Ezekiel's third and final phase of poetry comprises roughly of the period when the last two volumes of poetry namely *Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter Day Psalms* were written. This period is also designated as the humanist phase. By this time Ezekiel's earlier confusions and conflicts had become dormant and subdued. The excessive sexuality which had caused him guilt and anguish was now no more a source of tension for Ezekiel. His guilty conscience syndrome has now abated as he no longer has such deep spiritual yearnings as before, contrarily he now celebrates sex and has no inhibitions about it. He no longer desires redemption now and even finds holiness in sexuality. He even combines the two themes of sex and holiness as in Hindu mythology, as for instance:

```
I have lost my reason –
let it go.
Did I create this woman,
untameable and yet
willing to be tamed?
Only Shiva meditating
Could be immovable
in her moving presence.
As for me
I hardly meditate at all. ("The Loss" 1-10)
```

Ezekiel thus no longer labours under apprehensions of guilt and has completely harmonized his impulses with respect to sex, achieving equilibrium. In this middle phase, the realist phase, there was a conflict or tussle between Ezekiel's urge for the pastoral order and his commitments to the city, but that too is longer an issue with Ezekiel. The conflict which was between his Indian and un-Indian roots has also subsided and now Ezekiel is faced with an issue of a higher order. He himself acknowledges the fact of a drastic change in his perspective and appreciation of reality in the first poem of the volume *Hymns in Darkness* called "Subject of Change". It is while he is on an evening
walk that Ezekiel decides that all his old concepts, viewpoints and themes are in need of a total change. He asserts the need to discard his old presumptions and perspectives as he declares:

The evening walk proved not to be
Along the shore of memory
I edged towards a different light:
The fevers of a future night
..................................................
Not a stone in the edifice
Well-loved is likely to suffice
Everything calls for a new place
A different rage behind my face. (1-4, 9-12)

Ezekiel's poetry discloses a growth from the time he commenced his poetic journey. In his first phase he was introspective, analysing and probing his own self; he outgrew these concerns in his middle phase, coming face to face with the physical reality of his environment. In this last phase he has further matured and outgrown both the concerns, inner and outer. He now ascends to the highest plane, the metaphysical, seeking to explore and define his own responses to it. His quest is to find meaning in life and he wants to discard all that which is obsolete or harmful, even though it may have deep implications for him. Ezekiel's own sensibility is now involved in a clash with moribund values and hollow religious beliefs which belong to both Hindu as well as Judaic / Christian religions. He decries those aspects of orthodoxy and faith which he feels impede man's progress or even make living unbearable.

In this terminal phase Ezekiel was alone and desolate. Both his parents had died and he had also separated from his wife and children living all alone. He had plenty of time on his hands in the evenings which he spent on reading the scriptures of various religions, ruminating on various aspects of life, its mysteries and beliefs. He also went into the aspect of man's moral and ethical responses and sensibilities. He gave shape to these thoughts which occupied his mind, some of which went deep into questions of dogma and made them into poems. His explorations of the spiritual aspects of life were
not always successful and made him disillusioned. He even despaired of finding the ultimate truth as he himself confesses in ‘Theological’:

I’ve stripped off a hundred veils
and still there are more
that cover your creation
why are you so elusive? (8-11)

The more Ezekiel tried to achieve and realize God, the more frustrated he became, finally realizing that his quest is an impossible one. In “Theological” again, he asserts that, “Your truth / is too momentous for man / and not always useful” (5-7).

Failure turned Ezekiel into a sceptic and he gave up his attempts to realize God. He now started focusing on the ethical, humanistic facets of life and on his poetry. He affirmed to human values and needs as opposed to the theistic and divine. He desired to re-interpret life in accordance with human aspirations and not follow the religious scriptural interpretations. His vision is thus humanistic and in conflict with the traditional theistic beliefs and values. Bruce King thus observes about Ezekiel quest subsequent to the publication of *The Exact Name*, “He had become a sceptical seeker, following various methods, reading about the world’s religions and philosophies to find comfort and an acceptable belief for his restless mind and increasingly disillusioned self (Three Indian Poets 40).

Ezekiel, was foremost, an intellectual who lived a varied and stimulating life. He had his own encounters with truth which gave shape to his particular beliefs which were essentially individual and personal. In a letter to V.A. Shahane Ezekiel defined his religious stance, thus, “I am not a religious or even a moral person in any conventional sense. Yet, I’ve always felt myself to be religious and moral in some sense. The gap between these two statements is the existential sphere of my poetry” (261).

Ezekiel, is thus unconventional in respect of religion and morality, having his own special views about them. His, is a sensibility which however differentiates between right and wrong looking at things in the light of human needs. He sympathizes with the deprived and also recognizes the need for social equality. He seeks to look beneath the layers of sophistication and superficiality and see the reality beneath in the physical world, as well as on the spiritual plane. Man’s life is both physical and spiritual and
Ezekiel's need is to imbibe of experience, in whatever form it is available and express it through poetry to benefit his fellow-man, as he himself asserts in "Credo":

To know beneath
the depth of life
another depth begin;
blindly to sink
and be sustained
by voices, by hands
by the human need
to hear new messages
to describe anguish
in a soft voice
in the simplest statements
to body forth the passions. (1-12)

Ezekiel's vision is more secular than spiritual. With respect to the spiritual he is non-sectarian as he does not ascribe to any one faith dogmatically, but believes in all, in a general way. He gives priority to humanness and human suffering. His desire is find meaning in life and relate it through his poetry.

Ezekiel does not negate the mystical aspects of religion and life but is opposed to dogma and rigidity which obscure and nullify the real objectives of religion, namely to comfort man and offer him salvation in life.

Ezekiel's unorthodox experience of mysticism is related in the poem "Encounter" which he describes eloquently:

Within the pandemonium of the street I felt his voice like a command. That was what I needed, to sense authority and to yield assent completely. Not to be divided. To move into another state, ineluctably, like death. Perfection in the flow of consciousness, like love.

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

Many men, like buses on a fixed route, and buses jerking away like drunken men.

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

And realized suddenly that it is necessary not to ask certain questions.

(1-5, 7-8, 10-11)
In his desire to have mystical experiences Ezekiel even took L.S.D. in 1967 and this is what he has to say about his experience, "And then I realized that everything that people said about L.S.D. is true: there is a mind expansion, you do have visions, you do hear voices which perhaps is your sub-conscious talking" (Rao 178).

Ezekiel was a questor after truth and in this endeavour he stopped short at nothing. Early in his life he had once even decided to take up religion seriously as a profession, as he himself declares in “Background Casually”:

At home, on Friday nights the prayers
Were said. My morals had declined
I heard of Yoga and of Zen.
Could I perhaps be rabbi-saint?
The more I searched the less I found. (16-20)

Ezekiel later gave up his idea of becoming a rabbi and concentrated on his poetry. He had lacked the sustained zeal and sense of mission to serve God. Ezekiel is unorthodox and modern in his ideas, though religious, he is not obsessed with religiosity. He can even be categorized as a sceptic as he prefers logicality and pragmatism to blind faith. He is traditional as far as his morality is concerned, which too is a part of the wider perimeter of religion, as without morality religion is meaningless. On being asked about his religious beliefs by Dr. Frank Birbal Singh in an interview this is what Ezekiel himself had to say:

I don’t think I have ever sat down to completely define my attitude to Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity or any other set of beliefs. Although people who are critical may apply the word ‘cynicism’ to me I think scepticism would be more accurate (Selected Prose 161-162).

Ezekiel does not like the word ‘cynic’ to be used to describe him as he does believe in social and moral values and sympathizes with human misery and suffering. He is quite firm in his beliefs with respect to the priority of human concerns over all others including even religious ones. He asserts this in “Blessings X”:

Let not your religion
mystic doctrines
or mundane experiences
knowledge, ignorance
and strong convictions
co-exist with a cold heart. (1-6)

Ezekiel desired to find meaning in life through humanness. His longing is expressed in “A Poem of Dedication” and it is for, “a human balance, humanly / Acquired ............” (32-33). Ezekiel would never forsake this human concern. His human flaws, his struggles and his suffering made him conscious of the fact that, though, religion purports to be there exclusively for man’s needs and help yet man is always alone in his struggle for survival and for realization of meaning in life. Ezekiel in the last phase realizes the fact of “God helps those who help themselves” and it is now that he evolves and develops a thoroughly pragmatic, sceptical attitude towards religion. He confesses that he does need the solace of some kind of purity or holiness to comfort him in his old age; but it is not to be of the conventional type like a retreat or hermitage in the mountains. He says:

Now I feel driven to the wall
by age and circumstance
holiness matters
sceptical as always
I cannot go in search of it
to an ashram or settle down alone
on the top of a mountain. (“A Different Way” 14-20)

Ezekiel’s holiness is individualised and has to come about through human suffering as suffering purges a man of all his bad thoughts and wrong inclinations. Ezekiel’s concept of holiness is revealed in “Portrait” more fully:

Beneath his daily strategy
Reflected in his suffering face
I see his dim identity
A small deserted holy place. (13-16)

Ezekiel in his last stage asserts the need for human concerns to take priority over godly ones. In this last phase his poetry depicts a struggle or conflict between the values of sceptic humanism and religion. He nowhere denies God’s existence but feels that ‘He’
has neglected man and has not treated him fairly. Ezekiel is not an atheist because he affirms God’s existence. He, however questions God’s judgements, his laws and even his sense of fair play and thereby shows his contradictory sensibility. His poetry displays his protest against the dictates of religion. Ezekiel appreciates holiness, purity and virtue but his humanness prompts him to locate these qualities in man rather than in divinity. He wants humans to find their own sources of happiness and sanctity irrespective of and inspite of, religion. This is what he asserts in “Transmutation”:

......................... be
Asserted in the common dance
........................................
Sense-explosions, agitations
Of the mind and marrow, merge
Into a wider, warmer meaning
Holiness reveals itself in everything (8-9, 12-15).

Ezekiel considers himself to be more worldly than spiritual, despite having written a number of poems with religious substance, he declares:

Well maybe in the general sense of religious philosophical I fall short, I think, because I don’t get a sense of religion sustained from day to day in my life. If I write a religious poem, the next poem is likely to be secular, sceptical. I attach a great deal of importance to the worldliness of the world, its independence. And, actual measure of holiness, I don’t think I get anywhere near (Beston 47).

Ezekiel thus favours worldliness over religiosity and this is because of his humanistic concerns. He had earlier been more religious than worldly with a deep spiritual craving. His faith was his rock during times of crisis and faithlessness was the ultimate crime as he asserts in “Something to Pursue”:

Empty of faith in the comeliness of God
Empty of faith in the shapeliness of man

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

......................... for such a man
There can be no redemption. (102-103, 105-106)
Earlier Ezekiel had been a devout believer and had relied on ‘Him’ for protection from evil. He had looked to God for support in times of crisis. ‘He’ was never far from Ezekiel, who had but to call, as:

- Deliver me from evil, Lord
- Rouse me to essential good
- Change the drink for me O Lord
- Lead me from the wailing wood. ("Psalm 151" 13-16)

Alas, wisdom came with age and experience and Ezekiel’s attitude towards God and religion changed. There was a complete reversal of his beliefs as time passed by or as he declares, “But tidal apprehensions come / with damning wisdom of the years” (“Speech and Silence” 11-12). The tide of time changed Ezekiel’s vision completely. He now realized that the rigmarole of religion is ineffective in securing happiness for man in life. He realized too, the futility of prayer as he affirms in “Prayer I”:

- Prayer is transcendental speech
- To transcend is to go beyond
- Beyond is anywhere – All
- Or nothingness. I have known
- Prayer as nothingness and prayer
- as all but nothingness
- But prayer as All I have not known. (1-7)

Ezekiel’s frustration with formalized religion made him turn to rationalism and logic. He had desired to imbibe of mystery and mysticism through religion but could make no headway in this direction. Finally he declared his allegiance to empiricist thinking, as he affirms in “Philosophy”:

- There is a place to which I often go
- Not by planning to, but by a flow
- Away from all existence to a cold
- Lucidity, whose will is uncontrolled
- Here the mills of God are never slow. (1-5)
Ezekiel prefers the lucidity of logic to the woolliness of religion. He even decries the delay encountered in Godly justice when he says, “Here the mills of God are never slow” (5).

Ezekiel’s experience of life now tells him that man generally suffers because of his ignorance and in the present times, he is unable to realize his full potential because of the misconceptions that he labours under. The biggest misunderstanding that man has is in relation to the role of religion. Man feels that religion fills a void in his life and thus lends him strength but the real fact is otherwise. Religion has little sympathy for man being concerned only with divinity or God and it constantly harps on man’s fallibility. The Church too is materialistic and to a large extent concerned with amassing wealth. As if all this was not enough, God too remains aloof from man’s travails. So, man would be better off if he woke up to the true reality and stopped depending on the institution of religion for help and guidance. Ezekiel’s unorthodox and contradictory views are humanistic and enlightened, seeking to defend man against encroachments in his private life by religion. P.R. Kher too affirms Ezekiel’s wider concerns as he says that, “According to Ezekiel, philosophy, morality and religion must always have humanitarian considerations to tackle the philosophic, moral or religious problem of the laity” (155).

In the early years of the decade of 1970s, Ezekiel lived alone as mentioned earlier both his parents having died and he, also having separated from his wife and children. To while away the time in the evenings Ezekiel would read English translations of the Vedic hymns. After reading for some time he would switch off the lights and sit in complete darkness. It was on one of these moments that he decided to write a collection of poems called the “Hymns in Darkness”. Ezekiel’s intention was to write poems which would reflect his own state of darkness, depression and gloom. Ezekiel, when he read the Vedic lore and imbibed of the teachings given there as for example of “Tamsomajyotirgamaya” which is the devotee’s cry to be led ‘from darkness to light’ was filled with a little dismay and apprehension. The cause for this was that Ezekiel realized that the virtue, nobility, humility and holiness of the Vedic times is now totally absent. The ancient ‘rishis’ or sages lived in the ‘Sat-Yuga’ or age of truth and purity and thus their creations i.e., the Vedic literature reflected all that was good and pure. Today’s age is the ‘Kal-Yuga’ or ‘age of darkness’ in which neither is heroism present anywhere nor is singing in praise of
it relevant and reflective of the times. Where as the creations of the Sat-Yuga eulogized heroic qualities like truthfulness, loyalty, devotion, bravery manliness, sacrifice, etc. raising them to the level of the divine, to do so in his version of the hymns would be an anomaly and wrong. Ezekiel’s intention was to state the truth of the prevailing conditions of society and religion too. He recognized the fact that there is nothing holy or pure about the atmosphere today, which is totally vitiated and impure. He could not bring himself to make his protagonist cry for enlightenment or ‘Tamsomajyotirgamaya’ as he knew that in present times a rendition of this type of an impulse would strike a false note.

In this age of materiality or Kal-Yuga (an age of darkness) man’s only desire is to seek wealth and propagate his own self at the cost of society and values. In such an age of darkness or inverted values to sing in praise of virtue and light, which represent goodness would not serve his purpose of depicting reality truthfully and thereby revealing his poet’s vision faithfully. He decided to sing hymns in praise of ‘darkness’ or the ‘fallen’ spirit of man which today is all pervasive and evident everywhere. Such a man as represents humanity today has no desire for illumination and prefers the dark to light. Ezekiel’s hymns are also a satire on the prevailing social consciousness which lacks moral and religious values and gives priority to wealth over virtue. Ezekiel dedicates his ‘hymns’ to ‘darkness’ in a manner opposite to the Vedic ‘Shlokas’ or hymns which were dedicated to light. Ezekiel in his ‘hymns’ sings in praise of lesser and ignoble qualities like craftiness, faithlessness, egoism, etc, which conflicts with the attitude and vision of the Vedic hymn writer who sang of noble deeds and virtue Ezekiel’s “Hymns in Darkness” are an inversion of the original Vedic chants and his attitude is absolutely the anti-thesis of the Vedic versifier. Ezekiel’s attitude is pragmatic as he glorifies success above everything else whereas that of the Vedic hymn writer was idealistic. Ezekiel’s negative vision, which seeks the easy way out is in direct contrast to the affirmative vision of the Vedic hymn writer who was optimistic and always hoped for the best. Ezekiel’s worldly vision is in conflict with the spiritual vision of the Vedic hymn writer who was inclined towards goodness, righteousness, fairplay, justice, simplicity and all the good values that should be there in man and society. Bruce King comments on the “Hymns in Darkness” and their contradictory nature saying, “these are tough, wry, epigrammatic songs of the modern spirit unable to know any ultimate reality beyond the
life it experiences" (Modem Indian Poetry 104). Ezekiel’s ‘hymns’ thus relate more, or are situated more on the physical plane rather than the spiritual. Ezekiel’s vision is sceptical of divinity as well as virtue in keeping with beliefs in contemporary times. His protagonist is a man immersed in himself and his worldly pleasures, he is one who is shut up in his own world of ego, isolated and fragmented away from the rest of society and its concerns. He lives only for himself. K.G. Srivastava too offers comment on Ezekiel’s “Hymns in Darkness” and on their lack of spiritual substance saying, “The poem is a testament of Ezekiel’s humanist / pragmatic world view tinged with Nihilism which denies old values of moral conduct but tends towards the assertion of life” (149).

Ezekiel begins the poem, which has sixteen sections by a description of his protagonist who is the very anti-thesis of the Vedic hero. This universalized city man is a vain and shallow person of no social worth. Ezekiel says of him:

He knows how to talk of humility
with humility.
He has exchanged the wisdom of youthfulness
for the follies of maturity

Self-esteem stunts his growth. He has not learnt
how to be nobody.
All his truths are outside him,
and mock his activity.
The noise of the city is matched
by the noise in his spirit.        ("Hymns in Darkness I" 1-4, 7-12)

This persona can only talk of humility, otherwise, he is not himself humble. He is a far cry from the Vedic ideal and is in fact the absolute opposite of such a paragon of virtue. In his youth unlike others, he strived for wisdom, normally youth is characterized by boundless energy and over-activity, and thus he was an exception. In his old age too, he has remained foolish instead of becoming wise like others. His mental and spiritual growth remained negligible because he was always proud and never tried to learn. This protagonist is thus one who can never aspire to purity, exaltation and great deeds like the hero of the Vedic hymns. He is just a shallow creature who beats his own drum and adds
to the unwholesome noise which is already present in his locale. This locale, too is far removed from the quiet, sacrosanct atmosphere portrayed in the Vedic lore, it is filled with loud noise which deafens the senses. Prem P. Kapoor makes a pertinent observation on Ezekiel’s conflicting sensibility in the “Hymns in Darkness” as he says that:

“Hymns in Darkness” are the songs of the troubled, alienated modern spirit. The very title of this series of poems indicates their theme. The poet’s irony bursts out at the glaring disparities of life. The ancient sanskrit hymns are the yearnings of man’s spirit to attain something higher than mundane existence. But Ezekiel’s hymns are those that has inverted almost everything enshrined in the ancient hymns (116).

This, unlikely protagonist, is conceited, a self-lover and he also believes in deceiving. He uses an assortment of tricks and devices to further his self-interests. He is not totally honest, motivated and filled with fervour and zeal like the Vedic hero. He is enamoured of wealth and riches and is always trying to manipulate things, so that he reaches the top. He is neither simple nor virtuous but given to hedonism. Ezekiel describes him thus:

He lives in the world of desires and devices. It
is colourful and full of poetry.

He speaks with his own voice. He listens
with the third ear. He sees
with the eye
in the centre of his forehead
It’s all of little use
He’s still a puny self
hoping to manipulate the universe and all
its manifest powers for his own advancement.
advantages. (“H.D. II” 5-6, 9-17)

Unlike the Vedic hero who uses meditation and penance for the good of the complete human race, Ezekiel’s hero is only bent on furthering his own selfish interests. In pursuit of this unholy aim he uses all methods and means, irregardless of their appropriateness or fairness. He only wants to succeed at any cost and in this his nature is
revealed as mean. Ezekiel’s vision as revealed in these ‘Hymns’ is a highly contradictory one as his protagonist is no virtuous hero, but only an inferior being.

As a matter of fact, Ezekiel is more appreciative of the ‘fallen’ than the exalted and even prefers ‘darkness’ to light. He projects his conflicting view thus:

The darkness has its secrets
which light does not know
It’s a kind of perfection
While every light

distorts the truth. (“H.D. XII” 5-9)

Ezekiel blames the light for revealing things in a wrong way which assertion is contrary to the accepted beliefs. All the religions of the world hold light as pure and designative of knowledge, the darkness on the other hand, has always been associated with sin and evil. Ezekiel’s contention, thus totally goes against the traditional religious beliefs and his stance is non-conformist and incompatible. ‘Night’ with which darkness is usually associated has always filled man with dread and fear and at this time he always remains closeted in his home; day on the other hand being light filled and bright has always been man’s friend and at this time man goes about his business of life outdoors, without fear, providing for himself and his family. Where, night has always been the foe, day has been always the friend of man and so Ezekiel’s view in denigrating light and praising darkness is unjustified.

Ezekiel’s protagonist not only lacks virtue but he is also a man without faith. Whereas the personae of the ancient Hindu texts were inspired persons full of divine illumination Ezekiel’s city man is an atheist who disbelieves in prophesies, revelations and portends. He is always too busy in his own self and in gratifying his desires to have time for anything else. ‘Truth’ which was the ideal of the true man, the realization of which was the ultimate goal of all seekers also does not move this mock-hero. He looks hesitatingly at it in a guilty way. The protagonist is full of all possible flaws and defects, as Ezekiel shows:

He has seen the signs
but not been faithful to them.
Where is the fixed star of his seeking?
It multiplies like a candle
in the eyes of a drunkard.
He looks at the nakedness of truth
in the spirit of a peeping Tom. (“H.D. III” 1-7)

Ezekiel’s concepts and rendition of the non-ideal conflicts keenly with that of the
Vedic Hymn writer. Ezekiel’s hero is in reality a non-hero as he lacks a sacrificing spirit
sharing his gains of life with no one except himself. The Vedic heroes like Rama, Arjuna,
etc. were real heroes who wished to serve humanity and whose character was of the
highest type. The Vedic hero was not only full of faith and conviction for himself but also
a source of these qualities for others. There is thus, a world of difference between him
and Ezekiel’s protagonist whose faith is shaky and insubstantial.

Ezekiel’s protagonist is but a representative of society, and if he as a
representative is so base, then naturally the society too would be the same. Ezekiel’s
sensibility is critical of the societal standards prevalent and this poem is his way of
commenting on its shallowness.

Ezekiel’s ideal or hero is not true in any sense of the word. He cheats and
hoodwinks. He is inconstant and cannot stick to anything for long, far removed from the
ideal of the strong, resolute and committed man. Naturally, no one likes or admires him,
as Ezekiel describes:

The difficult way is the subject of his theories
The easy way is his choice
He has played at being disciple
He has played at being guru.
To his wife an impossible husband
To his children less than loving.
Now he calls it destiny
He names the circumstances
A life is a symbolic pattern
He’s this life
He’s the interpretation (“H.D. IV” 1:11)
Ezekiel's protagonist feels himself to be the centre of the universe. He has ready excuses for all his failures. He never accepts the fact of being himself lacking in ability but is quick to always blame fate and the circumstances. Ezekiel looks deep into the human nature and psyche and points at those facets of human nature which are inferior and mean unlike his Vedic counterpart for whom man was the supreme creation of the universe and who was the repository of the noblest virtues. Ezekiel's vision borders on the cynical in depicting such an anti-hero.

Ezekiel himself mocks this creature who lacks virtue and courage, so completely, saying:

So much light in total darkness!
So much courage given beside the abyss.

He has lost faith in himself and found faith at last. ("H.D. V" 1-2, 8-9).

Though this villainous persona is Ezekiel's creation yet, he cannot restrain himself from ridiculing him. He further mocks him for his own faithlessness and his attempts to discover it (faith) somewhere else. Ezekiel fully knows that those without faith in themselves cannot find it else where too, as they would never be able to recognize it. What becomes a matter of intricate thought and theorizing for Ezekiel, namely faith, is something with which the Vedic hero is naturally endowed. Thus there is a world of difference in Ezekiel's outlook and that of the Vedic versifier whose vision was basically pure and simple. Ezekiel's sensibility is in direct conflict with that of the Vedic writer because Ezekiel's hero never tries to fight against the adverse circumstances and also because he limits himself completely to the depiction of the present grim reality without ever being hopeful for the future. Ezekiel's 'hymns' also neglect to praise virtue, goodness and sacrifice completely even to off-set the negative qualities of his protagonist or as a counter to them. He completely ignores and avoids mention of good, holy and pure things and so his 'hymns' are but a travesty of the term. His vision is an inverted one, the opposite of the Vedic writer who wished his readers to learn of the magnanimity, fortitude and self-sacrifice which he portrayed. Ezekiel has no such lessons to teach nor
are the qualities shown in his 'hymns' worth imitating. Ezekiel’s protagonist is a poor specimen who is thoroughly flawed and often wrong:

How far a man may travel
in the wrong direction!
Now he is smug
in his hindright wisdom.
His follies are familiar
accepted
like old friends

A single decision
is better than a hundred thoughts
To hell with all directions old and new. (“H.D. VI” 1-7, 12-14).

Ezekiel’s protagonist not only lacks faith, resoluteness, reliability but he also lacks the power of sustained thought. He quickly decides on his course of action heedless of its suitability or appropriateness. Even if he goes wrong, he is complacent and unbothered. Ezekiel’s persona is a typical ‘fallen’ man who is causal and nonchalant about his responsibilities and attitude. His ‘hell-may-care’ attitude is the anti-thesis of the noble, righteous attitude of the hero of the ‘shastras’ or sacred texts. The hero of the Vedic lore was infallible and even divine in his endeavours and deeds; Ezekiel’s hero bears no resemblance to him whatsoever. In comparison to the Vedic ideal Ezekiel’s persona is but a puny creature. Ezekiel’s ‘hymns’ do not reveal any ‘truths’, they also do not deal with holy aspects and metaphysical abstractions and thus do not qualify to be properly called ‘hymns’. They only portray and depict sordid qualities and aspects of life and are thus not true to the designation of ‘hymns’ or sacred songs. Ezekiel’s sceptic vision clashes with the holy, inspired and faith-filled one of the Vedic chant writer. Bruce King too comments on Ezekiel’s lack of spirituality when he says that, “The sceptical ironic attitude towards the divine finds expression in “Hymns in Darkness” poems partly derived from the elliptical profundities of the Vedic hymns and formally from the stanzatic shapes of their English translations” (Modern Indian Poetry 104).
Not only is Ezekiel’s hero a miserable creature but even his environment is impure, chaotic and unhealthy, far from the holy, pure and pleasant environment depicted in the ‘shastras’. This environment of the Kal-Yuga is a desecrated one:

There's only this
a tarred road
under a mild run
after rain
glowing,

wet, green leaves
patterned flat
on the pavement
around dog-shit
one ragged slipper
near an open gutter
three crows
pecking away at it
And breasts, thighs, buttocks
swinging
now towards
now away from him. (“H.D. VII” 1-17)

The ‘Kal-Yuga’ hero lives among refuse and garbage as though it is perfectly normal and natural. He lives in a world of fantasy and illusion obsessed with sex and sensuality. This sort of a picturisation cannot be imagined or compared with the Vedic literature which was concerned with the ideal aspects of life and even life after death. The Vedic literature not only dealt with the life which one leads but, also the births which would follow subsequent to death, believing in the doctrine of ‘Karma’ and thus laid down a proper moral code to be followed by man. The vision of the Vedic vesifier was thus all-encompassing bringing into its fold the present as well as the future, in this respect Ezekiel’s vision is sorely limited only taking into consideration the physical reality of the contemporary times. He does not go at all into the questions of right and wrong and completely negates them.
Ezekiel’s protagonist, a typical dweller of the ‘Kal-Yuga’ is paradoxical. He fits no definite category. Even though he is a man without faith and convictions yet, when faced with the necessity, he turns to God, as Ezekiel illustrates:

Self-love, vanity throw a sickly light on his gods
He prays for power and stamina to make it.

His house is built on rock
It shakes in the wind.
All around it the land is laid waste. (“H.D. VIII” 1-2, 5-7)

Though the gods take pity when this persona prays for deliverance, yet, his faith remains shaky and can never totally be relied on. He is basically a thankless person who would never return a favour and his desolate surroundings and neighbourhood aptly shows his destructiveness. Ezekiel’s sensibility is modernistic and he portrays a scenario which reflects disillusionment, vice and moral corruption which are a part and parcel of contemporary reality but, his world is miles away from the sacrosanct, sacred atmosphere and air of the Vedic hymns. Prem P. Kapoor offers comment on Ezekiel’s vision saying, “Ezekiel finds modern life is barren. He wanders in a vast desert alone and friendless (177).

Ezekiel’s pessimism comes to the fore and he fails to find any value in altruism and socially useful activities. He declares:

I met a man once
who had wasted half his life.

An energetic man, an active man
I liked his spirit
and saw no hope for him.

To others, all attentive
To his own needs indifferent
A tireless social human being
destined always
to know defeat
like a twin brother.  ("H. D. XIII" 1-2, 5-7, 10-15)

Ezekiel thus sees no value in social service because in a vicious, vice-ridden materialistic society nobody will appreciate such good works and 'good samaritans.' This view of Ezekiel's is narrow minded and selfish, it differs much from the Vedic viewpoint which preaches service of humanity and community. Ezekiel's practical view is thus a contradiction of the theistic view as enshrined in the Vedic literature.

Ezekiel gives precedence to man above everything else. In his book, being a man is the most important thing in the world, and before this fact nothing else matters. He declares:

A man it's often been said
is simply a man.

He's simply a man
and his speech is human
The rest is important
to understand that speech.  ("H.D. X" 1-2, 11-14)

Ezekiel does not give any importance to the good qualities, positive attitudes and constructive actions that a man is supposed to perform. He even condones licentiousness and debauchery as:

Short of learning her clothes
he's using all his force.
Soon, he's had what he wanted,
Soft, warm and round

If only he could love the bitch
There's one thing to be said for hell:
it's a pretty lively place
A man could be happy there.  ("H.D. IX" 4-7, 10-13).

Ezekiel's protagonist is more bothered about his sensual pleasures than his spirit and purity. He would even go to hell if he could get physical gratification there. He is a
crude, vulgar and insensitive beast who conflicts sharply with the Vedic ideal. The man portrayed in the 'shastras' or Vedic literature is a man who respects woman, her modesty and her virtue. He is a sensitive soul who is eternally vigilant about the good and bad aspects of his actions and would never talk lightly about heaven or hell.

Ezekiel's persona in fact, feels no affinity for man or for God. In fact he even hates God, saying:

The Enemy is God
as the Unchanging one
All forms of God
and the God in all forms
The absentee landlord
the official of all officials.
The oppressor who worships God
and the oppressed who worship God
are victims of the enemy.
They rot in families, in castes
in communities, in clubs
in political parties. ("H.D. XI" 1-12).

Ezekiel's protagonist hates God because he is strict, but he fails to understand the fact that it the fear of God that keeps order in society. This persona not only condemns God for his eternal watchfulness but also for his immutability. This persona is also not well disposed towards his fellow, human beings, as regards them, he declares, that "they rot". Such a persona would never find his way into the scriptures, and Ezekiel's portraying him in his 'hymns' shows his own conflicting and contrary sensibility. Prem P. Kapoor makes a comment on the conflicting nature of the "Hymns in Darkness" saying:

"Hymns in Darkness" is a disturbing series of poems. There poems cannot be dismissed lightly as many of Ezekiel's poems can be. One vignette of modern life follows another, each darker and gloomier that the previous one, each an outcome of a profound self-searching and deep rumination on life. Each poem is a bas-relief rising from the decadence, loss of values and the moral dilemma of the present age (118).
Ezekiel’s conflicting sensibility negates the efficacy and worth of religion. He projects the opinion that death is the inevitable end for all and even religion can do nothing to alter this fact. He projects the amazing belief that there is no difference between theism and deism, he thus declares:

In the presence of death
remember, do not console yourself;
there’s only death here
only life.
You are master
neither of death nor of life.
Belief will not save you.
nor unbelief.
All you have
is the sense of reality.
unfathomable
as it yields its secrets
slowly
one
by
one. ("H.D. XVI" 1-16).

Ezekiel’s view, which revolts against the scriptural one, is that, life exists only on a physical plane, he further asserts that to know its truth or decode its reality one has to live it on its terms. Ezekiel’s denial of the spiritual dimensions of life also means that there is no need of religion at all to look into the spiritual side of things.

Ezekiel’s negative and pessimistic attitude offers no hope for mankind. He even envisions the end of the world through a nuclear catastrophe. He declares:

Present at the creation
of the universe
I would perhaps have proceeded
differently.
But if the destruction
is in our life time
the mushroom cloud
is as good a way
as any I can think of
and more aesthetic. ("H.D. XV" 1-10).

The 'mushroom cloud' refers to the cloud of smoke and vapour that forms over a place after an atomic detonation. Ezekiel is quite casual about this eventuality remarking flippantly on its aesthetical value.

Ezekiel's sensibility as projected in the poems "Hymns in Darkness" is in direct conflict with the Vedic hymns which it seeks to emulate. His vision is negative, and stance, anti-spiritual and is the anti thesis of the vision and attitude reflected in the Vedic verses. Ezekiel's hero too, is a travesty of the term; a paradoxical, fickle man, he is in total contrast to the Vedic hero, who is a real hero, in the proper sense of the word.

This poem is a realistic picture of society and its lack of spiritual values and a sort of mock-heroic poem in which Ezekiel has inverted everything. His rendition in a way, is suitable, because he depicts or attempts to depict the "Kal-Yuga" in which the 'fallen' is on the ascendant or rise and the virtuous and noble have fallen.

In the collection of poems "The Egoist's Prayers" again in the same volume Hymns in Darkness, Ezekiel's non-conformist, sceptical attitude is arrayed against the traditional religious one. He takes on no less than the personality of God assailing him for his aloofness, inaccessibility and distancing himself from man. Ezekiel addresses God mockingly in these collection of poems showing impiety and irreverence. He has doubts about the efficacy of prayer and this method of seeking, boons and bounty, from God. His ironic vision hits upon the method of speaking familiarly, with God, thereby showing through disrespect his lack of faith in the institution of prayer. In these 'pseudo-prayers' he attempts to bring God down to man's level and to bargain with 'Him' for concessions. Ezekiel's disrespectful manner is in direct contradiction of and in conflict with the accepted theistic customs and observances. He goes against and abrogates the norm which is associated with worship and adoration of God. A correct frame of mind is the first requirement in worship, in which utmost respect is to be accorded to God, who has to be looked up to with awe and extreme love or adoration. The complete institution of
religion which is man’s oldest institution rests on a proper attitude of faith, reverence and humility, in this, there have never been any allowances made on any grounds. All men, from Kings to the lowest, have observed the rules of conduct pertaining to God and worship as laid down in the scriptures and by the ecclesiastical order. Ezekiel disregards all conventions and norms, thus showing his conflicting attitude and nature and assumes the role of an ‘egoist’. He pre-supposes himself as an egoist and starts indulging in a dialogue with God. To not shun one’s ego and observe humility before God is a wrong perspective in itself. Ezekiel himself states that in these ‘prayers’ the “persona is that of the self-centred self, which is strong in all of us” (qtd Rehman 33). He, himself hints at the conflicting substance of these prayers by affirming his “self-centredness”. Ezekiel is not awe-filled or scared of God as he patronisingly says to ‘Him’ in the beginning of his ‘prayers’:

Kick me around
a bit more, O Lord
I see at last
there’s no other way
for me to learn
your simplest truths. (“E.P.’s I” 1-6).

Right in the beginning, itself, Ezekiel adopts a conflicting stance in giving suggestions to God. He also shows his dissent with religion by ironically showing dissatisfaction with God’s scheme of things. Ezekiel is aggrieved at the cruel nature of the world, which is God’s creation, and at how a man has to endure falls and bitter defeats in it. Ezekiel does not bear his burden of misfortune stoically as enjoined by religion but grumbles to God and in this his attitude is unorthodox and humanistically inclined. He, actually is always conscious of his human stature and takes pride in it. He sees no reason to bow and scrape before God just because he is human, flawed and mortal. He believes not in quietly enduring suffering and pain but in speaking out and complaining even if it is to God ‘Himself’ and against all norms.

Ezekiel is a Jew and the Jews are known for their orthodoxy in matters of religion. In Judaism, God is considered as a rigid disciplinarian who is extremely strict and sensitive on matters of moral conduct. Judaism also insists on a full and complete
observance of ritual and total submission to God’s will. Ezekiel’s rudeness and scornful attitude is thus a contravention of the observances of the Jews and inexcusable. His attitude in questioning God’s ‘Grand Design’ and throwing doubts on ‘His’ infallibility is most improper and incorrect. Prayers are the method through which a man displays his faith, trust and love before God and thereby seeks to impress ‘Him’ with his ‘trueness’. To make a parody of prayers is thus going against religion and religious norms. It is only through prayer that man seeks to enter into a holy communion with God and to ridicule this institution and cast aspersions on its efficacy is patently an anti-religion exercise. Finding fault with God, too is an unheard of and exceptional thing. Ezekiel seems to feel that God berates and punishes man unfairly. He seems to believe that man is never at fault and that whatever flaws are there in him, are but a part of his essential human nature and, should therefore be excused. Ezekiel’s stance is thus purely humanistic and in opposition to the theistic one. He again addresses God in an aggrieved way, offering no excuses for his faults, he says:

The vices I've always had
I still have
The virtues I've never had
I still do not have
From this Human Way of Life
Who can rescue man
If not his Maker?
Do thy duty, Lord. (“E.P.’s II 1-8”)

Ezekiel puts the blame for man’s short comings on God and even commands ‘Him’ to make good ‘His’ error. Ezekiel, is thus uncompromising and unrelenting in his attitude towards God. This attitude springs from his humanistic perspectives which accords a full stature to man and is assertive of it irrespective of God’s omnipotence and might. Ezekiel neither affirms completely to a rationalistic, scientific viewpoint nor to a completely religious one. He hangs suspended between two opposing worlds, one of faith and adherence to custom and the other of scepticism and revolt against tradition Bruce King, too, observes this in Ezekiel, saying that:
The problem for Ezekiel has always been how to avoid the bleakness of a purely scientific materialistic view of the world with its lack of values, spirit, purpose, poetry and how to avoid the confining repressive orthodoxies of most religions and their other worldliness at the expense of this probably the only life we have (Three Modern Poets 44).

In these ‘egoist’s prayers’ Ezekiel’s materialism is dominant. Though he uses them to mock God, his conflict is not against God only but also against orthodoxy and ritualism. Ezekiel’s grudge is against religion as a whole as he feels that it does not understand and sympathize with man, his needs and his problems. Man is constantly faced with dilemmas and problems in this world about which religion offers no viable solutions. Man has to get together the means of subsistence for himself and his family, he also has to fulfil social obligations and duties towards his country. Man’s struggle is largely of a materialistic nature in which he has to compete continuously against rivals and odds. He also has certain spiritual yearnings for the satisfaction of which he turns to religion. However, instead of offering him solace and strength, religion, and the Church tend to exploit and capitalize on his inner needs. They blame him for being weak and fallen. The Church endows man with the innate propensity to sin and lays the blame on him for the ‘Cardinal Sin’. The Church thus plays a negative role in burdening man with guilt and shame instead of adding strength to his already weak nature. God, too, though he is the emblem of ‘mercy’ remains largely apathetic to man and his predicaments.

Ezekiel’s humanistic perspective, too is responsible for his anti-theistic stance. He acknowledges and accepts the fact that civilization has attained to modernity and has progressed because of man and science. Religion had done its utmost to hinder the path of enlightenment and humanism. But despite its repression and tyranny, in the middle ages, men like Copernicus and Galileo advanced the cause of science and of man. The Church representing both God and religion was largely a reactionary institution which was intent on curtailing man’s liberty and freedom of thought. In the middle ages the Pope behaved more like a despot than a religious head indulging in politics and extracting taxes from the populace. It was due to the corruption and vice in the Church that the reformist movement started and it broke up into the Roman Catholic and Protestant branches. Ezekiel, as an intellectual and as a humanist is aware of the historical aspects of
religion and so he feels no hesitation or guilt in pointing out its deficiencies and criticizing it if he feels that it is deserved. He is not at all apprehensive or frightened of propounding and declaring his views even if they contradict the traditional theistic ones. In his anthropocentric world view religion, is for man and not vice-versa. Though he wishes to avoid direct criticism of theology and Deism and uses an oblique method yet his intention does not remain concealed. In the poems “The Egoist’s Prayers” Ezekiel’s belittling of God by using a condescending tone shows his human concerns which, he feels have always been neglected and ignored by God and by religion. Prem P. Kapoor is also of the same opinion and asserts that, “The seven poems published under the common title “The Egoist’s Prayers” show that the poet had kept life under close observation. Very often the religious and ethical teachings are at variance with the reality of life” (115). It is this very fact of religion distancing itself from the vital concerns of humanity that irks and irritates Ezekiel prompting him to hit out at it.

Ezekiel is a humanist and does not believe in negating desires. He believes in the validity of human needs and desires and in their fulfilment. He as a rational human being is aware of the facts of evolution and does not dogmatically toe the line of faith and superstition. He has less of a belief in ‘revealed truths’, miracles and myths than in logic and scientific methodology and thought. He believes in his own self-assertion and ‘Ego’ which is the foundation or at the core of these “Egoist’s Prayers”. He believes that ego is individuality which is the essential substance of personality and identity. Without ‘ego’ a man has no worth or distinguishing feature. Ezekiel does not see anything wrong even in displaying and parading his ego before God. His complaint against God is that he has no sympathy for the humanistic viewpoint and only looks at things from ‘His’ perspective which is too demanding, too strict and too harsh to be accommodated and obeyed easily by man. Ezekiel wishes for happiness, he does not see any need to be sacrificing and he also wants God to accord legitimacy to his views and sympathize with his needs. He does not want to give up his worldliness and materialism and deny himself like Arjuna when exhorted by Lord Krishna. He declares his conflicting view thus:

No Lord
not the fruit of action
is my motive
But do you really mind
half a bite of it?
It tastes so sweet
and I’m so hungry. ("E.P.’s III" 1-7)

Ezekiel does not believe in relinquishing the fruit of his actions in accordance with Lord Krishna’s theory of disinterested action but still he would like to oblige God and would content himself with half-a-bite. Ezekiel’s ironical comment seems to say or imply that without temptation of reward no action is possible and as such this theory is not a sound one. Ezekiel’s pragmatic view asserts the principle of motivation and result.

Ezekiel, as a Jew, is descended from the lineage of patriarchs like Solomon, Abraham and David who were exceedingly devout, pious and God fearing. The Bible recounts their exploits and tells of their faith in full. They were dear to God ‘Himself’ who even revealed ‘Himself’ to them. It was Abraham who made the covenant with God to circumcise himself and his followers and since then this custom has prevailed in the Jews. It was Moses who affirmed the ten commandments with God during the captivity of the Jews in Egypt and consequently with God’s help he was able to liberate the Jews. David came during a time when the Jews as a tribe had become scattered and weak. He lent them strength and unity. The Old Testament is replete with such tales of the utmost faith of the Jews but Ezekiel is an exception. He ascribes to a sceptic humanist view and offers challenge to the old views which he feels do injustice to man and his legitimate concerns, as, for happiness, material prosperity and self-affirmation.

Ezekiel’s attitude is conflicting for a Jew insofar as he accords priority to himself rather than God. The Jews without any exceptions, always consider God or Jehovah to be the First cause and everything else in the world including man is considered secondary to ‘Him’. Ezekiel is contradictory insofar as he gives precedence to humanistic matters over theistic ones, even when engrossed in ‘prayers’ which are supposed to be ‘entreaties’ before God. His conflicting perspective disbelieves in the necessity of man having to forgo his pleasures for the sake of pleasing God and the Church. He is not ready to sacrifice anything at the altar of God needlessly. Ezekiel is liberal as opposed to puritan in his perspective. He does not ascribe to or set store by the dogmatic beliefs that project
the view of man's sinful nature and 'fallenness'. He feels that the Church should project a positive view of man and of life rather than a negative one.

Ezekiel feels that it is not only man who is fallible but such fallibility can be laid at God's door, too, as proved during the 'Holocaust' in which 'He' was ineffectual and impotent. Ezekiel accords the right to man to speak out against injustice even if it is done by God 'Himself'. He gives precedence to human needs over divine ones and thus tries completely to overturn the man and God relationship which has continued through the ages. He feels that this relationship and also the injunctions of the scriptures need to be re-examined and re-interpreted in the light of modernity and change in the status of man. The 'Gospel truths' are today the subject of disbelief and dispute and atheism is on the increase. To combat disillusionment and disbelief which is spreading in humankind the Church should also review its rigidity and intolerance and become more accessible and acceptable. It was the fact of repressiveness and unwarranted interference in man's private life that alienated man from religion and its doctrines. It is due to disbelief in the religious teaching that the two world wars took place in the recent twentieth century. It was a time of such misery and bloodshed as had never been witnessed by mankind before. During it, atomic bombs were also used which led to the death of many lakhs of people. The happening of such events can be called as a failure of religion and its teachings. The hypocrisy of the Church and its preachings was exposed in its inability to prevent the catastrophic events of the twentieth century. Even in the present times the Church is unable to prevent exploitation of millions by the profit hungry capitalist systems. The Church has to endorse and propagate liberal and free thinking and give up its fundamentalist approach examples of which are found in the inquisition and its barbarities. Ezekiel thus condemns the Church and religion for their failure on several fronts and advocates for a change in its thinking.

Ezekiel has doubts about many aspects of religion and its beliefs. He fails to understand the need for God to take help from man, as 'He' is 'the almighty'. Ezekiel believes that if today man is encountering a 'crisis of faith' it is basically because the Church fostered falsehoods and wrong thinking. He is himself unwilling to be an 'instrument' of God, he says:

Do not choose me, O Lord
to carry out thy purposes
I'm quite worthy of course
but I have my own purposes
You have plenty of volunteers
to choose from Lord
why pick on me the selfish one?
O well if you insist
I'll do your will. ("E.P.'s IV" 1-10)

Ezekiel disbelieves in the teachings of the Church and he takes up the man / God relationship by which to show his scepticism. He makes a joke of the various aspects of this relationship showing his reluctance to be a part of ‘God’s Design’ and thereby tries to discredit religious assertions. The Church has always emphasized on the unequal relation of God and man in which God is always the one who dictates and man is always the one to obey. Ezekiel does not want to directly refute the assertions of dogma so he uses irony. His use of irony is gentle in these ‘prayers’ whereby he straight away does not refuse to do God’s bidding but grudgingly accepts it.

Ezekiel’s scorn of God is in sharp contrast to the adoration and worshipping attitude of another poet Milton, who even as he was going blind did not refuse God’s bidding and wrote *Paradise Lost* in praise of ‘Him’. The following lines of Milton reveal a world of difference between him and Ezekiel:

> When I consider how my light is spent
> Ere half my day in this dark world and wide
> And that one talent which is death to hide
> Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent.
> To serve therewith my Maker and present.
> My true account lest He returning chide (1-6 : 95)

Ezekiel’s vision too, was religious in his first phase as in “Something to Pursue” where he had desired for “the winds of God” to make his mind “sweet with love” (134, 135) but now he has completely changed and become the opposite. He, now finds religion to be of little value. He finds himself now in conflict with it and its doctrines of
passive submission. He believes that religion has failed in its most primary objective, of making man feel secure and thus there is no use in placing trust in its preaching.

The ‘egoist’ in Ezekiel now wants God to excuse him his materialness and greed allowing him entry into heaven. He does not care for the fact that religion preaches against materiality and acquisitiveness but asks God to make an exception in his care. He thus does not take God seriously and is not all in awe of him. He declares:

Let me be, O Lord,
the camel of the Higher Income Group
who passes smoothly through
the eye of than needle. ("E.P.’s V” I-4).

Ezekiel conflicting view stems from the fact that he knows that without worldly wisdom and without a material instinct, it is impossible to survive in present times. Even the Church itself accepts donations and contributions. Ezekiel’s voice is that of a lone individual against a complete institution, but he feels justified in crying out, against what he feels is, exploitation and injustice. Satya Narain Singh, too observes somewhat similarly as he says that:

The question of the individual ranged against establishment assumes a sharp and strident note when the poet has to cross the hurdles set by code ethics, or grapple with fossilized tradition. Ezekiel’s poetry discloses a constant dialectic between an individual’s yearning for spiritual growth and the constraints of institutionalized religion, his quest for deeper fulfilments and the iron-cast frame work of organised opinion (50).

Ezekiel does not want to kow-tow to the conformist line and wishes to strike out on his own path and evolve his own beliefs. This view is not unnatural but however it is still in the category of radical and contrary. He pay more attention to practical life and less to the spiritual one. However, his discussion with God on these aspects of mundane material existence in his ‘prayers’ is extraordinary and conflicting. Displaying this exceptional sensibility again, he says:

The price of wisdom
is too high
but folly is expensive too
Strike a bargain with me, Lord
I’m not a man of ample means. ("E.P.’s VI” 1-5)

Ezekiel shows how despite the Church’s pontification on frugality and simplicity, materiality has permeated into every aspect of life and exposed the hollowness and inefficacy of its teachings. Today, there is nothing which can be got for free and it just shows how corrupt society is despite the Church and its preaching. The preaching lacks force and conviction and is unable to have any impact on the people. The reason for the lack of force in the Church’s sermons is that the priests themselves do not believe in denial. Ezekiel’s viewpoint is justified but his method of disputing and doubting is undoubtedly a wrong one as he throws the complete structure of religion into discredit. His vision clashes with the theistic doctrine of total acceptance and complete submission. Ezekiel’s use of irony in respect of religious beliefs and values is a contravention of the norms practiced and preached. Bruce King too finds Ezekiel’s stance to be anti-thetical to religion as he declares that, “The ironic, sceptical attitude is conveyed in “The Egoist’s Prayers” (Modern Indian Poetry 103).

Ezekiel in the last “Egoist’s Prayer” keeps talking in the same familiar, confidential way with God as though with a close acquaintance and confidant. He says:

Confiscate my passport, Lord
I don’t want to go abroad
Let me find my song
Where I belong. ("E.P.’s VII” 1-4).

Ezekiel’s equating God with an official is a very impertinent and cheeky thing which is not at all complimentary to God, but Ezekiel, in a contrary way, does not care at all for God’s feelings.

Ezekiel’s sceptic / humanist attitude is thus portrayed in “The Egoist’s Prayers” where through, irony, he ridicules the institution of prayer and God too. His attitude is in stark contrast to and in complete conflict with the traditional theistic beliefs and practices.

As Ezekiel progresses further in life and maturity this sceptic sensibility becomes even more pronounced and in the poem “An Atheist Speaks” he unrestrainedly gives voice to his antipathy against religion and God declaring:

He
divided us
one part longing for wisdom
the other for folly
He
made us animals
grunting and rutting
He
made maya
with nothing behind it
He
made Hitler and Stalin
He
made the Inquisition
He
made the Holocaust. (1-16)

Ezekiel, unlike an atheist does not disbelieve in the existence of God but all the same in an extremely contrary way, blames ‘Him’ for all the tragedies which have befallen man.

Ezekiel, being a Jew was deeply hurt at the happening of the ‘Holocaust’ in which a programme of murder was launched against his tribe by the Nazis. About 70 lakhs or 90 per cent of their population was put to death on the orders of Hitler who blamed them for Germany’s defeat in the first World War.

Ezekiel feels that God, purposefully neglected the Jews, during the ‘Holocaust’. They were the people whom he had sworn to protect and provide for eternally if, they obeyed him. The Jews had always been faithful but their faithfulness was not repayed in the correct way by God as ‘He’ did not protect them in the ‘Holocaust’. This matter becomes the ‘bone of contention’ and the cause of his conflict against the Bible, its teachings and God in the poem called the “Latter-Day Psalms.”

In these collection of poems Ezekiel’s sceptic/Humanistic vision conflicts with theological precepts and beliefs as he makes parodies of the Biblical Psalms. Ezekiel seeks to question God’s action and wisdom in his “Latter-Day Psalms”. He believes that the original Psalms of the Bible are not suitable and applicable to contemporary times and
seeks to up-date them by modifying them. Ezekiel logically examines the Biblical Psalms and systematically demolishes their credibility and claim to be ‘revealed truths’. His stance which conflicts with the theistic one is caused by the anguish and disillusionment he feels because of the ‘Holocaust’ and God’s responsibility for it. He feels disappointed with God for not having averted this calamity and for failing to forewarn the Jews. He is thus scornful of the Biblical Psalmist’s piety and humility as also of his trust in God because he feels there are all misplaced. Ezekiel himself adopts an arrogant tone in his “Latter-Day Psalms” because he feels that there is no need at all to show awe and wonderment at God because he did not live up to the expectation of his ‘chosen people’. He even refuses to accept ‘Him’ as his shepherd as is customary among the Judaic/Christian beliefs.

In his “Latter-Day Psalms” Ezekiel picks out psalms from the Bible individually and remodels them to turn out his caricatures. He adds a word or phrase here and omits one or two there, to come up with startling new meanings or inversions of the old ones. Ezekiel’s retouching and modifying of the original Biblical psalms is an evidence of his contradictory thinking because these are considered as holy, ‘revealed’ and perfect. To seek improve and edit them is to reveal one’s irreligiosity and disbelief. Ezekiel projects radical views on the subject of God and man relationship. He declares that through ‘He’ had always warned man to be observant of his duties towards ‘Him’, it was God ‘Himself’ who failed in ‘His’ obligations to man. Ezekiel thus finds God to be a defaulter. Ezekiel lists the various roles in which God is comprehended by the Jews and Christians, viz., as the ‘Creator’, as a shepherd and as a protector and provider and finds him lacking and wanting in all. Ezekiel feels aggrieved and angry with God because the history of the Jews is a history of persecution and this persecution happened inspite of all their faith in God. They always believed in ‘His’ assurances to them and this is the reason why they were unprepared for the ‘Holocaust’. The “Latter-Day Psalms”, are designed for modern times and the sensibility involved in them is skeptical and humanistic, and is not religiously oriented. This pragmatic thinking is in direct contrast to, and in complete conflict with the religious feelings embodied in the Biblical psalms on which they are modeled.
Ezekiel had gone to Rotterdam in Germany for a poetry festival. At the hotel there being nothing else to read except a Gideon Bible Ezekiel picked it up and started reading it. As he was riffling through its pages, a sudden realization hit him, or, as he himself says: “I travel to that poetry festival in Rotterdam......The only thing to read in the hotel room is the Gideon Bible......and I read the first psalm. I think I realized suddenly that I had never really accepted the psalms” (qtd A.N. Dwivedi “Imagery in N.E’s Later Poetry” 120).

Ezekiel according to his own admission thus did not repose faith in the Biblical psalms and their ‘revealed truths’. He was in Germany, the very place where the ‘Holocaust’ was conceived and perpetrated against the Jews and decided to take this opportunity to lodge his protests against God and the Biblical teachings and show his resentment and sorrow. He hit upon the plan of writing his own “Latter-Day Psalms”. He picked out nine psalms from the Bible corresponding to the numbers 1, 3, 8, 23, 60, 78, 95, 102 and 127 and remodelled them. In the conclusion he adds one more ‘psalm’ which makes a comprehensive comment on the entire lot of psalms in the Bible.

This Ezekiel is totally different from the early Ezekiel who had longed to be redeemed and made whole. His sensibility is now skeptical as against spiritual. A hint of this rationalistic perspective had been given by him in “A Time to Change” when he had stated, “Flawless doctrines certainty of God/ These are merely dreams” (66-67). The present Ezekiel does not challenge the existence of God but does offer dispute against the doctrines and belief associated with ‘Him’. He is contradictory because he challenges the views that hold God as omniscient, infallible and even as all merciful. Ezekiel repeatedly stresses on his own humanness, his needs, his vulnerability and God’s apathy. Ezekiel represents not only his own self and the Jews but all of humanity and seeks a redressal of grievances. He uses wit and irony with devastating effect clearly exposing his hostility and dispute with the authority of religion. From time to time his anguish and grief are also expressed which lend credence to his claims against God. A.N. Dwivedi comments on the contrast and conflict in there poems of Ezekiel, the “Latter-Day Psalms”, as he says, “The title piece “Latter-Day Psalms” is especially marked for its modernity vis-à-vis its religiosity. Against the highly devotional attitude of the age old worshippers the poet’s sceptical temperament comes out vividly” (“Modernity in N.E’s Poetry” 115).
Whereas the Biblical psalms were meant to appease God and seek ‘His’ blessings, Ezekiel’s “Latter-Day Psalms” have no such large and holy objectives, on the other hand he even mocks God at times and shows his defiance of ‘Him’. His attitude reflects lack of faith in the assertions of the Biblical psalmist. His attitude is worldly as against, the spiritual one of the original psalms. His desire is not to idolize or worship God like the psalmist but to remove him from ‘His’ holy pedestal. Ezekiel shown a rationalistic approach and heaps scorn on the superstitious notions and supernatural concepts represented in the Biblical psalms. His attitude is conflicting and contrary because religion enjoins blind faith and not a questioning spirits.

Ezekiel’s first “Latter-Day Psalm” is modeled on the first Biblical psalm. This original psalm is in an admonitory vein cautioning man not to seek the company of sinners, not to sin and to remain good. The psalmist also declares that god would reward the righteous who followed ‘His’ injunctions and punish the transgressors. The Biblical psalm proceeds thus: Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord;
and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

His leaf shall also not wither
and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper
The ungodly are not so:
but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

For the Lord knoweth the way
of the righteous but the way of the ungodly shall perish. (521).

The Biblical psalmist is confident of God’s omnipotency and justice. He trusts God implicitly having no reservation about committing himself to ‘Him’ and ‘His’ mercy. His faith is unshakeable and he makes a clear division between the good and the bad and also between the righteous and the unrighteous. His exhortation to all his listeners is to submit themselves to the will of God. Ezekiel’s view is however quite
contrary in his “Latter-Day Psalm. I”. The two differ completely in spirit and substance being anti-thetical to each other. ‘Ezekiel’s ‘psalm’ proceeds thus:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the conventional but is at home with sin as with a wife. He shall listen patiently to the scornful, and understand the sources of their scorn. He does not meditate day and night on anything, his delight is in action

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Yet his leaf must wither and that which appears to prosper is often dying at the root.
The ungodly are in the same condition no more like the chaff which the wind driveth away than the godly.

For the Lord only knows how the way to him is found (1-10, 12-19, 27-30).

Instead of devoutness, humility and morality which the Biblical psalmist portrayed Ezekiel displays superiority and humanity. He even condones sin as it happen to be a human failing. Ezekiel’s thrust is on tolerance and sympathy with those who err. Ezekiel seeks to reinterpret the teaching of the scriptures in accordance with human needs. He is, in a conflicting way, less anxious about the dictates of divinity than about the needs of man. His view is modern, rationalistic and human and clashes with the religious one which seeks to put the fear of God into man and frighten him into
submission. Ezekiel even declares conventionality to be a greater sin than keeping the company of the wicked. Ezekiel also does not want man to waste his time in meditating on God. He disbelieves the assertion of the psalmist that the ungodly would suffer. Ezekiel seems to disagree with everything which is meant to keep man on the right path and observe goodness and morality. Ezekiel excuses every lapse of man on the grounds of humanness and stresses on enjoyment and pleasure at the cost of purity and morality.

Ezekiel has completely changed his views about spiritual and moral values as enunciated by his own self, in “A Time to Change”. It was from ‘revelation’ in the Bible itself that he had quoted earlier to express his yearnings for religion, and it is the same Bible that he now condemns. The changed Ezekiel does not value religion much and also has no desire to conform to its principles. He is now a disbeliever in dogma and orthodoxical precepts. His view of religion is now wider and more humanistic. It was in the poem “‘After Reading a Prediction” that Ezekiel had stated a new heart felt desire:

---------- I remind myself
that to be the healer
not the sick
or the indifferent one
was always my ambition
and to rage against the barren. (4-9).

Ezekiel has now given up his spiritual sickness and become a sceptic. He does not want to keep quiet about his views but wants to disseminate them and help others as he has helped himself. He has now realized that religion is but an ‘opium of the masses’ which does no good.

It is through the “Latter-Day Psalms” among other poems that Ezekiel wishes to ‘rage against the barren’ through his logic and humanism. Though his logic is irrefutable and his humanism beyond reproach however, Ezekiel’s vision is still not an ordinary or common one. His desire is patently to express his disillusionment. He had been frustrated and exasperated at God before, as in “Theological” when he had bewailed in perplexity, “What a terrible situation/Your divine love has created /.../ I am very tired of it.” (49-50, 57)
Only bits and pieces of Ezekiel’s frustration had been earlier expressed but now its flow is unchecked in the “Latter-Day Psalms”. He not only despairs of God and the Church but also finds nothing esoteric or mysterious about the scriptures even. They hold no fascination and are as mundane as the comic books of children. In “Blessings I” Ezekiel states this:

May your read
wisdom books
in the spirit of the comics
and the comics
in the spirit of the wisdom books. (1-5)

Ezekiel has at last matured and his intelligence now exceeds that of the wisdom books or scriptures. His experience of life is now more valuable to him than the ‘gospel truths’ and this is what guides him in life. He would rather have a full, rich and varied life of enjoyment than forgo his pleasures for the sake of a heaven which may not even be there. Bruce King comments on Ezekiel’s views as expounded in the “Latter-Day Psalms” as he says:

Ezekiel’s imitation or parody affirms the world of experience, the loss of innocence, the enjoyment of sin as a means towards tolerance, understanding, reason, salvation. The law is replaced by the spirit, instead of fear of temptation there is involvement in the world. (*Three Indian Poets* 47)

Ezekiel stresses more on the worldly aspects of life and seeks to legitimize them through his “Latter-Day Psalms”. He wants mankind to be happy and for this he is ready to relinquish spirituality and he would also like other men to follow suit. He feels that, religion through its checks and curtailments on man’s action is a hindrance and obstacle in his pursuit of happiness. It is for this purpose, of obtaining freedom and licence for man that he comes out with his contradictory versions of the psalms.

Ezekiel’s second “Latter-Day Psalm” corresponds to the 3rd in the Bible. In this Biblical psalm the psalmist portrays God as the ‘Protector’ who has been like a shield for his devotees protecting them from their enemies. The psalmist showers praises on God and thanks ‘Him’ effusively for ‘His’ grace and mercy to him. He pledges his total allegiance to ‘Him’ saying:
Lord how are they increased that trouble me!
How many are they that rise up against me,

But thou O Lord art a shield for me; my glory
and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the
Lord with my voice and he heard me out of
his holy hill. Selah.
I laid me down and slept; I awakened for
the Lord sustained me.

Arise O Lord save me O my God: for
thou hast smitten all my enemies upon
the cheek bone; thou hast broken the

Salvation belongeth unto the Lord:
thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah. (521)

The Biblical psalmist's words ring with fanatical fervour and genuine adoration for God. He is thankful to 'Him' for each and everything, small as well as large. He is apprehensive of danger from his enemies but his total faith and trust in God yet sustains him, making him carefree. Faith reigns supreme in his world, making him feel at peace and at ease. Ezekiel's perspective is totally at variance with that of the Biblical psalmist. He shows no love for God and even disdains 'His' help. He is assertive of his own humanness and that of other human being too, asking God not to break the teeth of the ungodly.

Ezekiel shows a complete lack of faith and piety as he states:

Lord, few are there that trouble me, fewer still that rise up against me. Be thou a shield for them as for me
I cried unto the Lord and so did they; hear us out of thy holy
hill. Save us from ourselves.
I laid me down and slept;
I awakened for the Lord sustained me. Let every man
woman and child, sleep and awaken, sustained by thee
How can I breathe freely if thou breakest the teeth of
the ungodly?
Salvation belongeth unto the Lord. It is not through
one or other Church.
Thy blessing is upon all the people of the world. (1-20)

Ezekiel’s ‘psalm’ is much different from the Biblical one. He does not want God’s help against his enemies. Ezekiel even takes the side of the ungodly against God. In fact his “Latter-Day Psalm” seems geared to integrate the whole of humanity against God, as a common enemy. He does not see any difference between the sinners and the righteous, as he claims God’s blessings for all. For, Ezekiel man’s actions are, all excusable and worthy of being pardoned because of their humanness, genuineness and also because they arise for the fulfilment of man’s urgent needs. Ezekiel sees no sin in any human being and this is a view which is totally the opposite of the religious one. Religion makes a clear division between sin and innocence. It seeks punishment for the sinners who are considered evil and reward for the innocent and pure called good. The institution of heaven and hell are also constituted on the basis of this basic distinction between the good and the bad. Ezekiel’s view thus attacks the very foundations of religion which draws a demarcating line between wrong and right. Ezekiel’s humanistic vision is pro-human and anti-religion and his motive is the attainment of human happiness. S.C. Dwivedi comments on Ezekiel’s attempt to update the Biblical psalms to make them relevant to present times saying, “Ezekiel has transformed his favourite
passages from Jonah and Job into modern poems. They aptly combine religious strain in an unorthodox way and modern consciousness.” (138).

Ezekiel’s conflict with dogma continues in his next “Latter-Day Psalm III”. This takes as its example the 8th Biblical psalm in which the psalmist praises God highly for his role as the ‘Creator’ of man. The psalmist thanks God profusely for making man only next to the angels in virtue and nobility, the angels being the highest. This, psalm bestows high praise on God for the greatness of ‘His’ works. The psalmist also displays the emotions of great awe and reverence towards God. The psalm proceeds thus:

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!
Who hast set up thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength.....
When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angles, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:
All sheep and oxen, yea and the beasts of the field; ............
O Lord, our Lord how excellent is thy name is all the earth (523).

The Biblical psalmist expresses his gratitude to God completely, without any reservations. He is himself very humble and earnest according ‘Him’ great deference. He conveys feelings of great adoration and worship towards God. He wonders at God’s magnanimity in being anxious about man’s welfare despite being so great. The psalmist credits God with having created the heavenly bodies like the moon and the stars and in this, his view is wholly dogmatic. He lauds God in high terms and his total faith is visible in each word and phrase. In his opinion God is the source of everything and man can have no existence independent of ‘Him’. In the psalmist’s theocentric vision man and the world are God’s creations and everything in the universe is dependent on ‘Him’. In his view therefore man’s foremost impulse should be always to await God’s bidding. This is
his bounden duty to his 'Maker' which he should carry out eagerly and unhesitatingly. The psalmist is thus totally a servant of God and affirms to 'Him' with all possible humility. He accepts the law of God in everything acknowledging 'Him' as his creator, as a benefactor and also as a protector.

Ezekiel's attitude in his "Latter Day Psalm" is quite unconventional and conflicting. He shows his doubts about religion and its assertions by criticizing God as well as 'His' creation - man. Ezekiel is not grateful to God in any way and is even scornful of 'Him'. His tone is insolent and extremely mocking as he declares:

How excellent is thy name
and thy glory above the heavens
Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength. So I shall listen to them. Also to adults

The moon and the stars are not enough for you to be unmindful of man

For thou hast made him both higher and lower than the angels, whose existence is not certain. The crown of glory and honour sits uneasily on his head.

What have we done with the dominion thou hast given us?

How excellent is thy name and thy glory above the heavens (1-7, 10-19, 24-25).

Ezekiel's antipathy is reflected in his insolence and arrogant way of talking. He does not glorify God as the most supreme in all the earth and omits the line "How excellent is thy name in all the earth". Where, the psalmist had declared that God
Ezekiel seeks to correct the psalmist and declares that he would not only heed these babes and sucklings but would also pay attention to adults. Here Ezekiel’s thrust is on logic rather than faith. Ezekiel is highly critical of God’s interference in man’s affairs and complainingly says, “The moon and the stars are not / enough for you to be unmindful / of man”. Ezekiel lacks patience with God as well as the revealed truth’s of the Bible, revealing thus both his scepticism and humanocentrism. His attitude is antithetical to religion and in these “Latter-Day Psalms” he disputes and challenges its claims.

Ezekiel is most uncompromising in his attitude towards God and refuses to address ‘Him’ with due deference, like the psalmist with the words, “O Lord our Lord”. His deliberate omission keenly highlights his humanistic stance which refuses to bow before God in an unseemly and indignified way. His modernist views are thus in conflict with the traditional ones in the Bible. Ezekiel does not believe in surrendering to the will of God, he wises to retain his independence and not be tied down by dogma. His pragmatic attitude comes to the fore in the matter of the psalmist’s assertion that man has been made only second to the angels, in stature, by God. In this respect he retorts saying that the existence of angels is a matter of doubt. Ezekiel’s doubts about God’s creation – man too surface, when he doubts man’s abilities saying, “The crown of glory and honour/sits uneasily on his head” Ezekiel’s sensibility is antagonistic to notions like piety, servility, passiveness, etc., as portrayed by the psalmist. His own tone is defiant and he seeks to question, to decry and to deny, which is the conserve of a religious, believing sensibility like that of the Biblical psalmist. Ezekiel shows his disbelief in the ‘gospel truths’, his dislike of sermons and of preaching. His views are radical and revolutionary, seeking to effect a transformation. N. Meena Belliappa quite rightly observes of Ezekiel’s unorthodox and therefore conflicting views, that, “The poet of the ‘Latter-Day Psalms’ may not be the prophet of a new religion but he has succeeded in making his poetry the locus of a valuable revelation of the sceptical spirit” (197). Thus, Ezekiel attempts to install a new ethos by demolishing the old one and its authority.

Ezekiel’s sceptic vision next demolishes the assertions of the Biblical psalmist in the psalm numbering 23. In this the psalmist envisions life as an idyll, being
overwhelmed with happiness at his good fortune. The psalmist pictures God as a shepherd who looks after his flock of the faithful i.e., the Jews. He declares:

The Lord is my shepherd, I Shall not want He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anoints my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (529).

Ezekiel shows the conflicting nature of his sensibility as he refutes the claims of the Biblical psalmist one by one. Where as the psalmist had implicit faith in God, Ezekiel shows a complete lack of it. Where, the psalmist was grateful to God for providing him with a surplus of everything, Ezekiel shows disdain and ingratitude. Where the psalmist’s tone and attitude towards God was one of adoration and praise, Ezekiel is cold and haughty. His response to the declarations of the psalmist is quite contrary and irreligious, as he states:

Is the Lord my shepherd?
Shall I not want?
I lie down is green pastures, beside
the still waters lead me
away from these into thy work.
When my soul is restored
I walk the path of self-righteousness
I do fear evil: they rod
and they staff do comfort me.
Let not my table be prepared
in the presence of anybody
I do not need a cup that runneth over
I shall not expect goodness and mercy all the days of my life even if I dwell
in the house of the Lord. ("L.DP. IV", 1-20).

Ezekiel shows doubts towards the view of the psalmist projecting God as a shepherd. Ezekiel is aware of the fact that human life is not easy and that humans have to struggle hard in order to survive. His rhetoric question “Shall I not want?” is in itself the answer which is that he shall want. Faith alone is not sufficient and unless man works he will starve. Ezekiel is scornful of the psalmist’s fascination with idyllic “green pastures” and “still waters” he asks to be led into God’s works. Here again Ezekiel does not wait for God’s bidding but seeks to make suggestions, which is a contrary attitude. Ezekiel makes a display of his pride when he says that he does not need a cup that runs over. He shows a lack of respect for traditional beliefs and concepts in the first line itself of this “Latter-Day Psalm” when he arrogantly inquires if the Lord is his shepherd. Ezekiel makes a patent attempts to cut down God to size as he even dispenses with his need for salvation. Instead of the psalmist’s affirmation of God as the saviour of souls, viz., “He restoreth my soul” Ezekiel states simply “When my soul is restored” deliberately omitting the ‘He’ which stands for God. Here, Ezekiel is again attacking the very foundations of religion and the Church which preach that only God can save the soul from evil and keep it pure.

Ezekiel’s vision is pessimistic in contrast to the optimism of the psalmist. Ezekiel’s thrust is on rationale and intellect while the psalmist speaks through his heart and soul Ezekiel’s practical common sense predominates while the psalmist relies on his faith to guide him. Even in respect of the psalmist’s assertion that he would “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” Ezekiel is practical because he knows that man is but mortal and so does not affirm to this statement. Ezekiel’s attitude derives from his worldly experience. He refutes and denies validity to whatever seems implausible and improbable even though it has been considered sacred and the ‘holy truth’ for centuries together. Ezekiel is even scornful of the psalmist’s assertions and his arrogance towards God is
somewhat similar to his stance in "The Egoist’s Prayers". Ezekiel’s attitude towards the ‘house’ of the Lord has now drastically changed from his previous one in “A Time to Change”. Where, earlier he was obsessed with its holiness and it was of paramount importance for him, it’s value has now completely diminished in Ezekiel’s eyes and he is completely casual about it. Ezekiel is now pragmatic and worldly instead of spiritual. He now observes religion dispassionately and maintains an objective distance from it. God is the source of inspiration for the psalmist whereas Ezekiel’s verse is the result of his analytical thought and pragmatic outlook. His thinking is guided by his humanitarian concern which seeks to assert its priority over theological ones. Though Ezekiel is scornful of the psalmist’s servile and pious attitude yet he continuously affirms to the existence of God, unlike an atheist. Ezekiel loves life and wants to rid it of misconceptions and myths so that it can be even more enjoyable. It is for this purpose that he contradicts those religious assertion which he feels are obsolete or redundant. He also feels that the church itself should also adopt enlightened thought and become liberal. It’s attitude should be constructive and it should not harp on man’s flaws and sinful propensities.

The sixtieth psalm in the Bible is the one that Ezekiel selects next. It proceeds thus:

O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased;
O turn thy self to us again

Thou hast showed thy people hard things:
thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.

God has spoken to us in his holiness;
I will rejoice

Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.
Through God we shall do valiantly for he
In this psalm, the psalmist is aggrieved and anguished because God has been displeased with him and his people. God was furious with the Jews because of their repeated sins and so scattered them all over the world. The psalmist begs forgiveness of God and throws himself on ‘His’ mercy. He declares that they (the Jews) have been made desolate and bewildered by God’s wrath. The psalmist’s emotions alternate between hope and despair. In the end of the psalm he is optimistic of obtaining God’s assistance against his enemies.

Ezekiel’s “Latter-Day Psalm V” is modelled on this, same Biblical psalm but his attitude is the opposite of the psalmist. His tone towards God is accusing and critical. He is completely disillusioned with God and speaks as though God is to blame for all the misfortunes that befell the Jews. He speaks as one provoked beyond his limits, saying:

Cast off, scattered for a thousand years, where shall we live in peace with our neighbours?
Hard things seen, drinking the wine of astonishment
We are still outside the strong city.
The end is not yet
Vain is the help of man and vain everything else.
Did none pray who was caught in the holocaust?

We do valiantly and so do our enemies (1-13, 19-20).

Ezekiel’s attitude towards God is impious asking ‘Him’ to account for ‘His’ failure in protecting the Jews. Ezekiel laments at God’s injustice, as despite the faithfulness of the Jews he uprooted them, scattering them all over the world. He bewails
the fact that despite God's repeated declarations of providing them security even now, the Jews are not completely safe from their enemies. Ezekiel is troubled and agitated by God's unreliability and unpredictable nature. He shows his sceptic sensibility when he asks "Did none pray who was caught in the Holocaust?" Ezekiel throws the efficacy and necessity of the institution of prayers into doubt by asking this question. This aspect is again a vital aspect pertaining to religion. Prayer or worship is a ritual without which no religion is complete and every religion stresses on its importance and value accepting it as a means of realizing God, holiness and heaven. To doubt prayer and question its efficacy like Ezekiel does is to question and doubt religion. Ezekiel is thus opposed to the basic tenets and principles that make up or constitute religions. Ezekiel even doubts God and his good intentions when he says, "Vain is the help of man / and vain everything else". There are wide differences between Ezekiel and the religious viewpoint. Ezekiel does not believe in resigning one self to God's will on the contrary he even demands accountability from 'Him'. Ezekiel's view conflicts with the traditional one in respect of the fact that his desire is to be independent and free of the constraints of religion, he has no needs of being tied down in any way. The psalmist on the other hand never dares to question God inspite of his travails and that of his tribe. In fact, his, is the true religious attitude which leaves every thing to god and also reposes trust in the 'Grand Design' whereby everything moves towards a predestined goal determined by God. In this 'design' everything gradually unfolds before man and becomes understandable. Every one also gets his fair share of everything according to the legitimacy of his needs and as a reward for his good deeds. Thus a righteous man who not only performs his duties, but also does good for others, gets rewarded, as a matter of course without any conscious volition or striving for rewards. Ezekiel however is a sceptic and does not believe in divine 'designs', he believes in the fruit of his actions. Ezekiel's lack of trust in God shows his rationalistic inclinations. M.K. Naik too asserts the same, when he comments that, "Ezekiel's "Latter-Day Psalms" parody the originals in a spirit of disbelief and disillusion" (Studies in Indian English Literature 79).

The next Biblical psalm taken up for parody by Ezekiel is the 78th. This psalm depicts the horrors that were inflicted upon Jews for disobeying God and for leaving the
path of virtue. The psalmist describes the punishment given by God or Jehovah as he says:

Give ear, O my people to my law, incline your ears to the words to my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of the old.

For he established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.

They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in his law.

The wrath of God came down upon them and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.

The fire consumed their young men and their maidens were not given to marriage (553-554).

The psalmist in this psalm wishes to drive home a lesson of obedience to his people, the Jews through a ‘dark saying’. He tells of how his people suffered when they went against the ‘Law’. The psalmist wants to frighten his people so that they never go against God. He wants them to be absolutely terror stricken and thus, keeping the lesson in view, always obey God. Ezekiel is not at all frightened by this tale of pain and suffering. In fact he does not even fully believe in the veracity of such tales of God’s anger and the punishment that befell the Jews. He subjects the tale to close scrutiny and lays bare the improbabilities under it. He is disgusted at this tale of anger, vengeance and ignominy. He is not frightened into submission and passivity which was what the tale was intended for. Ezekiel wishes to express his own self-righteous frustration and disappointment. He wants a change in perspectives as he declares:

Give ear to new parables unlike the old ones, and to darker sayings than our fathers passed
on to us.

How long are we to rely
on those marvellous things
in ancient Egypt? Tell me of the
marvellous things in Nazi Germany
Even with manna in our mouths
we are not estranged from our lust.
And God remembers we are
but flesh till he is pro-
voked further and gives us
over to the sword.
It's not a pretty story
and somewhat confusing
Perhaps the story-teller
is to blame; perhaps it is
neither God's fault nor
that of his chosen people

Yet for this the fire con-
sumed our young men. For
this our maidens were not
given in marriage. ("L.D.P. VI" 1-4, 10-25, 31-34).

Ezekiel in his 'psalm' declares that the terrible tales of the Bible have been
surpassed by the horrible happenings of the 'Holocaust' thus there is a need for 'new
parables' rather than old 'darker sayings'. Ezekiel wishes to point out that the miseries of
the Jews never ended but continued from the Egyptian times down to the Nazi ones
despite all that the Jews did to placate and appease God. Such prayer and propitiation
therefore is futile as God does not behave according to logic or as Ezekiel says, "God
remembers we are / but flesh till he is pro - / voked further". Ezekiel thus does not place
any more trust is God's justice. Ezekiel is sceptical of the stories of miracles performed in
Egypt by God also, as he is aware of the fact that such miracles were not performed during the 'Holocaust' when the need of the Jews was most dire and urgent. Ezekiel wants to know why God only helped the Jews in ancient times and not in the modern, when their condition was equally desperate and critical. Ezekiel is thus not satisfied with the Biblical 'truths'. His questions cannot be answered by these holy texts which purport to be the words of God 'Himself'. Ezekiel's viewpoint discredits the Bible and its wisdom and shows that it is not the repository of complete knowledge. Ezekiel viewpoint challenges and conflicts with the dogmatic one which believes in each and every word of the Bible and in its relevance for all times past, present and future.

A. Raghu comments aptly on Ezekiel's conflicting view of religion as he says, "Ezekiel does not confine his attention to God proper alone, but allows it to spread out into 'His' traditional paraphernalia like sacred literature, rituals, holy men, organised religion, none of which escape unscathed at his hands" (77).

Ezekiel's hitting out at all the aspects of religion is due to his sceptic / humanistic viewpoint, in addition to which his Jewishness also seeks answers for the persecution and oppression that the Jews had to suffer through the ages.

The 95th psalm of the Bible is remodelled by Ezekiel next, it proceeds thus:

O, come let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

For the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods.
In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.
O, come let us worship and lie down,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart as in the provocation and as in the day of temptations in the wilderness. When your
fathers tempted me, proved me and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation (561).

The psalmist is grateful to God for all ‘His’ ‘grace’ and wants to sing in praise of ‘Him’. He calls ‘Him’ the “rock of salvation”. He tells of God’s great deeds, how he has made the sea, the desert and man himself. He reposes utmost trust in God likening ‘Him’ to a shepherd, and himself and his people to ‘Him’ flock of sheep. The psalmist warns his people against ever hardening their hearts towards God or else ‘He’ would wreak ‘His’ vengeance on them, as before.

Ezekiel’s attitude is completely the reverse of the Biblical psalmist in his “Latter-Day Psalm VII”. He shows scant regard for God’s holy stature, as he declares:

Come let us make a joyful noise unto him with psalms
And a different noise with Latter-Day Psalms.
The sea is his; we may drown in it. He formed the dry land, on which millions thirst to on end.
We are the people of his pasture, we are the sheep of his hand. Baa Baa Black sheep.

........................................
To tempt God and seek to prove him is sheer folly
If that’s what our fathers did, I’m sorry for them
I suspect they merely voiced as doubt or two, which our psalmist exaggerates as usual. (1-12, 17-23).
Ezekiel breaks all the bounds of propriety and faith as he finds fault with God and his works. His attitude is irreligious and insulting when he says that a different noise should be made unto God with “Latter-Day Psalms”. The way in which Ezekiel derides the psalmist’s grave and serious assertions shows his contradictory response to them. He remains absolutely unmoved by the tales of suffering recounted by the psalmist. Ezekiel is contemptuous of the psalmist’s faith and doubtful even of his truthfulness. Ezekiel’s contradictory sensibility even takes up the cause of those who doubted God and wanted ‘Him’ to prove ‘Himself’. His attitude is thus completely in opposition to the Bible, the psalmist, God and all the teachings given in the holy book. Ezekiel’s casual and flippant attitude is also most inappropriate in including lines from a necessary rhyme, viz. “Baa Baa Black/ sheep” in his ‘psalm’.

Sanjit Misra correctly observes of Ezekiel’s contradictory attitude when he says, “Equating Hymns to nonsense verse smacks of an erratic thinking even to a common man” (143).

The 102nd psalm of the Bible is the one that Ezekiel takes up next in his dispute with the theistic order. In this psalm the writer is deeply anguished because of God being enraged at him. He laments that God has stopped blessing and providing for him. He, thus recounts his misery to God:

Here my prayer O Lord and let my cry
Come unto thee...

My heart is smitten and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.

I am like a pelican of the wilderness : I am like an owl of the desert.

For I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping.
Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down.

He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and not despise their prayer.

For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death.

But thou art the same and thy years have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue and their seed shall be established before thee. (563-564).

The psalmist’s grief is heart-rending as he has been ignored by God. He is completely desolate because of God’s annoyance, even food and water do not appeal to him. His desire is to appease God and return to ‘His’ favour somehow. He pleads to God for mercy and reminds ‘Him’ of how he is looked up to by all the people of the world. The prisoners who are condemned to death, as well as the needy and homeless all look up to ‘Him’ as the ‘saviour’ and ‘He’ is great as ‘He’ is never unheeding of their entreaties. The psalmist is confident of God’s forgiveness and blessings whereby he, and his children, too would continue to serve ‘Him’.

In his “Latter-Day Psalm VIII” which modifies the 102nd Ezekiel again offers arguments which militate against the theological viewpoints and assertions. He shows no desire of securing God’s favour and refutes all the assertions and declarations of the psalmist. He declares:

I am like a pelican of the wild –
erness, like an owl of the desert, like a sparrow alone
upon the house top-but not in misery
I forget to eat my bread,
not because my heart is withered like grass.
I have eaten ashes to some
purpose, and mingled my drink
with weeping, for worthy causes
I worship the God who regards
the prayer of the destitute
who hears the groaning of the
prisoner, and of those who are
appointed to death.

My children shall continue
and their children shall
continue ................. (1-16, 20-22).

Ezekiel's concerns are individual in contrast to the psalmist's who voices
collective concerns. Ezekiel concern is humanistic and he looks from the human angle
whereas the concerns of the psalmist are spiritual and he looks at matters in accordance
with his experience of God, 'His' law and the dire punishment 'He' inflicts on those who
disobey 'Him'.

The last Biblical psalm taken up by Ezekiel to parody is the 127th. This psalm
reflects the utter devotion and faith of the psalmist in God. He considers 'Him' as the
ultimate and sees 'Him' everywhere. This psalm proceeds thus:

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain, that build it......
It is vain for you to rise up early to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows
for he giveth his beloved sleep.

As arrows are in the hands of a mighty man so are children of the youth,
Happy is the man who hath his quiver full of them ..... (577).

Ezekiel mostly contents himself with saying the reverse of the psalmist. He says:

Except the Lord build the ho-
use – and not even always then –
they labour in vain that build
it ..........................................

...........................................
It is not vain to rise
up early, to sit up late,
to eat the bread of sorrow
Children are as arrows in
the hands of a mighty man,
but not every man is mighty
Lo, children are an heritage
of the Lord, but a quiver
full of them is not ess-
ential for happiness (“L.D.P. IX” 1-4, 8-17).

Whereas the Biblical psalmist opines that for God’s ‘faithfuls’, faith in itself shall suffice as ‘He’ shall provide for every thing Ezekiel has no such illusions about God’s mercy and bounty. His viewpoint is a sceptical one and he places faith only in human efforts and abilities. He is logical and disputes the superstitious statements of the psalmist. He does not take the declarations of the Psalmist to be as ‘revealed truths’ and thus holy but dissect them to expose their hollowness and improbablity. He is not at all in awe of the Bible and its sacrosanct nature but uses witty rejoinders and sharp retorts to demolish its credibility. His intellectuality is in sharp contrast to the dullness of the psalm writer. Daphna Uuvlan-Erdinast too finds Ezekiel views as unorthodox and conflicting as she says that, “Ezekiel’s readings of the psalms which are designed to glory God (as the Hebrew root indicates) to plead or to offer a pledge of worship turns into a pierce quarrel with orthodox institutionized religion” (130).

Ezekiel has focussed on the anomalies and ambiguities of the traditional theistic system and shown that there are a host of flaws in this body of holy ‘truths’. He has through his sceptic attitude tried to divest it of its sanctity and thereby decrease the fear and awe that people have for it. His humanism has tried to assert its importance over that of God and in these views of his, a contradictory response towards traditional beliefs is revealed. In his last “Latter-Day Psalm” which makes a condensed comment on the entire lot of psalms in the Bible i.e., 150, Ezekiel’s attitude is again conflicting and derogatory. He says:

All that fuss about faith,
all those decisions to praise
God, the repeated appeals,
denunciations, laments and hopes
the division of men into virtuous and wicked.

How boring and pathetic ("L.D.P. X" 1-7).

Ezekiel's summarisation of the psalms is quite unfair but, it highlights his humanness adequately which wants a better deal from religion. In this last phase of his poetic journey Ezekiel took it on himself to probe and examine religion through a sceptic and humanistic viewpoint. He had out grown his earlier conflicts of sexuality, urban discontent, identity crisis, etc and now focussed on those aspects of life which guide and influence it though remaining unseen, which are nothing else but metaphysical. In his "Hymns in Darkness" the poet through an ironic vision exposed the lack of spirituality and morality in society which approximated to a condition of a Kal-Yuga or age of darkness. He sang in praise of the fallen and fallible instead of the noble and exalted, in praise of darkness rather than light and thus showed a conflicting sensibility. In the poems "The Egoist's Prayers" Ezekiel shows a dual self, the dominant being the egoistical one which disdains notions of holiness associated with God. He pitches his humanistic concerns against the traditional beliefs through mockery and aspires for a better deal from God. Lastly in the collection "Letter-Day Psalms" Ezekiel turns on the full force of his rationalism and humanism against the Christian beliefs as embodied in the Biblical psalms. He pleads for more care from God and protests against his indifference as seen in the incident of the 'Holocaust'. He would only like to "worship the God who regards / the prayer of the destitute" ("L.D.P. VIII" 12-13). He is not an atheist at all and his prejudice and protests are part of his modernistic beliefs. He wishes for a wider, more encompassing religion, with a more humane God and a lesser emphasis on ordained literature, and this thinking is constructive rather than erratic or misconceived. He focusses more on man than on God which may be a conflicting viewpoint, but all the same has its plus points too. In "Blessings XII" Ezekiel half-jokingly and half-seriously states his need for a change in perspectives. This transformation would
seek to accord priority to individual human concerns rather than the traditional theistic ones. He declares:

Of your generation
try to be like one of
the 35 just men
whose destiny is
to redeem the age,
even if you only succeed
in redeeming your self (1-7).

The last word which Ezekiel wants to insert affirms his individualism. His poetic vision is unique and flows from his own individual consciousness and experience. He finally affirms the necessity of a proper vision. The age can never be redeemed by those who are faint hearted and cowardly. It is only those who are bold and have the force of conviction in their speech and actions that can think of changing the world. In this last phase Ezekiel's sceptic/humanistic viewpoint conflicts with the religious beliefs and the views that he projects have their own validity and logic.
WORK CITED


