Even a casual reader of Ezekiel's poetry is likely to discern his strong predilection for the theme of love and this forms a major burden in his poetry. Love for him is an indispensable aspect of the business of life and living. Love is life's greatest boon and man's most prized asset; a truly coveted possession. It is this which spurs him on to achievement and possible excellence. It represents life's strongest motivation, and is perhaps its basic drive. Besides it imparts to life a fundamental vitality and vibrancy; it provides a solid foundation too. As love and life are inextricable, the former has an inevitable place in the latter. A genuine craving for the acquisition of love is manifest in a very early poem.

And let my leaf be green with love
And let me live.

It is interesting to note that 'no theme recurs so frequently as does the theme of love and passion,' in his poetry. On the strength of his own experiences of love, he elucidates his philosophy on this vital dimension of human life. In his endeavour to comprehend the concept
three clear stages of observance, indulgence and experience are to be noticed.

As Professor Gurrey says,

Art demands the participation of powerful feelings in the experiences it provides but these powerful feelings are centred on fundamental experiences of life, presented in new and significant ways. And these feelings are so deeply involved in the reader's re-creation of the experience, giving power to thought, to imagination, to intuition and fullness to the whole.

All this seems to have been achieved in Ezekiel's case. His own experiences in the field lend an unmistakable authenticity to his utterances.

He is no prude in his candid statements and declarations. He would, on the contrary, manifest his attitude in this delicate area of human experience unabashedly.

We who leave the house in April Lord
How shall we return?
Debtors to the whore of Love,

The flesh defiled by dreams of flesh
Rehearsed desires dead in Spring.
How shall we return?

In this very first poem in A TIME TO CHANGE, he is aware that one easily succumbs to the temptation of the flesh. As Srinivasa Iyengar has aptly stated, he is
Painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind, the urges of the body being powerful and overwhelming, the protagonist discovers that it is not within the realm of possibility for him to resist its magnetic pull. He concedes that love is for him a fundamental requisite. It encompasses in its framework.

A bit of land, a woman and a child or two
Accommodated to their needs and changing moods
And patiently to build a life with these.

By his own axiom, then, a life devoid of love is colourless and insipid and deprives one of the very purpose of living. This notion cannot be dismissed as perfunctory and we can hardly afford to be nonchalant when Ezekiel professes a statement which is largely true from his own frame of reference. He himself would gladly luxuriate and bask in the splendour of love rather than foolishly abnegate its pleasures. In his love poems, there is an urgency for fulfilment. He is vulnerable to feminine wiles and charms. So instinctively strong is the inclination that he cannot afford to overlook it or dismiss it as in consequential. There is an initial period, though, when a certain reticence marks his expression and inhibits spontaneity.
But once he has discovered his real self and his own authentic voice, he embarks undauntedly on his venture and there are no more hindrances in his path of articulating his experiences.

The true business of living is seeing, touching, kissing The epic of walking in the street and loving on the bed.

Prof. Shahane states that his early verse is marked by an awareness of physical passion, sexual impulse, intermingling of the corporeal and the spiritual and a sensitive reaction to objects of sensory pleasure or pain. His wide experiences of love assist him in determining the nature of real love, that is able to withstand the test of time. His repeated indulgences are definite steps that help him to progress in his course of discovery and revelation. The theme of love has been the focal point of interest in almost all his poetic volumes. The emphasis is on the body and its unfettered passions. It has been aptly stated by Linda Hess about Ezekiel thus,

He is a poet of the body and an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious delivings and twistings of the ego and the ceaseless attempt of the man and poet to define himself, to find through all the myth and maze a way to honesty and love.
He appears to understand the true nature of the body and its impact on the mind.

The poem 'For Her' taken from SIXTY POEMS reveals his indebtedness to woman. He depends heavily on the love and companionship of the fair sex. In his very first volume A TIME TO CHANGE, he persuades the lady to shed her apprehensions and inhibitions in the interest of gaining a true insight into the magnitude of love and passion. The protagonist himself is at a groping stage of exploration. Yet, instinctively, he seems to realise that one can afford to be natural and unpretentious in the course of love. There is no room for masking one's true self in love.

The defense in love is just defencelessness. A feeling for the mystery of man and woman joined.

In his poems on love and sex, he is as naively honest as Yeats. A significant point to be noticed is that he is no romantic enmeshed in the fanciful trappings of fantasy, he is no platonic either and so it is not disconcerting to discover the woman emerging frequently in his poetry. As a hesitant pilgrim of love, he is initially slow-paced in his attempt at unravelling the mystery that love and
woman constitute. Yet all along he is acutely conscious of the urgent and impending desire for discovery. Elaborate musings and reflections of love are not for him; he would readily indulge in it rather than languish vainly speculating on its possible pains and pleasures.

As Lower, love, you know that I am lost
To continents of thought and every urge
To see, know, hear, touch and praise the earth
Is concentrated on your lips and thighs.

In some of his love-poems, we sense something higher than the merely sensual; it may be a hesitant striving after wisdom, or even towards philosophy. His poems on sex have a freshness and artistic finesse. With absolutely no trace of self-consciousness, he approaches the subject with an accuracy and a precision that has been cultivated. 'Motive' exhibits the fluency of his expression in this sphere.

It's easy to remember
your body in its nakedness
I dwell on it
as on a landscape
or a beloved painting
not the total form only
but the details interest me
My motives are sexual,
aesthetic and friendly

Your thighs are full and round
thin and flat I'd love them too
There go my aesthetics.
In Twenty-four Lines, he is honest and forthright in stating his impulses. And this is one of the most distinct features of his poems on sex. There is no effort to cloak his feelings and expressions. Several of the poems included in A TIME TO CHANGE reveal the poet's unrelenting pursuit of love devoid of mask and make-believe. The second volume SIXTY POETS is a strengthening of this quest where he fortifies his observations on the subject. The poems in THE UNFINISHED MAN appear to explore the ecstatic element in love.

As the poems progress, we see a greater spontaneity in his expression of sexual encounters and the anatomy of the woman. In his 'Passion poems' he admires the candour of the Sanskrit poets.

How freely they mention breasts and buttocks They are my poetic anagogists Why am I so inhibited?

In this manner is he emboldened to shed remnants of his earlier inhibitions, if any, and proceeds to divulge the details of his philosophy of love and sex. He finds no reason to strain the flow of his verse in this direction. No longer is he abashed or stifled in his expression. It is in 'Nudes' 1978, that he gives wanton expression to the subject of sex.
I am given up to nakedness
a pleasure in itself doubled
now by the nakedness of the other
-- she and I
limbs intertwined retain our names.

Innumerable are the pleasures explored and experienced. Perhaps the woman involved in such physical and romantic escapades is temperamentally a person of gay abandon who flings herself whole-heartedly into it. Such a woman depicted in several poems is often indifferent to the more refined sensibilities of love. In a sense, she is coarse. It is such a woman who is described as a "great woman beast of sex" possibly because her appetite and drive for sex are of a high intensity. The poet has depicted such a category of woman and going by his own statement, a woman can be as promiscuous as a man—a point made explicit in his poems.

Ezekiel has always maintained that one cannot suppress the needs of love and, notwithstanding the fact that several of his attempts at love meet with failure, indeed a fiasco too, if he is not disheartened but proceeds in his pilgrimage with renewed vigour. His apparent failures though are not wholly unprofitable for they provide him with new insights and varying
perceptions. In 'Love songs' he is spontaneous in his statement.

Beneath your dress, I find you young
Rewarding to my explorations
Certain, soft and flowing
And tender to the touch of love. 15

Some of his declarations though apparently startling indicate that he is gifted with an observation that is shrewd and an expression that is clear and pointed. The poem 'Pagan' from his volume 'THE THIRD' expresses what is certainly a fact of human conduct but generally considered a rare perception on the part of the poet.

At night the body gives itself, by day
It pretends — pausing before mirrors

Always the body knows its nakedness
The first baptism is not in water
But in fire. The limbs are shaped to lock
and love. 15

Ezekiel is not niggardly with sensuous descriptions of sex and woman in his poems. A point that sharply registers is that he is alive and responsive to the
urgent demands of sex, having outgrown the early idea of sex as sin. By now he learns his former misconception and thus alters his outlook. The antiquated notion being dispensed with, he proceeds to indulge in elaborate descriptions of woman and love-making. There is of course added to it an aesthetic dimension. This quality redeems his poetry from degenerating into the obscene, and the profane. The following poem 'On Giving Reasons' illustrates the point.

She gave me
Six good reasons
for saying NO
and then
for no reason at all
dropped all her reasons
with her clothes.

Yielding deftly an expression that is crisp and concise, he renders such poems appealing mainly on the asset of his unique expression. This a salvages such poems from possibly degenerating into the crude. It is one of his strongest points that he has a mastery of the intricacies of language and the casual
tone enhancer the effect. It is obvious that the pressures and influences of the world are sharply realized and experienced. Szekiel states, "I attach a great deal of importance to the worldliness of the world, its independence." 18

The protagonist who is in quest of worldly delight joins a group of nocturnal revellers who derive pagan joy in witnessing a dance. 'At The Hotel' exposes the details of the situation.

Our motives were concealed but clear. Not the coffee but the Cuban dancer took us there. The naked Cuban dancer was it not for this which we came? 19

Yet he is not visibly contaminated by such indulgences. It is another step further in his endeavour to attain a comprehensive view of sex and physical involvements. The stark honesty of his attitude to the incident is commendable for such
Inclinations to feminine wiles are perhaps normal to man. Such a typical male approach is effectively and concisely stated.

But Adam in the busy street
Is tempted to be indecent.
Ross savage red, now mildly pink
Are thoughts I cannot help but think
Exposed to mountain air or sea.
Her unashamed anatomy.

Very strong and powerful then is the attraction to the fair sex. Even in her absence thoughts about her cannot be dispelled. They are carried into the hustle and bustle of life as 'You' reveals.

Even in a bus queue
Even in a crowded third class railway compartment
I carry with me
The perfume of your breath
The faint odour of your skin.

The sheer exquisiteness of physical union is captured in the poem 'Cry'. Its craftsmanship represents an excellent mastery of language and technique. Employing single words deftly and by a deliberate
economy of words, the desired effect is created. Besides, it ascertains the progress made in his view of human passion. Love can often be elevated to sublime heights, if viewed artistically, sex can contain an element of the near spiritual.

Breathe
My breath
And let me
Breathe yours
Bodies
Savouring
Phenomena
Sifting
Passion
To the fine
point
of penetration
Luminous
obscene
Nuomena
Breath
of my
Breath of my
Being.

The hitherto strong credo of the pagan woman as synonymous with sin is abandoned. Sexual encounters have truths to convey. Possibly for Ezekiel it is a point of advancement for he has discovered the radiant
beauty of the female form and he indulges in the variety of experiences offered. It is relevant to note the frequent occurrence of words like flesh, hair, bone, breasts, thighs and marrow in almost all his volumes of poetry as the poem 'Lines' reveals.

Listen to the secret marrow
Lung and liver speak the word
Accept the long tormented breath
And tremble in the thick of love.

Colin Wilson states:

Now the populariry of poetry as also of great music and painting is that it has the same power as the sexual orgasm — of twitching aside the curtain, of pressing the switch. ... It is like taking off a uniform and putting on civilian clothes. ... Good poetry has this power of getting straight through to the deeper level of issuing the order 'relax' and being obeyed. 24

Despite the sincerity of his purpose, the protagonist experiences love in shallow and superficial forms. A few poems in A TIME TO CHANGE illustrate
the point, then he is directed in his course of true
love, he encounters, not suprisingly, set-backs and
frustrations owing to the artifice of the woman. But
he is not dissuaded in his quest of a love that is w
wide and expansive and in which the woman is a contribu­
tory factor. This effort to unravel the deeper
implications of love is deliberately doubled and inten­
sified in his second anthology, SIXTY POEMS. Even here
failure is imminent but he nevertheless takes it in
his characteristic stride. There is of course, a slight
change of attitude as his experiences progress.

Basically, his experiences are not radically
different. This accounts for an overlapping of
expressions. But there is a clear obsession with love,
woman and sex. In the blinding intensity of his
obsessive handling of these subjects, Ezekiel is
unaware of these repetitions.

A critic has aptly pointed out that his vision
is free from illusions, falsities, exaggerations
and abstract ideas. In the aspect of love, too, he attempts to strike a balance between passion and a rational approach to love, and that can be adhered to in daily life. A safe middle path is what he would propagate thereby ingeniously avoiding the explosive extremity of passionate involvement. Confirming the point he states, "I like to make controlled meaningful statements avoiding extremes of thought and expression." 25

All along, therefore, there is discernible a definite dispassionate stand maintained by the poet. Rarely does he allow himself to become engrossed emotionally in a situation, however intense it may be. On the contrary, he maintains a controlled precision of observation. Nowhere does he become an active victim of crude love. At best, he contrives, even counterfeits feelings and role plays. So emotionally he is outside the situation, striving to estimate it, gauge it by his own standard of judgement. But the
fact remains that every such venture beneficial or jeopardising, bears a distinct significance to him. They are not worthless, or totally useless. They may be like spring-boards in his path of discovery and subsequent revelation. As we are well aware the road to enlightenment and discovery is beset with darkness and gloom at the most unexpected quarters. But the destination may yet be reached regardless of such impediments. None of his experiences however trivial, can be scoffed at or brushed aside. Even when considered in retrospect, the poet cannot afford to be supercilious in regard of them. Each even has helped him gain a more distinct view. So much may be stated in favour of the progression of events – major and minor.

Quite conspicuous is the fact that he is no romantic in his concept of love. But there is a faint indication of his romantic inclination, even if faint. He experiences an almost exuberant taste of love which is uncommon to him.
our love has formed like dew on summer nights.
The wind has ruffled up your hair
We look in consort at the distant sea,
And feel it turbulent and salty there
A passionate and perpetual mystery

A certain happiness would be to die. 26

This reminds one of Keats' lines, 'Now/more than
ever seems it rich to die.' The lines indicate that an almost untainted love has been achieved. The deliberate choice of words like hill and cloud reiterate the fact. Love does not seem to carry with it its usual flaws and blemishes. 'Love sonnet' establishes Ezekiel as a possible romantic with a faint glimmer of the streak of romance in him. But such instances are extremely few and not very strong either. And quite unexpectedly his theory of love takes a queer twist when he states that passionate love is not enviable at all.

And those who love are not
As people think, happy
Because they love, but nearly
Sad because the sea
of passion is nothing precisely. 27
To a large extent, one understands and even appreciates this comment. The turbulent sea of passion is ultimately inconsequential, like a bubble, momentary and transient. At the rational level, the lines make sense and make sense. Yet, at the emotional level, the same lines do not have much impact because to rationalize romantic feelings is not only unwise but irrational too. It does indicate that passion in love is an aspect that does not appeal to the poet. Of course it is already evident that Ezekiel is more a thinking poet than a feeling one. Be that as it may, we understand the poet's outlook from his own frame of reference. When Kamala Das states with intense feeling

Ah! Why does love come to me like pain again and again and again?

the fact of her being an ardent seeker of love immediately registers. Her passionate utterance is the very antithesis of that of Ezekiel who will not trust passionate love. Even Burns was able to express
romantic love by employing a number of winsome exaggeration.

O my love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June
O my love is like a melodies
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

Subas Chandra Saha, referring to the contrast between
Kamala Das and Ezekiel, says,

In Kamala Das, Passion is explored with a lyrical intensity and form is moulded by the will of passion. — — — passion is no less the theme of Ezekiel but surely with a difference. While in Das, passion is exalted and more often surrendered to than not, passion in Ezekiel is subjected to a thorough dissection and often transcended by a conclusive philosophy. Ezekiel does not trust passion entirely when he writes poetry.

Ezekiel is reported to have advised Lal that a precise observation at the close would strengthen a poem. Many of his poems conclude with wise observations.
and this despite the repetition of his experiences. Some critics maintain that Ezekiel does not show the sort of vigour and enthusiasm which we notice in his earlier work. They further state that he is perhaps tired of his labour and feels he has nothing more to say.

In love and passion, then, Ezekiel is staid, introspective, subjecting feelings, inclinations and tendencies to scrutiny and close observation. Failures are viewed at dispassionately and most of the his statements are controlled and precise. It has been stated that the failure of sex in his poems is the thematic correlate of incomplete absorption in the world. Sexual encounters abound in the poems of all the volumes and the poet now appeals to them as evidence of the involvement of the body and now rejects them as incomplete. The dichotomy of his struggle to arrive at a balanced view of things is clear. This
accounts for the dispassionate stand he takes even in the most heady man-woman relationships. Though this is an ordeal, he persists and arrives at a logical approach to love and life.

It is worthwhile to view his attitude to the body as revealed in his poem 'Nakedness' which occurs in SIXTY POEMS

This implicit longing is for nakedness
Soul naked, body naked — —
But when my soul will you be bare?
And body naked, breathe no shame.

Likewise the same idea is implicit in the poem 'For Her' which concludes thus,

But here as I in nakedness
And do not go to meet the world.

He is able to perceive a woman's body and nakedness in two diametrically different ways. On the one hand, there is a close indulgence, while on the other he acclaims it as a work of art which constitutes aesthetic
finesse. He seems to derive a sort of professional
delight in detailing intricate points that engage his
attention. Sometimes he even acknowledges the Divine
hand in the beauty of a woman. To this effect he takes

HYMNS IN DARKNESS

Wasn't it Blake who said
That the nakedness of woman
is the work of God.33

The body and mind are considered one and the naked
body provokes no ignominy. Anisur Rahman states,

This reflects a Yogi's attitude whose commitment
to the ultimate makes him indifferent towards the
nakedness of the body. That is why the poet
finally submits to his insistent sexual urges,
the naked call of the body.34

...this critic's statement seems to be irrelevant and
inapplicable in the case of Ezekiel for his approach
is a direct one of indulgence rather than one of
abnegation.

Rajeev Taranath and Meenakshisundar Patnaik sound quite
convincing when they state,
It is not always that Mr. Ezekiel succeeds in handling the ordinary. His failure is due to several reasons. Primarily it is the lack of urgency of feeling. There are instances when he drops into the too casual escaping as a result the tension we find in many poems the impending chatter which leads to journalese.

This charge levelled against him is due to the fact that his intellect dominates all other factors and considerations; this coupled with his aptitude for the right expression and his quest for the precise craftsmanship accounts for an apparent absence of urgent feelings. It is his sober frame of mind that makes him realise that the sea of passion is nothing precisely. According to Ezekiel the cementing factor in a man-woman relationship is not turbulent passion which always runs the risk of eventual dissipation but a sensible, adult love. A meaningful and intelligent approach to love is recommended.

The more you love
The less you burn away

Even love is not so magical, whatever the romantics say.
Affirming his faith once again in reason and maturity, states in 'Marriage poem':

Between the acts of wedded love
A quieter passion flows
which keeps the nuptial pattern firm
As passion comes and goes.

Earthly love, O earthly love
Be active when you will
But let the quieter passion come
to every lover till
The nuptial pattern is secure
Though you are still.

In the same volume of poetry SIXTY POEMS, he imagines and craves for a state of ideal love in the poem entitled 'Two Nights of love'. It reveals that he is truly in quest of real, enduring love rather than be unduly impressed by the ephemeral nature of earthly love.

After a night love, I dreamt of love
Unconfined to threshing thighs and breasts
That bear the weight of me with spirit
Light and free.

Thus his approach to love passion and sex is marked by a conspicuous logic of reason. This enables him to
gain a view from the right perspective. While passion is powerful it is often transient, while mature love successfully weathers the storms of life and is eventually triumphant in the test of time and reality. His view of woman too is finally characterised by a rational approach and this is implicit in 'Torso of a woman'.

Torso of a woman it is again
in colour or in stone
Not the whole woman
but her torso
arms cut off
just below the shoulders
legs cut off
just below the knees
unperturbed for art's sake.

I hate it
however great the image
Praise the form
praise the modelling
praise the dynamic movement
and the complex synthesis
of muscular tension
the woman plainly needs
her common arms and legs.
NOTES

1. JSAL, P. 42.
4. JSAL, P. 11.
6. JSAL, P. 12.
8. Linda Hess, Post-Independence Indian Poetry in English, QUEST 49 (Spring 66) Page. 31.
9. JSAL, P. 39.
11. Ibid, P. 96.
16. JSAL, P. 50.


19. JSAL, P. 60.

20. Ibid, P. 52.


22. JSAL, P. 105.


25. From a review of *Hymns in Darkness*.

26. JSAL, P. 64

27. Ibid, P. 45.


32. JSAL, P. 39


36. JSAL, P. 40.


39. The journal of Indian writing in English, July, 83, Volume II, 'Two Recent Poems'.

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