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Philosophy in the Matrix of Poetry -The World –View of Nissim Ezekiel

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the world-view of Nissim Ezekiel, the unquestioned czar of Indian Poetry in English, as witnessed through the lens of his poetry. The term 'philosophy' as used in the paper embraces the poet's views and concerns about the human predicament with a critical eye upon his own. It also circumscribes three main concerns of his poetry—his struggle to find meaning in life, his quest for selfhood and his constant endeavour towards discovering his own idiom of poetry.

Keywords: Poetry, Philosophy, Selfhood, Human Predicament, Idiom

“The purpose of poetry is to remind us how difficult it is to remain just one person, for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors, and invisible guests come in and out at will.” Milosz “*Ars Poetica*”

1. Introduction

Off shoot of a modestly bourgeois Jewish family, a few generations removed from the traditions of rural village life; a young writer living in the aftermath of a great European empire in dissolution, Ezekiel returned to his native city after a sojourn in London; drawn inexorably to his very own city of Bombay, a city, with which he had a love-hate relationship till his death. On his return to Bombay, he wrote, in “Background, Casually” (CP 179-81):

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am. (71-75)

Ezekiel's father had distanced himself from Jewish practice. Despite this, Nissim's Jewish identity was never questioned in his poetry. He writes in “Jewish Wedding in Bombay” (CP 234):

The Sabbath was for betting and swearing and drinking.
Nothing extravagant, mind you, all in a low key
and very decently kept in check.
My father used to say,
these orthodox chaps certainly know how to draw the line
in their own crude way. He himself had drifted into the liberal
creed but without much conviction, taking us all with him.
My mother was very proud of being 'progressive'. (26-32)

The poet's songs, in their finely tuned observation of his own sensibility and his links to the world around him—Bombay—flow from this rock-bed, the rootedness in Jewish culture that he owns and recognizes. In “Declaration” (CP 34), the poet observes: Obedience to a comprehended law is freedom, peace and power. Creation moves in submission tirelessly. Unyielding men are broken by the hours. (1-3)

Following this trail of obedience through his work, we come to Ezekiel's “Concluding Latter-Day Psalm” in his last collection of poems, *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982): “Now I am through with /the Psalms; they are / part of my flesh”(CP 261). Hence, the poet is consistent in pursuit of osmotizing his dreams and making them a part of his life. As one of the Bene Israel who decided to stay behind in India after the birth of the State of Israel, Ezekiel and his family belonged to a residue of a remnant. “My ancestors, among the castes, /were aliens crushing seed for bread (48-49),” he recollects in “Background, Casually” (CP 179-181).

When the Bene-Israel emigrated to Bombay, it became possible for them to move away from their traditional occupations. Even before the move, many of them had taken up weaving or fishing. What is significant here is the fact that Ezekiel probably showed the same adaptability when he scrubbed the decks to pay for his passage to England.

If the Romans were irradiated by the rhetoric of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the environment of post-independence India was defined as much by Nissim Ezekiel through his poetry. Social critic, unabashed defender of unaffectedness in art and an untiring crusader in pursuit of a true poetic idiom, Nissim Ezekiel was a poet for whom art began with as much the mind as the body; and he wrote to keep both in synthesis. The poet made his intention to explore his real self through writing as early as 1950 when he wrote a letter to his sister Asha Bhende from London. He wrote that:

There was no alternative if I am to live a creative life. There is no other life for me. In a sense, of course, I am beaten, since I cannot organize my life as a whole. Nevertheless, fidelity to the poetry of it is a great saving factor. I do not wish to make excuses nor draw attention to the lives of the poets and their characteristic shortcomings. I want to be practical too and to stand on my own feet (61).

The result was a substantial corpus of eight volumes of poetry which form the cornerstones for this work.

2. Philosophy and Ezekiel's Poetry

It is this practical approach to life that is reflected in his essay- "Poetry and Philosophy"(SP 41-49). "No man, said Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a great philosopher" (Perry 25). It follows then, speaking broadly, some poetry is philosophical. This will give us to search for the philosophy that does exist in poetry without well demarcated boundaries or conversely speaking, some portion of philosophy may be poetry. But actually speaking, little of true philosophy is truly poetic and vice versa. These are the contentions that Ezekiel raises in this essay. He agrees with Valery that the nature of abstract thoughts that go into the making of in poetry differ entirely from the manner that is employed in philosophical reasoning (Perry 41-49) For Ezekiel, poetry remained as a supremely important mode of knowledge. His views resonate with those of Clyde S. Kilby who insists that, poetry, with its known power to evoke experiences and associations, is able to express subjective facts about a thing or situation. Poetry, at its best, can evoke a new realm of subjective facts for its reader (74). This realm may involve frames of mind, feelings, and impressions that are new to the reader, along with others that are more familiar.

In either case, Coleridge goes on to explain, this realm of subjective fact is new, because it differs from the domain of subjective facts that came with the more routine experiences that the reader already had before reading the poem (Perry 75). Such a philosophy is adequately reflected in "Poetry" (CP 13):

A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two, but poetry
Is something more. It is the why
The how, the what, the flow
From which a poem comes,
The savage and the singular,
The gentle, familiar,
Are all dissolved; the residue
Is what you read, as a poem, the rest
Flows and is poetry. This should be so,
Precisely so. (10-20)

This belief in poetry is further strengthened in his essay, "Poetry as Knowledge".(SP 29-40) Ezekiel advocates an entrenchment in poetry to an extent that involves "learning to live with it "(SP 32). His views can be expressed coherently using AimeCesaire's words that, "it is in the poetry that the poetics is formulated, and that the resulting knowledge is constitutive of the poet's identity..."(Scharfman 109-120).

In the 16th century, for example, Sir Philip Sidney stated that poetry was 'the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges' (Sidney 96). This view of poetry combines inspiration and knowledge. In the 19th century, Wordsworth characterized poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science"(423); and in the 20th century Ezra Pound asserted that "The arts, literature, poesy are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual" (Sidney 42).

In his essay, 'The Serious Artist' (1913), explaining the function of art, Pound writes:

We are asked' to define the relation of the arts to economics, we are asked what position the arts are to hold in the ideal republic. And it is obviously the opinion of many people less objectionable than the Sydney that the arts had better not exist at all ... It is as if one said to me: what is the use of open spaces in this city, what is the use of rose trees and why do you wish to plant trees and lay out parks and gardens (1-2)?

Here is also where a similarity is found with Ezekiel's beliefs that poetry has to be precise and exact like all other forms of knowledge. His ideas chime with those of Pound as the following lines reflect:

By good art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean the art that is most precise. You can be wholly precise in representing vagueness. You can be wholly a liar in pretending that the particular vagueness was precise in its outline (Pound44).

The poem "Philosophy" (CP 129) gives an insight into this belief of Ezekiel's:

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. (1-4)

It is reflected that though the poet is overpowered by the Muse in the writing of a poem but the pragmatic analyst that he is , Ezekiel soon turns the flow of words to establish the primacy of knowledge of *emotion* (italics mine) in a poem as he says in "Psalm 151" (CP 73):

In sorrow I am not enlarged,
 My corn and wine do not increase,
 Hours of joy with doubt are charged,
 Confessions bring me no release.
 Deliver me from evil, Lord,
 Rouse me o essential good,
 Change the drink for me O Lord,
 Lead me from the wailing wood. (9-16)

He reinforces the double- edged idea of opposites---looking for precision and then rejecting it after the point it enters the realm of pure philosophy.

3. Features of Ezekiel's Poetry

Ezekiel's credo is no technical textbook concept but a bundle of insights derived from his own experiences. Ezekiel's formal development is quite startlingly individual-- not only in the radical transformations which his language and form undergo, but also in the extent to which his underlying themes and preoccupations remain virtually constant throughout.

Bruce King defines Nissim Ezekiel in the following words:

Ezekiel had his own distinctive personality, character, and themes which he expressed within the perspective of a modern intellectual. He brought to Indian English poetry the skepticism, restlessness, feeling of alienation, openness to experience, self – consciousness and quest for some meaning to life that is as much a part of the modern mind (31).

It is true that Ezekiel was a pioneer amongst the modern poets writing in India using English as a medium of expression. His existential concerns, questioning ways and doubting prose hence carry the uniquely Indian flavor that was to become the cornerstone of Indian English poetry that is written and appreciated today.

4. Dualism of Thought

A startling feature of Ezekiel's poetry is the dualism encountered in his poetry. He has a bewildering propensity for opposites; of support of speech in some poems juxtaposed against advocacy for silence in others. For example, "Speech and Silence" (CP 53) –in silence is simplicity / Expressed through speech, reality (53-54); The poem, "For Satish Gujral" (CP 194) presents another nuance of this dialectic of opposites :

It is the task
 Of love
 And imagination
 To hear what can't be heard
 When everybody speaks. (19-23)

4.1. Inclination towards the Unusual

He hungers for the dark as against finding meaning in light He champions darkness as a custodian and repository of secrets. These lines from "Hymns in Darkness" xii "(CP 223) reinforce the point—

The darkness has its secrets
 Which light does not know.
 It's a kind of perfection,
 while every light
 distorts the truth. (5-9)

4.2. Dualism of Gesture

A most noteworthy poem of his is "The Double Horror" (CP 7) which takes the dualism in his poetry to a different dimension as he says—

Corrupted by the world I must infect the world
 With my corruption. This double horror holds me
 Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake, ... (21-23)

These lines point towards a different kind of dualism, a dualism of gesture in his poetry, whereby the poet is compelled to reciprocate with a full force of hatred and decadence towards a world that has never abdicated the ugliness of its villainy or squalor in deference to the sensitivity of the poet.

Though one finds that Ezekiel was a poet for whom poetry was a totally supra-mundane and most important facet of his life but his strange contention against words encountered in poems like "On Meeting a Pedant" (CP 8-9) where he says—

Give me a touch of men and give me smell of

Fornication, pregnancy and spices .

But spare me words cold as print, insidious

Words, dressed in evening clothes for drawing rooms. (16-19)

This expression points towards a thirst for deeper understanding of life that will perhaps be discovered beyond the realm of words.

4.3. Advocacy for Insightfulness

While in most of his poetry, he has championed the cause of the word, in the poem "In Retrospect" (CP 144), he advocates against them. Contradicting himself, as Ezekiel very often does, while in most of his poetry, he invariably displays a passion and penchant for the concrete and the human, here he displays an affinity for profundity and at the same time, subverses the sensory experience. It is evident in the following lines:

...

but I was impatient.

I used too many words,

And now I know:

There is a point in being obscure

About the luminous

About the luminous phrase of living

Which ought to be

Delicately improvised and left alone. (20-30)

All the above mentioned approaches and affinities make the matrix of Ezekiel's poetry.

Human beings are kaleidoscopic cultural beings shaped by complex social situations and to a large extent, bound by roles which were imposed during infancy – a period when little control can be exercised over what happens to one's self. Taking this framework as orientation begins the journey towards what each one ultimately becomes. Sometimes an individual will peep beyond this framework or even tear it apart to create the magical utterances we call poetry.

Taking this idea further, in the foreword to *Nissim Ezekiel*, a publication by Sahitya Akademi, Keki .N. Daruwalla describes Ezekiel in the following words:

The contribution of Ezekiel becomes all the more stark in comparison to his predecessors and contemporaries on the platform of Indian Poetry in English. Ruthless analysis of one's own motives and passions, the reflection on inner turbulence in poetry, doubt and self-doubt and the questioning of the scriptures, all this was new.

4.4. Associationism

There are two features which arise almost organically in Ezekiel's work, out of the demands of his approach to his environment material. One is that he approaches the particulars of his experience as particulars, rather than as parts of a scheme which is known in outline. What is more, the particulars appear unrelated, and, in his insistence upon taking things as they are, Ezekiel is loath to impose some pattern alien to their nature (and possibly obscuring some real pattern) upon them. Secondly, association in Ezekiel's hands is a technique which sometimes provides only the bare minimum of linkage required to keep the poem in one piece. The argument in "Latter Day Psalms", for example, is not developed in any even vaguely linear sense, but ranges where it wills. Open-endedness and dis-associationism-- characteristics of the modern poets of the world are, in Ezekiel's case, indicative of his explicit concerns as a poet: their importance in his work reveals the structural problems he is facing. These structural characteristics of Ezekiel's poetry clearly reflect, once again, a set of responses to the modern situation.

Throughout his oeuvre, Ezekiel overtly affirms his feeling, that poetry includes everything in it. He arranges the world as language about himself in an almost solipsistic manner. As he says in "Credo" (CP 244):

to describe anguish

in a soft voice,

in simplest statements

to body forth the passions(9-12).

To him, then, poetry is quite obviously the means of resolving his existential plight. No trace of this exaltation of language occurs in the poetry of Auden, Day Lewis, Spender, Robert Lowell, and others, however. Poetry is revealed as a mode of being – in –the –world through all the attempted resolutions of material and structural problems. The existential predicament is expressed as these problems in Ezekiel's poetry.

5 Influences on Ezekiel's Poetry

Ezekiel was influenced by some great poets whose influence is reflected in his early poetry. Rainer Maria Rilke's passion for silence and solitude is evident in "Speech and Silence"(CP 53) and in "Prayer I" (CP 54):

If I could pray, the gist of my

Demanding would be simply this:

Quietitude. The ordered mind,

Erasure of the inner lie,

And only love in every kiss. (1-5)

Ezekiel wrote "The Crows" (CP 41) in response to Rimbaud's "Les Corbeaux" where Rimbaud's crows where crows suggest all the contradictory qualities—ugliness and beauty; attraction and repulsion; physical death and spiritual essence; evil and good. Ezekiel, however, like Poe's "The Raven", finds himself drawn towards misery and dejection in life.

Sixty Poems (1953) had personal importance for the poet as they gave him to his life a "sort of continuity" (Foreword *Sixty Poems*), much in the Yeatsian vein. "For William Carlos Williams" is his early declaration of the belief in creating poetry which could fuse and infuse music with meaning- an enterprise which the poet pursued faithfully throughout his career.

6. Modernism in Ezekiel's Poetry

Ezekiel is a poet who sees reality on a basic level, upon which the inevitability of 'cause and effect' does not operate, resolutions do not take place as a matter of course, patterns prove meaningless, things fall apart, and there is no backdrop - moral or natural, for acceptability. "Lamentation" (CP 72) is one example of this ennui—

My lips lack prophesy

My tongue speaketh no great matters

The words of the wise are wasted on me

Fugitive am I and far from home. (1-4).

Armed with a personal religion then, he writes. Like Yeats, who used a religious sensibility to demonstrate the truth of his beliefs and which consequently provided him with a certainty and meaning, Ezekiel presents the reader with a rich collection of his critical writings, not only on the matter of poetry but politics, society, religion and art that indicate towards a mature world view put forth by a thoughtful individual. As far as his concept of poesy is concerned it can be understood in part, from what he says of Daruwalla's poetry:

.....a fine blend of freedom and discipline, metrical rhythms and the word order of prose, compact harsh alternative phrasing and relaxed movement (Karnani 9).

Ezekiel's own poetry is this rare amalgam of freedom and discipline. It displays a thematic concern with the whole problem of belief. It is the struggle into religion, not the religion itself, which is indicated in his poetry. For example, as in "And God Revealed"(CP 25):

A thousand small intricacies of brain

Hold my blood-streams captive,..

. . . until

They know the various ways of men,

The soul in solitude and God revealed. (17-21).

In a stance that is quite similar to the later poetry of Auden and Eliot, it is the process of writing a poem, not the poem itself that concerns much of Ezekiel's poetry. In his writing, belief generates its justification rather than self- assurance. For Ezekiel, beliefs are a form of data; the choice of any one is a hazardous undertaking. As he says in "Something to Pursue" (CP 14-17)

The way of speech is difficult to

find and the way of silence is

difficult to find. Trust the way ,

my son, that is difficult to find. (91-94)

7. The Nature of Ezekiel's Poetic Self

For a poet as sensitive as Ezekiel, the self has always been a point of concern.

In the poem "Subconscious" (CP 271) ,the poet talks about his divided self:

Consciously, I ask my sub-conscious

To supply me with a poem.

It sends up this harsh message:

You have not turned to me so long,

I shall not speak now. (1-5)

Discussing the nature of Ezekiel's self, Dore says:

The self to which Ezekiel here refers to as a modernist is not the old unitary self of psychology but the divided self of psychoanalysis. Naturally, he pokes fun at Freud by transposing the id and ego as a married couple living in a two-storied house (478).

Hence, for the poet, beliefs do not serve as keystones which can be implied and then left alone, but are vexing questions in themselves. He struggles with predicaments and presents them as evidence. Hence, whatever unity his work possesses, often not very much, comes from the emotional rhythm, the thrust toward completion, of this predicament.

The problem of belief for many modern writers is such a predicament. But underlying all such predicaments and dilemmas is the primary problem of the 'thrown', 'displaced', 'dispossessed', or 'lost' self . Sartre, in his book *Literature and Existentialism* (1962), summarizes the whole question of the modern writer-in the world:

... if we ourselves produce the rules of production , the measures, the criteria , and if our creative drive comes from the very depths of our heart , then we never find anything but ourselves in our work . It is we who have invented the laws by which we judge it (13).

The most fundamental problem facing the modern writer is the self. "There is a goal but no way what we call the way is only way ," says Kafka (Richter et al 37), echoing his main influence Soren Kierkegaard. Ezekiel is a typical modern writer, who is skeptical of beliefs and finds the prevalent atmosphere of scientific rationalism and objective knowledge incapable of fulfilling aesthetic needs. These ideas find coherence in the poem "Philosophy "(CP 129):

But residues of meaning still remain,
As darkest myths meander through pain
Towards a final formula of light.
I, too, reject that clarity of sight:
What cannot be explained, do not explain. (11-14)

Ezekiel wants an exact formula, but his wish to plunge into dialectical struggle and his rejection of those who demand a final integer indicate that his other goal is always a unified understanding.

In previous ages, writing presupposed a unified context within which it took place and which it reflected. The process is reversed in the modern period. The context has become the goal. As for Ezekiel's explicit offerings of his struggle and search for facts , one does not detect any end to his restlessness even in his later poetry. In the very act of writing, modern poets such as KekiN.Daruwalla, A.K. Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar or O.P. Bhatnagar attempted to construct a reality which was essentially individual and free – growing forms which seem to express the modern consciousness, most fully. The Romantics would never have claimed-I am large, I contain multitudes, for that is a radically modern doctrine. The self for Walt Whitman is never in doubt, and nothing is off limits to it. A similarity in the selves of Ezekiel and Whitman would be that for both, the self is neither ultimately absorbed into a depersonalizing transcendental unity nor is it reduced to civilized proportions. Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Ezekiel's "Latter Day Psalms"-viii (CP 259) beg comparison here. Having catalogued a continent and encompassed its multitudes, Whitman decides: "I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." Ezekiel affirms the same indefatigable assurance when he declares"

I am like a pelican of the wild-
-erness, like an owl of the des-
-ert ,like a sparrow alone
upon the house top-but not in
misery. (1-5).

The effect is an avowal of freedom from norms that limit the poetic self.

Another one of Ezekiel's perpetual efforts has been meaningful synthesis of the manner with the matter. In an interview to Indian Express, he says: "The problems of Indian writers are strange. They have to make a synthesis between the ancient and modern cultures" (7 November 1982). In his own case, a remarkable synthesis happens between the Jewish and the Indian, the Western and the Eastern, the urban and the rural. This synthesis in Ezekiel's poetic vision is expressed well in "Latter Day Psalms x"(CP 261) --

The images are beautiful birds
And colourful fish: they fly,
they swim in my Jewish consciousness.
God is a presence here
and his people are real. I see their sins. I hear
His anger. (11-17)

Being-in-the-world, the core of modern thought as well as a Heideggerian standpoint, is Ezekiel's central theme. The concept, it should be noted, is neither an idealist one (in which everything is the self) nor a materialist one in which the self is objectively part of the world. Being-in-the-world is a constructive process. The focus of creation becomes the experiencing self. Ezekiel experiences the world and the world is available to him. His perception too, is multipronged. In "Morning Prayer"(CP122), the poet prays:

Whatever the enigma,
The passion of the blood,
Grant me the metaphor
To make it human good.(13-16)

For the poet, the essence of poetry lies in its power to render a situation bearable. One does not find a body-soul dichotomy in Ezekiel's poetry. The search is located within the realms of the material. As far as modern writers are concerned, a poem about the self cannot end or be resolved in a conventional manner. It is hence noteworthy, that his poems seldom have conventional endings because no experience is final for the poet.

Examples of existential shorthand, his poems, are not a bunch of fragments shored up against the ruins but a series of images, leading to search for meaning ,if only by implication. For Ezekiel, that tenuous grasp on the absolute which was sufficient to permit Whitman his joyous, unquestioning affirmation of being, has faltered. What was for Whitman, an Eden, has become an "Island" (CP 182) for Ezekiel, which is "Unsuitable for song as well as sense"(1) and where the self wanders alone, to wonder ,

and agonize, handling bits and pieces it chances to find. He tries to grasp and grope for meaning. The poet might try to assimilate what he finds, but the pieces fit into no universal scheme. These questioning lines from "Island" (CP 182) are a case in point:

...the air is still again
as I sleep the sleep of ignorance
How delight the soul with absolute
sense of salvation, how
hold to a single willed direction.(16-18)

In dealing with the problems faced by a modern poet, Ezekiel emerges as a representative on the stage of Indian English Poetry. Keki N. Daruwalla terms Ezekiel as essentially:-

a poet of inner conflict, of love, passion, the constricting role of the mind, social inhibitions, and mental states. The poet ruminates on privacy; enigmas, quiescence and this mode don't easily lend itself to striking imagery (406).

His continual and explicit preoccupation with the theme of potential should not make one overlook the fact that this is always seen in terms of poetry, and it is poetry above all with which he is concerned. He is constantly absorbed by the questions, what shall I write? How shall I write? For what shall I write? The writing itself is never in question. It is a 'given' of his existence. It is his essential self-consciousness as a poet that makes it valuable to examine his work in order to explore the problems of the modern poet. The consequence of the fact he is so concerned with what he is doing, is that he faces these tribulations.

In a world where the word 'truth' carries with it connotations of outrageous presumption, the poet is left on his own to find content and value for his work which he can accept as 'true'. Ezekiel contends that the poetic truth "may be located anywhere between the strictly personal and the universal"(SP 37).

Poetry stands true or false on the touchstone of the poet's feelings as they are felt in the "...coherence, consistency, tone, and resonance of the poem as a whole"(SP 34). Ezekiel, if he does not question the fact of his own existence, is full of questions about the world he lives in and his own role as a poet. He is not a philosopher. His preoccupation with truth is his mission and for this reason his poetry seems to take the search for an original idiom as well as a clear world view as a predominant theme.

A number of modern writers like Ezekiel explicitly equate art with truth. Pirandello, in *Sei Personaggi* and *Cerca D'aulore* and Yeats with his *Byzantium* are examples. It becomes an end in itself. The order in art does not exist merely as a lattice whereby communication becomes possible (the explanation of the order in Sartre's and Heidegger's methodical treatises) but rather as its own object. In the realm of creative writing, language is the art, and the world of language is often given a status above the world 'out there'. It becomes an icon, and sometimes even a fetish. Even for Imagists and concrete poets, language retains a reality distinct from other things. By adopting it as of central concern, it is removed from the chaos of the 'Waste Land' and given a certain pre-eminence as Ezekiel declares in "Morning Prayer" (CP 20):

"Unveil, expose, expound
Your metaphors of meaning,
And let them know lucidity,
White wings of the morning." (13-16)

8. Ezekiel's World View

One can notice two recurrent aspects in Ezekiel's poetry-- the striving for a world view based upon some principle or schema as yet unknown, and what amounts to an obsession with the potency of the language material. Intuition or interior revelation, fail to carry a sense of conviction. The poet, dealing with his situation, always keeps an eye upon the outside world which constantly challenges his intuitive flashes, rendering them illusory, because it remains chaotic. Intuition ebbs and flows while the world Ezekiel sees himself in remains the same. He continually perceives himself pursuing a goal which remains elusive. He struggles and at the same time sees himself struggle in vain, as he attempts to win through to a vision which never comes. The poem is decisive stage in Ezekiel's career, for thereafter he refuses to trust in pure revelation and engages himself actively in his environment. His potential, of which vision was to have been the realization, is to be approached more actively in the future.

Ezekiel's career revolves about the two poles of revelation and observation, with poetry and language assuming the special status which has been outlined. He is unable to accept revelation without proof – that is, without reference to the outside world. He turns to poetry; at the same time, he awaits the possible sudden intuitive flash by which this knowledge will become meaning. A beautiful imagery has been employed in "A Time to Change" (CP 3-6) where the poet plods on like a stubborn workman, hacking at the stone, sowing the seed in the soil allowing it to die but waits and – "Finds, on a lucky day, a metaphor / Leaping from the sod"(77).

Not only does he seek the fusion of thing and word, of knowledge of things and knowledge about things, but he is ever hopeful of achieving the fusion of intuition and discovery. In the world, he seeks a pattern, to be revealed through knowledge. He seeks the revelation of the meaning of the pattern through the poetry he wants. Philosophy, for him, is not understanding of the world. To understand his place in the world he must know what it is, in all its complexity.

To Ezekiel, poetry was a means towards knowledge in so far it did not step into the realm of philosophy to "destroy the pleasure of senses by its clinical quality" (SP 41-49). But if knowledge per se had been his real source of concern, he would have abandoned poetry; as it is the world of facts is a theoretical one, and his triumph over it is as remote as the ideal of

understanding. The choice of knowledge and the choice of poetry are two extremes which are simply incompatible. However, his approach has led to his insisting that neither one can have value without the other (*SP* 41-49).

Modern poets, excluding the Dadaists, still need a sense of relations, but have no outside reassurance. Their approach to the environmental material depends upon them alone. Since so little is taken for granted, for these poets, a sense of relations becomes difficult to maintain. It is not surprising that the focus of their poetry is often, both implicitly and explicitly, upon the question of approach itself. The lack of a way of seeing the world obviously means that this question will be emphasized. How to deal with the environmental material, how to codify it, shape and organize it, make something coherent out of it, in the absence of this way of seeing, is revealed as a pressing problem in much modern poetry.

What makes Ezekiel's work unique and invaluable as representative of modern poetry in general, is the self-conscious and determined way in which he deals with hurdles in his evolution as a poet. The problem of approach is not taboo in his works. As in—"In Retrospect"(*CP* 144):

there is a point
in being obscure
about the luminous,
the pure musical
phases of living
which ought to be
delicately improvised
and left alone. (23-30)

This refrain from handling of material, however, should not be confused with an inclination towards obscurity. His striving for the genuine is never more evident than in his "The Egoist's Prayers" (*CP* 212) where each prayer emanating from the core of his being flows with simple diction and pungent statements as in prayers v and iii respectively : "Let me be O' Lord / the Camel of the Higher Income Group" (1-4) and the desire of the poetic self to taste the fruit of action , may be just "half a bite of it" (5)?

It is pertinent to state that the modern poet in Ezekiel is in synchronization with his urban environment and on solid ground in poems like "Urban" (*CP* 117) where he realizes the primordial in "kindred clamour close at hand" or "rides into a marsh to see the Grail"("Perspective" *CP* 134). His ceaseless self-questioning and doubt, which force him to follow his own remorseless logic in development, extend easily to the question of his approach to his environmental material, and by so, doing reveal to us the nature of the problem itself. The open-ended poems of Ezekiel are an example of a new, more personal, looser structure. Such poems have no conventional resolutions: there is always room for additions. This is one approach of his later poems – that is, progressive unfolding – this seems necessary for coherence, Sometimes it is a rich and imaginative association which is made, and sometimes and intellectual one instead. It is rare that one finds serial associationism in his poetry.

9. Conclusion

We can see how poetry is a means by which Ezekiel tackles his own existence in – the–world and involves himself in meaning by experiencing and using his medium. The various ways in which he goes about this can be observed by examining his approach to the material and structural problems which have been outlined. It emerges, in art and literature, human expression remains primary. Having established what approach not to take, he falls back on philosophical musing. Reason serves the end of pleasure. For him, truth (in the abstract-- it is implied) becomes "too momentous for man" and consequently, not "always useful" (*Theological* 156) ,as he exclaims in metaphysical exhaustion.

Without the religious sensibility of Sri Aurobindo or Henry James or the hermetic vision of Yeats or even the relatively disciplined literary/ historical consciousness of Pound, Ezekiel's own presence is magnified in his creation as he stumbles, changes direction, makes commitments , encounters temptations and succumbs or at times overcomes them in his search for a true idiom of poetry. His entire work reflects the existential dilemmas of our time as they are expressed in poetry. His self-consciousness and single-mindedness allow us deeper insight into poetry of his fellow travelers in the "Island". He develops his own ways of coping with an environment hostile to earlier notions of art as revelation. Ezekiel uses these as equipment to create an identity, utterly on his own responsibility -that of an egoist who prays with a caustic honesty (*The Egoist's Prayers" CP*212) and can hold his own when pelting the almighty opponent. The poet lambasts Him as an equal, whom he sees as an apathetic, "The absentee Landlord"("Hymns in Darkness"-xi *CP* 222). It is difficult to think of many modern writers who have consciously adopted this attitude. It cannot be stressed too strongly that these poems are of interest because the poet's approach to the problem of existence shifts to a semi-philosophical attempt to clarify the issues. The poems themselves are not very direct, and the philosophy they contain is not intense. The struggle, however, is. It is in this endeavour that the greatness of Ezekiel lies as a poet.

10. References

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