CHAPTER – 2

The first phase of Ezekiel’s poetry comprises of the volumes *A Time to Change*, *Sixty Poems* and *The Third* in what in what is generally termed as the Romantic period of his poetry. This phase was characterised by the basic conflict between physicality and spirituality, his desire to submerge in sensuality and the consequent desire to escape from it. Ezekiel’s over indulgence in sex made him guilty conscious and the conflict between morality and indulgence reverberates throughout his poetry, written in the early period, though the same conflict is nowhere absent.

The genesis of this basic conflict lies in his being a Jew with strong moral concerns and his equally strong desire to indulge in the pleasures of the senses. Most of the poems of this early phase deal with his over indulgence in sex, his guilt ridden conscience, and his compulsive desire to come out of the cess-pool of sensuality to lead a life “redeemed with prayer” (“A Time to Change” 94) according to the “creed a man of God requires” (53).

In this phase (romantic) Ezekiel focused heavily on love and sex, which was both a source of joy as well as sorrow for him. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar rightly observes that Ezekiel “was painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind” (657).

Ezekiel went England in 1948, at the behest of his friend Ibrahim Alkazi and stayed there till 1952. Ezekiel initially stayed with Alkazi in his flat. He took up a job at the Indian High Commission as a clerk and also enrolled himself as a student of B.A. Philosophy in Birbeck College. As Alkazi’s wife joined him in about a year’s time Ezekiel had to vacate his flat and took up a room in the basement of that very building. He also gave up his job at the Indian High Commission as he felt that too much time was lost there. It was now that Ezekiel had to face hard times. He himself acknowledges this fact in a letter written to his friend Abraham Solomon written from England dated 1st, August, 1950: “I was knocked about a great deal after I left my job; particularly during, the first three months” (Rao 86).

Living in a foreign country, with no support or finances must have been most difficult for Ezekiel. It led to disillusionment and a skeptical outlook as is seen in his
poetry. Ezekiel mentions his basement room in some later poems especially his autobiographical poem “Background Casually” where he mentions “Philosophy/Poverty and Poetry” (23-24) as his three companions. Ezekiel was lonely and penniless and compensated himself in other ways which even caused self-revulsion in him. R. Raj Rao Ezekiel’s biographer hints at Ezekiel’s waywardness when he comments about his company and pre-occupations, “There were other companions, more human ones, like the Spanish woman and her daughter” (73). The caustic remark implies that Ezekiel had his share of women friends and distractions.

Ezekiel’s parents were both from the teaching profession. His father Moses was a lecturer of Botany and Zoology and his mother was a teacher who later became Principal of her own school.

The values that Ezekiel had imbibed from his parents, of discipline, orderliness and conservatism contrasted sharply with his bohemian way of life in the basement room adding guilt to his already present state of uprootedness and isolation.

Ezekiel’s family belonged to the Bene-Israel community of Jews. Though they could be called liberal, yet they observed all the rites like circumcision, Sabbath, Bar Mitzvah and also went to the Synagogue regularly. Ezekiel’s family was moralistic in outlook and conscious of their staid middle-class position.

Ezekiel had studied in the Antonio D’Souza High School and had imbibed an ample amount of Christian orthodox morality regarding purity of conduct, non-marital sex and family obligations. Due to this moralistic upbringing he considered casual sex as sinful and was even inclined towards observance of celibacy. Ezekiel’s has himself acknowledged the influence of Jewishness on his attitude and writing, he says, “I am sure that my Jewish background has something to do with my life, ideas, career, etc, but cannot define that something easily. One day I may do so” (Bayapa Reddy 31)

Ezekiel’s attitude towards the fair sex was chauvinistic and reflected his Jewish mentality. Sanjit Misra affirms, “As a follower of a monotheistic religion Ezekiel shares with brethren of his religious creed the ingrained prejudice against the fair sex as the corruptor of flesh” (50)

Ezekiel considered women to be inferior creatures who had disproportionate sensual desires and were generally sinful. This superior attitude in relation to woman
caused Ezekiel to feel demeaned and taint when he indulged in sexual affairs. Nissim Ezekiel confesses to his lowly opinion of woman when he says, “There is frequent focusing on and pre-occupation with pagan woman in my poetry” (Rehman 43) This sexist outlook also caused Ezekiel self disgust and torment when he associated with woman (which was frequent) and caused in him depression and anxiety.

Ezekiel held woman responsible for his abject and sorry condition wherein he could not resist her (sexually) and was obliged to consort with her. His Judaic-Christian upbringing brought to his mind again and again visions of the fall of man and God’s wrath directed at Adam. Ezekiel felt penitent and full of remorse whenever he felt that he had transgressed the bounds of propriety and morality.

There is no doubt that Ezekiel’s life in England was not the ideal virtuous type, of the kind that would be desirable for an aspiring young poet. The poor shape of his finances, lack of support from his family plus his indulgence in sensual affairs caused guilt and torment inside him. Ezekiel makes mention of these London days and basement room in his autobiographical poem “Background Casually”. Ezekiel also makes mention of the woman who initiated him into sex calling him the “Son of Man” in the same poem (29-30)

It is against this background of disillusionment, despair and awareness of sin and betrayal that Ezekiel’s poem “A Time to Change” of the volume of the same title was written. The poem is central to the understanding of the dynamics of conflict governing his sex life. It tells us about his indulgence in sex, consequent feelings of guilt, his desire to come out of the abyss of sensuality and quest for spirituality. The problem with Ezekiel is the problem with most of the people. He knows what ails him but the temptations are so strong that he cannot resist the same.

Ezekiel begins the poem with an epigraph taken from the Bible, Revelation 3:16 where the spirit speaks to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans:

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold. I will spue thee out of my mouth”. (1-2)

The inclusion of this Biblical extract shows Ezekiel’s deep religious and moral concerns and highlights his tortured, anguished condition wherein he projects himself as one who has insufficient faith and conviction. He has not proved to be strong enough in
the face of temptation like Adam and succumbs to it and consequently forfeits all worth in the eyes of the Lord. Anisus Rehman comments on the efficacy of the epigraph in showing Ezekiel’s deplorable state in the following wards, ‘The epigraph from revelation 3:16 is highly functional and underlines the tortured self with an acute consciousness of the over-rehearsed sensual desire and defiled flesh’ (28).

Ezekiel’s condition is of some one who has betrayed the trust reposed in him. Ezekiel has lost the direction and certainty of his life, consequently his life has become devoid of meaning and identity. His condition is further highlighted in the following lines:

The amputated gestures, eyes turned away
Incomplete absorption in the common scene
Cramped, sedentary in silent rooms,
Marking time on unknown ground
With faults concealed. (“ATC” 16-20)

Ezekiel no longer has the will to carry out his ordained tasks to completion, he feels distracted and diffused and like a stranger to his own surroundings. He is aware of the fact that it is his guilty conscience which pricks him and causes him shame and remorse resulting in such a state of inertia, confusion and disintegration. He hesitates in accepting his faults even to himself.

Ezekiel’s deplorable condition has been caused by his own weak self which cannot resist desire. He feels guilty at having forsaken the path of righteousness and religion. Ezekiel’s Judaic–Christian upbringing revolts against his sensual life and causes self-disgust and disillusionment in him. He is apprehensive of guilt and sin. He is guilty of wrong doing and is seized with remorse and fears of damnation. He wants to give up his degenerate habits and be redeemed.

He says:

We who have the house in April, Lord,
How shall we return?
Debtors to the whore of love,
Corrupted by the things imagined
Through the winter nights alone
The flesh defiled by dreams of flesh
Rehearsed desire dead in spring,
How shall we return? (1-8)

The opening lines of the poem are extremely significant and have a deep religious and racial significance for Ezekiel.

The ‘house’ reminds us in the first instance of the Garden of Eden. Leaving it implies the committing of the cardinal sin, of eating the forbidden fruit and also man’s expulsion from paradise. Ezekiel through use of this metaphor wants to show the gravity of his wrong doing, his remorse at his lapse and his desire to alone for it.

In the second instance ‘house’ implies the lost homeland of the Jews, Israel, their desire to return to it, corresponding and co-existing with it is Ezekiel’s own desire. The Jews had forsaken their God and had committed the sin of worshipping false Gods. They were cursed by God and were enslaved by the Egyptians as well as the Babylonians, subsequently they had been scattered all over the world and became a homeless people searching for a sanctuary.

By use of the metaphor Ezekiel states his racial awareness of being a Jew, his desire for expiation and for striking roots again in life. Bruce King rightly observes, “there are Old Testament echoes reminiscent of the Book of Psalms or the prophets, Ezekiel in London could be the Jews in Babylon corrupted by unlawful desires, strange Gods and defiled by foreign practices” (Modern Indian Poetry 92)

The house’ is also symbolic of the place of worship. The lines, “we who leave the house ... return? (ATC 1-2) show Ezekiel’s awareness of his state of barrenness and sterility caused by his loss of faith and his sinful way of life.

The ‘house’ also means Bombay Ezekiel’s own home. It was with great aspirations that Ezekiel had arrived in England, to make a name for himself and his family. The lines betray his concern at having lost his innocence, purity and purpose, he is no more dedicated to the direction of goal of his life which was to write poetry.

The opening lines thus reveal Ezekiel’s essentially religious and spiritual concerns. They bespeak his awareness of having strayed from the true path, of being an outcast, of his desire to return to the life of virtue and faith. His letter to his friend
Abraham Solomon just before he returned to India is a pointer to his state of mind. He says, "I feel now that I have done badly abroad. I want to redress the balance somehow, not out of vanity, but because I really cannot return home with empty hands" (Rao, 93).

Ezekiel's sorrow emanates from the fact that he had become a "debtor to the whore of love" ("ATC" 30) which means that he had become licentious and had given up the path of virtue. Ezekiel feels defiled not only physically but also mentally because it is his mind which has led him astray, instead of being his anchor. In youth itself, he has become a slave to his passions, with loss of purpose and focus in life. He is filled with fantasies and unhealthy thoughts of sex which occupy his mind perpetually and prevent him from being constructive and productive. His body seems to be affected adversely by these lustful, sensual fancies and fantasies.

Ezekiel a deeply virtuous man, is aware of the sin committed by him. This awareness leads to disquiet and disorder. Based on his Judaic-Christian beliefs and upbringing he makes a candid 'confession' of this sin so that he may win redemption in his own eyes and in the eyes of God and society. The next step for him after winning redemption is to start his journey to a life marked by quiet and order, peace and faith, love and virtue.

This is the recurrent pattern of both his life and poetry. He knows the way to attain the kind of life he wants to lead but the temptations on the way are too strong for him to resist. The constant awareness of his sin, his desire to expiate and redeem himself leads him to a haunting realization that he is too morally weak to resist the temptations on his way to a new life. This constant refrain is the genesis of the various conflicts informing his poetry right from the start of his poetic career.

Ezekiel wants to return to his old accustomed beliefs and practices. Though it has been difficult but Ezekiel has exposed his 'secret faults' to himself and brought them out in the open light. He is helpless in the face of his lust which when satisfied leads to physical inertia and spiritual anguish. He is constantly consumed by guilt and shame. Ezekiel feels bereft of good sense and a proper guiding principle in life. He is aware of the fact that:

The juice of life is in us still
But when the mind determines everything
The leap is never made, the music
Never quite completed, redemption
Never fully won. (9-13)

Ezekiel’s desire is to come out of the rut of debility and participate vigorously in life’s activities, however he feels that his mind alone cannot extricate him from his state of dejection and despair. He would have to involve himself heart and soul to come out of the morass that he is in. He longs for music and harmony in life and he also wants to feel worthy again. His need is to make a ‘leap’ out of his sorry state and become free from self-doubt and anxiety. He wants his burden of guilt to be removed. Ezekiel is fully aware that music in life would elude him and he could never re-integrate his shattered self if he does not wholeheartedly involve himself in healthier and purer activities. He asserts, “Love of life can always be renewed” (45) His longing is for “Discovery of cities fresh as brides” (31) and “New orchids or unimagined seas” (33). Ezekiel desires for a new pattern of life which will be as fresh as brides or as pristine as the unchartered seas. He desires to change and turn over into a new leaf. He states optimistically:

.... in our style of verse and life
The oldest idiom may several
A smile never seen. limbs retain
A virginal veracity and every stone
Be as original as when the world was made (34-38)

Ezekiel not only wants to discover new things but he also needs to discover new meanings in life. His desire is not to seek redemption in renunciation but rather in involvement. He longs for a vision which could enable him to look at things, in a purer, clearer light. He wants restoration of his original perspective to what it was when he was not rusted by his lust, guilt and sin.

Ezekiel has now firmly resolved to mend his ways and seek out a new life with newer commitments. On the one hand is his shameful past and on the other hand is the promise of a rejuvenated life. The gleaming hope of a new life with new priorities and perspectives leads him to spell out in detail the ordered pattern of his life characterised by order and freshness. He has realized that his corrupted ways have yielded him nothing but shame and remorse; he longs to be redeemed in his own eyes through accepting
spirituality and domesticity. Bruce King comments on Ezekiel’s awareness of his corrupt state as well as desire for a new life in the words, “The subject is a mind tormented by awareness of following false gods, disgusted by continuing restlessness, while desiring stability, quiet, discipline, purpose, order" (Modern Indian Poetry 92)

Ezekiel has now decided to discover and organize his own self through poetry and marriage. Domesticity would consume his excessive energies which had led him into the wrong paths. A domestic life is a life of fulfillment in which spirituality as well as worldliness is involved. Ezekiel says:

To own a singing voice and talking voice
A bit of land, a woman and a child on two

Practicing a singing voice and a talking voice
Is all the creed a man of God requires. (46-47, 52-53)

Ezekiel wants to re-affirm his religious affinities and compose poetry in praise of God and mankind. He would like to emulate the patriarchs depicted in the Bible who lived a full life characterised by balanced co-existence of religiosity and domesticity. All rituals and ceremonies with religious and domestic implications are to be performed with utmost solemnity in his new life as he declares, “He has to silence no one but himself” (Line 58)

Ezekiel desires to fulfill his spiritual needs as well as his physical ones by taking up a family life. He is conscious of the fact that motivation has to come from inside his own self. He has to prove his own worth to his ‘self’ and not fall a prey to lust and temptation again. He has to give up his immorality and affirm to purity. Ezekiel feels guilty at having disobeyed the voice of morality and conscience and desires to be redeemed and restored. Ezekiel is fully aware that the new life is to be characterised and guided by order and stability to be found only in domestic life. The key word phrase ‘to own’ implies that solution to life’s problems lies not in running away from life or its renunciation but rather it lies in full absorption and enjoyment of life and poetry.

Ezekiel would further like to be involved in and, relate his poetry to human activities and endeavours. His longing is, “To know the various lives and dreams of men/And show his deep affection for the world/With words emerging from a contrite heart” (60-62). Ezekiel would like to give up his solitariness, affirm his bonds with
humanity and be humble too in the process, he would atone for his misdeeds through his poetry and would include in it the aspirations, fears and frustrations of mankind. He would continually affirm his love for the world through his poetry. Involvement and poetic composition would go hand in hand with each other and reinforce him. Being shut up in his own self and pandering to his ego, has led to the present wretched state that Ezekiel is in. With no one to turn to for help and having forsaken religion too, Ezekiel had succumbed to the temptations of the forbidden fruit and had further sunk into the sorry state of recriminations and self-disgust that he is in. Ezekiel has stated his predicament and found a way out of it. The only problem that lies is, in, implementation of his resolve to shun excessive fleshiness and to timely affirm to the demands of the spirit through prayer.

Bruce King asserts about Ezekiel’s quest:

Life in seen as a quest for wholeness, for intellectual and spiritual satisfaction, for maturity. While the aim is salvation of the spirit from distractions and obsessions it is grounded in the physical and social. The quest essentially concerns how to Live happily, calmly, ethically as an integrated human being (Modern Indian Poetry 92)

Ezekiel decides that he would turn to religion again to avoid being tempted by lustful desires. He also affirms that religiosity could include two more activities from him-domesticity and poetry. His personal credo would include both. Anisur Rehman comments that, “His servitude to sinful sex has drawn him away from the virtuous world and there is a desire now to acquire a life of true commitments” (28).

Ezekiel feels that perfection, purity and infallibility are not possible in this materialistic world but he being human would treat such subjects in his poetry. He would be like the hard working peasant who through dint of both labour and faith is able to grow fruits from the hard, crusty inhospitable earth. Ezekiel feels that his patience, faith, forbearance and application would be rewarded by suitable metaphors. He avers, “Subsidized by dreams alone/ The stubborn workman..../Finds on a lucky day, a metaphor/leaping from the sod” (72-73, 76-77).

Ezekiel feels that while a poet may labour like a workman for his fruits yet he required of grace or inspiration from God. Ezekiel in an essay reasserts the need for both
inspiration and craftsmanship in creating verse, he says, “I’ve never relied entirely on inspiration but feel no need to discount it altogether” (Selected Prose 22)

Regarding Ezekiel’s poetic theory Chetan Karnani observes:

No other Indian English poet has shown the ability to organise his experience into words as competently as Ezekiel has done.... In this he has believed in Yeast’s dictum that poets like women must labour to be beautiful. (22)

Now that Ezekiel has made his resolve to affirm to spirituality through a mundane household life and poetry his tension is allayed and he is at peace. His crisis of faith seems to have been resolved. He has exposed his ‘secret faults’ and through a chant like repetition he seeks to implant the message firmly into his psyche. He says:

Perception in April
Of my condition
Secret faults concealed no more

.................................
The going forth
Prepared with prayer
The timed with prayer
Redeemed with prayer
The aspiration
Found again

.................................
In sight illumination

Bruce King affirms the inter-relationship of Ezekiel’s life with morality and poetry when he says that, “The writing of poetry is treated as a moral act and a prayer, art is for Ezekiel the product of a secular moral conscience, its hopes and desires.” (Modern Indian Poetry 93).

Ezekiel through his stay in England had hoped to learn art and poetry and had also desired to experience life and evolve his own philosophy. He however fell into the trap of sexual allurement and this caused self-revulsion inside his Jewish self which had strong
moral inclinations. The conflict between opposing desires which went on inside his ‘self’ was seemingly resolved by him by immersing himself in a life of domesticity, it was the only way to regain his paradise and his vision of purity and innocence. It was the role method by which he could re-integrate his shattered moral and poetic self.

However, Ezekiel’s resolutions proved to be weak and short lived as his physical needs proved to be stronger than his moral concerns. The conflict between his passionate desires and his spiritual needs resurfaces and he is back to square one, as far as his crisis of faith is concerned. In “Something to Pursue” Ezekiel is again faced with the dilemma of choosing between sexuality and spirituality. He longs to love but is afraid of damnation. When his lust gets the better of him he is filled with remorse and penitence, self-disgust and self hatred and a longing for redemption sets in him. He is aware that he lacks resolve, he longs to be stronger, but he fails in the attempt. This cycle continues on and on throughout Ezekiel’s life and his poetry. His pursuit is of a purely moral, integrated and creative self. Faced with dissolution, he long for definiteness, as he says:

That I may see myself
No longer unresolved
But definite as morning
Moving to fruition
When the season comes. (6-10)

Ezekiel’s condition of being ‘unresolved’ or without identity is the same as it was in the poem “A Time to Change” where this condition was highlighted by the epigraph where in the poet-persona was neither hot nor cold, only vague and diffused. This condition was due to guilt at having sinned. In this poem too, Ezekiel is in a state of debility and dissolution caused by his awareness of guilt. Despite his avowals of abstinence and adherence to morality which his inner self craves, Ezekiel has succumbed to lust again and is again faced with a crisis. He feels guilty at having sinned and decides that it is woman who is the cause of his being anguished. He is filled with feelings of being defiled and tainted because he has had sexual intercourse with woman. Ezekiel was a moral person who considered sex as sin, if, indulged in out of the bonds of matrimony. He, deep inside his mind, considered marriage to be sacred and a bond which enjoined fidelity on the part of the married couple. Despite his strong religious-moral concerns he
could not restrain his impulse for extra-marital sex (even after marriage) and this caused him torment. He was perpetually faced with a choice between his sensuality and his morality in which his physical desire, more often than not, got the upper hand. A duality was thus ever present inside his integral self which became uncreative, unfocussed and indeterminate causing him untold misery and shame. Ezekiel even laid the blame for his debility at woman’s door step as he felt that he was constantly seduced and tempted by her. A.K. Singh affirms this attitude of Ezekiel as he observes:

He sees her again and again as an object of sex, an annoying truth and an invariably, impending menace impeding the persona’s moral voyage. She appears as a femme fatale, an agent of corporeal corruption, sensuality, defilement, and nasty passion, and so in a way an inferior being in human attributes of all sorts (182).

In this poem “Something to Pursue” Ezekiel shows his desperate desire to be free of moral corruption and be free of such pervasive and insidious influences which mislead and misguide him from the true path i.e., of purity of conduct. He can have no respite from his inner tension of he does not overcome his desire for woman. He will be free only, “When the female animal no longer/Haunts the bed in flesh or dream” (123-124) Instead of having holy visions and visitations of muses and the creative impulse Ezekiel suffers from night mares of seduction and the Fall. He longs for his soul to be pure and sacred and not to be tainted by sin. Consorting with such women, as are lustful and pagan has made Ezekiel apprehensive of being damned and fearful of losing his worth in the eyes of God and himself. Ezekiel suffers from doubts and anxieties as to his own worth and in unable to be definite, composed and collected. He is confused about his own identity, as he says:

Who is this man aspiring
To the Good, which may be God?

A score of voices are repressed,
A hundred nightmares press upon his soul—
Tell us : Are you self-possessed? (55-56,64-66)

Ezekiel suffers from disintegration of his ‘self’ which he wants to keep integrated and whole by his adherence to religiosiity and purity. Giving up his belief in religion and
taking up profligacy, instead, has led to Ezekiel’s suffering from delusions, nightmares and self-doubts. Ezekiel’s basic inner core is devout and his indulgence in sex has caused him grief and self-revulsion. The conflict inside him between his spirit and his body each longing for satisfaction of its own urges has upset his equanimity and reduced him to an abject state. He wants his equilibrium to be restored and for that he has to reaffirm his religious convictions. His beliefs in ethics and purity of conduct had required him to lead a life of control but he ignored his inner needs and this now leads to a crisis of faith in which he finds himself without any anchors or roots. He has fears of losing his soul. He wants to be delivered from such a fate. His spiritual crisis causes him misery and he has no answers to the questions which beset him, “.....Is sin supportable?/Does commerce with it damn the soul?/Is it the road to dissolution?” (116-118). Ezekiel is concerned with the very tenets of religion. His essential craving for metaphysical truths comes out in the above lines. He would like to know the answers to the questions which are the very basics of religion. He longs for his spiritual thirst to be quenched and to know the ‘true way’ in life. He would like to be devout, pious and reverential and give up his obsessive worldliness which only leads him into sin and resultant guilt.

Ezekiel is cognizant of the fact that he not only has a weakness for the ‘female animal’ but he also has a tendency to lose his grip over his spiritual beliefs. To achieve harmony inside his mind, he has not only to negate carnality but also to buttress his inherent religiosity. He proposes, “These I have recommended/Order and incantation...../Prayer and poetry, poetry and prayer” (50-51,75)

Ezekiel displays his knowledge of the fact that excessive sensuality would be against his best interests and even destructive for him, as he says, “The honey comb/ is sweet and too much honey is/too much sweetness” (83-85)

Ezekiel is resolved to no more indulge in unhealthy sex. Ezekiel moved from awareness of his condition of debility to the cause thereof, and finally arrived at the point of resolution. He has through intense self-scrutiny decoded his own complex psychical make up. He has realized that he can only resolve his dilemma if he first accepts his flaws and beings them out in the open. He can only aspire to achieve a stronger self, free from self-doubt if, he learns of his own weaknesses and takes measures to rectify them. The cause of his present state of disturbance and upsetting of equipoise has been his excessive
indulgence in sex which has caused him guilt and shame. His ethical self has rebelled against his degenerate life style and this resulted in self-revulsion and disgust at his own self. His waywardness disrupted the tranquility and harmony which his mind desired. His inner pure 'self' felt demeaned and debased and he fell low in his own estimation leaving him fragmented, frustrated and confused with no recourse except to affirm to spirituality and righteousness again. Ezekiel's inner religious self has been subjected to sorrow and suffering by his falling into wicked ways and he is unable to compose poetry or carry through normally in life. Every fiber and bone in his body cries out to be delivered from his sinful activities. N. Mohanty ascribes Jewishness to be the cause for Ezekiel's inner conflict, as he says that:

Ezekiel need not define precisely in concrete terms what his Jewish background has done to him. His poetry in the direct revelation of such influence. There is no doubt that Ezekiel's spiritual quest stems from and is molded by his Jewish consciousness and The Bible. (108)

Ezekiel's religious convictions are apparent in his Biblical allusions. He has been probing at and searching out ways from his dilemma and has felt the need for religious affirmation and dogma to help him to tide over his crisis. He has hopes that he can yet ameliorate his demeaned status and redeem himself. He states:

Gethsemane, where Christ was sorrowful
Even unto death, is not the final station
........................................................................................................
But the scriptures were fulfilled
And Jesus rose again, the stone was rolled away,
Our dissonance may yet be willed away (97-98, 108-110)

Ezekiel's sexual revolt against the dictates of religion and breaking the laws of celibacy has led him into his extreme soul-searching and agonizing introspection. His awareness of guilt makes him gloomy and fearful. He feels that he is a betrayer of the trust reposed in him by the Lord.

Sanjit Misra observes of Ezekiel's Condition, "The poet finds himself in a peculiar fix, torn by the tension between powerful passions and a equally overriding sense of guilt." (53)
Ezekiel's only salvation lies in affirming his spirituality and righteousness. Like Christ who rose again, he hopes to be reborn from the depths of his depravity, which is akin to death with the help of faith which is still alive, though dormant inside his soul. Faith would help Ezekiel to tide over his crises. He feels the need to retain his spiritual beliefs in grace and piety as he feels that in their absence he would not be able to achieve redemption. He asserts:

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 believes in the catholic institution of confession which means a man of faith can be forgiven and absolved of his sense if he confesses and is penitent. The absolute and essential requirement in such a condition where absolution is accorded is faith, in absence of which such release cannot be possible.

Like in the poem "A Time to Change" where he had improvised a solution to his dilemma of dispiritedness through involvement, "He has to build some thing with able hands" (54) here too, Ezekiel desires to terminate his dissonance and anxiety compounded with lack of will, by participation, as he says:

There is a way
Emerging from the heart of things
A man may follow it
Through works or poetry
Or from woks to poetry (13-17).

Poetry is Ezekiel's pride and joy and something which he really requires. In "A Time to Change", too he had professed his inner most need when he had stated that, "Practicing a singing voice and a talking voice/Is all the creed a man of God requires" (52-53) and in this poem too he affirms his attachment and bond with poetical composition, as is clear from the above lines. Ezekiel's two fold strategy is to combat dissolution of the spirit and ward off emptiness by being continually involved in routine life and in poetry for which he has to relate to virtue and purity to invoke poetic inspiration and divine grace. For poetic creation he has to retain his essential integrity of
spirit and clarity of perception If he is dulled and clouded over by doubts and anxieties he would not be able to capture the essence of the poetic experience in its true manifestation. Intensity of perception and clarity of expression are the means through which a poet is able to transmute his experience into poetry and this would not materialize if Ezekiel does not make the 'leap' required to come out of his state of spiritual sickness.

Where as poetry is Ezekiel's obsession it also serves the purpose of enabling him to express his dilemmas and conflicts in black and white, and thus has a cathartic effect for him affording him release. Ezekiel in his interview with Suresh Kohli admitted, "Scores of my poems are obviously written for therapeutic purposes but since you ask me to give examples I shall mention "Something to Pursue" in A Time to Change. (Misra 58). The matter which troubled Ezekiel most was his duality in respect of sexual desire and spirituality. His body longed for consummation where as his spirit yearned for communion and the conflict between the two created chaos and confusion in Ezekiel, building up to the dimensions of a crisis of faith needing therapy and remedy.

Ezekiel could not restrain his sexual appetite and libido but it caused him inward guilt as being a Jew by heart and spirit felt that indulgence in sex was sin. He had in the manner of his race, an ingrained prejudice against the fair sex for being the reason for man's fall from divine grace. He in "A Time to Change" calls woman the "whore of love" (3) and in this poem "Something to Pursue" too, Ezekiel's opinion of woman is derogatory as he calls her a "female animal" (123) A.K. Singh perceptively comments on Ezekiel's enigmatic conception of woman in the following words:

The poet-persona's relation with woman has been of ambivalent nature. He negates the woman's love but returns to her again and again and affirms his predilections even for a whore and almost knowingly exposes himself to her seducing powers. (190)

Whereas on the one hand Ezekiel considered woman as debased, he also nourished deep inside his psyche a concept of woman as an embodiment of virtue (through unrealized). In actuality he could never find any woman who measured up to his standards fully. The women Ezekiel encountered and projected in his poems were very different from what he desired. Inability to realize his virtuous ideal in woman led to his frustration. Ezekiel's portrayal of woman as an active agent of causing damnation is seen in several poems. In the poem "The Female Image" this concept of woman as cheap and
nasty is clearly seen. It was also the reason why Ezekiel felt disturbed and burdened with guilt, conscious of the fact that she was not a suitable person to consort with. The yawning gap between the concept of his ideal woman and the real woman portrayed in many of his poems is a pointer to the conflict raging in him. He says:

She lies, the female image
On the lonely pillow in the single room
This harlot of a dream
Shall her Belly know lust of man? (1-2, 6-7)

Ezekiel’s essentially Judaic-Christian background could only accord his women, the status of an enticer or seducer. She is imaged as a whore, a harlot who is a threat to his morality and purity. Ezekiel always sees woman through the perspective of his Jewishness and Male-centeredness. She causes him concern for his pure god-fearing self. Relating with her causes a conflict inside him, one half desiring to have no truck with her and the other half desiring only her body. Ezekiel could only relate to women physically and never intellectually and spiritually. Asha Biswas observes, “Like his predecessors Ezekiel associates woman with sin and depicts a number of sinful women” (201).

Ezekiel’s image of woman as a mean and lowly creature is further noticeable in the poem “For Love’s Record”. In this poem Ezekiel portrays a woman who unabashedly lusts for men and is a type of a woman Casanova. She is shameless and bold and is a sort of witch (sorceress) who can cast a spell on men and hold them in her power. Ezekiel too was fascinated by her, but managed to keep his distance but not “too far.” He says:

With her I kept my distance (not too far)
But heard the music of her quickened breath
Laughing sorceress to harlequins
Who gathered men as shells and put them by. (9-12)

Ezekiel in this poem, portrays woman as an insatiable, wanton and totally corrupt beast.

It can be judged from Ezekiel’s portrayal of women in numerous poems that he is unable to fully relate to her. This is because he considers such women to be beneath him, fit only for casual encounters. A lengthy more involved relationship with her would not
be worthwhile in Ezekiel's estimate and would even have leave him with a feeling of stigma and taint. A. K. Singh makes a pertinent comment about Ezekiel's non-committal attitude to woman in the following words:

No where in the whole corpus of his poetry the poet has suggested complete absorption in sex, for putrefied love is associated with sin. The persona has related the woman with sin because, she has been depicted as synonym of undribbled deceit and discord and that is why he suffers from the lack of love and genuine commitment. (189)

Ezekiel moves from one woman to another unable to make any affair last long, because he is unable to satisfy his inner yearning for virtue in the women he meets. His strict moral vision has created in him the need to be associated in the purity, innocence and goodness which however he fails to find. After every sexual affair his innate ethical sense is seized with guilt and remorse, he feels apprehensive of retribution and punishment by God and decides to reform himself, but in vain. More often than not, his worldliness vanquishes his spiritual desires and he rushes head long into another affair causing more grief and self-disgust. His involvement with the worldly aspects of life is as deep as his craving for asceticism. His worldliness lead him into sensuousness and affairs with women, in whom however, he cannot find his ideal. Lakshmi Raghunandan comments on the character of woman as depicted by Ezekiel in his poetry, she says:

In most of Ezekiel’s poems that deal with women, they appear to be prototypes of Eve or Delilah, the legendary symbols of sex, “Great woman-beast of sex you are” but rarely does he perceive them in the innocence of Ruth. (51)

Ezekiel’s projection of woman as a merely sexual and immoral being finds culmination in the poem “The Old Abyss.” He portrays a woman who was once married and had a child too, but who has now deserted both and spends her time in having casual sexual affairs with men. Ezekiel states, “This girl once married, with a child/But now alone, torments/The men she knows” (1-3)

The common denominator of Ezekiel’s conflicts is that he is perpetually torn between two worlds. One of desires and the other, of negation, one associated with fulfillment and the other with denial. His ideal world was one of purity, innocence, chastity and virtue but his actual world was sordid and corrupt. He desired to be virtuous as desired by his religious convictions but he could not attain such perfection which left
him disgruntled and morose. His desire for perfection through art and married life remains unrealized. This quest for ideal moral perfection in life remains as elusive as his quest for “flawless doctrines” (“ATC” 66) and “certainty of God” (“ATC” 66).

Ezekiel’s conflict and contradictions are the stuff his life and art are made of as he himself declares in an interview to ‘Gentleman’ quoted by B.K. Das, “To start with my own inspiration is and always was my “inner life”. And writing is for me a way of coping with the tension between my inner life and outer life” (“NE. and the Making of the Indian English Idiom” 243)

Ezekiel had high aspirations and expectations of a moral nature from his own self and his lapses in this context; of falling a prey to temptation led to self-laceration and self-castigation. His poetic self was dismayed at his own vulgarity and crudity.

Ezekiel’s condition is peculiar because even though he is aware of his weakness and flaws yet he is inadequate in coping with them. He confesses in” I told the Thames” that he is powerless, and is but a slave, to his passions. He says:

Beside the Thames
I watched the waves
And I was one
Of passion’s slaves. (9-12)

Despite Ezekiel’s protests and exhortations to himself to be stronger, he fails to live up to his own expectations and is time and again, back in the morass of unhealthy desire. This fact, of his, being helpless in the face of temptation comes out for forcefully in this poem and also that sex is an obsession and a compulsion for his. Being a victim of his own fleshiness caused Ezekiel extreme anguish as his real desire was patently, to be free from vice. Holiness and purity though unattainable fully, could yet be aspired for and realizable to some extent, so Ezekiel was utterly dejected and desolate whenever his self control broke down and he committed excesses. He felt guilty of betrayal of his own self as well as religion which idealized abstinence. He even felt undeserving of divine blessings and grace. In the poem “Lamentation” Ezekiel’s grief and sorrow is poignantly and explicitly projected, his suffering being caused by sexual desire which overwhelms him and vanquishes him. Desire whether satisfied or unsatisfied causes him to be disturbed and anxious. He says:
My lips lack prophesy
........................................................................
Fugitive am I and far from home
........................................................................
Desire postponed is death to me
Pursued it rots the bowels
Give me vision and I shall be clean (1, 4, 13-15)

Ezekiel's sorrow and suffering is caused by his own self. He laments that his words have lost efficacy and meaning because there is no truth or force of conviction behind them. He is like a vagabond who has no roots and has deserted his, home. Ezekiel's use of the word 'home' in the line “Fugitive am I and far from home” (4) is reminiscent of the poem “A Time to Change” where also he has talked of being homeless, it suggests that he has deserted his convictions and is without any legitimate bindings. He is more or less in the same condition as before guilt-ridden and anxious for his veracity. Sex is again the cause of his torment. His physical and spiritual sickness makes him despondent and he longs for succour. He beseeches God to give him a true ‘vision’ of reality so that he can extricate himself from his dilemma. Ezekiel can neither satisfy his craving for sex and be fulfilled nor can he be free of its destructive attraction. He is both attracted and repelled by his innate urge so that he is continually in the throes of despair. He longs for worldliness but that would be at the cost of spirituality which too, is his essential requirement. Spirituality alone too, does not give him contentment as he desires to participate in life too. Spirituality cannot co-exist with the type of life that Ezekiel leads and this factor makes him frustrated and confused. Realisation of either i.e., indulgence or abstinence can only be by the denial of the other but he is unable to decide on his choice. The conflict between the two opposing desires for supremacy goes on inside Ezekiel unabated. B.K. Das asserts that, “Torment of the flesh and the spirit resulting out of the failure in achieving one’s goal seems to have made the poet a bitter man” (The Horizons of N.E. 's Poetry 7).

Ezekiel's dissatisfaction is at himself and at life too, which has landed him in such a queer situation. He wants to live life fully and be an integrated personality but his own inherent weaknesses prevent him from achieving his aim. His quest is to discover his own
identity and also to recount his experience of life through poetry. He wants to gain an all-round perspective of reality which would not only afford him subject matter for his poetry but would also yield him pleasure and fulfilment. He wants to negate the demands of ego which could distort his perception. For this, he has to keep a check on impulsiveness and unhealthy desire. The biggest hindrance in achievement of self-realisation by Ezekiel is his own complex self. V.A. Shahane rightly observes about Ezekiel and his delineation of opposites or conflict:

There is clearly a very close connection between Ezekiel's life and his poetical work. He is primarily a poet, seeking sometimes in vain, other times successfully a balance between an almost existential involvement with life and an intellectual quest for commitment. His poetry emerges from a tension between opposites, an emotional plunge into life and a desire for detachment from it; a sensuous perception of the physical world and a spiritual abstraction out of that world; a craving for prayer and a temptation for irony; a passion for this world and a hankering for the world beyond. His poetry is deeply imbedded in his life (existence) and at the same time merges into meditation (essence) (254).

Ezekiel believes that words should emerge from the very core of a human being and to carry force and authenticity they must be linked to truth and one's true convictions or else poetry would be insipid and worthless. What he says in "Speech and Silence" bears testimony to his belief, "Integral with the inner self / Becomes the public spoken word" (33-34). His need thus is to resolve and subdue all conflicts and contradictions which would lead to confusion and mixing up to thoughts and emotions rendering him unable to compose authentic verse.

Ezekiel was devout and God-fearing at heart, with a fine poetic sensibility. He wanted his inner longings for purity and virtue to be realised to some extent, and also desired to keep his ideals intact. However these desires of his, were rarely if ever, realised in real life. He wanted poetry to be both his vocation as well as avocation but this could not materialize as he was not comfortably off and needed to work at a job to survive. Poetry was not a well paying venture in those days. Ezekiel's viewpoint while being idealistic was also tinged with a touch of scepticism, which would question the veracity and validity of everything including human relationships and religion.
To avoid fragmentation and dejection Ezekiel needed to believe firmly in religion. He tried never to go against the commandments and basic tenets of Jewish-Christian dogma and orthodoxy so that he would not suffer from guilt and remorse. This naturally meant that extra-marital sex was taboo for him which was a fact that he well understood but could not comply with. The poem “Two Nights of Love” shows both of Ezekiel’s basic desires. He says:

After a night of love I dreamt of love
Unconfined to threshing thighs and breasts

Within a freedom fresh as God’s name
Through all the centuries of Godlessness. (1-2, 5-6).

After engaging in sex Ezekiel is disgusted and longs for a purer, higher, non-physical love. He longs for holiness, purity and exaltation. His duality patently comes out in the next stanza when he negates spirituality is an opposite manner to the one above, affirming again to his weakness and disability, which is sex. He says, “After a night of live, I turned to love/ The threshing thighs, the singing breasts / Exhausted by the act, desiring it again” (7-9).

Ezekiel’s inability to remain committed to his own resolve is glaringly exposed by himself, though inadvertently. Ezekiel’s desire for sex was compulsive and was an obsession with him. Chetan Kamani pertinently observes that, “Ezekiel is indeed ‘a child of flesh and fancy’. He is a child of flesh because human passion is the theme of many of his poems. More than anything else a beautiful woman stirs him into verse” (38).

Ezekiel is a slave of his passions and try as he might he cannot overcome his fascination for woman. He hears the call of faith but heeds it not because his sexual desire is stronger. Even though Ezekiel has seen the darker side of woman’s nature yet he cannot resist his longings for her. The scales of Ezekiel’s longings were sometimes in favour of spirituality and other times tilted to the side of sensuality. When he affirmed to sex, he was tormented; his affirmations to spirituality were rare and only for short intervals. Ezekiel’s desire for both kinds of love-physical and spiritual is again shown in the poem “And God Revealed”. This poem shows Ezekiel surprisingly affirming to spirituality with a greater clarity and firmness than generally found. He says:
We were not made for love alone, my love
Though our flesh and bones would have it so
A thousand small intricacies of brain
Hold my blood streams captive, which will not flow
Freely to serve the ends of love, until
They know the various ways of men,
The soul in solitude and God revealed (15-21).

Here Ezekiel even in the midst of physical consummation negates physical desire and spurns his lady love; his desire is for divine love. Ezekiel's twin concerns are both laid out in this poem and the complete incompatibility of one with the other is also unequivocally illustrated. To avail of one is to negate the other. This poem is a rare example where spirituality is put on a pedestal higher than that of sensuality.

Both Ezekiel's life and art are a study in contradiction. S.C. Dwivedi confirms this contention when he states, "Ezekiel's own life has been full of contradictions. His poetry demonstrates his efforts to come to terms with himself" (179). Ezekiel's dilemma's caused him anguish as he held himself responsible for them.

Ezekiel suffered a lot because his essentially moral self was hurt at his own excessive sexual indulgence. His despair and desolation is poignantly expressed in the poem "Nothingness". As the title itself suggests his condition is one of being reduced to a cipher or to nothing. The reason for this fall from the heights of glory to the depths of despair is his profligacy which burdens him with guilt. He says:

At lat I have been reconciled
To simple nothingness and catch
Myself, hour after hour
Free from any need to live at all –
The impulse and the fear of love (1-5).

Ezekiel has sunk so low in his estimate that he has even no desire to live any more. He has betrayed his religious convictions by breaking the code of celibacy and is disgusted at his own corrupted self. His spiritual vacuity is caused by his neglect of essential principles of social and ethical conduct. He has failed to measure up fully in his own eyes because of his repeated failure to be true. Love, instead of, lifting him up and
giving him pleasure has dumped him down with a bang and causes him untold grief and
guilt because his love is, as he is himself aware only sexual love or lust.

Ezekiel knows that excessive guilt and torment would lead to inner dissolution
and in the absence of certitude he would be unable to compose poetry. He knows his
dilemma but still cannot come out of it. Herein lies the cause and effect of all his
conflicts. Ezekiel feels the need for deliverance from his wretchedness and misery. In the
poem “Prayer-I” Ezekiel makes an attempt to resolve his inner conflict and come to terms
with his own contradictions. He says:

If I could pray the gist of my
Demanding would be simply this:
Quietude. The ordered mind.
Erasure of the inner lie (1-4).

The outcome of being continually involved in activities which cause his ‘integral
self’ to become divided and doubt ridden makes Ezekiel thirst for order and adherence to
moral principles time and again. His habit of concealing his ‘secret faults’ and behaving
like an ostrich in the face of storms of lust consequently makes him confused and
bewildered longing for abatement of this state of inner chaos and turmoil. His personal
life and poetry have both been affected adversely by his vacillating between his dual
concerns; of sex and of the spirit. He bewails despairingly, “… – both life and art / Are
ground and bogged in crudity” (17-18). Vulgar passion has disrupted the harmony of
Ezekiel’s life and he desperately yearns for his equilibrium to be restored.

Chetan Karnani’s observations about Ezekiel’s tormented self are highly
perceptive, he says, “He found himself tormented by conflicts and raging at his own
image since he knew himself as one who is mystified by the intricate mould of human
desires (44).

Ezekiel’s quest is to achieve equanimity of mind and spirit – a state above the
level of sordid and degenerate desire. He wants to curtail and curb his excessive
worldliness which causes him agony. Ezekiel’s trauma is that he knows his condition, of
being a slave to passion, he also desires to be free of such excessive emotion but he fails
in his attempts due to lack of determination.
Ezekiel now turns to Buddhism to help him in salvaging himself. He tries to take inspiration from the Buddha and quotes him in the following lines, “Which, mind - blessed is the tamed mind* - / Can mend and build the Holy City” (21-22).

Ezekiel knows that his salvation lies in purging himself of retrogressive desire which only leads to shame and disgust. He takes refuge in the Buddha's teachings which state that desire is the root cause of all sorrow and suffering in the world and that man can be liberated from such sorrows if he could only check his ever multiplying or limitless desires. When man would be able to check his ever increasing lust or 'Vasana' then man could attain a stage of illumination or wisdom, thus Ezekiel quotes from the Dhammapada, “-blessed is the tamed mind*.-” (21). After superceding ordinary worldliness man reaches a state of enlightenment which would be a source of perpetual joy and bliss to him. Ezekiel too, desires to tame his impulsive mind which lacks fixity and resolve. He too wishes to be free from the trap of worldly desire or 'Vasana'. He too, would like to attain to a state of harmony – inner and outer. He too desires to attain Nirvana or freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. Though the acceptance and assimilation of the Buddhist creed in his life Ezekiel hopes to make amends for his past wrong doings and also to find a principle for future conduct of himself. He desires to strengthen his moral fibre by soothing his tormented conscience.

The poem “In Emptiness” again deals with Ezekiel’s desire for an end to his agonizing duality by incorporating the Buddhist teachings in his life. He would like there to be a balance between his passions and his reason represented by the heart and mind respectively. He avers:

Broken by excesses or by
Lack of them, let me always feel
The presence of the golden mean
Between the elan of desire
And the rational faculties (22-26).

Whereas earlier Ezekiel had decided to curb his desires or ‘Vasanas’ as enjoined by the Buddhist teaching he now, wants to take more steps in his direction of achieving harmony. The next step as advocated by Buddhism in order to achieve wisdom and thereby balance or equanimity is to accept the eight fold path or the middle path which
avoids all extremes and is thus also known as the golden mean. The eight fold path 
enjoins the observance of a strict code of conduct. A person has to achieve self-
realisation through moderation and has to give up his wrong habits, wrong attitudes and 
wrong actions. He has to observe simple virtues like charity, truth and chastity and have 
full and complete faith in the Buddha as a great teacher and benefactor of mankind. In 
this way the disciple can achieve harmony as opposed to duality and can thus emerge 
victorious over the forces of illusion and disintegration or ‘Maya’ achieving bliss finally.

Ezekiel is completely earnest and sincere in his desire to combat his degenerate 
longings, achieve integration and subdue his guilt. Ezekiel leaves no stone unturned as he 
searches every where for something to give him support and strength to fight against his 
enemy of temptation. The anguish and desolation which succeeds the succumbing to 
temptation is beyond Ezekiel’s capability to endure. In the poem “Psalm 151” he broken 
heartedly laments, “Confessions bring me no release / Deliver me from evil, Lord, / 
Rouse me to essential good” (12-14).

Ezekiel finds no salvation for himself in the prescribed 150 Psalms in the Bible 
and adds one of his own in his desperation to be delivered from his guilt and his evil 
ways. He wants God to help him out of his unenviable predicament. He is but human, 
with human needs yet he feels apprehensive of sin and of damnation. Recourse to religion 
does not fully relieve Ezekiel of his guilt and remorse assails him continually allowing 
him no rest or respite. Ezekiel’s desolation and grief arising out of his consciousness of 
the causes there of are prominently stated in “Report”. He declares:

Possession is not, as once 
I thought it was, an act 
Of love, it is only 
A substitute ............
............... there is clearly 
Emphasis on the inner lie 
For which one pays so dearly (1-4, 8-10).

In order to have sex Ezekiel has to convince his own inner self through lies to get 
over his sense of wrong doing. The habit of fabricating or cooking up lies to assuage his 
guilt has caused a shattering up of Ezekiel’s inner self or psyche. This is the reason why
he bewails that "..... there is clearly / Emphasis on the inner lie / For which one pays so dearly" (8-10). Such double dealing and two-timing can have a destructive effect on one's sanity, too. Lying and cheating are against Ezekiel's basically moralistic make-up and causes him guilt and a feeling of humiliation. He acknowledges that, "... The sea/ Of passion is nothing, precisely" (14-15). After Ezekiel has suffered endless indignities and shame realisation finally dawns on him about the worthlessness of excessive sexuality. To quote Ezekiel, "There were conflicts with in me of a psychological complexity which demanded expression and writing poetry helped me in coping with them" (qtd. Trikha 23).

Ezekiel is haunted by the knowledge of his misdeeds. He is desolate and filled with remorse and has no one but himself to blame. His misery and suffering are all too apparent in the poem "A poem of Blindness", as he says:

Within the certitude of darkness I
A little sadly, care
To feel the bounty of the open sky,
And keep in bounds my old despair
Whose tireless hydra heads
Twist and turn, the hydra heads
None can follow where I'm forced to fly. (8-14).

Ezekiel likens his malady to the hydra heads of the mythical monster in Homer's epic which kept growing back even after Odysseus cut them off. He longs to be free of the burden of guilt that he carries. His poetic vision has become distorted and warped by his unhealthy passions and, anxiety and mortification have become his lot.

Sanjit Misra observes that, "No Gentile or Jew worth the salt can overcome the sense of guilt and sin caused by involvement with flesh and Ezekiel is no exception" (71).

With his mind being a battleground of opposing desires of sexuality and spirituality each striving for supremacy Ezekiel became subject to trepidations and fears losing his decisiveness and focus. Earlier Ezekiel had resolved to actively participate in human activities and to relate them in his poetry. He had desired to get over his spiritual sickness or dissolution by affirming to religion and prayer as also to poetry. Progressing on the path of reconciliation of his conflict and end to crisis of faith, Ezekiel further determines that there must be in him an equitable balance of reason and emotion, or in
other words of head and heart. Satya Narain Singh rightly observes about Ezekiel that, he is. “A victim of impulses and indecision” (53). Ezekiel feels let down by his own self.

Aspiration has not resulted in achievement and Ezekiel has been helpless in controlling his own weak self. Far from being an integrated personality with an assortment of good qualities, virtue, inner-strength and poetic creativity Ezekiel found himself to be lacking in all these respects. This awareness caused disgust and bitterness in him. His longing for a correct equation between thought and passion comes out in the poem “Division”. He says:

For nothing can be hidden long
From heart or intellect
To each the other’s fantasy
Is plain in retrospect,
But welded they could seem and be
A single architect (13-18).

Ezekiel knows fully well that the division between his head (thought) and heart (passion) causes instability and disorder in his life and art and he again and again tries hard to bridge that gap but all his efforts come to naught. In the poem “A Poem of Dedication” Ezekiel further re-affirms his commitment to seek moderation as a way to subdue his worldliness. He declares, “I want a human balance, humanly / Acquired, fruitful in the common hour” (32-33). Ezekiel furthers his line of reasoning by asserting that:

Not to hanker for a wide, god-like range
Of thought ..............................................
...............................................................................
I do not want the perfect charity
Of saints nor the tyrant’s end less power (27-28, 30-31).

Ezekiel’s poetry records his struggles to come to an understanding with himself. N. Mohanty opines that:

Nissim Ezekiel variously christened as the father of modern Indian Poetry in English and its law giver punctuates his poetry with the compulsions of inner
dichotomies and inheres a tendency to illustrate what W.B. Yeats long back acknowledged that out of our quarrels with our selves we make poetry (107).

Ezekiel’s desire to resolve conflicts even finds its way into his poetic style and beliefs. In the poem “On an African Mask” he says:

The mask evokes a muffled noise
Of dialectic oppositions
Which like it must slowly poise
Their various sings as good equations
And in the passion of mind or heart
Acquire the equilibrium of art (13-18).

Ezekiel avers that as in an African mask the separate facets; the signs, markings etc., merge their distinct identities into one coherent whole, in the same way poetry too must synthesize opposing or conflicting things into itself. The conflicts should be presented in way that they do not offend the sensibility but appear complementary to each other. Bruce King comments on the artistic theory propounded by Ezekiel in the above stated lines in the following words:

As in the artistic and literary theories of the 1950s art is seen as the product of contrasting emotions structured into a balance of tensions and stresses. The poem itself moves from an appearance of disequilibrium to a final order (Three Indian Poets 21).

Ezekiel’s theory of merging conflicts in poetry in further illustrated in the poem “Poetry”. Ezekiel also makes a distinction between a poem and poetry. He states:

A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two, but poetry
Is something more. It is the why,
The how, the what, the flow
From which a poem comes,
In which the savage and the singular
The gentle, familiar
Are all dissolved ...... (10-17).

C. Nageshwara Rao pertinently observes that, “Ezekiel seems to believe that making poetry out of life with all its contradictions and conflicts is the highest harmony
and synthesis for a poet to achieve" (160). Through poetry Ezekiel is somewhat able to get release from his tensions and it serves a dual purpose for him.

Throughout the first two volumes *A Time to Change* and *Sixty Poems* Ezekiel was troubled by the conflict going on inside him between his physicality and his spirituality but by the time Ezekiel wrote *The Third* a change had come about in his attitude to sex, which had previously caused him severe mental and spiritual agony. He now started using sex as a means of poetic creation.

The first intimations of this radically changed way of thinking comes in the poem “Nakedness I” in *Sixty Poems* where he says, “And let him understand that in the working / Of his mind the body takes a hand” (13-14).

Ezekiel was persuading himself that he should not be ashamed of his body’s needs and was stressing on the close relationship between the two, viz., body and soul Ezekiel had even at that initial stage; of writing *Sixty Poems* believed that the mind cannot function independently of the body and that sensations are necessary to give it inspiration. His belief was similar to that of Yeats who says in the poem “Among School Children”, “Labour is blossoming or dancing where / The body is not bruised to pleasure soul” (57-58).

Ezekiel clinched the argument for sexuality, in poetry, in his favour in the last poem of *Sixty Poems* “Creation” where he says:

> The sunshine of a kiss can glow,
> Within a dozen poems, and a body yielding
> On the summer grass with expert fingers
> Can release
> A spring of words fresh as women’s eyes (5-9).

Chetan Karnani comments on Ezekiel’s use of sex in stimulating the mind and making of poetry in the following words, “He not only talked of human desires without any reservation but he treated passion as an essential requirement for the creation of poetry” (51).

It is now that Ezekiel gives up his guilt in respect to sex and starts celebrating it. He now resolves to make poetry through it. He now feels that sensations can be transmuted into poetic impulses, which will not only enable him to compose poetry but
will also liberate him from the burden of guilt caused by his indulgence. Sexuality would lead him to an increased knowledge of things and a wider perception which would facilitate versification. Ezekiel now believes that sex is normal, natural and even a cause for celebration. Ezekiel’s changed perspective liberated him from guilt and this transformation enabled him to write of sex with more abandon and ease. A poem which celebrates sex and associates it with spirituality is “Admission” in which Ezekiel says, “I am not sure of anything but this: / The blood must leap before the spirit sings / Perpetual life is in the mutual kiss” (9-11). Ezekiel asserts that the soul too gets its impulse from the body; to deny the body pleasure is to deny the soul. Ezekiel’s belief corresponds to Walt Whitman’s when he declares in “Song of Self”, ‘I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not debase itself to you / And you must not be debased to the other” (82-83).

Ezekiel too feels that the relation of body and soul is close and while validating the need for bodily love asserts that it could even lead to immortality, or in other words he means that love is immortal.

In the poem “Paean” Ezekiel’s changed view of sex and its relationship with man is prominently projected. He asserts that sex is even prior to religion, as it is the cause of existence itself. Ezekiel asserts that rituals like baptism are unimportant as compared to physical consummation. His astounding declaration is that, “The first baptism is not in water / But in fire. The limbs are shaped to lock / And love .......” (12-14).

Ezekiel declares that the human body is naturally constructed to love and this proves that it is not sinful and wrong. Ezekiel whose Christian beliefs were predominant in the poems “A Time to Change” and “Something to Pursue” has now turned away from dogma towards the Freudian way of thinking which believes that repression of sexual desire could lead to neurosis and should be fully enjoyed to achieve wholeness. Ezekiel now considers sex to be a blessing. Anisur Rehman asserts that:

In a way Nissim Ezekiel’s poetic pilgrimage may precisely be interpreted as a pilgrimage from sex to super-consciousness. No theme recurs in his poetry as frequently as does the theme of love and passion. Neither a romantic dreamer nor a platonic, he holds an altogether different stance in his approach to sex and woman (13).
In the poem “Aside” Ezekiel declares that each and every living organism in the world engages in the sexual act. Through the poem Ezekiel seeks to legitimize his indulgence in sex and his fascination for it. He says:

One cannot imagine
Elephants making love

Or even other men
With women

Except as a song
In which the lovers
Are sung and saved
From too much separation
Love is the ultimate reparation (1-2, 6-7, 10-14).

Ezekiel maintains that life is nothing but a song of love which is created and sung for lovers. Love can heal all the wounds that life may inflict, it can recompense for all hurts and redress all wrongs. Poetry treats of love and lifts it above all other matters in the cosmos, and there is a two-way correspondence between love and poetry.

Progressing from poem to poem Ezekiel elaborates his changed beliefs in the volume The Third.

In the poem “Declaration” he says that:

........ possession is necessary

And deprivation is desolation

No moral law can fill the void
Deaf and dumb to all is appetite (12, 15, 19-20).

Ezekiel clearly states that morality cannot be the cure for loneliness and desolation arising out of loneliness. It has its limitations. Love and its physical aspect sex is necessary for Ezekiel, its need is all-consuming and it has no other alternate nor compensation. It is a primal instinct which cannot be repressed without causing serious
harm to one's own self. It is through sex that life is propagated and goes on; it should not be condemned but comprehended in a correct way. Ezekiel tried to be just to his own self and do the right thing in life. As his knowledge and experience increased his views kept on changing and his poetry is a sort of a record of the growth of a mind. Michael Garman observes about the relationship of Ezekiel's life and his poetry that, "He is a poet of whom it is not trivial to say that his poetry and his life are inextricable and whose purpose in writing is to make a harmony (life, poetry) out of a purely biological fact (existence)" (209).

In the poem "Conclusion" Ezekiel's viewpoint becomes totally hedonistic, like that of the Epicureans who lived a life of sensuality. He projects the view that life is basically to be enjoyed and woman is just a medium for its realisation. His contention is, "That women, trees, tables, waves and birds / ... / Are here to be enjoyed" (4, 7).

Ezekiel has now no qualms about stating his preferences. He further qualifies his assumption when he says that, "The true business of living is seeing, touching, kissing / The epic of walking in the street and loving on the bed" (20-21).

However despite his new outlook and changed way of thinking Ezekiel cannot shake off his feeling of sin and guilt which pursues him remorselessly. He again finds himself disturbed and tormented because his religious ethical sense revolts against his liberal attitude towards sex and he feels the pangs of conscience pricking him. Ezekiel is back to square one as far as his quest for achieving balance or harmony is concerned. His condition reverts to what it was in the beginning — of anguish, spiritual sickness, distraction and indecisiveness as was projected in the first poem "A Time to Change".

"Song of Desolation" in the volume The Third again finds Ezekiel dangling between the opposing forces of morality and sexuality. His awareness is one of having broken the moral code and of having defaulted. He states, "You lifeless moralists prescribe your laws / And make me see / My secret flaws" (10-13).

Ezekiel is disgusted and takes a dig at moralists or preachers when he calls them lifeless thereby meaning impotent. Ezekiel is desolate as the title of the poem indicates. He has turned full circle about and is back to where he was in the beginning. In his very first poem he was facing a crisis because of his 'secret faults' and now again his dilemma is caused by "secret flaws" they being the same thing.
Despite Ezekiel’s shift of perspective his turmoil refuses to die down. His “secret faults” are too deeply ingrained in his psyche for him to give them up easily. Neither is he able to debunk his morality, so his chaotic condition persists. A.K. Singh comments on Ezekiel’s versatility in the following words:

Even his failure in love and relationship with women does not dampen his longing at achieving balance and reconciliation in human relationship amid the dark dilemmas of the existence and the poet sustains his faith .... It has been his obsession and libido giving him, sustained strength to live and love, both (190).

The fact remains that despite all Ezekiel’s sufferings, hardships and ignominy he is unable to give up his excessive sexuality. He is caught between love of live on one hand and love of spirit on the other. His nurturing of a duality inside himself has led to a shattering of his focal energy, thrust and oneness of being. He is weak willed and disspirited due to habitual debauchery. His shifting from one perspective to another and changing of intrinsic beliefs has resulted in destroying his identity and commitment.

The poem “Midmonsoon Madness” reveals Ezekiel in a state of complete instability and insecurity. He nonsensically says, in the opening lines, “I know I will go / From here to anywhere / Which means no where” (1-3). Things have evidently proved to be too much for Ezekiel and he is at the end of his tether. He continues in the same vein, as he says “I listen to my own madness / Saying : smash it up and start again” (14-15). The poem with its lack of inherent logic and incomprehensibility prompts A. Raghu to comment that, “The speaker seems to suffer from a mild attack of schizophrenia” (71).

The tension caused in Ezekiel by his longings for sex and his attempts to curb such desire has finally become too much for him. He seems to have become so frustrated that in his anger he has completely lost control and restraint. Inability to channelize his excess energy into poetry and other creative activities has led to an eruption in Ezekiel. His morality constantly berated him and burdened him with guilt and finally his normalcy is under the threat of being seriously disrupted and destroyed. He has almost reached the brink of insanity.

At the time the last volume studied in this phase The Third was published in 1958, Ezekiel had done a stint at The Illustrated Weekly of India, had worked at Shilpi’s (a Sarabhai undertaking) and was now about to take up another job at Chemould’s as a
factory manager. His life had become chaotic and even his marriage was proving to be an unhappy one. He was going through a critical phase with numerous conflicts tearing him up from inside. R. Raj Rao Ezekiel's biographer makes a pertinent observation in respect of Ezekiel and his conflicts as they figure in *The Third* as he says, "In several poems Ezekiel wears a third person mask to disguise himself and to deflect suspicion that the poems may be about the conflicts he was going through as a real person" (133).

The fact emerges that the poems with themes of conflicts are personally related to Ezekiel and depict reality.

The poem "What Frightens Me" is one of the last in this phase and it reveals Ezekiel in a doubt-ridden, apprehensive and self-disgusted state. He is filled with shame at his own sorry state and confesses that sex has been his undoing. It has been the cause of his humiliation and defeat in life. He holds his own self responsible for his sad fate because he has been unable to resist the temptation of the forbidden fruit. He says:

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Myself examined frightens me
It is no accident I am what I am
I saw the image being formed
I saw it carnal in the arms of love
(Crushed, compromised and consummated)
I saw it making vows
With hidden weakness in the bone (1-7).
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Ezekiel has himself said it all in this poem. He confesses that his resolutions had no efficacy because he was not really committed to keeping them. He had seen the end coming, but had no power to avert it.

Ezekiel is highly perturbed and alarmed at his own condition. R. Raj Rao makes a statement about Ezekiel in relation to the period when this poem was written (about 1958), he says that, "He led a somewhat promiscuous life that alienated him from his family" (137). It is obvious from this observation (of Ezekiel's biographer) and also from the poem's lines, "I saw it carnal in the arms of love / (Crushed, compromised and consummated)" (4-5) that Ezekiel was facing a crisis at that time and the reason was his own irrepressible and degenerate passion.
The poem ends on a negative note with recriminations and despair. Ezekiel laments:

I have long watched myself

..............................
At times ashamed but always
Rationalizing all I do

..............................
I have felt the mystery of the image being born
Establishing its dim but definite
Identity. I have realised its final shape
Is probably uncertainty
This it is which frightens me (9, 11-12, 18-22).

Ezekiel’s struggle with his own self, which began with the publication of his first volume *A Time to Change*, 1952 sets the tone of his poetry. His quest to achieve wholeness through poetry and a settled life failed to yield any concrete results. The disquieting voice of disorder and chaos heard for the first time in “A Time to Change” is there for the readers to hear with more clarity in the poems he was to write subsequently.

The first phase of Ezekiel’s poetry ends with the poem “December ‘58’”. Making a beginning with the poem “A Time to Change” with focus on his own conflict-ridden self, Ezekiel throughout the three volumes, is in quest of a way to reconcile the clash between his own passions and needs and to attain a ‘human balance’, “I want to attain a human balance, humanly / Acquired (“A Poem of Dedication” 32-33). Not being able to live up to his own aspirations makes him despondent and gloomy at this stage. His dejection is apparent as he says:

At night returning home, I bring
With me the darkness and the old
Voices that once had made me sing,
My faith and patience growing cold (13-16).

Where as on the one hand Ezekiel is full of melancholy and pessimism because he was not able to realize his hopes on the other hand he also wants to avoid frustration and
self-condemnation, and, instead wants to start afresh, giving up egoistical, parochial concerns. He declares:

I must define myself, the place
An time, the starting line or tape
To mirror for the seeking face
What love of self distorts its shape (5-8).

Linda Hess’s observation provides insight into Ezekiel’s duality of concern, she says:

Every mature poet finds his art demanding again and again that he synthesize certain powerful and apparently opposing forces within himself. In Nissim Ezekiel this synthesis which has continually to be made is that between the ever abstracting intellect and the concrete irreducible experience of the senses in which if there is not the comfort of symmetry and system, there is the substance of life itself. If the life of the senses confronts us with the constant spectre of incompleteness, it also opens to us the doors of endless discovery, balancing the climax of consummation against the abyss of what lies beyond (qtd Karnani 47).

In this first phase of his poetry the conflict is imbedded deep inside Ezekiel’s psyche. His consciousness of his own debility creates a tension and turmoil inside him. He realizes fully well that both poetry and domesticity will help him to restore the strength and vitality of his vision. So his quest for a poetics which would help him in redeeming himself in both his own eyes and in the eyes of God is synonymous with a quest for a better ‘self’ too. Ezekiel had a very high conception of poetry and its requirements of strict discipline, hard work and a virtuous life. Poetry is for him a way of organising one’s ‘self’. While living a sordid life in basement room in London he had been hopelessly hoping for “passages of pure creation” (“ATC” 24) without realizing that the grace and inspiration so essential for composing such inspired verse can only be available by being faithful to moral principles. He was conversely attracted to “Girls lightly dressed and light of heart” (25) and this failure to adhere to basic principles in respect of the poetic profession causes him anguish. He would like to be a serious, dedicated poet, and not involve himself in the lightness of ‘light’ pleasures, but somehow this ideal keeps eluding him and remains out of his grasp. In the core of his being Ezekiel
feels a deep need for retention of moral and religious conviction but his physically sensual nature makes short shrift of all such concerns. Both desires—physical and spiritual seem valid to him and they keep clashing inside his ‘self’ to assert their supremacy and dominance over him. Ezekiel is unable to check his sexuality right till the end of his career.
WORKS CITED


