wrote poems on the traditional mythological themes. He lived the life of an ascetic and his verse springs from the depths of his soul and from his implicit and complete faith in God. His insatiable desire was to learn the mysteries of metaphysics and to transcend physical reality and achieve super-consciousness. Sri Aurobindo tried to transmute his mystical experiences or ‘revelations’ into poetry. He strived towards sublimity as can be seen in “Thought the Paraclete”:

As some bright archangel in vision, flies
Plunged in dream-caught spirit immensities,
past the long green crests of the seas of life,
past the orange skies of the mystic mind
Sir Aurobindo had visions in which he at times felt the close proximity of God. Much of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is symbolical as is clear from the full title of “Savitri”, written in an epic style, *Savitri : A Legend and a Symbol*. It comprises of 24,000 lines. The legend is found originally in *The Mahabharata*. It is about a man Satyavan who is to die on a pre-ordained day. However when the appointed day arrives and the God of Death ‘Yama’ comes to claim Satyavan, Savitri, Satyavan’s wife tries to dissuade him from doing so. Savitri’s virtue, nobility and earnestness have the effect of changing the destiny of Satyavan’s life and Yama goes to his abode empty handed. The poem thus symbolically asserts the supremacy of virtue and truth over even Fate. It asserts that man can even achieve a divine status through purity of thought and action. It was Sri Aurobindo’s belief that man is only restricted from achieving a super-conscious state by his ever reasoning habit, which keeps him tied down to earthly laws and way of thinking. Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* is said to include in it features of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* and Dane’s *Divine Comedy*. Sri Aurobindo claimed that *Savitri* was written under the influence of an over-mind, thus revealing his belief in mysticism and mystery.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar considers Sri Aurobindo as the best among Indian English writers and he says that, “Without question Sri Aurobindo is the one uncontestably outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian Literature” (144). Actually Aurobindo Ghose had his share of both admirers and detractors. There were many who admired and aped his style like J. Vijayatunga, K.D. Sethna and J.A. Chadwick. His detractors, the modernists like P.Lal, K. Raghavendra Rao and Nissim Ezekiel claimed that his verse was vapid, vaporous and obscure. The truth of Aurobindo Ghose’s worth as a poet however lies in the middle of both the extreme views. His literary output is impressive and widely admired because of its sheer size, range and esoteric imagery. *Savitri* is the only epic written by an Indian in English and all credit goes to Sri Aurobindo for this unparalleled feat.

Rabindra Nath Tagore is a household name in India because he was the first Indian to win the Nobel price for literature. Though, he primarily wrote in Bengali, he also wrote a few works in English and translated other originals from Bengali to English,
as was the case with *Geetanjali* for which he was awarded the Nobel prize. Tagore was a prolific writer who wrote not only poetry but also novels and plays. Tagore was brought up in an atmosphere of culture and learning. His father Debendra Nath Tagore was the soul-force behind Brahmo-Samaj, the reformatory socio-religious institution set up by Ram Mohun Roy in the 1820s. The Brahmo-Samaj was also an intellectual movement which worked for the emancipation of women and eradication of social evils and it was due to its efforts that ‘Sati’ was banned in India. Rabindra Nath had no formal schooling but was taught at home and he had started writing poems at an early age. He had visited England too and was familiar with the romantic tradition. The *Geetanjali* was published in 1912 with an introduction by W.B. Yeats who was highly impressed by it and declared that, “these lyrics ... display in their thought a world I have dreamt of all my life long” (qtd Iyengar 102).

The *Geetanjali* consists of a hundred odd devotional songs or songs of Bhakti in the great Indian tradition. In India there have been numerous religious poets both Saiva and Vaisnava who sang in praise of their Gods and Rabindra Nath too, follows in their footsteps. These poems, in the *Geetanjali* are prose poems which were written originally in Bengali and later translated into English by the poet himself. The poet shows himself in a variety of moods, we find him sometimes pleading to God, or exulting with joy or even lamenting over some sorrow at other times. Tagore also had nationalist sentiments but he desired not to be embroiled too deeply in politics which would impinge upon the time and freedom he needed for creative writing.

Rabindra Nath’s poetry in Bengali was so forceful and original that he was considered as part of the tradition of Chaitanya, Chandidas and Vidyapati, the renowned bards of old Bengal. The only short coming that can be laid at Rabindra Nath’s door is that he wrote no epic in the manner of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Mitton’s *Paradise Lost* or even Aurobindo Ghose’s *Savitri*. His poetry lost its lustre and charm in later years in Europe, where he had been much admired earlier, but where now the modernists had made their appearance under Pound and Eliot.

The renaissance in India or re-awakening came about through Bengal. Ram Mohun Roy originated this intellectual, cultural and religious movement and he is acknowledged as the first Indian man of letters. He knew a number of languages and
wrote extremely well in English. English got its impetus from Ram Mohun Roy and with Macaulay’s intervention it became the medium of instruction in 1835. Ram Mohun was followed by Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar, Keshub Chunder Sen, etc. in English prose writing. With the setting up of universities in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta in 1856 English soon became popular as through it liberal thoughts were disseminated. Bengal became the hub of the romantic tradition as well as of the revolutionary movement. All the early Indian English poets were from Bengal, viz., the Dutt’s, the Ghose’s and even Tagore.

The last great name in the romantic tradition in Indian English poetry was that of Sarojini Naidu. She was a Bengali writer who had been brought up in Hyderabad. After her school education was over she was sent to England for higher studies. In England Sarojini became acquainted with the poets of the Rhymer’s club. She was given sound advice by Edmund Gosse to strive for originality and authenticity unlike the hordes of Indian poets who had only so far copied the English models. Sarojini took this advice seriously and on her return to India she started writing poetry with a typical touch of Indianness to it. She depicted India, Indian people and the local customs and traditions. She wrote poems on palanquin bearers, snake charmers, weavers, etc. who were exotic by western standards and completely native too. She was a lover of nature too and mentioned many varieties of flowers in her verse which are immediately recognizable as Indian e.g., the lotus, Champak, Gulmohur, etc. Sarojini Naidu also wrote of legends and mysteries of Gods and princes. She was undoubtedly the ‘nightingale of India’. Sanjit Misra lavishes high praise on her as he comments that, ‘Her contribution lies in giving an authentic Indian English utterance marvelously tuned to the composite Indian ethos marked by the splendours of native scenario’ (4). Sarojini Naidu was not only a poetess but she was also a great nationalist who took part in the freedom struggle. Her own life was full of pain and suffering which she bore stoically and with courage. She wholeheartedly supported Mahatma Gandhi in his fight against British tyranny and even went to prison. She became the first woman president of the Indian National Congress in 1925. She was proud of her Indian heritage and tradition as is seen in her poems which utilized typical Indian imagery and allusions. She published several volumes of verse, the first and most famous of them being The Golden Threshold (1905). Sarojini picked up the
cause of women’s rights and also of India’s emancipation from slavery and these factors led to her withdrawal from poetry in later life. She along with Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose had genuinely patriotic sentiments for their motherland, India.

Sarojini Naidu’s brother Harindranath Chattopadhyaya was a poet too, though in a lesser vein. He had an interest in mysticism, of both the Hindu as well as the Islamic type, of which he had imbibed in his childhood in Hyderabad. He wrote a large amount of poetry but its standard is not high. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar comments on his verse saying, “Innumerable are the bursts of song in the corpus of his poetry and the reader is delighted but often disappointed because of the frequent padding and the mere decorative vocabulary” (606). In this pre-independence period of the twentieth century there were several other poets too, like Armando Menzes, Joseph Furtado, Humayun Kabir, V.K. Gokak, etc. who wrote passable poetry. The thing common to all of them was their romanticism.

An important fact which comes out from a perusal of Indian English poetry before independence is that all the poets mentioned except Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu had as their examples British models. They did not try to find their own authentic voices, and looked for inspiration as well as appreciation to the British shores, and some of them even had very close associations with the British poets.

As the climes in Europe changed drastically due to the first world war, the great depression, the emerging of socialism, the fascist doctrines, and also because of increasing disbelief, its effect was felt on literature as well as on art. The impact of disillusionment and disenchantment was to give birth to, in the field of poetics, to a poetry of protest and escape. This poetry was representative of the ordinary man and his problems. In India at about this time, there emerged on the poetic scene a number of poets who were bilingual like, V.K. Gokak, K.M. Panikkar, Arun Kolhatkar, etc, and thus the English language now even started expressing concerns which were completely indigenous and native as an interrelationship had developed between English and the regional languages. If the early Indian poets in English were completely influenced by the British romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Mathew Arnold etc. these new poets like Suhrawardy, Jayant Mahapatra, Dilip Chitre etc, were not completely mesmerized and guided by the English masters. The Indian English poets now gave up the themes of the
romantics and even their theory of poetic moods. The Indian poet now started concentrating on poetry as a craft. He increased the range of his poetic subject matter to include man and his travails. The new Indian poet started to look at things through the eyes of the common man and his desires. Where nature and her moods and mysteries had once enthralled the poet, he now looked more at the city and was more concerned about issues of social justice, exploitation and poverty. The new Indian English poets also strived to express extreme subjectivity. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly asserts of this period that, "there were poets who were disillusioned enough about everything to make them turn away from romance to satire, from idealism to cynicism" (643). The new theories of psycho-analysis, nuclear physics, the change in the life styles of the public and in its perspectives all led to a great change in the Indian English literary scene. The new poetry which sprung up in the 1940s and 50s was 'modernist' and it portrayed melancholy, frustration, bitterness and also to a large extent individual concerns. The poet now considered himself, as his source of inspiration, trying to dive deep into his own psyche and convey his deepest emotions. His attempt was to universalize his personal experience and thus achieve a rapport with his readers. A debate about the relevance of Indian poetry in English also cropped up at this time between Buddha Dev Bose and the poets of the Writer's Workshop, Calcutta. Buddha Dev Bose was of the opinion that genuine poetry can only be composed in one's mother tongue and as English is a foreign language, writing in it would not serve the purpose of Indians as they would not be able to truly express their inner feelings and states. This claim of Buddha Dev Bose was refuted by P.Lal, Nissim Ezekiel and others who were of the opinion that English is the only language which is accepted all over India and that writing in English would further the cause of poetry as well as nationalism. Another change which was felt in the 1950s and 60s was that American poetry also began to influence Indian poetry in addition to the European one. This type of poetry reflected a mentality which can be called alienated. Such topics as guilt, sexuality, conflicts, shame, childhood, ambition, etc. also found their way into poetry. Confessional poetry also came into being in the Indian literary scene in English.

A clear change came about in the Indian poetic scenario with Nissim Ezekiel's *A Time to Change* (1952) which heralded the advent of modernism in India and the end of
the romantic tradition. Dom Moraes too was a poet of the new tradition, making his beginning with his volume of verse *A Beginning* (1957). Moraes wrote mostly in the confessional mode and he invariably spoke of his loneliness and insecurity. He was a poet who lived mostly in England, having renounced his Indian citizenship which he later reclaimed. M.K. Naik comments on his poetic craftsmanship saying that, “Dom Moraes is one of the most technically accomplished poets of his time (Indian English Poetry 55).

A modernist, woman poet known for her bold and frank treatment of sex is Kamala Das who has several volumes of verse to her credit. She is bilingual who writes both in Malayalam and in English. She is a feminist poet who asserts her equality and freedom forcefully. She uses a confessional mode pouring into her verse all her pain and suffering caused by her feminine status. She talks about her frustrations, childhood memories and even sexual desires with ruthless honesty. A number of her poems are well known like “The Old Playhouse”, “The Freaks”, etc.

Another modernist poet who emerged after independence was A.K. Ramanujan. He lived in America for three decades and his poetry stems from his need for roots, for which, he turns back to his Indian origins and childhood.

There also emerged a number of lesser poets like P.Lal, Keki Daruwalla, Adil Jussawalla, R. Parthasasthy, Jayanta Mahapatra, Salim Peeradina etc., who were also exponents of the modernist tradition. Their style, diction, imagery, themes and situations were very different from the romantics as well as the mystics like Aurobindo Ghose and Tagore. The new poets used a colloquial idiom, their concerns were largely urban and also related to the present reality If the pre-independence poets followed the British models, then in this respect the modernists too, were no different as they also wrote in imitation of the British modernist poets. The main differences which came about in the new poetry or the modernist poetry can be better understood by comparing and contrasting the salient features of both romantic as well as modernist poetry.

Romantic poetry was characterised by its focus on nature, its strong emotionality, its belief in the limitless reach of imagination, a yearning for the mystery of life, an unquenchable thirst for spirituality and stylistically use of the traditional poetical forms like Sonnet, Ode, Ballad, etc. plus an eye for innovation.
In India, modernism basically was a revolt against tradition. Our Indian poets aim at subjectivity, dealing with human emotions like hope, despair, disillusionment and the causes of such tensions. The modern Indian poets use a colloquial idiom which is precise and compressed. They have discarded the flowery and ornamental language of yesteryears and focus on concreteness and immediacy. Old concepts like fancy and Victorian prudery too have been given up and a frank and bold treatment of sex is undertaken. The new Indian poet tries to tackle contemporary issues. The propounders of modernism Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot had maintained that adherence to the traditional rules of prosody is not as important as the expression of the poet’s immediate experience. If the poet feels the need, he can devise a form of his own or make alterations in the traditional structure. The modern Indian poets thus feel free to use Vers libre as well as blank verse. In contrast to the romantic notion of the poet’s intense personal involvement in the poetical process and the projection of his intimate experience into poetry Eliot propounded his theory of impersonality and declared that poetry is an escape from emotion. The modern poet thus relies less on inspiration than on craftsmanship. Eliot posited his theory of “objective co-relative” by which he means that a complex experience can be re-capitulated and transmuted into poetry retaining all its urgency and concreteness. The device used to communicate such an experience is generally a metaphor or a series of disjointed images as in a fragmented dream. Modern Indian poets also do not conform to lyricism as much as they do to the expression of their immediate perception.

Eliot wanted poetry with a large intellectual quantum so that it would not only afford pleasure but would also enable instruction. His concept of poetry was elitist in which there would be a plethora of allusions and complex intricate imagery. The pleasure accruing from the reading of such verse would naturally be lasting. Modern poets use devices like paradox, inversion, ambiguity, irony, distancing etc. to make their images rich and evocative. Ironical statements or irony is an integral part of modern poetics, stress is also laid on the use of words and phrases in a new way. Modern poets relate to the city unlike the romantics who alligned themselves with nature. Modernism is in fact a new way to look at things, an attempt to break out of the old mould of traditional values and attitudes, to forge out on one’s own and even revolt against conformism and convention. The new Indian poet is an intellectual whose poetry springs from his
rationale unlike the romantic poet for whom inspiration came from his heart. The first world war caused a great dismay and revulsion in Europe and out of the outcry for a change in perspectives was born modernism. It seeks to re-define, to re-orient and re-shape and also looks for the formation of a new value system. Eliot's *The Wasteland* was representative of the decadent society of the rich and spoiled people of Europe and America. It showed how there was a total lack of morality and spirituality. He disregarded the old norms of rhyme, meter, stanza and subject matter and presented a poem which was disjointed, fragmented and esoteric but which faithfully presented a true picture of the chaotic reality then present. It was a tremendous and immediate success and totally revolutionized the theory and practice of poetry. P.Lal published an anthology of modern Indian poets in which he stated a credo for modernist poets. He emphasized on the need for concreteness, experimentation and innovation, new imagery, authentic creative urge, superb craftsmanship and also for poets who would take up poetry as a full time vocation. He also decried the use of poetry as propaganda.

The poet who really launched modernism in India and nurtured it during its formative years was Nissim Ezekiel. His contribution lies in liberating it from the shackles of decadent romanticism and mysticism. He gave Indian English Poetry a new modern diction and a distancing ironic mode. He made individual concerns the focus of his poetry. He gave a frank and bold treatment to sex. His poetry was directly addressed to the audience and he established a straight link between the poet and the public. Ezekiel duly experimented with all forms of prosody-metrical, Vers libre etc., and showed that different forms are suitable to different themes. He took the poet’s vocation seriously and showed that craftsmanship is as necessary as inspiration. Ezekiel had found Indian English poetry in a sorry decrepit state and transformed it into something respectable, up-beat and progressive. He was an inspiration to a new generation of poets like Keki Daruwalla, Gieve Patel etc., who came to be called the ‘tribe of Ezekiel’. He wrote seven volumes of verse which fact speaks eloquently of his devotion to poetry. Not only modernism, but the whole of Indian English Poetry owes a debt to him for elevating its standard and raising it to the Common Wealth level.

Ezekiel’s poetry has been analysed from various angles and viewpoints especially with emphasis on the thematic and biographical concerns. Chetan Karnani in his full
length study entitled *Nissim Ezekiel* comments that, “the flesh is too much with him” (35). He emphasizes the fact that words like “bone, marrow, blood and flesh” appear with too much frequency in his poems (34). Chetan Kamani also finds a similarity between Ezekiel and Yeats with respect to their battles with themselves over sexuality. However Kamani does not elaborate much on the subject especially, on the depth and degree to which this aspect dominates Ezekiel and his poetry specifically, in the first phase in which, the first three volumes figure.

In Ezekiel, the contours of sexual desire are distinctly different in each of the first three volumes of verse. Though Kamani rightly considers Ezekiel to be a poet of physical love yet he fails to see the vital link between the poet’s lust and his consequent guilt due to apprehension of having sinned. The critic fails to see the conflict between Ezekiel’s sexuality and his spirituality which continuously plagues him and dominates his poetry in the first phase.

Bruce King’s scholarly study of Ezekiel and his poetry in his two works, *Modern Indian Poetry in English* and *Three Indian Poets* takes note of Ezekiel’s strong intellectual concerns, his detached ironic stance, his colloquial idiom and also his Judaic / Christian beliefs and outlook. He also takes into account biographical details like Ezekiel’s failed marriage and his desire for integration of his psyche to study his poetry. However in certain ways his evaluation and assessment is deficient. What is more remarkable is that Bruce King finds most of Ezekiel’s poetry a result of deliberate contrivance or merely an aesthetic strategy and not a genuine outflow of emotions. He finds no genuine relationship between Ezekiel’s life and his poetry; no genuine anguish, anxiety, remorse or actual emotions. For him there is only a mask involved as he himself asserts in *Three Indian Poets*:

Ezekiel’s construction of a persona, confessional, self-analitical, distant yet emotional is art and not pages from a diary.... part of Ezekiel’s new achievement is the discovery that he can make poetry from the naked self behind the mask. But the naked face of crisis, of emotional turmoil, of frustrated desires, of despair screaming to escape from its cage is itself still another persona, another face (30-31). Bruce King’s study appreciates Ezekiel’s poetic craftsmanship for which he is all, praise as he declares admiringly, “Such modern characteristics as irony, heightened critical self-consciousness,
strong intellectual purpose... a multiplicity of tones, the artistic distancing of emotion through a persona were among his contributions to Indian poetry” (Modern Indian Poetry 92).

The ‘self’ or the quest for the ‘true-self’ pre-occupies Ezekiel and he strives to attain a unity of different experiences and perspectives to achieve that ‘true-self’. In his exhaustive work on Ezekiel entitled *Form and Value in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel*, Anisur Rehman considers the aspect of ‘self’ or its realization to be the guiding principle in his poetics. He asserts that it is the ‘self’ which shapes the ‘form’ of a poem which in turn becomes its value or meaning. Thus the ‘self’ is the crux or core of poetry. So, to discover the poet, his major aspirations and failures the study of the ‘form’ becomes indispensable. He declares, “We may say that the study of form in poetry ... necessarily leads us to discover the form of the poet’s vision, his essential self and explore thereafter its execution in his art” (7).

The special issue of *Journal of South Asian Studies* (JSAL) published by the Michigan State University on Nissim Ezekiel contains eight scholarly articles which “represent a range of insights pertaining to Ezekiel’s themes and techniques” (Kher 5). Garman studies Ezekiel as “a poet of pilgrimage” (210) and a maker of myths. Garman is of the view that Ezekiel’s pilgrimage is undertaken to “make life out of existence” (211) and the creation of myth subsequently follows.

K.D. Verma in his article “Myth and Imagery in The Unfinished Man” studies Ezekiel by utilizing Northrop Frye’s terms for the depiction of the displacement of myth in the “fallen city” (229) of Ezekiel’s poetry. The overriding concern of Ezekiel is however with the “image of man” who remains “unfinished” (229). Verma also studies the poetic influences on Ezekiel’s poetry and he mentions the names of Eliot and Auden in this respect.

Christopher Wiseman studies the poetic craftsmanship and techniques of Ezekiel in his article “The Development of Technique in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel”. Wiseman’s is a thorough and balanced study of “three distinct voices or styles representing the old, the transitional and the new” in Ezekiel’s poetics (241).

Vasant A. Shahane studies Ezekiel in his article “The Religious – Philosophical Strain in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry” stating that:
Ezekiel’s earlier verse is marked by an awareness of physical passion, sexual impulse, intermingling of the corporeal and the spiritual and a sensitive reaction to objects of sensory pleasure or pain. The promptings of the spirit are audible through the limbs of the flesh and the consequential significance of intellectuality and abstraction are obtained and realized only through the emotively stimulating effect of the human body (253). Shahane examines Ezekiel in the light of his “aesthetically inclined philosophical humanism” (254), which reveals the relation between his poetry and his beliefs.

Shiv K. Kumar’s study entitled “Poster Prayers of Nissim Ezekiel” is limited in scope. He asserts that Ezekiel’s attitude in there poems “is not of passive submission but of defiant questioning” (263). He asserts that Ezekiel has “added a new dimension to his poetry” (264) through these poems. The foregoing presentation of various critical views clearly brings out the various angles from which Ezekiel’s poetry has been studied in the special issue of the Journal.

One of Ezekiel’s major concerns is the man and woman relationship. A.K. Singh in his article “A Perspective on Woman in Ezekiel’s Poetry” feels that he has “earned for himself a place of exceptional eminence as a poet who has probed into the intricacies of modern man’s and woman’s nature” (181). The critic finds Ezekiel to be chauvinistic and comments on the persona in his poems saying that “the relationship which man tries to establish with woman is based on sex and she is presented as a whore” (183). The critic finds Ezekiel to have failed in his attempt to “study this enigma called woman” (189).

Asha Biswas in her essay “Women in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel” finds Ezekiel echoing the attitude of the “ancient Indian eroticians” who regarded woman as fit only for sexual gratification (201). She opines that, “Ezekiel too regards woman as an object created for the enjoyment of man” (201). The critic feels that though Ezekiel’s focus is generally on the erotic plane yet sometimes “the profane and the sacred permeate indissolubly” (214).

Satish B. Deshpande find in Ezekiel’s poetry “the basic impulse to explore the essential sensual aspects of man-woman relationship” (224) and here he is no different from the other critics. But he sees Ezekiel’s physicality in a different way too. In this respect he declares that for Ezekiel, “the sexual encounter ... is elevated to the level of an aesthetic experience where nakedness acquires and nudity becomes, the abstraction of
this concrete but formless beauty into various art forms” (230). Thus sex is for him, “a journey from formless sensuality to an abstract form” (230). Deshpande thus, finds Ezekiel to be looking for something more than physical pleasure in sex.

Ezekiel belongs more to Bombay than to any other place in the world and this affiliation to Bombay finds its way into his poetry in different ways, sometimes flattering, sometimes cynical and at other times completely derisive. Urmila Varma comments in her article “Urban sensibility in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel” that in his poetry, “the city figures prominently and he depicts the scene in a realistic manner stripping it of its glamour” (76). She further finds that “Ezekiel has a love-hate relationship with his environment” (79). Ezekiel’s city is full of people who indulge in “hypocrisies and shams” and theirs is a life “full of dilemma” from which there is no escape” (84).

K.P. Ramachandran Nair too, focuses on the urban aspect of Ezekiel’s sensibility. He finds in Ezekiel’s poetry a “genuine attempt to harmonize the diverse elements of our volatile urban culture” (117). Nair asserts that what “unsettles the poet” (117) and causes in him “the sensation of oppression” (118) is nothing but his decision to stay in the city. Ezekiel conveys “the dichotomy between man’s hopes and achievements in the distressed city” (121) as well as the “paralysis of will” (122) of the city dweller. The critic finds Ezekiel in a “perpetual quest for identity and commitment in a world of eroding individuality and lack of purpose” (124).

Dr. C. Anna Latha Devi also studies Ezekiel’s urban sensibility. She finds Ezekiel to be disapproving of the “pseudo-modernity and snobbery of urbanity” (144). She discerns that the poet “spotlights the baneful image of India through the urban life in Bombay” (142). The poet suffers from “utter loneliness and isolation” (145) despite his being a native, which fact is as paradoxical as his environment.

In “Annotating the Reality of the Indian Context : A Study of the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Adil Jussawalla and Gieve Patel” Sunanda Sinha while taking the same line as the other critics with respect to Ezekiel’s rendition of the city as chaotic also observes that, “he blends emotion and consciousness with irony and sarcasm which gives his poetry a much desired authenticity and detachment” (185). She also comments on how “his sarcastic commentary was at times mistaken for his anti-
Indianness" (185). Urbanity, with its attendant woes, was thus, a major concern with Ezekiel.

Other critics find in Ezekiel’s poetry a way to attain spirituality. Jagdish V. Dave explores this aspect of spirituality in his article “An Indian Pilgrim’s Progress in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. He finds that Ezekiel “clothes his moral and spiritual vision in contemporary vestures” (170), belying the assumption that mysticism and modernity cannot co-exist together. He finds the source of Ezekiel’s verse to be “an inward light, peace and humility” (171). Dave asserts that “Ezekiel’s objectivity towards himself is an Upnishadic quality” (179). Comparing Ezekiel with the Indian mystics of yore he finds in him a desire for “liberation from temporal shackles” (188).

N. Meena Belliappa examines the spiritual outlook of Ezekiel as apparent in his poetry in her critical piece “Placing Ezekiel in the Indian Tradition”. She finds that “Theological concepts like the Primal Fall and the mark of Cain derived from his religious background keep teasing his thought, despite emergence into the aura of modernity” (191). The critic finds in Ezekiel “diverse strands of faith and scepticism” (197).

Ezekiel’s pre-occupation with the ‘self’ has been the subject of study by many critics. Ezekiel’s attempt has throughout been to dissect his own feelings, thoughts and attitudes, sift the desirable from the undesirable, assimilate the good into his personality and emerge stronger and purer with each experience. Thus, he has continuously strived for a stronger and purer ‘self’. In his perceptive analysis of Ezekiel’s poetry entitled “Nissim Ezekiel’s Two Voices: A Study of his Early Poetry” T.R. Sharma comments that “his confessional nature affords him an opportunity for self-analysis” (62). He further opines that there is in Ezekiel an absolute need for the “development of an individual consciousness” and for “commitment, sincerity and integrity” (63) in life, both as a man and as a poet. Sharma asserts that Ezekiel’s poems show his “philosophical existential quest of the moral self” (65).

Prem P. Kapoor too analyses Ezekiel’s ‘self’ in his article “Self-Assertion in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. He finds in the poetry of Ezekiel an “individuation process by which the true self emerges as the goal of the whole personality” (109). The critic asserts that, “self is a mystery for him which he tries to unravel, come face to face with” (112).
Suresh Chandra Dwivedi too explores the 'self' in Ezekiel's poetry. In his critical article “‘To Become a Form and Find My Relevance’ Progress of the Self in Ezekiel’s Poetry” he finds Ezekiel to be “a poet of the self” (176) to whom “faithfulness to his own temperament and progress of his self are very significant” (176).

Satya Narain Singh, too, finds Ezekiel's 'self' to be of prime importance. He asserts that the poet has an “aversion to sham and hypocrisy in the field of art and religion” (51). The poet desires control over himself as he is aware of his self-destructive tendencies. The critic affirms that “the poet's worst oppressor is his own self and yet this oppressing self is also the source of his poetry” (53). Ezekiel longs “to explore the true and the false in the self” (55). The poet's destination is to achieve the “awareness of being and ... the realization of the primal power of the self” (58).

Humanism occupies a prominent place in Ezekiel's poetics and this aspect has also been discussed at length by various critics. P.R. Kher delves into this aspect in his write-up “Neo-Humanism in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. He declares of Ezekiel that, “his religious feeling necessitates love for human being” (154) highlighting his humanity. The scholar comments that, “It is this human factor that is the controlling principle in all his poetic meditations” (155). His human concerns come out, according to the critic, because he feels, “a sort of commitment and moral responsibility to people at large, to mankind” (157). What is most remarkable is that Ezekiel's humanism is “earthly ... not so much transcendental and spiritual” (158).

Dr. Rajiv K. Mallik examines Ezekiel's poetry from a humanistic perspective in his article “Nissim Ezekiel and his Humanism”. In his opinion “Ezekiel’s quest as a poet has been a proper communication of the meaning of life by presenting the myriad nature of human spirit” (182). According to him Ezekiel emphasizes the “centrality of man-in-the universe” (185) and finds in him “the urgency of a humane heart” (189).

Critics like M.K. Naik and P.R. Kher study Ezekiel's poetry with special emphasis on various aspects of alienation and existentialism. Looking at both Ezekiel's history and poems in his article “Nissim Ezekiel and Alienation” M.K. Naik concludes that there is in Ezekiel “a strong and persistent strain of alienation” (48). Naik closely examines the poem “Background Casually” and he feels that alienation on the one hand makes Ezekiel assume a stance of “easy superiority” (48) whereas at other times he is full
of “regret, hope and despair” (49). The critic proposes that the poet himself becomes aware of his “dilemma” and “alienational lack of communication” which induces in him a “sense of failure” which is witnessed as a special feature in several poems (50). P.R. Kher explores the influence of existentialism on Ezekiel in his review “Existential Strains in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. The critic finds several facets of existentialism in Ezekiel like comprehension of “life as a tragedy”, “anxiety or fear” and “loneliness and its suffering” (8). The critic finds “a very individualistic and even unique kind of existentialism” (11) in Ezekiel which relies heavily on irony.

Quite a few critics have probed Ezekiel’s biographical antecedents and have tried to locate the source and inspiration of his poetry there. Surya Nath Pandey scrutinizes the origins of Ezekiel as a key to his poetics in his article “The Nature of Ezekiel’s Patria”. Pandey asserts that, “As a Jew Ezekiel is eternally rootless ... his poetic oeuvre abounds in numerous references to this sense of uprootedness which overweighs his consciousness” (83). Pandey places Ezekiel in the category of de-racinated writers like Eliot and Pound. He finds “a sense of cultural dislocation” in Ezekiel’s poetry (85). The relationship of the multi-cultural set-up represented by the Hindus and that of Ezekiel’s community is termed as the meeting of the “marginal and the mighty” by Pandey (83).

Nibir K. Ghosh studies the dynamics of Ezekiel’s Jewish lineage and his portrayal of India and Indian sensibility. He observes that his “primary concern is not the India which appeals to the west but the India to which he can and does truly belong” (50). The critic approvingly states that “In his poetry Ezekiel evolved a synthesis between the Jewish and the Indian” and also comments on Ezekiel’s” need for a literature of cultural contact on a global scale” (52). The critic finds in Ezekiel an “authentic Indian sensibility” (61).

G. Damodar studies cultural dichotomy in Ezekiel’s poetry and he pertinently observes that, “Ezekiel’s groping for identity at times appears to reflect an East-West dichotomy” (47). The scholar observes that since Ezekiel is not a Hindu he can only “relate himself with modern India” and further elaborates that, “In him we find a synthesis of cultural polarities which is ... partly the result of an Indian poet having to write about the indigenous experience in an alien language and partly on account of his Jewish upbringing” (51). C. Vijayashreee, too looks into the aspect of Ezekiel’s cultural
make-up. She holds that, in the new post-independence era all the minorities in Bombay like the Jews, the Parsis and the Muslims, developed, “a strong sense of dislocation and a crisis of identity” to which minorities Ezekiel also belonged, being a Jew (162). Thus the “issues of alienation and assimilation … recur with insistence” (163) in Ezekiel. She is right when she says that the poet finds it hard to identify with India yet, “he does not withdraw from his environment instead he strives for an identification with the place” (164). His feelings towards India are “of love and hate” (166). The scholar observes that Ezekiel appropriates to himself the right of being critical of India’s short comings and comments that, “it is this critical spirit that informs his creative work and enables him to play his role in the making of modern Indian culture” (168).

Surya Nath Pandey examines Ezekiel in relation to his poem “Background Casually” which has autobiographical details and has even been called his verse history, in his article “Nissim Ezekiel’s “Background Casually” : Travails of Marginality”. This poem “Background Casually” was published in 1965, the same year in which Ezekiel made his famous rejoinder to Naipaul’s An Area of Darkness. The poem is in three sections and “underlines the predicament of the poet” (146). The critic observes that the poet had developed a “persecution complex” due to his minority status (146). He left for England where he stayed for more than three years with “Philosophy, Poverty, Poetry” as his companions (147). The critic asserts that the poem reveals how the poet changed “from the quest for assimilation to an acceptance of the actualities surrounding him” (149). The critical significance of this study cannot be underestimated as it reveals Ezekiel’s response to his Indian milieu.

N. Mohanty puts special emphasis on the Jewish ‘self’ of Ezekiel and its ramifications in “Self Within the Self: A Study in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel” Mohanty comments that, “Ezekiel’s poetry evolves out of an attempt to define and redefine the differences between the real Indian and the unreal Indian” (107). Mohanty observes several features in Ezekiel which reveal his “Jewish sensibility” (109). Some of these features are his “earth bound vision” (109), the “ritual of the flesh” (114), “a home-bound vision” and the “cultivation of humanism by the individual” (116). The critic locates in Ezekiel “the amalgamation and absorption of Jewish and Hindu philosophy” (123) towards the end of his poetic journey.
Where as most critics have concentrated on Ezekiel's biography and themes in order to understand his poetry and evaluate it, there are some others who have paid attention to his craftsmanship. Ezekiel tried to bring the idiom of poetry closer to the spoken language. He has remained totally devoted to poetry always, even though he has tried his hand at other forms of writing too, like prose and plays.

R.S. Pathak in his critical piece "Nissim Ezekiel's Quest for Poetic Idiom" examines the use of language by Ezekiel. He observes that, Ezekiel has a "mastery over a variety of styles and poetic modes", his language has "poise and precision" and a "rich supple rhythm capable of subtle modulations and wry irony" (124). He further comments that Ezekiel's is a "poetry of statement" (128). He is a master of the "homely conversational style" (132).

B.K. Das examines Ezekiel's language in his essay, "Nissim Ezekiel and the Making of the Indian English Idiom". The critic credits Ezekiel with a "cool, detached and matter of fact tone" (243). He succinctly comments:

Ezekiel's contribution to Indian English idiom lies in his attempt to re-create Indian characters in their situation (243-244). Das praises Ezekiel for his apt "use of irony, paradox and metaphor" (249).

Dr. Syed Md. Rafique Azam also studies the poetic language employed by Ezekiel in his perceptive essay, "The Language of Nissim Ezekiel" He finds Ezekiel, "a conscious artist skilled in using apt and suggestive words with epigrammatic and proverbial force" (174). He also commends Ezekiel's "dexterous use of rhetorical devices such as personification, simile, metaphor, alliteration, allusion, etc., coupled with the use of striking symbols and palpable images" (174).

A.N. Dwivedi focuses his attention on the images in Ezekiel's poetics in his article, "Imagery in Ezekiel's Later Poetry". He observes that Ezekiel uses "imagery sparingly and judiciously" and that his "images remain strictly functional rather than decorative" (165). Dwivedi quotes David McCutchion who praises Ezekiel's laconic precision for "virtuosity and technical brilliance ... deft precision .... the stock phrases in new contexts, the juxtaposition of the common place and the erudite... a startling appropriateness" (170). Dwivedi finds that "not too many of Ezekiel's images assume the
nature of symbols ... Of such recurring images we may mention the images of journey or
pilgrimage, the woman, city, nature and the basement room” (173-174).

B.K. Das finds that Ezekiel’s poetry is remarkable for its images. In his review, “Imagery in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel” he observes that, “the images of India pervade all through his poetry” (20) which is a “remarkable fusion of rhythm and meaning” (16).

Zerin Anklesaria examines wit in her critical appreciation entitled “Wit in the Poety of Nissim Ezekiel”. The scholar contends that in Ezekiel’s poetics the “analytical faculty” gradually displaces “feeling as the motivating force” (70). According to the critic the poet uses “corporeal analogies” (74) and “verbal anti-thesis and anti-thetical juxtaposition” (75) to achieve the desired poetic effect.

K.Ayyappa Paniker examines the use of irony in Ezekiel’s poetry in his essay, “Behind Irony : The Third vision of Nissim Ezekiel”. He finds that, “Two kinds of irony seem to operate in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. One is closely linked to satire where the poet stands at a distance from the object looked at; the other closely allied to compassion where the poet examines the experience as if from within” (1) The critic finds a progression in Ezekiel from the “wit and irony” in early poems to a “double vision” (3) in *Hymns in Darkness* and a “third vision” in *Latter-Day Psalms* (4).

A.N. Dwivedi studies Ezekiel as a modern poet in his article “Modernity in Nissim Ezekiel’s Poetry”. He calls Ezekiel “the barometer of modern India’s literary atmosphere” (107). He finds all the facets of modernity in Ezekiel like “variety and complexity” (108), “skillful execution of wit and irony” (112), “Contemporaneity of the Content” (112) and “skeptic temperament” (114).

N. Prabhakar Acharya is highly impressed by Ezekiel’s “technical skill” (155). He approves of Ezekiel’s “impersonality” (161). Finally he finds that, “Ezekiel uses traditional meters, regular stanzas and rhymes with dexterity and competence” (162). The foregoing analysis’ reveals that Ezekiel criticism has wide range and scope which goes into many important aspects of Ezekiel’s poetry. However one issue central to understanding Ezekiel’s poetry has hardly been taken up for detailed study in any of the works on Ezekiel. This is the theme of conflict which is ever present in his poetry which provides variety of themes and treatment. Conflict is the core of Ezekiel’s poetry and it emanates from himself and his life. His poetry is in fact a testament of his conflicts and
troubles. Ezekiel not only clashes with his own self, but also with objective reality and with religion. Conflict figures in Ezekiel’s poetry as a clash of opposing ideas, sensibilities or also as an unconventional, unorthodox and therefore, conflicting response. There are times when there is a patent duality in Ezekiel wherein both the emotions of love and hate are aroused and the two selves clash and conflict with each other.

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines “Conflict” as ‘a situation in which there are opposing ideas, feelings or wishes; a situation in which it is difficult to choose” (319). Conditions and situations approximating to this definition are found in ample measure in Ezekiel’s poetry. His condition also approximates to a ‘conflicted’ one which in the same dictionary is defined as “Confused about what to do or choose because you have strong or opposing feelings” (319). Such a state arises in Ezekiel’s poetry when a single thing generates double response in him, as is the case with his ‘Indianness’ about which he is ambivalent.

Whereas Ezekiel is torn from inside by opposing sentiments, he also finds a clash between natural and the man-made phenomena. In his vision, thus, nature and the city are conflicting forces. If conflict is present as an inner reality and also present in the objective world for Ezekiel, it is because he perceives the world as a duality. His conflicts are a result of his highly personal perspective, background and experience. He looks at life in a way different from others. His attempt is to look at both sides of the coin simultaneously. There are times when a thing evokes a double response in Ezekiel, as is the case with his native city Bombay which both attracts and repels him. He is often on the horns of dilemma with respect to things and is unable to decide. He likes to examine thing minutely and distinguish between the incongruous from the appropriate, the benevolent from the malignant and the human from the inhuman. His view at times touches extremity and a wrong step fills him with remorse and desolation which is faithfully recorded in his poems. Conflict provides the momentum and substance to Ezekiel’s poetry. He moves from one confrontation to another and hardly is one tension resolved than another one crops up.

Ezekiel had departed for London in 1948 with his friend and mentor Ibrahim Alkazi for learning art and philosophy. Once he reached London, however his lascivious nature took him on a path of self-destructiveness which caused him anguish. He gave up
a good job at the Indian High Commission and also gave up going for B.A. classes in which he had enrolled. There came a time when he was extremely hard up for money. Added to his poverty was the misery which he felt due to his promiscuity. In the poem "London" Ezekiel confesses to inherent contradiction inside him when he talks of a "self-destructive self" (30). Responses inside him are rarely unified and in the same poem he talks of his confusion and psychological blocks or inherent handicaps calling them "inner knots" (21). He was thus quite aware of his own impulsive nature, his habit of looking at things in a duality and also of his own exceptional reactions to things. The dynamics of Ezekiel's conflicts begin from his very first poem "A Time to Change" which truthfully records his torment caused by conflicting or opposing desires inside him. Even after his return to India his conflicts did not subside and even underwent different forms. Though he had got married to attain stability and meaning in life, yet he could not be faithful to his wife for long and this factor continually kept him in a state of turmoil. He was restless, disillusioned with himself and with life and could not hold on to any job for long thus demonstrating his 'self-destructiveness'. R.Raj Rao his biographer, comments on Ezekiel's own awareness of his failings, which made him feel unequal to the occasion as he says, "he often thought of himself as a failure" (126).

The volume of verse The Unfinished Man is a testament of Ezekiel's awareness of the conflicts which were disrupting his inner harmony making him long for wholeness. The poem "Case Study" has autobiographical details which match up completely with Ezekiel's real life. He reveals his tension and conflicts in his marital life, career options and also his poetic self. In the poem "Marriage" Ezekiel talks of the 'mark of Cain' (16) which had started disfiguring his marital relationship. Instead of trust and love there was now mistrust and incompatibility. Many poems of Ezekiel's middle phase in which the two volumes The Unfinished Man and The Exact Name appear to strive towards a resolution or synthesis of opposites representing a latent desire which was inside him in respect of his own contradictions. Such poems are "Poet, Lover, Bird watcher", "Paradise Flycatcher" and even "Night of the Scorpion".

In this very period in the volume The Exact Name there is patently a conflict in Ezekiel with respect to his love and hate relationship with Bombay, his native city. In the poem "In India" Ezekiel shows his superior or westernized sensibility which sneers at the
“..... beggars / Hawkers, pavement sleepers” (2-3). Ezekiel was a westernized Jew who frowned and fumed at various aspects of India which repelled him. There was patently a conflict in him between his ‘Indianness’ and his feeling of marginality which had a deep impact on his poetry. This sensibility is to be seen in his “Very Indian Poems in Indian English”. Though earlier in life Ezekiel had been deeply religious he became a sceptical humanist in his old age. In his later poems there is patently a conflict between his pragmatic outlook and the traditional religious values.

Right from the beginning of his career Ezekiel faces dilemmas because of his inconstant and indecisive nature. He is perpetually in a quandry and cannot decide on his course of action. He wants to live the bohemian life of a typical poet who knows no laws except those of his calling and yet there is another half of him, which wants a stable, respectable domestic existence. It is a predicament to which Ezekiel has no ready solutions. Ezekiel wishes for the attainment of ideals of virtue, nobility, purity but his worldly needs and obligations nullify and negate this desire too. He is a man who is forced by circumstances to accommodate and adjust, a fact which leads to frustration and agony. In the poem “A Small Summit” he feels as though he lives in a “one-man lunatic assylum” (45). The poet wishes to lead a religious life but his sexuality cancels this desire. He would like to be involved in things but such involvement would hamper his poetical inspiration he conversely cannot afford to be too detached also as he needs a context for his poetry. His dilemma is highly personal and he goes through his trials and tribulations which provide such material for his poetry which is therapeutic. James Wieland, too comments pertinently that, “His sense of being alone, of being a divided man and of living and moving through a world of change form the basis of his vision” (35). The poet lives in a world where everything is present in the form of binaries. He is in a state of tension, hanging between two worlds, where to affirm to one choice is to negate and deny the other. The complete corpus of Ezekiel’s poetry finds its impulse and driving force from a sequence of conflicting situations and states.

One patent reason for Ezekiel’s contrary nature was his Jewishness and its accompanying faith in Old Testament precepts. In his early stage which begins with the poem “A Time to Change” he is torn between the opposing desires of sex on one hand and spirituality on the other. The persona desires commitment to faith but is helpless in
the face of his lust. He is filled with guilt and remorse at his sinful nature. Try as he might he cannot, remain focused on ‘poetry and prayer’ and thus harmony eludes him. He is aware of his disintegrated state and longs for wholeness but as his body’s needs cannot be subdued he remains unfulfilled and anguished. The first three volumes of Ezekiel’s poetry outline how he moves from hope to despair, from the need of a ‘human balance’ to the debilitating arms of desire; from religious frenzy to sexual fantasy and from sin to beatitude. Ezekiel moves though a dialectical progression, now affirming to this approach and later affirming to the other. He is constantly in a flux of desires, and options. In the poem “A Time to Change” he bewails his lack of spirituality and his excessive sensuality. He wishes to reaffirm to the ‘house’ of the Lord which he has defiled. Despite his resolutions the poet always fails in his endeavour. The poem “Penitence” too outlines his predicament and patent conflict:

I will be penitent
My heart, and crave,
No more the impulse
Of a wave
But I am still a sea
And hold within
The muffled tumult
Of a sin. (1-8)

Ezekiel’s view of woman as wanton, his belief in the ‘Cardinal sin’ and the ‘fall of man’ are all factors which are linked up to his conflict of sexuality versus spirituality. All the poems in the first three volumes are related in one or the other way to this basic configuration. In one poem he castigates his sensuality, in another he celebrates it and the cycle moves on around the issue of sex and celibacy.

The cultural affinities of the poet determine his response to his ‘Indian situation’. In the middle stage Ezekiel is in a search for roots. He however cannot overcome his prejudice which arises out of his feeling of marginalisation. The middle stage is a witness to the conflict inside. Ezekiel oscillates between his hate for the city life and his love for nature. In several poems like “Urban”, “A Morning Walk”, “Island”, etc. he gives voice to his frustration and disgust which is caused by his unpleasant urban habitat. He
conversely describes nature with loving care as it fills him with hopes of resurrection of his vision distorted by the city. Ezekiel shows a stark contrast or conflict between the nightmarish urban environment and the benevolent ambience of nature. His is the predicament of a typical city man dulled and drugged by the city noise, tied to his job and commitments and unable to achieve communion with nature which his soul cries for. The persona is confronted by corruption and unbridled exploitation on all sides; he longs to escape but lacks the will to do so. Time and again he resolves to seek ‘primal quiescence’ (“Morning Prayer” 8) but has to reconcile to ‘kindred clamour close at hand (“Urban” 18). Ezekiel’s juxtaposition of the city with nature showing a conflict between their values incorporates not only the myth of ‘Eden’ but also utilizes an aesthetic strategy. His utmost concern is for his poetic inspiration and vision. Most of the meaningful and important poems in the middle phase relate to the contrast and conflict between city and nature and until and unless this factor is kept into consideration the poems fail to yield any meaning or convey any message. The factor or principle of conflict is thus the key to Ezekiel’s poetics at this stage too, the way, it was in the earlier one. Ezekiel’s quest for a meaningful life makes him ponder over the facts of man’s existence or the human predicament. It is essentially related to loneliness and suffering. Ezekiel is aware of this fact and his companion and friend is his poetry which helps him in tiding over his crises. Adjustability is part of life but he does not believe in blind acceptance knowing fully that Fate is cruel and to avert misfortune a person has to be active. In the last phase in which the two volumes *Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter-Day Psalms* are included Ezekiel hits out at the stereotyped thinking which is preached by religion. His sceptical attitude refuses to accept dogma and orthodox principles blindly as his experience of life tells him that such precepts and attitudes are worthless. Ezekiel’s humanistic beliefs clash with the theistic ones as he seeks to assert the legitimacy of human needs. Ezekiel feels his experience of life to be superior to that of the ‘revealed truths’ and he seeks to prove this by discrediting accepted beliefs and conformity. In this last phase he feels the need to tell the truth of his experience and thereby heal himself and others. His search in life has not only been for a poetics but also for a way of life which would yield meaning and purpose. His poetry is the ‘song’ of his experience which has been gathered and accumulated through falls and mis-adventures. He has suffered much in life due to his conflicting views and
attitude but has never been completely vanquished. In the first phase Ezekiel could not merge his sexuality and spirituality, in his second and middle stage, his quest for identity was not altogether successful and in the last stage too his ‘rage’ has not subsided and he is still at logger heads now with religion. Inspite of his defeats, Ezekiel keeps clashing with the world, its ethos and its coercive power which seeks to humble man and reduce him to passivity. Conflict is the governing principle of Ezekiel’s poetry right from the publication of “A Time to Change”. It is the thread which links all the disparate of his poetry together and makes them related to each other. He moves from one encounter or conflict to another perpetually in a quest for more knowledge, experience and meaning, never satisfied, always desiring for more. His poetry thus keeps growing, his diction and form keep changing and his vision keeps maturing more and more. It not only encompasses his subjective self, his response to outer reality but also his intrinsic spiritual beliefs. It is the pre-dominant note of his poetics without which it is bereft of meaning and worth. It provides Ezekiel not only with the structure but also the substance of his poetry. It is thus both its warp and woof.

A.N. Dwivedi also asserts that, “The tension to be witnessed in a number of Ezekiel’s poems often results from a juxtaposition.” (Imagery in Ezekiel’s Later Poetry 129). The aim of the present study is to examine the feature of conflict as it occurs in Ezekiel’s poetry and to show its impact and influence on him. The origins and causes of conflicts will also be highlighted and the changes which occur in his poetry in the various phases will also be traced and their nature examined.

The present study will consist of five chapters. Besides carrying out a detailed critical survey of Ezekiel’s poetry, the introduction chapter will also deal with the evolution of Modern Indian Poetry and Ezekiel’s contribution to it. Chapters II, III and IV will study how the nature and objects of conflict go on changing in the early middle and last phases of his poetic journey. The last chapter will sum up the findings.
WORK CITED


