CHAPTER – 3

The period subsequent to the publication of The Third (1958) and up till the publication of the Hymns in Darkness (1976) is termed as the realist phase in Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry. The early phase had ended on a note of disillusionment for Ezekiel caused by his inability to achieve integration and harmony and his failure to resolve various conflicts haunting his life.

Ezekiel’s conflict in his first phase was patently between his sexuality and his desire for spirituality. He had got married in 1953 and tried to live up to his ideal expressed in “A Time to change” for “a woman and a child or two” (47) but he could not realize his ideals of a stable married life. In the first volume of this present stage The Unfinished Man Ezekiel blurs out the truth about himself and the fix he is in:

..... men are lost
Who wanted only quiet lives
And failed to count the growing cost
Of cushy jobs or unloved wives. (“Commitment”, 13-16).

Ezekiel’s domestic love live was a factor which constantly haunted him and left him divested of peace of mind. In the lines quoted earlier from the poem “Commitment”. Ezekiel blames himself for the sad state of affairs. This present tragic condition was a legacy of his earlier phase. Ezekiel was himself double minded about marriage and there was an inner conflict inside him in respect to matrimony. Outwardly he was all for domesticity and domestic bliss but inwardly he found the demands of household obligations to be beyond him.

It was as though Ezekiel had a premonition of what was to follow when he wrote the poem “To a Certain Lady” included in A Time to Change when he was still a bachelors. He had sensed before hand that the married life would be marred with indifference, boredom and incompatibility:

Then absences and quarrels, indifference
Sucking like a beech upon the flesh
Tasteless encounters in the dark, daily
Companionship with neither love nor hate. (49-53).
Ezekiel, though married, was again embroiled in his love affairs by the time he went to America in 1956 and now it was with a lady named Linda Hess that he was involved. The truth of the matter is that Ezekiel was by now bored with his marriage and the initial charm had worn off. Ezekiel describes his early romantic feelings as well as his gradual distancing from his wife in the poem “Marriage” where he says, "I went through all this believing all/ Our love denied the Primal Fall/ ....... / Then suddenly the mark of Cain” (9-10, 16).

The bride is always pretty, the groom
A lucky man ...................................

...................................................

Ezekiel himself states the fact of his infidelity to his wife when he talks of the “mark of Cain” and the awareness of this agonizes his mind and spirit. Ezekiel’s dilemma was the dilemma of a husband who finds his married life incompatible and who, inspite of all has to adjust himself will the conflicting reality as he finds himself unable to run away from the responsibilities of a husband or a father.

In the poem “Case Study” Ezekiel candidly confesses that, “A man is damned in that domestic game” (Line 20) thereby patently revealing the conflict that was raging inside him in relation to his marriage. Thus, Ezekiel was not able to resolve the central conflict between his sensuality and spirituality even in the middle phase of his life and poetry. The realist phase saw Ezekiel moving out of his self to reach out to the outer world. This outreach brought in fresh conflicts to contend with. Coupled with the central conflict between sexuality and spirituality was his acute awareness of sordid realities of life and his revulsion for it. City for him became synonymous with corruption both of the body and soul and nature came to be associated with wholeness of body and spirit. This conflict now gained the centre stage in the realist phase under study.

Some of the most important happenings in Ezekiel’s life took place in this middle phase. His two most successful volumes of poetry, The Unfinished Man, 1960 and The Exact Name, 1965 were published in this middle period. His rejoinder to V.S. Naipaul’s An Area of Darkness entitled “Naipaul’s India and Mine” (Imprint, 1965) and autobiographical poem “Background Causally” (Voice and Verse England, 1965) were also published in this very period, but this period was also characterised by constant
upheavals and turbulences of his personal life. His marriage was not working the way he had envisioned in “A Time to Change” and there was no stability in his professional life as he kept on moving from one job to another.

In the year 1958 Ezekiel had been working for Shilpi’s an advertising firm but he soon resigned from it and joined Chemould’s a firm making frames for pictures in the capacity of a manager. However this arrangement too did not last long and Ezekiel joined a magazine Design as manager. In the year 1961, Ezekiel joined a college – Mithibai College as lecturer, thus signalling coming back to the profession he had left when he went to England in 1948. Ezekiel’s restlessness and quest for roots are signaled by his frequent changing of jobs and inability to be satisfied with any job for long.

Ezekiel had been sent to America in 1956 by Sarabhai’s who owned Shilpi Advertising to learn hard sell techniques. He had not taken his wife along as he found her an obstacle in his sexual escapades.

It is said that Ezekiel went to America for the sole purpose of meeting Linda Hess, who was an authoress as well as an academician. R. Raj Rao, Ezekiel’s biographer observes on authority that, “Rumour has it that he accepted the American assignment given to him by the Sarabhais principally to be with Linda Hess, with whom he had one of his most flamboyant love affairs.” (102). This lady came to Bombay later in 1966 and at that time Ezekiel’s marriage almost broke up. Ezekiel’s relationship with Linda Hess boded evil for his marriage in which irrevocable differences had cropped up.

Ezekiel went to Leeds (England) in 1964, and while he took his wife along, he sent her back after a few weeks and developed extra-marital relationships with a large number of women, thus revealing his inconstant and weak attitude towards his marriage. R. Rao, Ezekiel’s biographer, comments on Ezekiel’s profligacy and lack of responsibility:

All said and done, then, his visit to England in 1964 was only marginally different from that to the United States in 1956 as far as his recklessness and restlessness were concerned. In both cases, he made sure that he did exactly as he pleased and that above all he enjoyed himself while the trip lasted. (159)

This conflict between his ideal of a stable married life and his profligate nature forms the subject matter of many of his poems in this period. Though he had constantly
aspired for stability as stated by himself in “A Time to Change” and his needs were for “A woman and a child or two / ---- / And patiently to build a life with these (Lines 47, 49) but the glaring fact was that Ezekiel lacked the complete devotion and dedication required to achieve the harmony he desired thereby exposing his inability and inadequacy to the whole world. His life thus, was devoid of any real meaning and his quest meant resolution of his conflicts. Awareness of his condition made Ezekiel anguished and disconsolate. His unsuccessful marriage as well as his shiftlessness contributed to his being an ‘unfinished man’.

A peculiar feature which emerged at this time to Ezekiel’s poetry was his unsympathetic attitude towards India though he was defensive about it and took great pains to couch it in general terms. Ezekiel was an English speaking Jew who had to adjust himself in a predominantly Marathi Hindu culture of Bombay in particular and India in general. Ezekiel could not identify himself with the majority language of the region – Marathi and with the majority religion i.e., Hindu. He was moreover an urban citizen and had no affinity with the large overwhelming masses of rural Indian folk. Part of Ezekiel’s conflicts and tensions were caused by this feeling of being an ‘outsider’. He himself states his position and underlines its ambivalent, confused nature:

There is no set formula [to relate to contemporary India and also to the whole Indian heritage], no set pattern but an unending series of adjustments and perceptions. In living out those I have experienced tensions, frustrations, disappointments and failures .... it is not easy because there is too much to unify, too much that resists integration, conflicts and contradiction for example between my Jewish racial soul and my Indian choices. (qtd Pandey 7)

The feeling of being an outsider or foreigner caused contradictory and conflicting emotions in Ezekiel and led to a sort of inconsistency and duality in his attitude and reaction to his nature environment.

To quote M.K. Naik:

The Biblical prophet Ezekiel prophesied the transformation of Israel into a wasteland Ezekiel’s wasteland is within. The sole denizen of it he contemplates it in different moods and the result is a poetry which rings constant variation on the central theme of alienation. (46)
There are times when Ezekiel goes too far and aligns himself with the western elitist clique of ‘India-bashers’ which devotes all its energies and time in denigrating India. In his autobiographical poem “Background Casually” where Ezekiel’s attitude is condemnatory towards Indians he comments proudly about his exclusive and exotic image, “To be observed by foreigners/They say I am singular”. (68-69) Ezekiel’s conflicting tendencies of secularism and religiosity, his marginality of being a Jew and his desire to relate to the predominantly Hindu India, his quest to attain stability, both in personal and professional lives and his innate nature of being a freelancer made Ezekiel feel bitter and incomplete and this made him to name his next volume of verse in 1960, as The Unfinished Man. He was deeply frustrated and filled with self-disgust at that time, his middle age was approaching and his accomplishments were not upto his expectations. His disappointment can be clearly felt in the poem “A Morning Walk” when he laments that, “The middle of his journey nears / Is he among the men of straw / Who think they go which way they please?” (26-28).

Ezekiel uses a third person mask in most of the poems of The Unfinished Man but all the poems are directly related to his own disillusioned self and his lost vision and goals. He gives the impression of a person hemmed in from all sides, whose vision has become distorted and constricted and who wishes to run away from the urban disquiet to the rural hinterland but is unable to make the final leap. He thus offers a contrast between urbanity and nature and the conflicting values they are associated with. Chetan Kamani comments in this respect that, “Ezekiel manages to create a picture of a man who wants to run away from the city’s turmoil”. (58).

The last poem of the initial stage “December ‘58’” had clearly stated Ezekiel’s desire to be rid of such influences as were distorting his perception and making him egoistical. His need was stated thus:

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

This ‘love of self’ of a city man is reminiscent of Eliot’s “The Wasteland”. Eliot in his poem “The Wasteland” has presented the city as an entity which corrupts man both
physically and spiritually by pandering to his sexual hungers and ego demands. He projects a reality which is both inner and outer and both of which are grotesque and nightmarish. Ezekiel is hit by a realisation of the fact that the city’s malignant environment has induced him to follow the path of sin and iniquity. He realizes that his sterility of vision and loss of creativity is due to the debasing effect of the city; he now decides to focus on its true nature and find a way out of his sterility, fragmentation and stagnation. Ezekiel would like to find his primal roots and achieve identity and harmony with his surroundings.

Ezekiel takes the epigraph of The Unfinished Man from Yeats. It bespeaks Yeats’ pain and ignominy which he felt while entering into manhood and outgrowing boyhood. The lines are, “The ignominy of boyhood; the distress/ Of boyhood changing into man:/The Unfinished Man and his pain” (5-8). Ezekiel likens his own condition to that of Yeats and he too feels anguished at being ‘unfinished’. He is aware of the regenerating and rejuvenating nature but he does not respond fully to nature. He is “Witness to the small rain and sundry mints/ Half-hearted birds, uncertain dawns” (“ATC” 21-22). This lacking of the self or inadequacy of vision is to Ezekiel’s mind caused by the putridness of the city, his ‘home’ and he makes it the target of his observation and accusations right from the first poem “Urban”. Ezekiel has a love-hate relationship with the city which he discovers as time passes by. Ezekiel presents conflict between nature and the city which arouses opposing sentiments or responses inside his consciousness. He is weary of the city and its ennui and longs for nature and its reinvigorating ambience. The stale air and vulgarity of the city make Ezekiel depressed and anxious.

Ezekiel’s prime concern in life was poetry and he felt unhappy at his own modest accomplishments. Right from “A Time to Change” Ezekiel is aware of his loss of poetic creativity as a result of his being a city man. He was aware that the urban milieu was at fault for its stultifying and petrifying effect on his vision. Ezekiel’s artistic consciousness resembles of the Fisher king and his land where renewal could only come through an interpretation of secret signs and symbols. Ezekiel too feels that city life is sterile and the city man’s life is devoid of meaning, because he has lost knowledge of the primary natural things:
We have lost
the language of dreams
we have forgotten
everything but knowledge
we grope among
the sings and symbols
for the source
of signs and symbols. ("Happening" 25-32).

Ezekiel was a city man, born and brought up in Bombay and he was well aware of
the chaotic and disturbing nature of modern urban life. He was aware of the fact that life
in natural surroundings, is much more fulfilling, healthy and even poetic. Nature is
essentially conducive to poetry as poetry deals with things of beauty which are found in
ample measure in nature, where as the city only presents ugliness and filth both to body
and spirit. Ezekiel had presented a true picture of the city, its chaos and distracting nature
in the poem "Something to Pursue" simultaneously divulging his abhorrence of it. In it,
he declares:

After a night of love, I left the city
.............................. but carried it
Within me, markets and courts of justice
Slums, football grounds, entertainment halls,
Residential flats, places of art and business houses
Harlots, basement poets, princes and fools (140-145).

Ezekiel graphically represents the city’s bedlam in its true colours. It is a motley
assortment where all are thrown together haphazardly irrespective of class, colour or
creed. Ezekiel cleverly even alludes to his own days as a fledgling poet in London’s
basement room when he mentions ‘basement poets’. Ezekiel particularly makes mention
of the easy and cheap entertainment available in the city in the form of ‘harlots’ who sell
‘nights of love’.

The poet in Ezekiel suffered due to the cramped and constricting environment of
the city. He felt his environment to be unsuitable and yearned for the solitude and
quietude of nature which both inspires and fosters creativity. He felt dejected and put-off
by the urban dissonance and putridity which cast a pall upon his creative impulses. Ezekiel became acutely conscious of the sordid facts of urban life, its repressive social codes and its destructive effect on individuality and talent. The shallow, hedonistic and corrupt life styles were destructive for him both as a poet and as a man, as he was no longer original and natural. Artificiality was a bane for him but there was no getting away from it in the city, which prided itself on it’s sophistication and ‘synthetic’ culture. Life in the city could only inspire verse of a lesser quality, stilted and spiritless, in opposition to which poetry in nature would be natural and flowing, relaxed and joy-giving like nature’s ambience itself.

A continuity is found in Ezekiel’s early phase and his middle one in the fact that both the phenomena that upset him in these phases – the corrupting woman and the defiled inhuman city are present in both these periods. Earlier, Ezekiel was more bothered about his inner self which suffered anguish and anxiety due to unchecked sexuality but now he had emerged out of his introspective shell and was more concerned with scrutinizing his outer domain, and this change from the inner reality to the outer objective one reflects a growth and development in Ezekiel’s vision as a poet.

In this present stage the physically present sordid ambience of the city clashes with the ideal of nature in all its purity and tranquility which Ezekiel envisions inside himself. He lives in a dream world in which nature presides, it is filled with music, order and creativity from which Ezekiel hopes for a resurrection or his vision. He is confronted with noise and ugliness and what he yearns for is solitude and beauty. The din of the city deafens him and distorts his sensibility, as he longs for the calm and quiet of the pastoral order with its healing touch and soothing influence.

Anisur Rehman perceptively comments:

At one end we find the pagan woman and the putrid city standing as the symbols of defilement and at the other there is the resplendent nature symbolic of essential vigour, vitality and innocence. Indeed, these are the obsessive images in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. These two sets of images representing two sets of values in contradiction to each other are the basic constituents of the poet’s search for meaning in life and poetry. (42).

The city stands for disorder, ugliness and exploitation whereas nature in total contrast stands for order quietude and serenity. Nature in Ezekiel’s sensibility is holy and
sacred, it sustains life through its elements—water, air, etc., the city on the other hand is ugly and destructive, thus, causing ruin. The two concepts thus conflict with each other in the poet's perception. The actual environment of the city clashes with his desired vision of nature in his poetry.

Ezekiel's concept of the city as inhuman had started evolving as early as his first volume *A Time of Change* itself although it had not assumed the definiteness we find in the phase under study. In the poem "The Double Horror" Ezekiel decries his miserable plight as a city man. His sorrow and anguish are poignantly projected as he protests that, "I am corrupted by the world continually / Reduced to something less than human by the crowd" (1-2). Ezekiel had realized the fact that urban life is not an ideal one; on the contrary it is corrupt with its corrupting ways which can lead a man astray. This kind of life made Ezekiel disgusted because he wanted inner peace, stability and order. Ezekiel was also conscious of the fact that the urban mass culture with its thrust on profits and sensual gratification is destructive of finer sensibilities and sensitivities. He did not want to become crude and vulgar. He was aware to the fact that the city man is constantly bombarded with commercials and advertisements which create havoc in his mind. Man's baser mercenary instincts come to the forefront in the city life and his finer qualities are pushed into the inner recesses of the mind. Sooner or later man succumbs to the infernal pressures and strains on his sanity and also becomes habituated to its uncongenial atmosphere. Ezekiel is conscious of the grim reality of the present day consumer culture, its parasitic propensity and its lack of moral justification. Ezekiel lists out his grievances in detail; he says:

Newspapers, cinemas, radio features, speeches
Demanding peace by men with grim war like faces
Posters selling health and happiness in bottles
Large returns for small investments in football pools

The jungle growth of what so obviously intends
The suck life from life leaving you and me corrupted.

("The Double Horror" 3-5, 9-10).
Ezekiel searches for peace and harmony but in the ghoulish reality of the city his quest yields him nothing. Such a horrid reality confronts him day and night; he is repelled by its inhumaneness but is helpless in breaking out of its captivity. The city's noise, its hustle and bustle has cast and spell on him and he has become a slave to it. He is aware of the dangers of succumbing to its fatal attraction and wants to embrace the therapeutic arms of nature. He can however, only dream of such deliverance as he lacks the will necessary to make a break with the city's corruptions.

Ezekiel's perception tells him that his identity as a human being destroyed by the city's evil spell. He has been reduced to insignificance and now even lacks self-respect. Ezekiel is disgusted at the fact that the city despite its claim to civilization is more or less a jungle where the law – 'survival of the fittest' prevails. Ezekiel laments in despair:

Huge porters dwarf my thoughts, I am reduced
To appetites and godlessness. I wear
A human face but prowl about the streets
Of towns with murderous claws and anxious ears
Recognizing all the jungle rounds of fear
And hunger, wise in tracking down my prey
And wise in taking refuge when the stronger roam. (“Commitment”, 5-11)

Ezekiel's is sickened and confused by the stark reality which he encounters. He longs for the life of primitive simplicities which could heal the hurt caused by the city. He declares that, "There is a world of old simplicities/ To which my calling calls me, turbulence / Is stilled in it and slowly understood" (“Commitment”, 14-16). Urbanity is hollow and devoid of worth where as primitiveness or natural life is meaningful and worthy. Ezekiel's constant conflict between his sexuality and spirituality, his desire to come out of the putrid ways of a city life and his compulsion to stay where he is forms a constant refrain in his poetry. The pattern of awareness of his condition, his desire to come out of it and his compulsion to stay in that some condition is visible all through his early and middle phase.

Ezekiel, an urban poet, does not eulogize city life but denigrates and denounces it in no uncertain terms. He tries to make the best he can of an undesirable situation as he has no other viable alternatives. Contrasting with his condemnation of the city is
Ezekiel's appreciation of nature as benign and life-sustaining. Anisur Rehman comments on Ezekiel's pre-occupation or compulsive concern with the city when he says that, "Ezekiel's preoccupation with the city deepens even further after the publication of The Third. But an acute consciousness of the horrors is discernible in the earlier poems as well" (35).

In this middle phase Ezekiel's vision with respect to the city gains maturity and intensity. He now recognizes and understands the fact that instead of acting as a mentor and support, the city's hostile and malafide atmosphere has thwarted his efforts to achieve fullfillment as a poet and as a man. Now that realization has dawned on him. Ezekiel is apprehensive of the urban dissonance, squalidity, and his own robotic responses as he feels that his creative instinct could suffer annihilation. This thought makes Ezekiel anguished as poetry is his pride and joy. It is something in which he desires to excel and anything which could possibly hinder the gaining of this objective is anathema to him deserving in full, all his hatred and loathing.

K.P. Ramachandran Nair befittingly comments that:

Ezekiel's life and poetry are in fact inseparable. The activity of poetry produces a solemn harmony of existence for him in a world riddled with discordant notes ... One of the most recurring themes in his poetry is the wound urban civilization inflicts on unattached man. His poetry gives the impression of an over-sensitive soul caught in the tentacles of a cruel city civilization unable to escape from its vagaries and consequently developing a love-hate relationship with its tormentor. (118)

Ezekiel envisions city and nature as conflicting environments. The city represents chaos, malignancy, confusions, noise, corruptions, etc, while nature represents order, benevolence, purity, innocence, fertility, etc., while the city's features evoke revulsion, nature's evoke admiration. City and nature are at opposite poles to each other. While one is man-made the other is divine, while one is steeped in sin and vice, the other is glorious and an embodiment of virtue. Where the city symbolizes Hell to Ezekiel, nature stands for Heaven or the Garden of Eden, unsullied and virgin in its holiness. Ezekiel accords an almost holy status to nature which is completely free of any taint or drawbacks. Ezekiel desperately yearns to free himself from the clutches of the city but finds himself helpless
to do so because the fascination of abominations, to use the correct phrase is always very strong.

Since, Ezekiel was a Jew, he always carried within himself illusions and yearnings for the paradise lost to man i.e. the Garden of Eden. Nature with its purity, beauty and innocence symbolizes the Garden of Eden for Ezekiel and he desperately longs to be a part of its graceful, benevolent and innocent pastoral ambience and forget the fret and fury of the city life. He longs to go to nature’s solitude and imbibe its freshness and fertility. Apart from the city’s physically abhorrent features Ezekiel also hates the urban habitat for its lack of beliefs. The city man is faithless with nothing to sustain him. Nature had served as a link between man and his maker and with his forsaking of the primitive life his link with divinity too has now been severed. Primitive Societies through nature worship and through worship of its elements affirmed and reaffirmed their own status as natural and deserving of nature’s bounty. They derived their strength and resilience from nature, but now that man’s bond with nature is broken, he feels inadequate, lacking in vigour and creativity. Rural people observed rituals and performed rites through which they appeased nature and reaffirmed their bonds with it, consequently they came to develop deep associations with nature, with the soil and its regenerative power. Nature was man’s friend, philosopher, and guide and through its help man prospered and progressed, but now the condition is the inverse of what it was. Man suffers from an identity problem and constantly searches for anchors in life. This feeling of being uprooted causes anxiety and despair inside Ezekiel himself and he feels in need of the sustaining and reinforcing force of nature. He wants to rediscover his roots and forge an alliance with nature and regain his vision. He feels the need of a spiritual anchor in life and his intuition tells him that in the primitive hinterland lies his salvation.

By being distanced from nature and its elements man has been distanced from God himself and Ezekiel feels the need not only for a reaffirmation with God and religion but also the other elements of nature like the Sun, Moon, rivers, sky, etc., which were worshipped and revered by primal man through folk festivals and country fairs. These rustic traditions served to install and affirm man’s eternal relationship with nature and religion. The origins of all religion and worship lay in the rudimentary pastoral life. The changing of the seasons was especially a time of festival and feasting, through which
bonds in the early communities were reaffirmed and strengthened; now in modern urban 
life no such occasions are celebrated, with the result that man in the city is friendless and 
eternally lonely. His breakup with nature has spelt doom for him with loss of his essential 
vigour, virtue and humanity. With the progress of civilizations man has become distanced 
from virtue and vision. To retrieve his genius he has to revert to nature and break the 
spell which the city’s corruption has cast on him. It is on these lines that Ezekiel’s 
thoughts flow and he longs to put his ideas into practice. He however cannot escape his 
hell i.e. the city, and make the break which is his dire need. He both loves and hates 
Bombay, his native city, nursing a duality within himself. Though its sordidness appals 
him, paradoxically, he is committed to it, as he declares in an interview, “I have a strong 
sense of belonging not only to India but to this city. I would never leave Bombay it’s a 
series of commitments” (Beston 44).

A specific feature of the city is its pretentiousness and it is in direct contrast to 
Ezekiel’s need for the genuine and original feelings and thoughts which are associated 
with nature. Ezekiel feels depressed because the larger than life reality of the city has no 
depth to it and cannot be transmuted into poetry. The urban experience lacks worth and 
the poetic element in it is inferior, so Ezekiel longs for the pastoral order in which he 
could discover things of real merit about which poetry could be made. The lewdity and 
atmosphere of sin associated with city makes Ezekiel dejected though it remains addicted 
to it. The city life in characterised by nudity and conventions are flouted openly. In the 
penultimate poem in The Third “At the Hotel” Ezekiel describes how the city corrupts 
with its shameful activities, “On the dot she came and shook her breasts / all over us and 
dropped / the thin transparent skirt she wore” (4-6).

Ezekiel depicts the reality frankly without holding back anything, even though, at 
times, it is outrageous and abominable, in doing so, he reveals the shocking and shameful 
activities to which he is a witness. Chetan Karnani rightfully observes that, “The city of 
Bombay has to thank Ezekiel for translating its bogus hurly-burly into his poetry” (55).

It is quite clear to Ezekiel that the city life is cheerless and without meaning. The 
cut-throat competition and dull routines makes the city man desperate for newer and 
newer forms of entertainment and amusements through which he might be free from 
tensions and anxieties however short-lived it may be. The night life of the city is
especially corrupt and debauched where revelry and partying continue into the early
hours of the morning. These facts are distasteful and contribute towards making Ezekiel’s
poetic sensibility twisted and misshapen. It is the reason for his sterility and why he feels
the city’s influence as evil. He wants to evade such situations as are morally and
artistically unhealthy but realizes that he cannot do so. Moral decay and indifference to
its consequences are characteristics of the city man which are not shared by Ezekiel. He
wants to be free of such degeneration and in the volume *The Unfinished Man* he
specifically wants to orient and familiarize himself with his city environment. He wants
to earmark and take note of the various pitfalls that he must avoid.

Ezekiel’s inner and outer worlds resemble and reflect each other. They are both
confused, jumbled up and disordered. The sordid and noisy outer reality has made its
impact on his inner self and it, too, has become grotesque and bizarre. Ezekiel’s senses
have been no pounded by the incessant noise and clamour of the city and its engines of
production that he is benumbed and unconscious to the reality around. His conscious self
drifts between dream and reality and is thus disjointed, displaced and dislocated,
confused and uncertain, not knowing what to do. His psyche has been shattered by the
absurdity of his urban experience and he is aware some what dimly of all that he lacks. It
is no consolation to Ezekiel that it is his city life which has caused this nightmare His
inner self is disturbed and distracted, lacking purpose and direction, made wretched by
the circumstances it encounters daily in its urban existence. Ezekiel hates the city for
making his life miserable and destroying his aesthetic sense and finer sensibilities. He
does not want to become coarse, brutal and vulgar like the other city people. He wants to
be associated with the goodness and purity of nature to off-set the urban effect. A conflict
is perpetually there inside Ezekiel between his longing for nature’s graciousness and his
inability to renounce the city life as he has become fascinated to its abominations. The
city’s fatal temptations hold Ezekiel in their grip and try as he might he cannot run away
from them and re-unify his vision. He is at times unaware of his own conscious and
unconscious states as his mind conjures up phantasms and illusions. He longs for nature
in a disorganized, dreamy way because it holds promise of salvation from his waking
nightmare, as he hangs between the two worlds:

The hills are always far away
He knows the broken roads and moves
In circles tracked within his head
Before he wakes and has his say
The river which he claims he loves
Is day, and all the winds lie dead ("Urban", 1-6).

Ezekiel uses a third person mask but without doubt he himself is the hero or anti-hero who lives in a world of delusion with a vision that is fragmented and distorted. He wants the association of nature whereby he can be healed. He longs for its solitude and 'primal quiescence' so that he can be revived and restored to his original state from this condition of ennui and mechanicalness. He wants to regain his lost perspectives and inspirations. The poet's mind wanders about sub-consciously as though in the city's crooked streets and alleys without direction and a guiding principle. He is out of touch with reality and even lacks faith which could serve as an anchor in life. His life is joyless, without meaning and filled with anxiety.

Lakshmi Rajhunandan comments on the persona's responses in the following words:

When those distant hills are his goals his mind is moving towards it however repetitive its motions maybe it loses its contact with poetic inspiration and expression. In a state of detachment he is unaware of all the changes around him (41-42).

The city has broken down the psyche of the individual who has lost his link with reality and remains dazed and uncertain. He remains oblivious of nature's elements which symbolize unity of vision, vitality, freshness and contiguity which could lead to poetic inspiration and creation. The protagonist lives in his shattered world where faith has crumbled and life is cut off from all that was fine and noble. Nature had endowed man with virtues and noble qualities and now that he has turned his back on her he is a weak, puny creature who lacks will and cannot stand up to anything. Not only is he dulled and made insensitive to impulse and inspiration by the city's clamour but he has also lost his innocence and freshness due to his vice-ridden nature which indulges in the corrupt entertainments offered by the city. Civilization and culture were made by man and the city is a by-product of their's but now man has become a slave to it, manipulated and controlled by it. His succour only lies through reaffirmation with nature, and thus
Ezekiel highlights the predicament of man and shows the anti-thetical nature of the city and nature. Bruce King points at the conflict in “Urban” when he says that:

The first poem contrasts the city man with his dreams of the natural world. Imagery from nature is used to symbolize the innocence, freedom and depth of vision not found among the distraction of the city. (*Modern Indian Poetry*, 97).

The cut-off from nature, Ezekiel lives in a kind of hell or personal purgatory shut up in his own shell-like existence. He has no friends or confidants with whom he can share his terrors and anxieties. Even the rays of the sun do not light up the darkness of his lonely life. Ezekiel elaborates further:

At dawn he never sees the skies
Which silently are born again
Nor feels the shadows of the night
Recline their fingers on his eyes
He welcomes neither sun nor rain
His landscape has no depth or height (“Urban”, 7-12).

The poet-persona is completely bewildered and non-plussed by the trauma of his urban existence. Nature fails to revive him from his stupor as he has become completely conditioned to the infernal din. He is impervious to the changes that take place in nature. The monotony of the city has put a spell on him and he stays fixated in its grip. His senses too do not afford him the necessary impulse and warnings where by he can change his mindless routines and set-patterns. Sanjit Misra perceptively comments on the negative personality projected and on Ezekiel’s personal relevance to the poem, as he says:

The unusual conglomeration of negatives conveys the quality of the persona’s entity. Both the first and the last lines of the stanza reveals the setting to be a not too-tall building. One recalls that Ready money mansion or Mazda mansion where Ezekiel lived was a relatively small building complex from where he could see neither the sky nor experience a sense of depth or height (74).

The city fosters egocentric concerns in man whereby his world in conditioned and guided only by his own selfish concerns, he is indifferent to the needs of others. He lives at such a fast and furious pace, in his need to out do others that he leaves his own ‘self’
behind becoming separated from his own essential personality and nature and becoming a schizoid personality or person with mental disorder. The only recourse for such an individual destroyed by the city’s unnatural, abnormal atmosphere is to seek the solace of nature. Thus in Ezekiel’s understanding the city destroy where as nature heals. The city life is a rat race and the city does not nourish humanity is any way as does nature. The city man becomes so alienated from his own humanness or human needs that he no longer acknowledges or affirms to the elements of nature and they cannot inspire or exalt him in this state of inner seclusion and separation. The city man gets alienated not only from his fellow beings and environment but also from his own essentials. His awareness of individuality recedes into the background and he becomes just a face in the crowds.

The poet persona lives in a cramped constricted house, with his windows opening not on green pastures but on blank walks. It is thus no surprise that he longs to escape to natural surroundings where he can feel free and alive again. He thinks of coming out of the pull of the polluting city but the fascination of the abominations of the city is so strong that he just relapses into it time and again. The endless conflict between the city’s attraction on the one hand and the persona’s aversion to it knows no resolution. He can neither wholly affirm to his sordid habitat nor can fully renounce it. His duality makes him divided and:

He dreams of morning alone
And floating on a wave of sand
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand (13-18).

The protagonist yearns to be one with nature and become whole but the deadly spell of the city’s noise is irresistible and, he perpetually remains a slave. The corruption of the city has infected Ezekiel deeply and created in him a craving for it as he himself confesses:

...............only being what I am
Hurts and hurts the world though it does not know
Between the world and me there is a frightful
Equipoise as infected I corrupt the world (“The Double Horror”, 27-30).
Ezekiel’s awareness of being a slave to the city hurts him and makes him concerned about others too. He knows that this condition of his will pass on to others making them also subordinate to its vagaries. The poem “Urban” highlights a conflict not only between nature and the city but also between the poet’s own divided self, one half of which yearns to be unified with nature and the other half which pulls back from the consummation. Anisur Rehman rightly observes that:

An endevaour to explore the chasm between the actual and the conceptual environments constitutes the core of the poem. The quest for the nourished ideal and the failure to acquire an emotional liaison with it adds up to the intensity of the poem (36).

Ezekiel’s vision of the city finds its inspiration from the Bible. As he is a Jew, his poetry has allusions and parallels in the Bible. His depiction and understanding of the city as a defiled entity finds its parallels in the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were sinful and were destroyed by God:

“And the lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and because their sin is very grievous” (The Holy Bible, Gen. 18:20). God further destroyed the sinful cities as the Bible relates, “Then the lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire out of heaven” (Gen. 19:24).

Ezekiel comes across such examples of sin in his city which fill him with consternation and horror. His house lies near a red light area and one day he spots a prostitute “On Bellasis Road” as:

I see her first
as colour only
poised against the faded
red of a post-box

........................................
She does’nt glance at me
waiting for her
hawker or mill-worker

........................................
I cannot even say I care or do not care
perhaps it is a kind of despair. (1-4, 17-19, 31-32).
The city thus corrupts and this fact is acknowledged by Ezekiel. As long as man was associated with nature he was virtuous, but life in the city has bred vice in him and he keeps going from bad to worse looking for more and more degenerate ways to amuse himself. Man in the city believes in exploiting opportunities to the full and does not care for the pain and suffering he inflicts on others this being the true ethos of city life. The growth of technology has not advanced the cause of humanity, thousands and millions are still bereft of basic utilities, downtrodden and discriminated against in every way. The growth of science has not fostered a corresponding growth in co-operation, altruism and sympathy. Only a bare handful are the possessors of wealth and the rest just cater to their whims and caprices. It is the city which has created such differences between human beings today. It is in the cities that man, being cut-off from nature’s healthy influence has come up with doctrines like Nihilism and rationalism which challenge the very existence of God and refute the efficacy and relevance of religion. It is for this reason that human values have become extinct and civilization is on the brink of annihilation.

Ezekiel feels that the forces of nature kept man’s vicious and selfish tendencies in check. He was committed to the welfare of the community as a whole and did not stray from the path of virtue and goodness. He subordinated his individual needs to the needs of the community and there was fellow feeling and love between all the members of the tribe or community. They as a result of being one with nature kept healthy, physically and mentally and were noble, simple and strong, low qualities like cruelty, treachery and such-like were denigrated and suppressed, but in the city paradoxically they prosper and flourish. The city is a hot-bed of intrigue and foul-practices having no mercy for the weak and infirm. As a blind old destitute man complains piteously in the poem “History”, “Will Bethlehem or Moscow end my fear?” (Line 8). The plethora of doctrines only project one side of the argument and there is no solution to the city man’s predicament because his ties with nature have been snapped. Ezekiel claims that only the pastoral order can save man from his fate of total destruction, He says:

Consorting gunmen hold the final fare
But by the hard unwelcome stone a dream
Of angles sings the abstract right to choose
And starts from rocks an unexpected stream. (“History”, 13-16).
Thus Ezekiel contends that where the city has brought man to the edge of the abyss, nature can yet be his salvation. Man can resurrect himself and reemerge anew by affirming to the primal pastoral life. Ezekiel envisions the city life as hostile to man’s well-being, it makes him prone to manias and phobias because it does not assuage his loneliness and anxiety in any way. Even in “A Time to Change”, Ezekiel had forcefully brought out the destructive nature of the city life:

And anywhere in London or in Rome
The amputated gestures, eyes turned away
Incomplete absorption in the common scene
Cramped, sedentary in silent rooms,
Marking time on unknown ground (15-19).

Most of the city people are unconcerned about others, they spend their time fruitlessly obsessed about trivial things of no particular consequence. Most of the victims of the city, as they can be justifiably called, are living out a charade as their life has no meaning or worth even in their own eyes. They have no sense of history or mission and they do not ascribe to any cause in life. They, in fact, do not live at all; they only exist. Their lives cannot qualify to be lives in the real sense of the word and it is the city which has destroyed their initiative and vitality.

Ezekiel constantly displays his ideal of nature which is harmonious, kindly and beneficent. It is complete, sufficient and wholesome in all respects. Ezekiel, in “Stone” shows the worth of nature, as he says:

I have learnt to revel in the stone
Hard, cold, heavy, shapeless, solid, stone
To turn away from all that seems to flow
..............................................................

The flare and flux of what is merely show (1-3, 5).

Ezekiel is in love with nature and its qualities impress him where as the culture of the city with its superficiality depresses and annoys him. He does’nt like the pretentiousness and empty life of the city people. He loves the pretty rights and beauty of nature as he declares in “Song”, “Summer blossoms on a tree/Red and red against the green” (3-4). So enamoured is Ezekiel of nature that he even remembers his childhood
days by its associations with nature objects. These childhood innocent memories serve to
lift up his flagging spirits in the repressive atmosphere of the city, his abode. He says:

Days of moderate warmth and cold
In April come, with early light
Slipping through the curtains and the sound
Of birds, breaking through the window panes,
And in the room the smell of wind and wet,
The touch of spring on lips and eyes

Only those alive can be reborn (“Remember and Forget”, 1-6, 20).

The last line quoted highlights the poet’s urban experience, his spirits are so low
that he even doubts if he is alive at all. A stark conflict is thus ever present in Ezekiel’s
poetry between the values attached to nature and to the city. Nature revives, sustains and
re-invigorates while the city destroys and degenerates. Nature is spontaneous, energizing
and original where as the city is artificial, shallow and misleading.

Ezekiel, again and again, highlights the malignant aspect of the city life and he
also feels that man can, through, association with nature, counter and nullify this
undesirable influence. In the poem “A Time to Change” he had opted for “A bit of land, a
woman and a child or two” (46). His desire was thus for pastures and meadows or in
other words to affirm to nature. In the same poem he had drawn an analogy between
himself the poet and a farmer. Ezekiel had desired to compose verse in the same way as
the farmer grew fruit, thus emphasing the creative power latent in natural, pastoral life.
He projects his imaginative reasoning thus:

The stubborn workman breaks the stone, loosens
Soil, allows the seed to die in it, waits
Patiently for grapes or figs and even
Finds on a lucky day, a metaphor
Leaping from the sod (72-77).

Ezekiel thus, considers the natural ambience satisfactory and potentially fulfilling
for him in every way, and desires for union with it disgusted, and fed-up as he is with the
city's lack of compatibility with him. Ezekiel's denigration of the city's flaws is well expressed, as he shows the uglier aspects of power politics which reduces persons to the level of pawns, in the following lines:

Those who say comrade are merely slaves and those
Who will not be my brothers share the acrid shame
Of being unwanted, unloved, incompetent
As leaders, disloyal servants, always alone.
Unpolitical I still embrace the steirle
Whore of private politics, sign a manifesto
Call a meeting, work on committees; I agree
Something must be done but secretly rejoice
When fifty thousand Chinese have been killed,
I who as a child wept to see a rat killed ("The Double Horror", 11-20).

Ezekiel laments for his lost childhood innocence which has been corrupted and turned into callousness and vengefulness by the city's malignant influence. Ezekiel is also disturbed at the way the city's mean nature and influence causes man to exploit and manipulate others creating an atmosphere of suspicion, hatred and hostility. Ezekiel is hurt by the city's mass politics which insists on conformity and negates the individual's needs. Ezekiel protests against forcible indoctrination by various parties and this repression on the part of the city alarms him no end. He would rather not be a part of it and would like cleaner, healthier climes where he could feel unpolluted and free from the sickness that permeates all facets of the city life. Instead of power politics and manipulation of the needy he would like the simple, honest and humble primal life. The city repels him in every way where as nature's purity beckons to him constantly. Anisur Rehman perceptively observes of Ezekiel's conceptualisation of the city, saying that:

The city being more than an image is transformed into a symbol of decomposed garbage, a space infected as also, it is on a deeper level, not a particular place in the large cosmos but a system of living shattered and eroded at the very core. The sapling of life with its freshness, vigour and innocence does not blossom here any more. (58)

Ezekiel feels the need to return to the primal life or nature to regain wholeness. Life in the city destroys all the human virtues and makes man a beast; to become human
again, he must go back to the primitive life. City life is centered on the mercenary motives of man and so the thrust is on exploitation and profits. No method is considered as unworthy in the realisation of the aim of amassing wealth. The weak and innocent are the worst causalities of this inhuman system. Ezekiel’s voice is that of the individual ranged against a whole system in protest, his vision in some ways resembles Dickens who spoke against the oppression and exploitation of the needy and poor in the cities. Ezekiel is aware of the fact that in such a repressive and oppressive environment nothing fine or noble can survive, not even the original meaning of words and language, as everything becomes distorted and twisted, being subjected to unnatural pulls and pressures all the time. Ezekiel wants not only to save and salvage himself but also his poetry and the only recourse open to him is to seek communion with nature.

Ezekiel’s desire is to come out of the corruption of the city into the wholesome and invigorating world of nature. However his drugged consciousness prevents him from making any motions and this state is the same as Eliot’s Prufrock who is unconscious yet conscious like a patient “etherized on the table” (3). His condition is no different:

..... men
Sleepless or drugged with dreams
Whose working hours
Drained of power
Flow towards futility (“Morning Prayer”, 2-6).

The life of the ordinary city man is joyless, he works without respite, hoping, for a better tomorrow which never comes. He keeps his spirits up by his dreams and fantasies of success. His nights are filled with fears and anxieties due to his sorry plight and apprehensions of failure and defeat in life and he either sleeps like a log exhausted and dead to the world, or suffers from insomnia and lack of sleep His living is futile because success eludes him and because he cannot achieve fulfilment of his desires. The city helps him not, as, the unprivileged are not its ‘chosen’ types but are rather its victims who are sacrificed at its unholy altar. Ezekiel himself has fallen a victim to the city’s caprices many a time and knows that there is no escape from it, save one, namely nature, and he implores it (nature and its manifestations) earnestly to revive and restore the fallen city man who has lost not only faith, but his hopes as well:
White wings of morning
Bring to city makes
A taste of spring
And clarity
Wake them by your symbols. ("Morning Prayer", 7-11).

Ezekiel implores nature to illumine the dark existence of the city man and
dissipate his doubts and anxieties. He wants nature to remove the masks of indifference
and make-believe from the faces of the city people and wake them to the reality. The poet
wants nature’s fertility and regenerative power to help out the listless, disspirited and
sterile city man and make him feel worth while. Ezekiel here conflicts the healing and
restorative power of nature with the city’s corrosive and corrupting influence. Anisur
Rehman rightly observes that, “The images of the city are the symbols of degeneration
and dehumanization while those of nature represent life and warmth.” (58)

The city in Ezekiel’s poetic vision is deadly and destructive of even man’s sanity.
The constant noise, pollution, pressures of business, and vocation, the furious pace, the
worry and anxieties, all combine to make man nervous, tense and apprehensive of the
future. He is filled with fantasies and delusions and all this finally leads to mental
disorders and symptomatic behaviour characterized by aggressiveness, hostility, and
depression:

All of us are sick, Sir
It’s all of us who need you, Sir
Psy – Chi – a – trist
Should we take to meditation,
transcendental, any other?
Should we take to Zen?
We cannot find our roots here,
don’t know where to go, Sir,
don’t know what to do, Sir,
need a Guru, need a God
All of us are sick. Sir (“Family”, 1, 5-6, 7-14).
Ezekiel's depiction of the reality is based on his own experience. The suffocating, repressive and sterile atmosphere of the city creates havoc in the minds of the sensitive and the weak who are more susceptible to its stress and strain. There is a big need for psychiatrists and quack remedies in the city as a result of its hostile atmosphere. The city does not nourish and strengthen its inhabitants; on the contrary, it gradually weakens and sickens them; it contrasts with nature in this respect which nourishes and sustains man in his endeavours.

Ezekiel wanted to directly relate to the original customs and traditions, which in turn related to the original primitive life which appealed to him. He needed to get over his feelings of frustration and get release from his unhealthy pent-up emotions by following country traditions. The poem "Jamini Roy" states Ezekiel's own desire to affirm to the folk or rural in preference to the urban. He posits the example of the famous painter who changed his original style to the folk, and became famous:

Among the adult fantasies
Of sex and power ridden lives
Refusing their hostilities
His all-assenting art survives
He started with a different style
He travelled, so he found his roots
His rage became a quiet smile
Prolific in its proper fruits

An urban artist found the law
To make its spirit sing and dance (5-12, 15-16)

Ezekiel shows how the city life is destructive of creativity, the abnormalities present there are a threat to the artists and to save their art they must travel like Jamini Roy to the localities further away in the countryside. Ezekiel too, wants to associate with simpler folk themes and models of the country side. Ezekiel is aware of the fact that the city life with in dull dreary nature is detrimental to poetic creativity. The shabbiness of the city life destroys and distorts the poetic impulse and thus Ezekiel feels disgusted at it and longs for nature with its vitality and beauty.
Anisur Rehman aptly sums up Ezekiel’s dilemma as he states that:

Whatever the poet considers as pure, he yearns to associate himself with it. This proposition is applicable to “Jamini Roy” where the poet while trying to unravel the aesthetic purposes of the artist commits himself rather remotely to the symbols of purity and innocence. It is a common knowledge that Jamini Roy as long as he remained urban could hardly find roots, but no sooner than he owned the folk art, he found his real identity (59).

Ezekiel has shown his fascination for nature in many poems and he uses terminology linked with nature with great felicity. Many of his poems contain images from nature which dwell on concepts like beauty, mystery, eternity, etc, and he visualizes nature as awe-inspiring, majestic and divine, too. He would also like some qualities of nature to be transmitted into him. To counter the negative effects of the city, he asks God for this boon, whereby, he can be restored to his original vision. He declares:

    God grant me certainty
    In kinship with the sky,
    Air, earth, fire, sea –
    And the fresh inward eye (“Morning Prayer”, 9-12).

It is Ezekiel’s heart-fell desire to get over his sterility caused by the city’s corruption. He wants his inner disturbance to be calmed and desires primal quiescence or quietude. He says:

    Restore my waking time
    To vital present tense
    And dreams of love or crime
    To primal quiescence. (4-8)

Dr. Sunanda Sinha perceptively observes that, “In Ezekiel’s city poems gruelling urban subsistence, is contrasted to the pastoral order, purity and distressing landscape. His poems reflect the disordered complexities of the urban existence which he always wanted to escape from (184).

Ezekiel wants a bonding with nature as his own habitat – the city, repels him with its filth and squalor. Nature’s clean, healthy and creative atmosphere is his heart’s desire his interior landscape is beset with anxieties and fears. The constant fret and fury of the
city has beaten him down into submission and his desire is to be free or such an atmosphere which makes impossible demands on him. His drab, dull and monotonous existence now cries out for release, he cannot stand such a lonely, cheerless life any more. The pollution, the unhealthy competition, the faceless masses of humanity all preoccupied with the problem of survival get his spirits down as low as they can possibly go. His world is a world of broken dreams and hopes, crushed and splintered as he declares:

Desolation taste, play the host
To broken hearted dreams,
Beneath a sky
Of blizzard news know
The empty zone within
Where no love resides ("Word in a Gentle Wind", 1-6).

The poet is haunted by his numerous failures and is desolate and desperate. His skies are dark with gloom and he is always apprehensive of the future. He finds it difficult to sleep properly and has terrible recurring nightmares in which he is lost, anxious, alone and without hope. He thus outlines his phantasmagoria:

Driven from his bed by troubled sleep
In which he dreamt of being lost
Upon a hill too high for him
(A modest hill whose sides grew steep)
He stood where several highways crossed
And saw the city cold and dim

When only human hands sell cheap ("A Morning Walk", 1-7).

The city is a maze in which Ezekiel fears his destruction, but he cannot find his way out of it. He is oppressed by the fact that he has no answers to its crooked and beguiling ways. It has defeated all his attempts to decode its enigma. The poet uses a third person mask and thus impersonally projects his dilemma corresponding to the city's own ethos of aloofness and distancing. It is as though his spirit and consciousness have been separated from his body and he hangs suspended in limbo. The poet thus manages to convey his helplessness and misery adequately. It is as though the city is a monster which has devoured all his masculinity and vitality heaving him just an empty shell of a man
who shakes and trembles at every sound. The city is described as cruel and oppressive where “human hands sell cheap”. (“A Morning Walk”, 7).

Sanjit Misra comments on Ezekiel’s sorry condition as he says that, “This is the first exhaustive and elaborate picture of the city of Bombay. The poem opens with the poet revealing the persona’s inner turmoil and confusion at the sordid state of his affairs” (75). This condition has been caused by his aloofness from nature. He has become benumbed to the soothing effect of nature, as:

It was an old recurring dream
That made him pause upon a height
Alone, he waited for the sun
And felt his blood a sluggish stream
Why had it given him no light,
His native place he could not shun

The marsh where things are what they seem? (“A Morning Walk”, 8-14).

To Ezekiel the city appears like a marsh whose deceptive and innocent, looks lead many a victim to their deaths. The sordid, unpleasant facts of his city existence obsess the protagonist and he feels dispirited and broken by his fate. He is tormented and anguished by the fact that no ray of hope or light comes down into the gloom of his wretched existence. He is all alone in the midst of this terrible quandary and feels completely exposed and defenseless. The city is all powerful and he feels puny in the face of its myriad traps and multiple manifestations. Urmila Verma confirms this predicament of the city man, in Ezekiel, as she says:

The urban dweller confronts a complex world which has multi-dimensional facts. Trapped within this prison-house he longs for freedom. There is a deep urge for a sense of belonging. The relationship with his immediate environment is that of love-hate. (81)

Ezekiel’s conceptualization of the city evokes Eliot’s portrayal of the city in “The Wasteland”. Eliot’s city too is cruel and manipulates and torments its inhabitants:

Unreal city
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn
A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many
I had not thought death had undone so many
Sighs, short and infrequent were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet (60-65).

Ezekiel, picturises the city as a jungle full of savagery and cruelty. It is also
similar to a swamp because there is filth all over and underneath the layers of
sophistication lies the rotten reality. To quote Ezekiel:

Barbaric city sick with slums

It’s hawkers, beggars iron-lunged
Processions led by frantic drums
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many tongued
Whose wages are in words and crumbs (15, 17-21).

The urban experience traumatizes Ezekiel and he calls it (the city) ‘barbaric’. He
calls it a type of hell where there is perpetually a cacophony of sounds out of which no
sense can be made. The whole place is rife with chaos and confusion. The poet’s
sensibility or inner consciousnesses cannot stand all this and consequently becomes
distorted and warped. He becomes just another freak in this grotesque scenario and loses
his own identification. He is bewildered by this unequiviable dilemma and exclaims
piteously that:

.......... The morning breeze
Released no secrets to his ears
The more he stared the less he saw
Among the individual tress (22-25).

The poet has been banking on nature and the ‘morning breeze’ to revive him and
help in decoding the urban reality but his aspirations are in vain. He remains confounded
and non-plussed by the urban enigma which remains undeciphered. He despairs because,
“The middle of his journey nears / Is he among the men of straw / Who think they go
which way they please?” (26-28). Ezekiel’s middle age has neared and he is yet to adjust
to his environment, he hates to be thought of, like the other city men, who are, without a
cause, and sense of mission, in life. He wants to think of himself as worthy but he is
unsure and undecided even with respect to his own self because the city’s atmosphere is
deceptive, illusory and harrowing and he feels out of touch with reality. He would like to be more substantial than just being a man of 'straw'.

The protagonist's world in nightmarish made so, by the city his 'home'. He is aware of his grim plight, his condition of hanging between the two worlds of sordid reality and unrealized ideals:

Returning to his dream, he knew
That everything would be the same
Constricting as his formal dress
The pain of his fragmented view
Too late and small his insights came (29-33).

The poet-persona is conscious of the fragmentation and shattering of his psyche. He longs to break free, and, develop his individuality and creativity, but everywhere and all the time he has to conform and accommodate himself to the social codes. The poet is aware of the destruction of his intuition and inspiration which are an absolute need for composing poetry; his will has degenerated to an extent whereby he cannot oppose the city's domination, as he bewails, “His will is like the morning dew” (35). In stead of capitulating to the city’s oppression the protagonist would prefer to free, but he is unequal to the task, as affirmed by Sharwan K. Sharma who says that, “In fact the inner struggle of the city on the one and the desire to escape the humdrum life of the city on the other is well brought out.” (72)

The poet finds solace and peace for his troubled mind and spirit in a quiet garden near the uncongenial city. Its calm and soothing atmosphere is in direct opposition to the noise and unseemly haste of the city and serves to revive and restore him to a normal condition. His hallucinations and delusions disappear as his imagination re-emerges, as “The garden on the hill is cool / It’s hedges cut to look like birds / Or mythic beasts are still asleep (36-38).

The protagonist draws inspiration from the ambit of nature and is able to momentarily get over his trauma. The natural spot is quiet, cool and endowed with freshness in total contrast to the city which is feverishly sick and seething in discontent. The idyllic natural spot is perfection personified for the beleaguered poet and he regains his lost wits and senses. Nature is Ezekiel’s elixir and it revives and re-energizes him,
working as an antidote for the city’s venomous influence. He gets release from the tensions generated inside by the city. Nature’s innocence and purity make him feel blessed and liberated from the feeling of shame and taint caused by the city. The city is thus, damned in Ezekiel’s view, where as nature is divine and glorious, having the power to exalt and resurrect. The city is polluted where as nature is virginal and unblemished. A.N. Diviedi remarks astutely on the inherent contradiction picturised in Ezekiel’s poetry between urbanity and nature, when he says that:

Nature is another recurrent image in Ezekiel’s poetry standing all for purity and tranquility in contradiction of the image of the city .... The tension to be witnessed in a number of Ezekiel’s poems often results from a juxtaposition of the defiled city and the pure nature (129).

Ezekiel’s condemnation of the city takes on a particularity as well as generality, as in the poem “Island” he refers to it pointedly by its geographical peculiarity i.e., of being an island, however, without mentioning its name openly. He finds the city of Bombay to be incongruous or abnormal is many ways and to be unsuitable for poetry, as well, as good sense, as he declares:

Unsuitable for song as well as sense
the island flowers into slums
and skyscrapers, reflecting
precisely the growth of my mind
I am here to find my way in it (1-5).

The city has proved to be enigma for the poet despite being born and brought up in it. The chaos and confusion of the city has found its way into the mind of the poet and, it too, has become disordered and anarchic. Ezekiel shows how slums and skyscrapers exist side by side although they represent opposite conditions, one of deprivation and destitution and the other of wealth and power. Ezekiel’s sensibility is disrupted by the grotesque reality. His aesthetic sense is no upset and disturbed by the city’s queer and fantastic mix-up of unmatched things that he uses an unlikely phrase “flowers into slums” conjoining the delicate and beautiful with horrid and crude to show his reaction of distaste as well as consternation. The city’s foulness has made Ezekiel lose his good sense, and he cries out that:
Sometimes I cry out for help

........................................

I hear distorted echoes

of my own ambiguous voice

and of dragons claiming to be human (6, 8-10).

The city has created a split in the poet’s psyche and he fears even in asking for assistance, to get over his unease and anxiety. He feels that the other city people will not help him as they are indifferent. The poet’s senses are in the grip of a phantasmagoria created by the city and he wanders in a half-haze of mixed dream and delusions. S.N. Prasad delineates Ezekiel’s sorry condition, correctly, as he states that:

It is a sorry world is which the poet lives and to which he belongs, body and soul, and which he cannot abjure. In this world or island which stands all alone in the vast limitless cosmic ocean, organic structures whether animal or human, can and do often decay, physically as well as morally, intellectually and spiritually and the poet has horrible perceptions of such cases of decay on this island (129).

The island city i.e., Bombay has isolated the poet, cutting him off from everybody else and has also made him into a kind of ‘island’. The city’s hostile and unfriendly nature has infected him too with its poison and he is somewhat aware of this transformation within himself.

The elements of nature, like the breeze, offer Ezekiel respite from his ordeal sometimes, and thus contrasts with the hostile atmosphere of the city:

Bright and tempting breezes
flow across the island
separating past from future;
then the air is still again
as I sleep the sleep of sleep of ignorance (11-15).

The poet is roused to optimism by the kind breeze and he again readies himself to take on the challenges of life. Ezekiel thus imagines nature as having the power of revival. The poet’s exhilaration and liberation is short lived as the city’s temptations soon have him again in their grip. He knows that the city is harmful for his life but he cannot give up his fascination for it. He affirms his inability thus:
How delight the soul with absolute
sense of salvation, how
hold to a single willed direction?
I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong (16-20).

The poet craves for a permanent resolution to his dilemma but has no befitting solution. He cannot run away to nature forsaking his urban heritage even though it means giving up his chance of salvation. He commits himself to his “daily business / minding the ways of the island / as a good native should / taking calm and clamour in my stride” (22-25).

Ezekiel’s resolve to stay but reminds one of “Urban” where despite his torment (caused by the city) he reconciles himself to the “kindred clamour close at hand” (18). This disinclination on Ezekiel’s part is because he has become a creature to the city’s fatal attractions and finds his own identity reflected in it and thus recognizes a bond between him and the city even though it is not one of love.

Ezekiel’s condition approximates to the one in his early stage, where, too, he was in two minds about his sexuality, both desiring it and hating it; now too, he has a patent duality inside him but it is with respect to the city, as he both desires to renounce it and simultaneously affirms to it. He knew that his art was suffering in the sterile urban atmosphere and like in case of Jamini Roy a change of scene, to the country side would re-establish him but he could never make that required ‘leap’.

Ezekiel comprehends nature in a way absolutely different from the way he understands and projects the city and his poems on nature reveal this. Ezekiel’s nature poems are gentle and soft in tone, devoid of irony and written in a plain straightforward way showing thereby that they come straight from his heart. They contain no rancour, ill feeling and descriptions of meanness, squalor or filth. The poem “Love Sonnet” offers a sharp contrast to poems like “Urban”, and “A Morning Walk” as in this he does not depict the grim urban reality but portrays the pleasant and reinvigorating ambience of the pastoral order. The poet shows how the natural surroundings induce in him a feeling of hope and gaiety. He has gone to a nearby hill spot with a lady friend and the effect of the change is such that he instantly feels carefree and exalted. Ezekiel becomes one with the
world of nature. His description amply projects the feelings of calm, peace and deep tranquility that he experiences in such a heavenly place. His words adequately convey the sense of awe, reverence and exaltation that he feels. Ezekiel says:

This cafe among the among the birds
Could house a passing cloud

Our love has formed like dew on summer nights
The wind has ruffled up your hair
We look in consort at the distant sea
And feel it turbulent and salty there
A passionate and perpetual mystery (1-2, 6-10).

Ezekiel makes his moment with nature seem magical and the effect on his mood and verse is visible even to a casual reader. It is the freshness of the hill air, the cleanliness of the surroundings and the quietude which has suddenly transformed the poet, enthralling him, and making him forget his anxieties and tensions. Ezekiel's perception takes note of all the objects of nature which give him joy and revive his drooping spirits, gone is the trauma and air of despair which fill his city poems and this shows how in his reckoning the two - nature and the city are contradictory to each other. The protagonist seems perfectly in harmony with his benevolent and gracious environment and he seems to be perfectly at ease, liberated from his doubts and even his cynicism; literally as well as figuratively, on top of the world. The only thing which mars his happiness is the thought of returning to the city and its sordidness, as he confesses:

We lose ourselves in mingling with the crowd
Not unafraid of this ambiguous fate
We look inquiringly at road and sky
A certain happiness would be to die (13-16).

The innocence and purity which Ezekiel had partaken, of, in nature's lap had restored and renewed him but he is disgusted and disappointed as he trudges back to the city. The melancholy and feelings of doom which had deserted him on the picturesque hill-spot finds its way back into his mental frame-work as he rejoins the crowds of the
city. He would even welcome death rather than give up the feeling of exhilaration and magic felt amidst nature.

The poet is thus constantly between two worlds one is his desired ideal, that of nature and the other is his real and given world of city. Anisur Rehman comments on this conflicting feature or depiction of opposites in respect of Ezekiel as he says that, “In “Love Sonnet” the poet undergoes the ecstasy of love and in intensely aware of the two condition one in which he has to come back, the city and the other which remains his desired world, the nature” (59).

The poet imbues nature with qualities which are in total contrast with those of the city. It (nature) is tranquil, pure, innocent and original with the ability to restore, revive and resurrect whereas the city is defined by feelings of hostility, callousness, treachery and artifice. There two environments are thus in conflict with one another. The poet longs for the desired ideal of nature but cannot relinquish the city because it has drugged his existence and therein lies the eternal conflict between the nature and city in his poetry.

K.D. Verma aptly comments on Ezekiel’s concept and picturisation of nature:

Such images as hill, river, sum, rain, beach, tree and stone are archetypal life symbols ... They project a pastoral vision of a fully refulgent and harmonious life, a pattern in which man enters into sacred communion with his cosmos, including objects of nature (231).

Ezekiel is constantly haunted by his failed resolves to return to the idyllic world of nature to revive his life and poetry. This very failure which characterised “Urban” and “A Morning Walk” is again found in “Enterprise” when he alongwith other city dwellers started their voyage to realize their desired ideal of life - the world of idyllic nature. But this enterprise also fails because the Gangotri of their life has itself been corrupted and marred beyond redemption and recognition.

The poet and his band were full of zest and missionary zeal, their desire was to enter into communion with nature and discover meaning in life. They took note to everything and even wrote down their observations, as the poet relates:

Observed and put down copious notes
On things the peasants bought and sold
The way of serpents and of goats,
Three cities where a sage had taught ("Enterprise", 7-10).

The 'enterprise' of being one with nature and of achieving harmony through this relationship could not succeed eventually, as the poet and his friends did not fully commit themselves, took to quarrelling between themselves and had finally to return to the city's inhuman atmosphere. The poet relates the band's feelings of strangeness and lack of rapport with nature:

We noticed nothing as we went
A straggling crowd of little hope
Ignoring what the thunder meant
Deprived of common needs like soap
Some were broken some merely bent (21-25).

Though the poet and his companions had made an enterprise to enter into communion with the world of nature to re-discover their original or natural selves but they could not do so as they have become habituated to the pollution and corruption of the city.

Time and again, Ezekiel dwells on this inherent contradiction. He bewails his confusion and lack of clarity, and says:

Compared to my mind
rocks are reasonable
Clouds are clear
It makes me mad
but that is how it is ("Transparently", 9-13).

Ezekiel knows that his condition is pitiable but, he can blame no one, as it is he himself who lacks the will to forsake the city though he knows its true nature. He cries out:

All I want now
is the recognition
Of dilemma
and the quickest means
of resolving it
within my limits ("Transparently", 42-47).
The poet is aware of the fact that the city's inhospitable atmosphere has made his life sterile and neurotic. The queer fact is that though Ezekiel hates this environment he cannot leave it. Ezekiel is frustrated, disillusioned and completely at his wits end:

I am tired
of irony and paradox
of the bird in the hand
and the two in the bush
of poetry direct and oblique
of statement plain or symbolic
of doctrine and dogma ("Theological", 19-25).

The two works, "Naipaul's India and Mine" and the poem "Background casually" were published in 1965. Both these works along with a few other poems incorporate an important aspect of Ezekiel's vision of duality. Ezekiel's life and poetry are characterized by contradicting tendencies and characterized right from the beginning. The same is evident in his attitude to his country i.e. India. He for once announces his allegiance to India but the very next moment declares his repulsion towards it. Ezekiel has within him a double impulse in relation to India in which he is revealed both as an insider and outsider. There is patently a conflict between his two selves one which is Indian and identifies with India and the other which is Jewish, English-educated, elitist and aligns itself with the western ethos or culture.

This feature of being both anti-Indian and pro-Indian is first examined in the light of what Ezekiel has stated in his article "Naipaul's India and Mine". Ezekiel had ostensibly written the article to defend India against Naipaul's charges of being backward, decrepit, and hypocritical or in other words an 'area of darkness'. But the conflict is evident in his words:

In the India which I have presumed to call mine, I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the darkness Mr. Naipaul discovered I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. (Selected Prose 99).

Ezekiel's duality is patently evident when in the same essay, he also paradoxically declares, "I love India" (98). In the light of the above two, contradictory statements both
emphatically asserted it can safely be concluded that there is a conflict or clash inside him between his love for the country (as it is his home) and his aversion to it (as he finds it culturally, inferior).

William Walsh correctly sums up Ezekiel’s conflicting relationship with India when he says that:

One is aware of a double impulse in the poet, which on the one hand keeps him at a distance from his environment as he clutches his private history and aspirations and which on the other by means of a free and painful act of will reconciles him to his environment (130).

It is Ezekiel’s consciousness of his Jewishness and marginal status in a predominantly Hindu India that creates the tension inside him and forces him to take a contradictory and conflicting stance:

This is the place
Where I was born. I
know it
well. It is home,
which I recognize at last
as a kind of hell
to be made tolerable (“After Reading a Prediction”, 13).

His conflicting response to his Indian heritage can further be seen in the following lines from his review of Naipaul’s *An Area of Darkness* where he says:

Few Indians are ready to believe that the roots of their failure go deep into history. They believe in their high ideals, attribute failure in not living up to these. That the ideas are false and stultifying in never clearly perceived. Hence the contradiction, between words and behaviour which is virtually universal in India, the insensitive contradiction between belief and way of life. (S.P. 97).

Ezekiel does not only believe that Indians are failures, but he also believes that there is a wide gap between what they say and what they do. Ezekiel’s western sensibility looks down at his Indian context and there is a clash between his ‘outsider’ self and his ‘Indian’ self. In his autobiographical poem “Background Casually” this conflict becomes immediately evident, the pertinent lines are:
The Indian landscape sears my eyes
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners
They say I am singular
Their letters overstate the case
I have made my commitments
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place
My backward place is where I am (66-75).

Though the landscape ‘sears’ or burns his eyes yet Ezekiel loves it too, identifies with it, and cannot leave it. He acknowledges that India is backward and yet he is intimately aligned with it. It is a patent fact that Ezekiel had all the opportunities of settling abroad but he declined to do so, as he felt comfortable enough in India. In the above lines both the emotions of love and hate are projected.

He defends his duality by saying that, “I am incurably critical and sceptical. That is what I am in relation to India also ... I find that it does not prevent the growth of love” (SP, 99).

At times Ezekiel does exceed the limits in his enthusiasm to cure India of its evils or what he conceives of, as evils. In some ‘Indian’ poems, he highlights the sordid aspects only, exaggerating some specific drawbacks and leaves out the plus points, as given below:

Always in the sun’s eye
Here among the beggars
Hawkers, pavement sleepers
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and gods,
Burnt out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal
All in noisy silence
Suffering the place and time
I ride my elephant of thought
A cezanne slung around my neck (“In India”, 1-12).

Ezekiel’s peculiar equation with India of love and hate arouses different reactions in different critics. Some condone it where as others blame him for it. K.P. Ramachandran Nair is one who condemns Ezekiel anti-Indian posture, he says that, “The different disgusting scene from Indian life depicted in “In India” symbolize inspite of their bantering tone, derision for the values of a culture that grips him from all sides”. (123).

In the lines quoted from the poem it is clear that Ezekiel has an eye for detail but it can also be felt that his western sensibility focuses on those features only which are worthy of condemnation and leaves out those which can be appreciated. He is proud of his own aloofness, deigns to mix with the Indians and thus shows his prejudice and bias. In the poem “Background Casually” earlier mentioned, Ezekiel was eager to be appreciated by foreigners but he does not show the same concern when the Indian reality is to be depicted. Ezekiel’s view point is contrary as poets of any region try to present their ‘nativeness’ in a praiseworthy way. In this poem too, (“In India”) he tries to assert the superiority of the western culture over the Indian when he talks about his sling the art magazine ‘Cezanne’ around his neck. He takes a potshot at the clumsy lives the Hindus lead:

........... All Hindus are
Like that, my father used to say
When someone talked too loudly, or
Knocked at the door like the Devil
They hawked and spat. They sprawled around

(“Background Casually” 39-43).

There are times when Ezekiel can be mocking of both the eastern as well as western cultures, he is a chameleon who can blend with the background, observe all and have his fun too, as he relates:

To celebrate the year’s end
men in grey on black,
women, bosom semi-bare
twenty three of us in all
six nations represented
The wives of India sit apart
They do not drink
They do not talk
of course, they do not kiss
The men are quite at home
among the foreign styles
(What fun the flirting is!)
I, myself decorously,
press a thigh or two in sly innocence (“In India”, 34-40).

Ezekiel’s cultural affinities are sometimes not clear, though he is reliant on both the Eastern as well as the Western. In this poem itself “In India” Ezekiel again displays his dual affinities though negatively as he decries both the cultures for their weaknesses. He shows a scene of intimacy between an opportunistic Indian woman and an equally opportunistic English gentleman, he relates:

This she said to herself
As she sat on table
With the English boss,
Is it. This is the promise
The long evenings
In the large apartment
With cold beer and western music
Lucid talk of art and literature,
And of all ‘the changes India needs’
At the second meeting
In the large apartment
After cold beer and the music on
She sat in disarray
The struggle had been hard
And not altogether successful
Certainly the blouse
Would not be used again
But with true British courtesy
He lent her a safety pin
Before she took the elevator down (48-67).

The long stanza adequately outlines the sordid story as well as the conspiratorial and deceiving nature of both the protagonists, the Indian as well as the foreigner, who are both out to hoodwink the other.

Ezekiel’s attack on fake spiritual gurus reminds us of Mulk Raj Anand’s exposure of Indian religiosity in *The Coolie*.

He does not share the feelings of awe and reverence which the locals bestow on such holy people. In fact he considers them to be frauds and no better than the run of the mill individuals. He describes one such ‘Guru’ or Godman, as he says:

> The saint we are told
> once lived a life of sin
> ........................................
> But then we learn
> the saint is still a faithless friend
> obstinate in argument
> ungrateful for favours done
> ........................................
> If saints are like this
> What hope is there then for us? (‘Guru’, 1-2, 11-14, 24-25).

Half, of Ezekiel is Jewish, and half of him is Indian, though the Jewish half or ‘outsider’ is generally critical of the things Indian, it is engaged actively in seeking identity with its Indian context, N. Mohanty correctly sums up the conflict between Ezekiel’s two halves when he says that:

> Ezekiel’s acknowledgement of the presence of Jewish consciousness of background unconsciously is the recognition of a self within the self, the one, trying to
assert its indebtedness to India, the other trying to drag him towards the centre of his Jewish origin. So the element of tension gets posited in the poetry of Ezekiel (81).

He does not fail to comment adversely on some or the other aspect of traditional Indian life. His criticism emerges at such custom as:

- Returning home
- I hear the this strumming
  of a one stringed instrument
  it means the bhikshuks are at it again.

Because of the superstition rampant in these villages,
they’re royally treated
may well be God testing his people —
and carry away huge quantities of rice,
chillies, fruit and nuts
It’s a shameless exploitation
of the people’s ignorance ("Rural Suite", 17-20, 27-34).

Ezekiel’s prejudice is in conflict with the local tradition which goes back a long way and in which the country folk repose all confidence. They do not feel obliged to give up their ancient customs even though modern times have arrived. Ezekiel basically does not share their viewpoint as his Christian upbringing and rationalist outlook makes him antagonistic to what he considers as superstition and superfluous. He believes in the efficacy of his better education and more intellectual outlook or even his better 'culture'. Ezekiel’s Jewishness especially avails of chances at cutting the Hindus down to size. He uses irony devastatingly at times for this purpose, as in this instance, where he invents a non-existing relationship between him, a Jew, and the erstwhile Sanskrit poets, who were Aryans and Hindus; his purpose is nefarious to say the least, he states:

- How freely they mention
  breasts and buttocks
  They are my poetic ancestors
  Why am I so inhibited? ("The Sanskrit Poets", 1-4).
Ezekiel does not commend any other aspect of Sanskrit poetry except that which will excuse his use of lewdity. He uses through this trivial bit to verse the opportunity to laugh and scoff at the Indian tradition which appears to him sterile and hypocritical as he was earlier quoted as saying in “Naipaul’s India and Mine” viz., “Few Indians are ready to believe ----- contradiction between belief and way of life.”

Ezekiel fails to understand that Sanskrit is the language in which the largest body of religious texts have been written and just because a few plays or poems have traces of explicit language that does not lessen its holiness and sanctity, so he should not show his cultural snobbery in this flippant way.

Ezekiel’s attitude can be as colonial and anti-thetical to Indianness as a true British at times. He makes good use of satire and sardonic observation to drive home his point in many a case. His ‘outsider’ consciousness makes him denigrate the Indian scene by parodying the local dialect and faulty English, ridiculing the ethos and mentality in the process. In his “Very Indian Poems in Indian English” he uses his talent to evoke laughter and simultaneously asserts his own superiority. In one such poem he says:

I am standing for peace and non-violence
Why world is fighting, fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding
Ancient Indian wisdom in 100% correct
I should say even 200% correct (“The Patriot”, 1-7).

It is felt by some, that Ezekiel uses his Indian identity rather unfairly, he takes the liberty of finding fault but seldom praises. When it comes to real important issues, he sides with the western viewpoint at the cost of the Indian one and thus his commitment to India is not genuine. His western sensibility is obtrusively present, always and he takes plenty of pride in it, however, there are times when unjustified criticism of the native tradition by a local poet can back-fire as in the case of Ezekiel himself, who is taken to task here, by Anthony Burge a British poet for his conflicting stand in relation to India; he says that, “Nissim’s distancing himself from fellow Indians in the Indian English poems smacks of disdain and a patronizing attitude” (qtd Rao 237).
Ezekiel's attitude is inclusive of both attraction and repulsion by his Indian scenario and, his relationship is ambiguous and paradoxical; he prefers to stay in India, unlike other poets like Dom Moraes and A.K. Ramanujan and despite this preference is uncomfortable too, as is attested to by his disdainful attitude seen in several poems. He asserts his loyalty to India is an interview with John B. Beston where he says, “I regard myself essentially as an Indian poet writing in English” (44).

The fact emerges that Ezekiel faced a conflict within himself between his 'insider' and 'outsider' self. The fault lay within his own consciousness which considered itself westernized and superior though Ezekiel always tried to apportion the blame for his maladjustment and discomfort on the Indian environment and culture. He did not try to reconcile the differences with his milieu, but was keen on maintaining his 'alien' status, his psyche too remained divided. He could not subdue either sensibility Indian or English successfully and find a voice which would satisfy his own aspirations as well as those of his admirers of both categories – Indian and western. He was distinctly conscious of his 'separateness' as he affirms:

It’s the language really
separates, whatever else
is shared ..................
..................................

The guests depart dissatisfied
they will never give up
their mantras, old or new
And you uneasy
orphan of their racial
memories merely
polish up your alien
techniques of observation. (“Minority Poem”, 10-12, 22-29).

Ezekiel’s, viewpoint as the above lines indicate, is critical of Indian customs. He also thinks of himself as one who has been discriminated against, and kept, isolated. He tries to find a meeting ground in which he can accommodate both his 'selves' but he is unable to locate such a common meeting point.
Ezekiel’s cultural conflict – with western sensibility looking down at the native one surfaces in the poem “Ganga”. He denigrates the step motherly treatment meted out to servants by Indians, as though this unfair practice is restricted only to them, he says:

............ The woman
who washes up, suspected
of prostitution
is not dismissed
She always gets
a cup of tea
preserved for her
from the previous evening
and a chapati, stale
but in good condition

.........................

She brings a smell with her
and leaves it behind her (3-12, 21-22).

Ezekiel is not fully in touch with the Indian traditions and customs and he therefore cannot fully sympathize with the Indians. He finds fault with the Indian mentality even at a roadside monkey show, here he feels they are miserly or act in the way of a ‘Shylock’ as:

The monkey show is on

..............................

Anticipating time for payment
the crowd dissolves
Some, in shame, part
with the smallest coin they have (“Entertainment” 1, 23-26).

Ezekiel mostly contented himself with criticism of the objective reality, in India and left the deeper aspects alone. He was undemonstrative and non-committal about his love for the country, rarely, giving it place in his poetry. More, often than not his upper class or ‘outsider’ sensibility was predominant and he did not share or participate in the
local customs even considering them crude. However, he did, deep inside, yearn for assimilation with his context as he himself asserts:

Do not in your vanity, the tenuous thread
Of difference flaunt but be
Asserted in the common dance. Participate
Entirely, make an end of separation ("Transmutation" 7-10).

As stated earlier Ezekiel was undemonstrative and believed in keeping his emotions in check and it is for this reason that most of his poems which deal with India project only one side of him, his critical side. In the following poem his rarely exposed, emotional side is in evidence where he bares his love for Bombay without reservation, still some what retaining his obliqueness which was his trademark, he says:

I have not come
to Edinburgh
to remember
Bombay mangoes,
but I remember them
even as I look
at the monument
to six Walter Scott,
Or Stroll along
in the Hermitage of Braid.
Perhaps it is not the mangoes
that my eyes and tongue long for,
but Bombay as the fruit
on which I’ve lived
winning and losing
my little life. ("From Edinburgh Interlude - Mangoes" 1-16).

It is thus, in one of his last poems, that Ezekiel shows his love for India poignantly and with great feeling. He also acknowledges his gratitude and debt at the same time. Ezekiel again compliments Bombay richly in the poem “Nothing to say” where he say it all, showing his deep appreciation and love:
The end of another
trip abroad,

............................

When I have nothing to say
I know I shall say it
gratefully, persistent and poetic
as the grass that grows
between Bombay’s pavement tiles (1-3, 10-14).

Ezekiel’s tributes are rich indeed as he finds identification at last between himself and his environment. He locates the qualities which he appreciated in his own self of ‘persistence’ and ‘poetic’ in Bombay’s soil thereby affirming his deep bond with it.

Throughout his poetry, at times love for his country is felt, when his Indianess predominates and at other times his dislike emerges which is linked to his ‘alien’ status and a conflict between the two selves thus comes to the fore in which he himself is swept along, at times unsure of his own affiliations.

C. Vijayasree observes pertinently in respect of Ezekiel’s conflicting relationship with India that, “Ezekiel often re-affirms his affiliation with India – a nation he respects and repudiates, a country he castigates and cares for, a place that is his hell and heaven at the same time” (166).

Ezekiel’s main conflict in this middle phase was one which personally consumed and obsessed him as his quest for identity and roots was linked with it. Writing verse was for Ezekiel a matter of pride as well as self-fulfilment because poetry was something that he desired from deep inside his soul and what caused him anguish was that his urban environment was inhospitable, crude and squalid, hindering and obscuring his poetic vision and creativity. His sensibility and aesthetic sense were offended and disturbed by the urban din and chaos; he longed for peace and tranquility which could be found only in the pastoral order but the tragedy lay in the fact that he could not renounce his bitter ‘native city’. A clash of sensibility thus takes place in this phase with revulsion for the city and its corruption co-existing with love for nature and its purity. The two images are in direct contrast to each other one vice-ridden, the other virtuous, one suffered and endured in real life and the other an abstract ideal longed for. Ezekiel longed to escape to
the country-side but was unable to forgo his commitments and do so. Ezekiel’s vision comprehends nature and urbanity as contradictory forces – nature associated with originality and benevolence and the city with all that is anathema to life and poetry. Ezekiel also finds nature, refreshing and imbued with innocence while simultaneously he finds the city stultifying and devoid of feeling. His poems like “Urban”, “A Morning Walk”, “Love Sonnet”, etc. show his love for nature and desire for amalgamation with it, while simultaneously condemning the city environs which have almost made him into a neurotic or schizoid. Conflict of another nature-love-hate relationship also comes of the fore in this middle phase. Some poems like “Background Casually”, “In India” and “Island” specifically relate to this aspect in which Ezekiel display an ambivalent attitude in which at times a posture of cultural superiority emerges and he criticizes various aspects of Indian life that are repellant to his western sensibility. Ezekiel also displays his minority psyche at times suffering from a feeling of marginalization.

He castigates Indian and its people, scorns them, pokes fun at them but can not leave them reminding the reader of his attitude to Bombay. “I cannot leave the island/ I was born here and belong.” However, scathing Ezekiel’s denigration maybe he yet retains inside a love for his country and this duality or conflict between love and hate, for ascendancy inside his mind makes his poetry interesting and arresting.

In this middle phase of being an “unfinished man” Ezekiel’s woes were further aggravated by his failure on his domestic front. His marriage finally collapsed and in about the early 1970s he and his wife separated.

Ezekiel himself admits to the fact of having encountered conflicts in life and also to using them in his poetry is an interview with Manorma B. Trikha, as he says that, “The tensions between two opposite and contradictory conditions is a reality in many human experiences. The difficulty always is to acknowledge it and use it. This is what I have tried to do” (26).

One thing that stands out in the delineation of different conflicting tendencies, attitudes and issues is Ezekiel’s failure to resolve the conflicts. His diagnosis is superb, his prescription brilliant but he is more of a patient refusing to swallow the bitter pills that have the efficacy to bring him out of his conflicting stance and provide wholesomeness. And this is what adds beauty and charm to his poetry.
Ezekiel's poetry and conflicts underwent a discernible change with his next phase with more of an emphasis on religious / Humanist issues. His poetry reveals growth both as a man and as a poet. His poetry initially focuses on his own subjective 'self', progresses to the objective reality outside, in this middle phase and culminates with the metaphysical in his last phase. Chetan Karnani asserts that “Ezekiel's poetry is the record of the various stages in his life” (Karnani 172).
WORKS CITED


