Ezekiel and Ecosophy

The philosophy of ecology or ‘ecosophy’, to be precise, begins with the premise that ‘Everything is connected to everything else’. No event or entity exists absolutely independently. Also, in trying to find the connection between things and/or beings all round, however, the attempt is not towards distinguishing the one from the other or even exploring a dependence on each other as Poggeler says ‘love of the neighbour’ (qtd in Parkes 53) which constitutes an obligatory relationship or sympathy for the other, it is more like a ‘friendship’ which ‘lets be’ the other in all diversity. ‘Letting be’ is the main refrain of ecology lovers. Non-interference with nature is what it takes to be concerned with ecology.

... the gentle art

of leaving things alone.(“Lawn” ECP 161)

A belief that nature will take its course if un-tampered leads to a ‘resonance’, an awareness of a ‘ringing in us’ (Parkes 53) which connects us to the vast beyond and not just be self (human) possessed. Thus, ‘we refrain from projecting a human horizon of world as the context or background against which to encounter things’. (Parkes 111) This is the crux of the issue that we need to move beyond ourselves, the human world, in order to strike a chord with existence. Existence is not the ‘other’ as presumed but we humans are an insignificant part of the whole existence. In order to be one with this expanse it is paramount to be aware of the immediate environment, the place in which one is. For Ezekiel:
India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. (Introduction ECP xxii)

For the poet, India is not merely a geographical or political entity but also its people, its culture, its epical, mythological background together with its present day scenario. Ezekiel is ‘what he is’ in his poetry, fully involved and concerned about ‘his’ environment, which is ‘India’. In a state of ‘heightened awareness’ he finds not only points of admiration but also very many to castigate. However, even while being extremely satirical and critical at times of the foibles he notices in India, his environment, he never stands aloof from it, its language, its philosophy, its landscape, its value system. In the process, he also experiences the comic in the negatives he sees around himself.

The comic view of man demonstrates that men behave irrationally, committing follies which reveal their essential ignorance and ridiculousness…(158)comedy and ecology are systems designed to accommodate necessity and to encourage acceptance of it…(The Reader 163)

The negatives are often exposed as ignorance and therefore tend to be ludicrous rather than a moral indictment. Moral dictates are essentially a human prerogative whereas the world exists in spite of it. There is an affirmation of the continuity of life in spite of them, which is an ecological outlook. It is in contrast to the tragic view of life wherein unachieved lofty ideals and heroism of mankind become the bane of human existence. Ezekiel denounces such ideas with his characteristic dig.

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. ("The Egoist’s Prayers" ECP 212)

Here, by questioning an established dictum, Ezekiel brings it down to the ground reality, that is an ecological initiative. We cannot deny the reality that ‘hunger’ determines the actions of humans and not metaphysical precepts. To be in tune with ecology, one needs to let go off many of the, at times illogical, moral precepts dictated by the human world.

Philosophy since Nietzsche has demonstrated the poverty of humanistic idealism, evolutionary biology has demonstrated the animality of mankind, and contemporary psychology has shown that the mind is guided by many forces stronger than great ideas. Political philosophies fail daily to meet mankind’s simplest needs, and now the environmental crisis raises the possibility that the world itself and all its creatures are in jeopardy because humanity has thought too highly of itself. (Meeker, *The Reader* 158)

Ezekiel subverts this presumptuousness of mankind time and again in his work. In “Foresight”, he stirs his readers with “We shall not find a tragic end beyond the mountains where ancient gods are buried. We could be buried there beneath a landscape brave with life…” (ECP 51) We often tend to forget this obvious fact that the ‘landscape’ we care little about will remain full of ‘life’ even when we are dead and buried. This ‘landscape
brave with life’ may not just contain a single species but a complex unity of variegated species dependent on and braving each other. The focus is on making things work somehow in spite of all the odds, which is the ecological perspective.

Comedy and ecology are systems designed to accommodate necessity and to encourage acceptance of it, while tragedy is concerned with avoiding or transcending the necessary in order to accomplish the impossible. (The Reader 163)

In the process, ‘comedy and ecology’ take steps forward to include/be included and participate, whereas ‘tragedy’ is a system of alienation. This makes the tragedian ‘uninvolved and unconcerned’ with the rest of existence, which itself goes against the basic tenet of ecology. Ezekiel moves on further from ‘India as his environment’ to the wider arena of the ‘earth’ and remarks:

…to keep our love as fresh as earth

Must charge our earthly love with love of earth.

We were not made for love alone, my love…

…my blood streams captive, which will not flow

Freely … until

The soul in solitude and God revealed. (“And God Revealed” ECP 25)

‘Our earthly love’ is love between humans and to keep it as fresh as ‘earth’ we need to charge it with ‘love of earth’. Here is a point worth noting that ‘Love of earth’ is the ‘charge’ with which ‘our earthly love’ blossoms. Else, it is a mere ‘Wasteland’. The ‘soul in solitude’ garners the ‘love of earth’ to acknowledge the existence of God. Another expression of the same sentiment:
Life can be kept alive
By contact with the unknown and the strange,
…By contact with the commonplace,
A feeling for the touch of wood and water…(“To a Certain Lady” ECP 28)

We have often touched a ‘commonplace’ thing like ‘wood’ or ‘water’ but the ‘feeling’, the sensation for its ‘touch’ is the reality underlying the ‘taken for granted’ wood or water. This touch when absorbed with awareness with respect to every animate or inanimate entity, ‘keeps alive’ the life that is being lived. Further, amidst the daily grind of the Sisyphean myth in life, this poet asks to be taught about

… Love, above all things, fidelity to music,
Sharpen our responses to the colours of creation,
Lead us undeceptively to what comes after passion…(ECP 30)

In the busy, meaningless daily routine, Man has forgotten to respond to music and the colours of creation. Ezekiel wishes to go ‘undeceptively’ beyond ‘passion’, to flow on with the universal tide of nature beyond bodily gratification.

By simple flowing, learning how to flow
And trees imply an obvious need of roots…(“A Poem of Dedication” ECP 39)

If we allow ‘Nature to be our teacher’ as the master puts it and ‘come forth, and bring …a heart that watches and receives’ (“The Tables Turned”, William Wordsworth) then surely one can be in unison with the eco system. Generally we are at a loss to understand our folly when a carefully planned and a meticulous execution goes haywire, “Allowed for everything, except a long/Arresting arm, the Unseen, the
Unknown.” (“Planning” ECP 32) After making the required effort, one needs to leave the rest and flow with the tide of existence. This flow is not an activity of the mind; the intellect does not come in the way. It is ‘care to feel the bounty of the open sky’ (“A Poem of Blindness”, ECP 49) an opening of the heart to receive nature’s dictates. In “A Poem of Dedication” Ezekiel does just that:

I close the eyes to see with better sight…

The image is created; try to change.

Not to seek release but resolution…

I do not want the yogi’s concentration

I do not want the perfect charity

Of saints nor the tyrant’s endless power.

I want a human balance humanly

Acquired, fruitful in the common hour.(ECP 40)

The poet is not hankering after some super human act of ‘other worldliness’ but keen to be a balanced human, that too ‘humanly acquired’ which is useful for general existence. Eco centrism is just this, the recovery of the lost equilibrium in nature. Says Meeker while talking about ecological perception “…the evolutionary process is one of adaptation and accommodation …in search of a means to maintain their existence.”(164)Very much like the ‘trees (that) imply an obvious need of roots’ (ECP 39) which means a stable state of being in a growing entity. Then, in the very next poem “The Stone” he speaks of his affinity to the ‘Stone’ due to its resistance to ‘flow’:

To turn away from all that seems to flow

Elusively; time, water, blood round the bone …
For something real like a common stone,

Not to be caressed, like flesh, but hard as bone.

I have learnt to love the texture of a stone,

Rough or smooth but all unyielding stone…

Which … holds itself together … (ECP 40)

The above mentioned antithesis reveals recognition of the value of both ‘flow’ and unmoving ‘rootedness’ and growth that we encounter in the eco system. Rigidity towards either of these will not conform to ecological principles. The poet sees the ‘stone’ as ‘something real’ whose texture he loves. The ‘unyielding’, indefatigable, steadfast nature of the stone entices the poet. The ‘elusive’ entities of particular ‘time, water or blood’ will cease to be after they have run their course but the ‘stone’ remains. One is reminded of Robinson Jeffers poem “Oh, Lovely Rock”:

…neither fern nor lichen, pure naked rock…

living rock…I shall die,…this age will die

…this rock will be here… (Thinking like a Mountain 33)

The ‘rock’, Ezekiel’s ‘stone’, is ‘living’ that which ‘holds itself together’ for eternity as if mocking at the vanity of mankind. Leslie also reflects:

‘A rock has being or spirit, although we

may not understand it. The spirit may differ

from the spirit we know in animals or plants

or in ourselves. In the end we all originate

from the depths of the earth.’ (“Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination”).
Many poets and thinkers have given similar viewpoints, a rock perseveres, it holds on. All else is transient, the human bodies, other life forms etc. The rock remains the anchor and fluidity signifies ‘growth’ and ‘love’. Both the anchor and the fluidity are important for existence which follows definite laws. Ezekiel says:

Obedience to a comprehended law is freedom, peace and power. Creation moves in submission timelessly. Unyielding men are broken by the hours.

And look, the liberation! The poise of being one with God, the precious quietude of blood, the aftermath of bold acceptance.

Intimation of some final good comes in surrender; Waiting instead of seeking, wanting nothing, being nothing, like a crab or kingfisher by the water, in the sun, and lighted up within.(“Declaration” ECP 34)

The ‘stone’ is admired for its ‘unyielding’ nature by Ezekiel but ‘unyielding men are broken by the hours’. Different laws apply to different entities in nature. The poet here is talking of ‘Creation’ wherein to relent with understanding is to be liberated. Expecting nothing and just ‘letting go’ in an egoless state of consciousness and open to the ‘within’ and ‘without’, is being completely in tune with nature. By ‘wanting nothing, being nothing, just as a crab or kingfisher’ one can be ‘lighted up within’ and be ‘one with God’. The ‘submission’ of these creatures needs to be emulated by mankind says Ezekiel. The poet is talking of ‘surrender’ which if imbibed from the other creatures around us, will merge us with existence. This takes him deeper to an “Encounter” where he is guided to ‘simplify’ by being undivided and to:

Move in living images…Rhythms, shapes, colours,
forms, they are yours. In them is embodied the
language with which the laws of the universe
brighten existence.
And dance in musical phrases for him who waits.(ECP 35)
The poet seems to have consolidated every visible form, rhythm and color to be in
tune with existence for dance emerges in the one who surrenders in ‘waiting’. He
understands these ‘images’ to be an embodiment of the ‘laws of the universe’. Wendell
Berry, the American poet, novelist, farmer and environmental activist also talks of
‘surrender’ in his poetry:

To take part in the rhythms of earth, one must be
prepared to enter into death, to lie down like light
in the dung heap, to descend like water into the
dark. One must become, as Berry suggests in the
title to his most recent book of poems, A Part of
the earth, not a calculating consciousness held
apart in its own individuality.(Elder 52)

Undefiled by adult dictates, ‘childhood’ exhibits such participation ‘in the rhythms of
earth’. Ezekiel recollects:

Once I was a child
And in the mornings woke to wind and sun,
With upturned face receiving kisses from
The constant newness of the world…
And knew the certain joy of mud and toys…
Whose colours sang the wonders I was born into…

Remember how I listened to the words around me,

Fresh as rain, with sudden thunder

Fearful in the adult anger… (“The Child” ECP 57)

As a child the poet recalls that he was in communion with the ‘wind and sun’, with the ‘newness’ of the world around him, and the wonder and joy with which he was filled while playing with ‘mud and toys’. He was very ‘attentive’ (an ecological trait) to all the sounds that he heard, which seemed to be as ‘fresh as rain’ interspersed with the thunder of ‘adult anger’. Wordsworth too says in his “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,

The earth, and every common sight,

To me did seem

Apparelled in celestial light

The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore;—

Turn where soe'er I may,

By night or day.

The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (Wordsworth)

Wordsworth laments that as an adult the wonderful experiences of childhood no longer have the same freshness because of lack of attention to the seemingly every day happenings. By saying this he points to a ‘usable past… (such poetry) can become a sort of therapeutic locus…where one may draw on the vitality of the past.’ (Elder 109) Whereas
Ezekiel feels the thrust of love within himself: ‘…now again… reaching /Down for water /Up for sunlight /Sprouting greenly in the fragrant air.’ (ECP 57)

This is an ecological being living in unison with nature. Ezekiel ponders in ‘The Fence’

What are fences for?
Not, I admit, comfortable
Seats…
Do we not
have our(Fences) uses?
What else will separate
those self-absorbed, blind
Enemies of enemies
who pass into history
Only to return destructively
with new faces, new names? (ECP 278)

‘Fences’ or partitions and boundaries serve only as dividing factors leading towards hierarchical living instead of a homogenous one. This poem reminds us of ‘Mending Wall’ by Robert Frost where he ponders as to what was being ‘walled in or walled out’ by the building of the wall. Frost is gentle and subtle whereas Ezekiel gives a scathing ironic comment on people who are only keen on division and destruction with every new face that they take on. Ezekiel talks of ‘fences’ only to castigate the rigid, unyielding minds which go against the ecological strain. What can the poet mean by returning ‘destructively’? How does one ‘return’? Obviously he means reincarnation but the poet remains sceptical about ‘self-absorbed, blind enemies’ of society, of nature who do not
curb their divisive, destructive tendencies in spite of the ‘new faces, new names’ they get. Also, can one be sure to get a new ‘human’ face that ‘return(s)’? This reality cannot be evaded and as a consequence we need to do away with ‘fencing’ in a metaphorical sense too.

The blessings of nature are provided to all without any discrimination on the part of ‘nature.’ ‘Water’ and ‘sunlight’ the two essentials of life need to be reached out (with awareness, not as a ‘taken for granted’ commodity) in order to bloom into one’s freshness, symbolized by the ‘sprouting greenly’ in the ‘fragrant air’ of life. Freshness has its own fragrance and vitality. The poet is yet again enveloped in the ‘Freshness of the first spring green /On turf unnoticed… /Let something sprout, let colour be, /…Let pettiness decay in sun and shadow’ (“Song for Spring” ECP 57-58). As we grow in age, the freshness in nature is largely ignored, the mind already knows too much to be awe struck with ‘wonder’ or ‘joy’ about nature. Giving cognizance to the seemingly routine and becoming ‘alert to largesse’ may provide a new zest to life. An encounter with spring will not happen in an unaware state of mind for Ezekiel. Also he knows that ‘So much must die that I may live/ Spaciously…’Only in death is rebirth possible that is what we gather from Nature. Here the death of ‘pettiness’ and narrow outlook is being envisaged in the lap of the spring season and ‘rebirth’ of the individual occurs. With ‘rebirth’ he showers innumerable blessings like:

When your water-tap
leaks, may you care
as if you are paying
for every drop
needed by the city’s source. (“Blessings” ECP 280)

Water is a vital source of existence and the awareness to be able to care for it is indeed a blessing. So through this blessing the poet is exhorting his readers to care for it as if one is to pay through one’s nose so that none wastes it.

Ezekiel points out to another blessing and that is ‘trees’. The earth is being depleted of trees and so the poet blesses:

God grant you trees
to live among,
if not in reality
then in imagination… (ECP 282)

How ironic this seems, that a time has nearly come when one may only imagine ‘trees’ and not actually find them around. Trees have been ruthlessly exterminated in the recent past and present so as to cull this ironic comment from the poet that at least in ‘imagination’ one may live among trees. Science has explained the link and importance of ‘trees’ now which our scriptures were already aware of in the ancient past. Innumerable are the connections within ecology which mankind may not even be aware of ‘Trees’ for Ezekiel form a subtle motif to dwell on the ‘inner being’ and hence cannot be devalued.

Summer blossoms on a tree
I gave myself prosperity-
Charity, lucidity- (“Song”, ECP 42)

The poet’s quiet attentiveness to the happenings in nature affirms his desire for ‘the real thing’ as reflected in the poem “Night Piece”:

Listening to rain or something in the sky
Made to carry death, or wireless sets
Left on in fear the silence may be heard…
… listening to rain
And turning in …
To recognize the real thing (ECP 58-59)

Ezekiel here is trying to listen to ‘rain’ or to ‘something… (which is) made to carry death’.

An eerie silence makes one want to escape from ‘the real thing’ which is “…a sense of the ‘being’ that awaits to emerge in me.”(Seed 80) This can be understood in the light of Pat Flemming and Joanna Macy’s “The Council of All Beings” in the book titled 

Thinking like a Mountain. Here, the Council of people get together and express what emerges from them in the ‘life form’(that even includes mountains and rivers) that chooses to speak through each one of them. This way everyone could relate to their non-human forms. Ezekiel too seems to be trying to comprehend ‘the real thing’ by ‘listening to the rain’. It shows the inward path of ‘silence’ that ‘may be heard’ but mankind is afraid to pay heed to. Hence, to fill the void, ‘wireless sets’ are ‘left on’. What is the silence trying to convey? It maybe to:

… Apprehend

The carnival of things created: water, wind
And season’s breath. (“Transmutation” ECP 56)

‘Water, wind and season’s breath’ When creation strikes a chord within to give a sense of joy and satisfaction, then says the poet ‘Holiness reveals itself in everything.’(56) This is a non-verbal communication without ‘the equipage of doubt and dissipation.’ (56) Therefore, the poet says that human ‘vanity’ should not try to assert the meagre, ‘tenuous thread of difference’ instead rejoices in the ‘common dance’ to ‘participate entirely’. Here
is an important precept of ecological living, not to castigate ‘difference’ but see it as a part of the whole and put one’s soul into the ‘common dance’ which will effect a ‘transformation’ and a change in consciousness.

Transformation may very well be the single term to which all adherents of ecofeminism would assent. (Gaard 3)

Ezekiel’s ecological moorings are very obvious with his penchant for spirited living and complete disregard for dispirited existence. Thus, ‘agitations of the mind and marrow merge into a wider, warmer meaning’ (ECP 56) to attain an organic unity.

In “Speech and Silence” too the poet recognizes that there are many happenings in nature which one cannot explain:

A man sometimes has no reply
To the flying fish and the frog,
Beside the subterranean stream
Whose flow from time to time erupts
In fragments of discerning speech.
But this he is content to hide,
(so) Man is alone and cannot tell
The simplest thing to any friend… (ECP 53)

Nature is incomprehensible and if at all the ‘stream’ seems to convey something, human beings don’t give any cognizance to it. There is no communication between man and nature. Therefore the words that humans use to interact with each other are only to ‘assert one’s identity’. So no real interaction occurs. The poet laments that we humans turn deaf ears to ‘articulate’ nature, which is ‘the real thing’ and therefore remain oblivious to
its misuse. We have ‘lost the art of listening’ (ECP 271) to nature of which we are a part. Hans Peter Duerr rightly says that ‘people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them’ (qtd. in *The Reader* 16). It is suggested by Christopher Manes that there is a connection between “listening to the non-human world (i.e., treating it as a speaking subject) and reversing the environmentally destructive practices modern society pursues.” (“Nature and Silence” *The Reader* 17)

… silence

A whisper of eternity…

… a silence which

Is not in articulation,

But rather speech that needs no words…(ECP 53-54)

When silence speaks then words are rendered inconsequential. This is so because it is the mind that utters words and therefore it ‘moves in circles tracked within his head.’ (ECP 117) To be able to hear the ‘speech’ without any words, the mind needs to be kept aside. Then can one hear the silent ‘whisper of eternity’ and be one with existence. This makes a movement in what Twotrees calls, ‘understanding of self, I-identity, and the shifting web of relationship, We-identity.’ (“Indigenous Mind”, Keogh 171) Striving to be one with nature is a recurring ecological strain that we notice in Ezekiel’s poems. “After Rain” is another such poem where he notices the ‘novel glow’ in the surroundings after rainfall. He goes out when the rain has stopped, to find:

If the road in wetness speaks

A different language … (ECP 63)
He found it to be ‘just so’, that is he could hear a ‘different language’ in the wet environment. Even the silence, which is language in its own right, seemed ‘purer, sweeter’ after the natural out pouring. The silence can then be heard if one is ‘heart fully’ attentive. The thrust is not to take existence for granted but as Munju Ravindra urges, to ‘shift your perspective…to experience those blinding moments of clarity…by cultivating a habit of attention.’(Keogh 181)

Ezekiel seems far from anthropocentric infatuations when he is mindful also of the silent ‘day’ which will unfold by and by. The poem “Day” begins with uncertainty, yet he addresses it as ‘My darling day’ which is going to shower unknown bounties through the twenty four hours. In the ensuing paragraph he says:

But I am young

And the morning of creation

is fresh upon my face; …

And the patience of the mountains

is steady in my eyes.

I know you, day,

You are my friend. (ECP 59)

A creative mind is ‘young’ every morning with faith in existence, (‘I know you, day,/You are my friend’) and belief in what it holds for us for the coming twenty four hours, ‘the feast’ of ‘silence’, ‘song’, ‘solitude’, or ‘spendthrift gestures of the heart’ anything is welcomed with an open heart. The poet explicitly puts the onus of daily events on ‘day’ and not on any supernatural power just as Ramanujan visualizes ‘the body’ as the one that brought him (his soul) into this world and not vice versa in “A Hindu to His Body”:
Dear pursuing presence,

dear body: you brought me
curled in womb and memory. (RCP 40)

Optimism is writ large upon the poems of Ezekiel. His expectations from ‘the ‘Day’ are all positive.

Even when he talks of the ‘city’ person who is ‘far away’ from ‘the hills’ and also away from the ‘beach and tree and stone’ we never find him morose at the most he is a bit satirical:

At dawn he never sees the skies
Which, silently are born again.
Nor feels the shadows of the night
Recline their fingers on his eyes.
He welcomes neither sun nor rain. (“Urban” ECP 117)

Every day is a new ‘dawn’, yet the ‘urban’ does not notice it since everything is so mechanized for him. Neither can he feel the ‘shadows of the night’ nor the bounties of nature like the ‘sun nor rain’. The city life is all he can think about with its ‘broken roads’ and ‘kindred clamour’. Therefore, ‘the river which he claims he loves /Is dry, and all the winds lie dead.’ Untouched by nature, the urban is unable to find peace, comfort and love.

Here too the poet decries the lack of ‘attention’ on the part of the urban which is responsible for the dullness and the narcissistic self with which he trudges on.

Ezekiel attributes the city-bred or ‘city-cramped’ people to be rudderless, without love. In “Love Song”, he finds the body of his beloved ‘young’ but laments that ‘the shop-soiled
wisdom/ of drawing-rooms and dowagers’ has made her ‘old’ since she lacks the vastness of the sky, and the flow of the river:

You are not sky, nor river;

You are not river.

You are city-cramped, my love.

Only flesh remains what it was meant to be. (“Love Song”, ECP 74)

The poet sees that bereft of nature, human relationships also dry up, but he sees this shortcoming in the other and not himself, maybe this is a baby step to ‘self-realization.’ Ezekiel has here come up with a significant observation that ‘Only flesh remains what it was meant to be’. The body alone is fulfilling its role not the person within since the person has become ‘city-cramped’, that is, bereaved of nature. So much of artificial city life has been stuffed inside that nature can hardly breathe through. “Island” talks of the urban land where the poet lives and works, hurrying to his daily grind and dig. The place is:

Unsuitable for song as well as sense

the island flowers into slums

and skyscrapers… (ECP 182)

Modern life is bereft of ‘song as well as sense’ since extreme poverty, connoted by ‘slums’ and extreme richness and the jungles of concrete, the ‘skyscrapers’ have become its bane. Both types of living take one away from nature.

However, something can be surely created out of ‘the dancing minute or the spacious hour’. The ‘dancing minute’ is an un-tampered joyous stretch of time which one experiences in an egoless state. It is in the recognition of such moments that life seems to
flow and not stagnate. Either differences evaporate or differences are accepted to make a composite whole, a unity. So, Dhanya accepts the difference between him and the richer class, his physical ailment does not deter him from helping around, doesn’t complain, doesn’t expect anything from anyone but accepts gracefully whenever given. Acceptance of one’s situation is also ecological in its import.

Given food, he eats,
otherwise, he goes without.
Quite a cheerful chap really…
We look after him
and he makes himself useful. (“The Truth about Dhanya” ECP 169)

There is a social and economic hierarchy in man’s world but ecology orientation sets its pace when the bane of hierarchical existence no longer pervades the psyche, the mind of the people; the oneness of all beings, not just humans, accentuates the concern for ecology. Then, in spite of all the troubled times, one can

God like make a universe
From chaos,
Of fire and air and earth and water. (“Creation” ECP 79)

Then ‘water’ coming in the form of ‘rain’ soothes the ‘town’ and its ‘metal roads’ and the ‘wayside trees expectantly have filled the air with green /and hope of love.’ (“Townlore” ECP 81).

The elements of nature come in different forms to the poet’s mind. A gangrenous dog appears to implore:

‘I too am life’
The image seems to say,

‘Air, earth, fire, water,

. . . _ remember me…’ (“The Cur” ECP 95)

The animals just like us humans are made up of similar elements and body parts, yet we choose to pass over their pain. However, the fact that the poet is writing about the creature is ample proof that the plight of the animal is heart rending for him even though he ‘dribble(s) past the challenge to a small café …/ and think of horrors less remote’. The poet is able to commiserate with the imploring dog because it troubles him to realize the vanishing of the difference between himself and the dog. Looking into the ‘troubled boundaries between the human and other creatures’ (Garrard 148) becomes a tenet of Eco-criticism. So, if it were a ‘gangrenous’ human being in place of that dog then ‘Singer contends that the suffering of a human should not automatically count for more than the suffering of an animal.’ (qtd. in Garrard 137) Else anthropocentrism is the bane from which we are unable to wrench free. Another facet here is that ‘…animals are always the observed. The fact that they can also observe us has lost all significance’. (Garrard 139) This is a pathetic situation where we give no credence to what the animal world may think of us. In Ezekiel’s poem “Entertainment” he describes a monkey show. This show is beneficial for humans, for the show men it means earning money and for the spectators it is entertainment. However, the poet feels poignantly that:

Only the monkeys are sad (ECP 194)

Do we ever give a thought to animals being ‘sad’? Here, the psyche of the two tiny monkeys who entertain and earn for humans is brought to focus. The monkeys have been culled from their natural habitat to provide a means of livelihood to some humans and
entertainment to some others. This is a kind of hideous slavery to which these beings, the monkeys, are subjected. Mankind has no right to enslave nature and its beings. Else, it will have its retribution in some form or the other.

Animals take up quite a lot of Ezekiel’s attention in his poetry. They serve as examples to emulate at times and at others it is human apathy towards them that he is concerned about. “Insectlore” talks of mortality of beings whatever form they may be in.

Worm, moth, serpent, toad,

…That you exist and are gone,

Claimed by mortality

Even more than we… (ECP 102)

These creatures may be ‘claimed by mortality…more’ than us but how does it matter. Only in numbers or life span do we hope to find solace for our mortality and so strive no more to better our ‘humane-ness’ towards our eco system? It is the height of human ignorance and vanity that does not see the undifferentiated treatment meted out by nature.

The “Sparrows” relates the ‘single aim’ of the sparrows, that is ‘to fly’ and ‘mate’, and to build a nest ‘sufficient for the need’. This is a jab at humans who build their ‘nests’/mansions, unduly beyond their needs and are therefore against the eco system. The birds nest is ‘Open, warm, and planned to give/ A truly bird’s eye view of things.’ It could also be another suggestion to human/culture to be ‘open’ and ‘warm,’ which is sadly not the case with Homo sapiens. The sparrows nest also gives a ‘bird’s eye view of things’ meaning it is able to look all round itself and is not just enveloped in its cocoon like the present day man. The poet goes further in his imagination to suppose ‘artists’, ‘statesmen’, and ‘philosophers ’ in the midst of this species who have a ‘better creed’ than their human
counter parts. However, he is confronted with the reality that ‘mating and the nest’ are basic to all living beings.

... and then I face

The facts- the mating and the nest-

Primeval root of all the rest. (ECP 104)

What makes us, humans, then superior to the rest of the earth, the poet seems to ask?

The “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher” is Ezekiel’s fine discerning of the ways of nature, both human and non-human and also significant is the similarities he finds therein.

To force the pace and never to be still

Is not the way of those who study birds

Or women. (ECP 135)

‘Birds’ and ‘women’ as embodiments of nature cannot be understood in a hurry, coercion or in anxiety.

The hunt is not an exercise of will

But patient love relaxing on a hill

To note the movement of a timid wing;

Until the one who knows that she is loved

No longer waits but risks surrendering. (ECP 135)

‘Patience’ is the key to all the mysteries of the world. Letting the other ‘be’ is the way to be on the path of ecological understanding. As Heidegger puts it, ‘What is needed is, without being seduced by over-hasty theories, to experience in whatever is closest things as they are.’ (Parkes 132) He gives the example of a piece of chalk. It occupies space, both
inside as well as outside. It determines the outside space by its outer surface. However, if the piece of chalk is further broken, its inner surface becomes the outer and so on it will continue. One can never get to the inside of it even if the chalk is reduced to the powder stage. It closes itself to any outside interference. Similarly:

...The earth is the forthcoming-sheltering ... the unimpressionable tireless-indefatigable ... the essentially self-closing ... which withdraws from any attempt to open it up and holds itself constantly closed. (“Thoughts on the Way”, Parkes 135)

Then, it could be the poet who unravels the inner being or else the lover or bird watcher who may get to the reality of things, so that ‘The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight’ says the poet. Humans, in general, are blind and deaf to their ecology, hence its misuse and detriment is rampant. Mankind has tried to tamper and exploit nature to its detriment and as a corollary also the earth. Poets, lovers and bird watchers may be able to help regain our sight and hearing capability to communicate with nature and ‘reverse the environmentally destructive practices modern society pursues.’ (“Nature and Silence” The Reader

In “Paradise Flycatcher” a bird watcher is admiring this black hooded bird gliding about the Casuarina tree. Nature has assigned it the job of picking ‘flies and moths’ for food. However, the bird is shot down dead probably due to human callousness. Apart from the fact that a living being is rendered lifeless before its time, the food chain is also disrupted. The bird-watcher, Zafar Futehally too, says Ezekiel with sadness, recounts the instance:

It lay with red and red upon its white,
Uncommon bird no longer, in the mud.

The live one flashes at the watcher

Chestnut wings; the dead is buried in the mind. (ECP 139)

The beautiful white streamers of the flycatcher become red with its blood strewn over. This image becomes superimposed upon the live bird that is being admired by the bird-watcher. Ezekiel feels so involved and concerned about the bird along with Zafar Futehally, the bird watcher. The Paradise Flycatcher’s function is cut short by its death. Even if we do not feel the pain of the untimely death of this exotic bird, our mind understands that by reducing the number of these fly catchers the propagation of harmful insects increases. The flies and moths are naturally eradicated if there is no human intervention. Else, their numbers multiply to no end. Then mankind manufactures pesticides and other harmful products in order to be free from these insects etc. In the poem, “Cleaning Up” Ezekiel talks about the different pests, like the mice and lizards, he gets rid of from his ‘kitchen or bedroom’ by the use of such poisonous substances which prove to be a health hazard. It is a vicious circle re-enacted time and again. The persona, “their Prince of Darkness” decides the fate of these creatures, and having cut short their life their bodies are thrown away, “Outside, crows, pigeons, sparrows /and a single unexpected vulture /provide the funeral music.” (ECP 284) In “Death of a Hen” we find similar sentiments evoked. A passing car crushes a hen which is witnessed by the poet on his ‘morning walk’. While the walker is simply shell shocked at the gruesome sight, a ‘host of crows /came upon the corpse… to celebrate the event. /Chance had offered them an early gift.’ It was a good beginning of the day for the crows but the spectator curses the ‘indifference’ of fate. Or was it the
indifference of the human behind the wheel of the car that crushed the hen, which he is perturbed about?

Ezekiel’s attention to detail in “After Reading a prediction” makes him auto-didactic:

   Watching spiders climb
   the commonplace, ants
   co-operate, lakes
   reflect the hills of some
   remembered holiday…
   I also learn…
   to be the bird in balance
   on the turbulent air…(ECP 156)

There is much to learn from the animal world and ‘nature’ around us to make us lead a natural life of unison and consideration and thereby steer through existence like a ‘bird in balance’. “In the Country Cottage” (158-159) he talks about a ‘lizard’ just like Ramanujan, however, the ‘learning’ aspect pre-dominates the poem instead. As the lizard waits for its prey, ‘he taught us patience’. It is deliberate on the part of the poet to use the pronoun ‘he’ for the lizard instead of ‘it’. This seemingly insignificant creature has come in the position of a teacher, a person here, hence the ‘he’. Since,

   The self that relates to the other in I-It attitude
   fails to capture what the other really is. (Selvamony 228)

By using the personal pronoun ‘he’, Ezekiel is in a way relating to the animal concerned instead of being a dismissive onlooker. When ecocritics come across such connections it certainly gives positive vibes towards concern for the environment. Ezekiel notices and
watches the lizard to find that the lizard was ‘more alive’ in his ‘silent energy’. With unflinching concentration to catch his prey, the Lizard waits long with all his energy but in a ‘silent’ manner. It is a routine affair of one species falling prey to a stronger one in the order of the food-chain, here it being ‘death of cockroaches’. Yet, it teaches a lesson or two to the discerning mind. Humans alone get bored of their daily drudgery and ironically even in life remain ‘lifeless’ and therefore unconnected with existence.

In the poem “The Worm”, there is another lesson to be learnt. The first person in the poem sees a ‘worm’ moving ‘after rain’ with amazing strength straight

… directed

By an inner eye, towards a dryer place’. (ECP 10)

The onlooker is reminded of the circuitous ways he (mankind) takes to reach one’s destination and is unable to bear the puniness of his travails in the world. He confesses that he(mankind) is ‘blinder (and)…So monstrously incapable of being just itself.’ The biggest irony of mankind is its inability to be what it is meant to be. The persona understands that the worm is ‘secure in dust’s ingrained vitality’ to be so focused and ‘free.’ Suddenly, ‘in bitterness, I crushed the worm.’ Humans are unable to relate to this earth and hence unable to rely and experience the ‘security’ which it offers. Even the understanding to follow a direct course of action is sadly missing in the human world.

… Only in anger can I emulate

The worm’s directness. I’ve killed the worm. (ECP 10)

Human ego is behind this insane killing by the persona. Eco centrists would sit up here to point out the inhumanity of humans. Culture dictates as opposed to the ‘live and let live’
dictum of nature could be attributed this cruelty. This is not to, however, endorse culture but repudiate it. We, humans suffer no qualms on crushing even the harmless creatures that we encounter. Culture at times gets the better of the person to destroy his concern for nature. However, ironically ‘only in anger’ can humans generally follow the ‘directness’ of the ‘worm’, unable to be ‘oneself’ in spite of being of the, so-called, higher species. We are reminded of another of Ezekiel’s poem “The Double Horror” wherein he says: ‘Only being what I am hurts.’ (ECP 8) I am corrupted by the world, continually

Reduced to something less than human by the crowd…

To suck life from life…

…I agree

Something must be done but secretly rejoice

When fifty thousand Chinese have been killed’

I who, as a child, wept to see a rat destroyed. (―The Double Horror,” 7-8)

This is how ‘the crowd’/culture dehumanizes humans to be able to exult in the pain of one’s fellow creatures, when as a child, uncorrupted by the world, even the death of a rat was painful for him. His tender emotions have now been crushed by the dominant human society as it is easy to fall prey to the ways of the world, therefore

…I only being what I am

Hurts, and hurts the world although it does not know.

…infected I corrupt the world (ECP 8)

The poet realizes that he is not his ‘original’ self since he has been ‘corrupted by the world’ and in turn ‘corrupts’ it. The use of the first person far from reflecting a solitary example signifies the black hole of society in general, ‘the myth of Sisyphus’ from which one needs
a total reprieve. ‘Being what I am hurts’ the self as well as the society because in the process one needs to relate and identify with other ‘beings.’ and it is comfortable to fall in the rut and follow culture/the society which is essentially anthropocentric in vision and so one remains far from realizing the ‘ecological self’ that Arne Naess talks about. Ezekiel reveals his lack of ‘belongingness’ to the world and its beliefs, the world is too much for his sensitive nature. In “Hymns in Darkness,” he says:

   The enemy is God…
   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. (ECP 222)

Ezekiel, is less of an atheist but more a spokesperson of the oppressed. He castigates God in order to wake up the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘oppressor.’ In “Rural Suite,” he castigates the bhikshuks who carry away huge quantities of rice, fruit etc. from the poor:

   It’s a shameless exploitation
   of the people’s ignorance. (ECP 197)

Culture, which goes against nature, has defiled him/humanity, “reduced to something less than human…(with) Posters selling health and happiness in bottles…To suck life from life.” (ECP 7) The big epithets and adjectives, that we adorn ourselves with, are worth nothing since we have no connection with ourselves, our ‘being.’ Arne Naess focusses on ‘self-realization’ as the way to be ecologically conscious. Ezekiel is very honest in
accepting that it is difficult to be ‘oneself’. However, knowing this is itself the first step taken.

The “Squirrel” (ECP 62) is yet another expression of admiration for the animal world by Ezekiel. Again we notice that the poet has used the personal pronoun ‘he’ to yet again coalescence with the squirrel. The poet notices the ‘agility’ of the creature and compares the swift disappearing movement of this ‘flick of grey and brown’ to that of ‘thought’ and as smart also to ignore the bait in fear of the ‘fingers of the watching child’. The ‘Squirrel’ is sure to come back, like thought, ‘home at any cost’ in order ‘to be caressed’. Caressing may not be a stroking with hands, since the animal is wary of human touch, it could be an indulgent admiration of the creature from a distance. We notice time and again that this poet has the will and ‘time to stand and stare’ at nature and its creatures, quoting Wordsworth, since nature ‘can teach us more than all the sages can’.

Then we move on to “My Cat” which is again ‘she’ not ‘it.’ This cat is very different from the usual ‘milk relishing’ and ‘drooling at the sight of fish’ ones. She neither ‘condescend(s) to chase a rat’ nor ‘play(s) with balls of wool’. “She has a single mood, she’s merely bored, Yawns and walks away, retires to sleep…” Now boredom is a human trait that is being emulated by the cat. She seems to have forgotten her own nature so as to

Defy(ies) all animal and human laws

Of love and hate.

One night I’ll drown this cat. (ECP 65-66)

Animal behaviour also has undergone change but man cannot accept it. The poet seems to be of a volatile nature in spite of his extra sensitivity towards nature and the abundant life therein. Human mind accepts the normal readily but is wary of the unusual. It is rather
surprising though because of the innate ability for creativity with which only the humans generally are endowed with. Why can’t one accept the other, here the cat, being original/different? The persona rejects the unnatural behaviour of his cat but seems to be unaware of human apathy or it could be an indirect way to pull out his readers from this state.

It is not only animals that have something to teach mankind but even the grass growing under our feet has an important ecological truth to convey.

the soil
requiring
not only water
and the seed
but patience at the root(“Lawn” ECP 161)

Again, ‘patience’ is basic to existence, only if humans can let things remain as nature has determined, this earth would be the heaven as envisaged. What is required is to

…keep an eye on it
in rapport with its secret laws,
maintain its ritual
of mortality. (ECP 162)

Can we learn that ‘mortality’ is a compulsory ‘ritual’ and not the end of everything? The grass in the lawn needs to be ‘cut’ when it grows ‘too long’ so that it is ‘in rapport with its secret laws’. That is the ‘ritual of mortality’ of the grass. Similarly, existence continues with ‘its ritual of mortality’ with regard to the individual as per his turn.

When ‘mortality’ becomes a ‘ritual’ and rebirth an accepted norm, then exchanging places with each other would naturally imply equality in treatment of all beings. The poem
“Woman and Child” beautifully demonstrates, through a dream sequence, the interchanging of roles and places.

My woman becomes the naked child,
I, the indifferent man
who almost steps on her.
He and the fruit-seller
stand on the bridge, view the city
and the sea,
discuss his life here and hers in New York
with a basket of large
yellow-green, crinkly-skin oranges. (ECP 267)

‘My Woman becomes the naked’, trampled child in the dream. This is also a reflection of reality wherein ‘woman’ is the ‘earth’ and ‘man’/humans are misusing it. However, nature might turn the tables any time. The central consciousness, the persona, I, switches places with the ‘indifferent man’. Discussion about ‘life’ is now the luxury enjoyed by the ‘orange-seller woman’ and the previous ‘indifferent man’. It is ‘nature’ that determines each one’s role at a particular time and place which can vary from being an ‘insect’ to a ‘mammal’, to being a poverty laden destitute or being born in a wealthy household. Can we still have the audacity to dis-regard ‘nature’ leading further to the detriment of this ‘earth’?

However, this also does not mean that mankind need not do anything since nature is sure to take its course. Ezekiel very much believes in the Gita which emphasizes the importance of work, ‘karma’ as it is called. So, in the poem ‘The Problem’, he exposes the real problem, that is ‘to make the effort’: 
Not to let the flux
of uncreative doing
Hide the emptiness of loud existence.
‘Uncreative doing’ is not his way of life, since at best this can hide the ‘emptiness of loud existence’, ‘Emptiness’ looms large upon mankind because we are unrelated to existence and so he castigates emphatically to pinpoint:

The problem is to make the effort,

Then leave the rest to weather and the rain.(ECP 80)
‘Weather and the rain’ is existence. So, he reiterates The Gita to exhort himself and his fellow beings to do one’s duty and not to think of the ‘fruits of action’ i.e. to ‘leave the rest’ in the hands of ‘the ecosphere’, the ’weather and rain.’

Ezekiel in his “Conclusion” comes to a seemingly light veined or male chauvinistic assertion:

That women, trees, tables, waves and birds
Buildings, stones, steamrollers,
Cats and clocks
Are here to be enjoyed. (ECP 96)

He may be talking about the unity of being and youthful desire but these lines are sexist in their import. Else, for better understanding of the above quoted lines of Ezekiel, one needs to realize that it is the male persona who is ‘enjoying’ here, hence ‘women’ have been included in the ‘to be enjoyed’ list. Had it been the female persona ‘enjoying’, a poet like Kamala Das for example, would have liked to place ‘men’ in the ‘to be enjoyed list’ along with ‘trees, tables, waves, birds, buildings, stones’ etc. However, ‘devaluing’ womankind does not go very well with the rest of his body of poetry. To assimilate the above ideas one
may say that both men and women should together be able to participate in the whole of existence, as it is, without interfering. This will develop ‘the human capacity for relatedness to ourselves, to each other and, by implication, the earth and all its inhabitants.’ (“People or Population” Mies & Shiva 294)

Ezekiel wakes up to the conscious thought that it is ‘Not the words that are found/ But the singing that counts.’(“Waking”, ECP 89) ‘Singing’ is an expression of heartfelt emotion

What does not make one sing
Or laugh or weep or think or act,
What use is it? Uselessness
Is terrible, such indignities
Are not to be borne.
The other day I was visited
By one absorbed in himself-
I prefer the company of spiders. (“Advice,” ECP 92)

The poet’s assertion yet again is to live wholeheartedly. A useless life needs to be rejected. Instead a life where there is song, laughter or even tears is to be endorsed since that is living deeply. He begins his poem “A Time to Change” with a line from Revelation 4, 16.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold,
I will spue thee out of my mouth. (ECP 3)

Then in the poem that follows, Ezekiel spurns ‘half-heartedness’ and relying too much on the mind. Since, ‘…when the mind determines everything/ The leap is never made, the music never quite completed...’ Living fully, embracing the moment, is to live in
unison with the universe. We may flaunt our knowledge of seeds and plants but have not wondered at the miracle of a seed that in its dying gives rise to a plant, say of ‘grapes or figs.’ Munju Ravindra says:

…wonder is a flush feeling-a sensation of enlarging,
of filling with space, of making room for experience
or revelation. (‘Wonder: A Practice for Everyday Life,” Keogh178)

The ‘sensation of enlarging’ merges with the non-human and this revelation connects us to the rest of the world which is a ‘part’ of us. Then ‘…every stone be (is) as original as when the world was made.’ (ECP 4) Meaning thereby that for the beholder it is as new and fresh as when looked at for the first time. This is not a mere poetic assertion but a call to all those who take nature for granted. A quiet mind is required for such an experience else

Words, looks, gestures, everything betrays

The unquiet mind, the emptiness within. (‘On Meeting a Pedant” ECP 8)

‘The unquiet mind’ is touched neither by the ‘sunlight’ nor by a ‘flower or bird’ only the ‘printed or spoken words’ fill his mind with thoughts.

The word is now become a Chinese Wall…

Words become ‘Chinese Wall’ since there is no connection with nature, they remain ‘empty words.’

Forgive me, stranger, grant me but a strip

Of silence for the taking off, a patch

Of grass and not of words to roll upon.

Give me touch of men…(ECP 9)
For the poet, ‘a patch of grass’ provides the ‘strip of silence’ to take off on a journey within and beyond to “broaden and deepen” oneself, whereas empty, feeling less, ‘words’ are ‘cold’ and lifeless, “dressed in evening clothes for drawing rooms.”(ECP 9) The journey ‘within’ takes one to the indivisibility of existence and “the possibility of satisfactory coexistence.”(Naess, Thinking like a Mountain 25) It is the touch of “grass… of men” that matters, when the heart moves ‘with the senses. Send(s) out songs.’(ECP 9) This physicality is what makes Ezekiel so rooted in place.
Works Cited


(All
further references to this book will be given as *Thinking like a Mountain* along with page numbers)

