


# **EZEKIEL'S POETRY : ITS STYLISTIC IDENTITY**

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This dissertation entitled **EZEKIEL'S POETRY: ITS STYLISTIC IDENTITY**, submitted by Ashok Kumar, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University. This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Masters of Philosophy.

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Ashok Kumar

## C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE NO.
1.	- EZEKIEL'S MAJOR THEMES	1
2.	- THE BELATED INDIAN SELF	38
3.	- FROM TRADITION TO FREEDOM : METRE	56
4.	- " THE BEST POETS WAIT FOR WORDS "	86
	CONCLUSION	109
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	116

CHAPTER - 1  
EZEKIEL'S MAJOR THEMES

## CHAPTER - I

### EZEKIEL'S MAJOR THEMES

Nissim Ezekiel (1924 -), poet, playwright, art and literary critic, is a major Indian-English poet. Many critics consider him as 'the' Indian English poet. In the heyday of fiction way back in the mid 70s William Walsh prophesied that the poetic "work of Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, and R.Parthasarathy "would outshine" the work of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao" in fiction. Having published nine volumes of poems (including the recently published The Collected poems 1952 - 1988, Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989) which have won him accolade, Ezekiel has justified his early promise and the critics' expectation. Recently, Bruce King has admitted that whereas "previously verse was a hobby, something done in spare moments, Ezekiel has made it central to life". Calling him "the leader" "Of the group of poets attempting to create a modern English poetry in India" he adds that while others wrote "poems", only he writes "poetry". Ezekiel's own assertion, "To me poetry is central -- all else peripheral", agrees with Bruce's assertion. Acknowledging him as the first of the "new poets" to publish a collection, M.K.Naik says that he is "one of' the most notable

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<sup>1</sup>  
William Walsh, "Introduction", Reading in Commonwealth Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. xviii

<sup>2</sup>  
Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p.91.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>  
Toni Patel, "Is it Pleasant to Meet Mr. Ezekiel", The Journal of Indian Writing in English VII, 2 (1971), 101

post-Independence Indian English writers of verse"<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Prof. A.N. Dwivedi admits his poetic genius by calling him a "barometer of modern India's literary atmosphere"<sup>6</sup>. D.Ramakrishna, however, goes a step further by accepting his international reputation and maintaining that he "has carved a niche for himself in the world of literary art as a practising poet of International standard"<sup>7</sup>. C.D.Narsimhaiah, likewise, says that Ezekiel "must be said to be an important poet not merely in the Indian context, but in a consideration of those that are writing poetry anywhere in English"<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the consensus of opinion recognises his greatness among the contemporary Indian-English poets.

Truly, Ezekiel has been a pioneer in creating modern Indian-English poetry. In the early fifties, by bringing out his first anthology, A Time to Change, 1952, Ezekiel was the first to materialise the objectives of "new poetry" ushered in by P. Lal and his associates. He, thus is the first to come out with the poetry that reacted sharply against the then existing romantic

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<sup>5</sup>  
M.K.Naik, A History of Indian English Literature (Delhi Sahitya Academi, 1982), p.193.

<sup>6</sup>  
A.N.Dwivedi, "Modernity in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry" The Journal of Indian Writing in English, XIV, 2 (July 86) 65.

<sup>7</sup>  
D.Ramakrishna, "Ezekiel's Credo", The Journal of Indian Writing in English XIV, 2 (July 1986) p.13.

<sup>8</sup>  
C.D.Narsimhaiah, The Swan and the Eagle (Simla Indian Institute of Advance Studies, 1969) p.40.

poetic trends. In other words, in perfect harmony with the goals of the "new poetry", he composed poems exploiting modernist techniques. Unlike his predecessors — Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, and Sri Aurobindo — he refrained from sentimental idealisation; he did not allow his poetry to become flowery, mellifluous, or loose.

His poetry is, in fact, remarkable for precise and yet evocative diction, apt and telling images and symbols, and a certain natural rhythm. His defining characteristics are a critical self-consciousness, a powerful intellectual purpose, and a skilful distancing of emotion through a persona. His thematic canvass is not <sup>so</sup> gigantic because his aim has been "Not to hanker for wide, god-like range/ Of thought". Love, marriage, man-woman relationship, sexual encounter, religion and redemption, and a certain kind of alienation recur as themes in his poetry. Although he seeks poetry in the ordinary events of our everyday life, his verse very often tends to be contemplative — it is taut with suggestions that compel the reader "To force the pace and never to be still".

Most of his themes, however, appear to be interwoven into one central theme of quest—how to live cheerfully, peacefully, and morally as an integrated human being.



This perhaps has led a number of critics to claim that his poetry is a personal quest for identity, commitment, and harmony in life. To Linda Hess, Ezekiel is "an endless explorer of the labyrinth of the mind, the devious delvings and twistings of the ego, and the ceaseless attempt of man and poet to define himself, to find through all 'the myth and maze' a way to honesty and love"<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, Chetan Karnani points out that his poetry is a "first-hand record of life's growth"<sup>10</sup>. Inder Nath Kher, too, maintains that his is an interminable search for identity"<sup>11</sup>.

In the following pages of the present chapter a comprehensive survey of Ezekiel's predilections throughout his poetry is attempted. Why? It is because, as Halliday and other proponents of functional linguistics believe, the semantic structure of a literary work is interwoven with, ~~is~~ in fact realised in the morphological, lexical, syntactic and metrical structure. Therefore, before we proceed to investigate the different levels in search of meaning it is necessary to isolate the broad semantics of his poetry.

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9  
Linda Hess, "Post Independence Indian Poetry In English", Quest, 49 (April/June 1966), 30-31.

10  
Chetan Karnani, Nissim Ezekiel (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974), p. 168.

11  
Inder Nath Kher, "That Message from Another Shore : The Esthetic Vision of Nissim Ezekiel", Mahfil, VIII, 4 (Winter 1972), 17.

To begin with, A Time to Change ( Fortune Press, London, 1952) is a landmark in the history of modern Indian-English poetry because it brought in modernity, i.e. expressed for the first time "a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom"<sup>12</sup>. The book marks a change in the poetic taste and sensibility so decisively that poets like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu now appear quaint to modern readers. This anthology reflects all the themes and interests that have always engaged his attention. Redemption and rebirth is the pivotal motif of the volume and takes various forms such as of love, religion, poetry etc., sometimes in the course of the same poem.

The title poem "A Time to Change" , a moral allegory, is a complex poem in five sections; it is part lament, part prayer. It clearly brings out the poet's quest for identity. He appears to believe that this is to be sought in the life itself and not outside it. He, however, constantly moves between two poles — the quest for personal identity and also for the identity of other people. Michael Garman rightly points out that " the poet's religion assumes a double aspect" - the introspective - contemplative and the outward-active<sup>13</sup> in this poem. The opening section is introspective in tone and makes a

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Keki N. Daruwalla, "Introduction", Two Decades of Indian Poetry (Delhi: Vikash Publication, 1980), p.xvii

13

Michel Garman, "Nissim Ezekiel - Pilgrimage and Myth", Critical Essay on Indian Writing in English, M.K.Naik et. al. ed. (Dharwar: Karnataka Univ. Press, 1972), p.109.

serious statement of man's departure from home in "April". The persona feels that as long as he is "with faults concealed" there is no hope of "redemption" and "return". In the second section, the realization dawns upon him that redemption can be sought not outside the life but inside. In the third section, the importance of material bliss and human relationships, which lead life towards fulfilment, is asserted. The fourth section has the message that manhood, loving family and proper conduct redeem "the private country of the mind / where the worser part, as Socrates would say / Presides". The extended metaphor of tilling and toiling workman "subsidised by dreams alone" precisely but emphatically communicates the stupendous task of a poet in his own creation. The final section answers the knotty problem : how to get redemption ?

Perception in April  
Of my condition  
Secret faults concealed no more (p.5)

\* [All page references hereafter are to be The collected poems 1952-88 (Oxf. Univ. Press, New Delhi 1989)]

Thus, the persona realises that only introspection and self realisation can see him through this problematic state.

There are other poems also in which this perennial theme is taken up. For example, in "The Double Horror",

the poet feels " Corrupted by the world, continually / Reduced to something less than human by the crowd " and destined to "infect the world". Similarly, "In Emptiness" the persona is "waiting now in emptiness / Annulled, cancelled, made a blank". Even in " The Worm " he feels the lack of "an inner eye" and consequently his brain is full of "cunning subtleties". Finally, "Communication" is the sad story of the shattered dreams of the poet who ventured out abroad to seek his fortune.

The volume also records Ezekiel's notions about poetry and art. In a poem entitled "Poetry" the persona contrasts "Poem" which is "an episode" with "Poetry" which is "something more". He further maintains that poetry "is the why / The how, the what, the flow / From which a poem comes" thereby relegating the poem to a lower status. In "Something to Pursue" he argues that "There is a way" which may be followed "Through works or poetry" or "From works to poetry/ Or from poetry to something else". That a perfect harmony between emotion and reason is needed to "Acquire the equilibrium of art" is categorically mentioned in another poem "On an African Mask".

In "Something to Pursue" Ezekiel strives to combine the opposites of love and sex, poetry and prayer. He

longs for a life of a "Pagan / Beside a girl or tasting freedom / On a bicycle". His wish for simple pleasures, devoid of all sorts of everyday worries, brings to him doubt when "Memory presents to him / An almanac of petty vices". In the third section, he asserts that there is no redemption for a man who is

Empty of faith in the comeliness of God,  
 Empty of faith in shapeliness of Man,  
 Contemplation turned to pus,..... (P.17)

Ezekiel in this anthology has also talked at great length about man-woman relationship, marriage and sex. In "An Affair" the persona accompanies a certain lady to the movie who cannot distinguish the real world from the celluloid world. Soon after the movie she declares :

I love you, just like this  
 As I had seen the yellow blondes declare  
 Upon the screen. (P.11)

Finally, she hates him because the persona does not reciprocate with a kiss. A similar sort of a negative image of woman is portrayed in the third section of "Something to Pursue" in which she "Haunts the bed in flesh or dream". The same negative attitude towards women echoes in "The Old Woman". Both the octave and the sestet depict her as a murderess because "She let her husband die of too much dying".

Ambivalently, although he looks down upon women but holds the institution of marriage in high esteem. The poet probes the "mystery / Of man and woman joined" in "Something to Pursue". Despite the serious conflicts between husband and wife he seeks a compromise :

Always we must be lovers,  
 Man and wife at work upon the hard  
 Mass of material which is the world. (p.30)

All these are the recurrent themes of Ezekiel's poetry and continue to appear in all the subsequent collections.

The next collection of poems, Sixty Poems (Privately printed, Bombay, 1953), comprising nineteen new poems written after A Time to Change (1952) and also some unpublished poems written during 1945-51, has been described as Ezekiel's failure by many critics. Karnani holds that "After the brilliance of the first volume, this collection comes as an anti-<sup>14</sup>climax".

In the very first poem "A Poem of Dedication" he delivers his theme :

Not to hanker for a wide, god-like range  
 Of thought, nor the matador's dexterity.  
 I do not want yogi's concentration,  
 I don't want the perfect charity  
 Of saints nor the tyrant's endless power.  
 I want a human balance humanly  
 Acquired, fruitful in the common hour. (p. 40)

In this collection , he wishes mostly to write about human relationship which will be useful in "the common hour" ; and he painstakingly maintains it throughout his verse.

Many of the poems of this volume treat of sex and women. The persona finds himself in difficult situation. For example, in "Situation" his romantic dalliance with the lady ends up in failure "with haze of self-deception" in their eyes. In "A Visitor" his "life (is) uprooted by a sudden storm" following his beloved's refusal. The "threshing thighs, the singing breast" constitute his dreams in "Two Nights of Love". "Description" testifies his courage to treat sex and woman frankly. In "Old Abyss", he accepts that he has himself "died beholding" the woman like others when she was in her prime of youth.

Ezekiel's ideal notions about marriage, already evident in the preceding volume, are again expressed in "Marriage Poem". He reiterates his view that "Between the acts of wedded love / A quieter passion flows / Which keeps the nuptial pattern firm".

Ezekiel rightly believes that the unpublished poems composed before A Time to Change have a " sense of continuity ". Love is the predominant theme of the early phase (1945 - 48 ). In the poem "Question" he queries whether the key

to happiness is "Prolonging kisses till the world / Of thoughts is dim ? ". He feels that " laughing love " is the secret of happiness and it will never be " cooled / By Time and mated to defeat ". Love helps to bear adversity ; it consummates all sorts of kinships and even tames lust "that burns in breasts or lips" ("Delighted by Love,"~~P.82~~). He is so much enamoured with love in "Invocation" that he is content just to assume "the simple roles of man and lover".

The poet's longing for "love in every kiss" is to be found even in "Prayers", one of the poems of the second set (1948-51). He finds it to be a great nourisher in " The Child ". He further longs to resuscitate the trapped love in " A Song, a Violin ".

The negative image of the woman that runs through his verse is to be found even in his early poems, viz. "Nakedness", "For Her", "Female Image" and "A Short Story". In all these poems he is enamoured of the fair-sex.

Right from the beginning, Ezekiel has a particular conception of his own vocation that is closer to the Platonic. For instance, in the poem "Creation" he compares the act of composing verse with God's act of creating the cosmos. He believes that inspiration is the *raison d'être* of poetry ; it transforms experience into a poem just as God "makes a universe/ From chaos , / Of Fire and air and earth and water." For him



lyricism is one of the essential ingredients of poetry. A poet lacking in lyricism is, he calls, a "stuffed owl" in the poem by the same name.

Many of the poems, such as "Lord" , "Prayer I & II", " Psalm 151 " and "Lamentation" etc. of the second set, evince Ezekiel's religious bent of mind. D. Ramakrishna's observation: " Ezekiel was an atheist and a rational from 1952 to 1967 " <sup>15</sup> is somehow more like an unacceptable generalization, when we take into account lines such as the following from " Psalm 151 ":

Deliver me from evil , Lord,  
Rouse me to essential good,  
Change the drink for me, O Lord ,  
Lead me from the wailing wood. (p. 73)

The lines makes explicit Ezekiel's profound faith in God.

Sex and Woman dominate The Third ( privately published, Bombay, 1959). Ezekiel talks about them without any inhibition but without being vulgar and coarse. For instance , in "Declaration" he holds woman superior to man since only they can "Fill the animal heart with wonder and warmth" ; its "deprivation is desolation" to a man. The poet-persona asserts the same constructive role of sex : " And lives are welded which exist apart " in another poem " Paen ". In "Conclusion" he continues that the

True business of living is seeing, touching, kissing, /  
The epic of walking in the streets and loving on the bed.  
(p.97)

Probably, that is why in " Episode " he entreats his lady-love to " Forget our (their)bonds and choose a common bond " of sexual game in order to do away their " romantic restfulness". The lines, "Your midriff moist and your thighs unruly / Breasts beneath the fabric slyly plopping" (" At the Party ", p.98 ) speaks of his preoccupation with the female body. He openly admits it in " At the Hotel " :

Our motives were concealed but clear  
not coffee but the Cuban dancer took us there  
the naked Cuban dancer. (p. 112)

There are a few other poems as well in which the same longing is reflected.

Further, besides his preoccupation with woman and sex, in some poems of this volume Ezekiel also praises love. As in the earlier volume, he holds it superior to natural laws in the poem "For Her": In this poem wood-burning is juxtaposed with the burning of love to emphatically convey that:

With love it is not so.  
Love breaks the incendiary laws,  
Blazing in a high wind  
But staying good. (p. 88)

Interestingly, he finds that "Love is the ultimate reparation" ("Aside", p.93) not only in the human world but also in the animal

world. Further in the volume he discovers that the language of love is :

Prodigious music of our silences ,  
 Dry-throated suffering and helplessness ,  
 This is the natural language of love.  
 ("The Language of Lovers". p.111)

A few poems in this volume also deal with the theme of marriage. For instance , in " Division" the persona looks back on his wedding :

With cold, detemind intellect  
 I watched the heart at play ,  
 And heard it sing of blessedness  
 Upon a nuptial day,  
 I warned it of a changing time,  
 It would not sing that way. (p. 87)

The poem " What Frightens Me " speaks of the persona's disillusionment with marriage. Thus the dark side of marriage begins to surface in this volume.

For the first time, Ezekiel extensively writes his feelings about animals in poems such as "Insectlore", "The Cur" , "Sparrow" , and "Aside" in this volume. He derives many truths from observing the dumb brethren of nature's teeming family; they are equally applicable for human being as well. Ezekiel philosophically envisages in " Aside " that the

love-making of elephants, tortoises, and snails might have been the fountain - spring of man's love making in the remote ages. The sparrow's " single aim / Which is to fly and then to mate " at once attracts the persona's attention:

The facts — the mating and the nest—  
Primeval roots of all the rest.

(p. 104)

This underlines the lessons man has drawn from the animal world. Thus, the animal theme assumes importance in the present volume.

The title of Ezekiel's most celebrated collection, The Unfinished Man (Writers workshop, Calcutta 1959), is very appropriate. Many of the poems are case studies of " The unfinished man and his pain / Brought face to face with his own clumsiness". "The city like passion burns" is the pivotal theme. " The ten poems are a sequence concerning the discontent of a supposedly settled life; they are related more by theme than by story".

In the very first poem, "Urban", the poet meditatively contrasts himself with his dreams of the natural world. The natural imagery of the poem symbolises the innocence, freedom, and profundity of vision not found in the din and bustle of the city. He "never sees the skies", never feels the "shadow

of the night ", " welcomes neither sun nor rain/ His landscape has no depth or height ". He, however, does not suffer from alienation and returns " To kindred clamour close at hand ". "Enterprise", an ironically entitled poem, depicts failure of the poet-persona's undertaking and futile efforts. At the end of the ordeal he realises pensively that his "deeds were neither great nor rare". Hence, his final philosophic aphorism: "Home is where we have to gather grace". In "A Morning Walk" he dreams of being lost "Upon a hill too high for him". He also sees the city and its " million purgatorial lanes ". He, in an introspective mood, questions himself whether he is " among the men of straw " who delude themselves with seeming freedom nowadays. He has begun to realise that nothing will change since " his will is like the morning dew "; and he belongs to the city like "an active fool ".

Unlike other poems, the scene of " Love Sonnet " moves to the hill from which the lovers descend to look " inquiringly at road and sky " while thinking of sexual pleasures of the earth. The redeeming possibilities of love are taken up by " Commitment " in which the dangers of passion are found superior to the 'lost' men:

Who wanted only quiet lives  
And failed to count the growing cost  
Of cushy jobs or unloved wives.

(P.121)

In " Event " Ezekiel portrays the negative image of a woman ; the woman in the poem decides her life partner after flirting for ten years with different persons while the flow of her time has " become a drift ". The poet finds both she and her paramours living in "day-dreams ...../ Reflections of the cheated mind ".

Ezekiel's viewpoint regarding the institution of marriage undergoes some change with the passage of time. He appears highly sarcastic of the paradisaical complacency of lovers in "Marriage". Although he has failed in this domestic game he still wants to keep its mystery intact ; he does not want this social code to collapse. However, antithetically, in "Case Study" the poet-persona decries it ; he accepts it as "the worst mistake" of his life. His generalisation , " A man is damned in that domestic game ", also suggests his loss of faith in this social institution. In the same poem the persona also realises the need for some decisive action : "The pattern will remain, unless you break / It with a sudden jerk", to get rid of it.

In " Jamini Roy " the poet-persona appears to have found a solution to " adult fantasies / of sex and power-ridden lives " of the denizens of the cities . His journey to a remote village appears to have endowed him with the gift of the secret communication which serves as a remedy to the wide-spread

disease prevalent among the connoisseurs of modern art. His floating and flinching mind finds firm anchorage therein symbolising the rebirth of an unfinished man. Thus, the collection ends on a note of hope. All these poems attest Ezekiel's meditative faculty and deep concern for humanity.

The title of the next volume, The Exact Name (Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1965) is appropriate, for in several poems Ezekiel examines the nature and function of poetry, its defining process, the way in which its images and symbols give exact names to the ordinariness of most events. Even the epigraph evinces his concern for endowing sensory character to his words. His desire, "Let my words be / The thing itself" is materialised to a great extent.

In "Philosophy" Ezekiel philosophically argues the superiority of poetry over both philosophy and history. "Common things" are the subject matter of poetry as "against the nakedness / That dies of cold" of philosophy and history. In the same spirit, in "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher", he sings the superiority of a poet over a lover and also a birdwatcher. Good poetry like loving and birdwatching entails a lot of patience. He further observes that "The best poet waits for words" as the lovers and birdwatchers wait for beloveds and birds. Similarly,

the poet eulogises poetry in the poem entitled " In Retrospect ". In "Art Lecture " the poet-persona moves from poetry and poet to art itself. He mocks at " The habit of the eye untrained " of most of the so-called art lovers. He, ironically, mentions how such people " Are granted .... a small reprieve " through these lectures.

The thrust of the volume, however, is the focus on of the sexual image of a woman. Unlike preceding collections, herein Ezekiel displays positive attitude towards woman, particularly in the two poems " Night of The Scorpion" and "Virginal". In the former the woman appears as a mother figure whereas in the latter she is portrayed as a spinster , " Remote from the prospect of a wedding kiss ". In the former she is a loving mother :

Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
and spared my children (P.131)

In the latter, the poet's concern is the vacuum in the spinster's life :

The universe is much too small to hold  
Your longing for a lover and a child. (P.139)

Even in " Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher " the persona views woman with



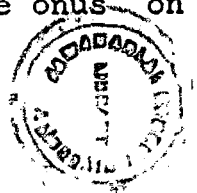
understanding : " To force the pace and never to be still/ Is not the way of those who study birds / or woman".

Nevertheless, poems such as "Beachscene", "Love Poem", and "Progress" present the same sensual image of the woman. Ezekiel finds the " Image of a female / Body nearly naked / On the beach, and bird-soft/ But blazing animal / Unhinging speech and bone " (" Beachscene" P.136). The obvious contrast between "bird/-soft" and "blazing animal" indicates her schizophrenic personality that has the propensity for destruction. Similarly, he views woman as a " Great woman - beast of sex " and as a whore in " Love Poem " and " Progress " respectively.

The two poems, "A Woman Observed" and "In India", further unveil the persona's feelings towards women. In the former Ezekiel feels depressed to see the pregnant woman's reaction to the nudes in the art gallery ; her denial of " the seed / and source" makes him sad. He, in fact, holds life superior to art. This perhaps is the reason that on seeing a woman he is fascinated by " all that sensual / movements bursting through the dress ". The other poem is a vignette about the sub-continent and its people. In the final section, the woman's aspirations for " The long evenings / In the large apartment / With cold beer and Western music..." leads to her deflowering by the English boss.

The poet's passion for animals finds expression in three poems : "Night of the Scorpion", "Visitor", and "Paradise Flycatcher ". In the first, Ezekiel exonerates the scorpion, though it has stung his mother, by passing the onus on to rain :

..... Ten hours  
of steady rain had driven him  
to crawl beneath a sack of rice. (P.130)



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The two verbs "driven " and " crawl " cogently bring out the helplessness of the scorpion. In the second, he shows his love for the paradise flycatcher — the one that is alive recalls to him the dead one which "lay with red and red upon its white/ Uncommon bird no longer, in the mud". In the third, however, the poet displays a conflicting attitude towards the crow whose presence and cawing " kill a little time of him ".

The period (1965-74), following Ezekiel's break with Writers Workshop, is held as the period of lull in his poetic creation. He, however, appears to maintain the same enthusiasm for sex, as noted in the preceding collections , in many of the poems. For instance, in poems such as, "Three Women", "Motives", " In Twenty-four lines ", "Haiku" and "Notes" he depicts woman as an object of sex. All the three women closely resemble each other :

Diss

O, III, I, N24.9  
M9

They all loved food  
 and loved to serve it,  
 particularly people  
 who dressed for the occasion  
 and undressed for it  
 in the room of time,  
 the strong, gentle  
 time of desire. ("Three Women", PP.150-51)

"Motives" reminds us of his candid treatment of sex. Unhesitatingly, he admits to the woman: "My motives are sexual, / aesthetic and friendly / in that order, adding up / to bed with you". Likewise, in "In Twenty-four Lines" he conveys his sexual motives overtly to the woman: "Desire was naked / in my glances, / it stripped her/of all pretence". Much more than all these poems, "Haiku" deals with the sexual appeal of a woman. Finally, in "Notes" he describes close physical contact, "arm in arm", with the woman.

In addition, the volume also contains his religious musings. The poem entitled "Lawn" is full of religious implications; its grass enacts the same "ritual of mortality" that human beings do. In the "Testament" he highlights the naked truth that everything on earth is ephemeral. He believes that faith is the only redeemer and resurrector in the poem "Process". In "Theological" Ezekiel foresees the inscrutability of the Lord; although he has "stripped off a

hundred veils/.. still there are more / that cover your (God's) Creation". He is rather restless and not at all happy with his achievements :

I am tired  
of irony and paradox  
of the bird in the hand  
and the two in the bush  
of poetry direct and oblique  
of statements plain or symbolic " (P.157)

A few poems of this period also witness Ezekiel's obsession with art and poetry. He discusses the humanising effect of art; " it's the art that finally / entrances reason / and makes us human " (" In the Theatre ", P-151).

While a few poems of this period record his quest for self, there are also some poems which record his concern for the common people. In "Transparently" the poet surprisingly discovers that none but he himself is responsible for his sad plight :

It's fanatastic  
what a slave  
a man can be  
who has nobody  
to oppress him  
except himself. (P.149)

In " Small Summit " he comes to realize that as a middle-aged person, only possible escape is to "refuse the company of priests/ professors, commentators, moralists ", and to be a guest in his own " one-man lunatic asylum ". Two of the poems, " Happening " and " The Truth About Dhanya ", show his concern for the suffering humanity, a note which gains strength later.

In Hymns in Darkness ( O. U. P., New Delhi, 1976) earlier themes reappear with an added emphasis ; his focus seems to have shifted from the quest of integration to an acceptance of the actualities and ordinariness of life.

The title poem " Hymns in Darkness " shows Ezekiel's old preoccupation with the sad plight of an urban man. These are not hymns celebrating the divine unknowable darkness — these are tough , wry , obliquely epigrammatic songs of the modern spirit unable to know any ultimate reality beyond the life it experiences :

All you have  
is the  
sense of reality,  
unfathomable  
as it yields its secrets  
slowly  
one  
by  
one.

(p. 225)

He is of the view that the urban man's effort " to manipulate the universe and all / its manifest power for his own advancement" are futile since he has essentially a "puny self". Further his looking "at the nakedness of truth / in the spirit of a Peeping Tom" brings forth his cowardice in facing the ultimate truth. Ironically, he does not know " Where is the fixed star of his seeking ? ". To an irreligious urban man he warns : "Belief will not save you/ nor unbelief ". The same theme runs through some other poems , viz. " Island " and " The Room " of this collection.

In spite of the religious overtones of the title itself woman's image " as sex object whore, seductress, unattached woman, passive woman, and as an enigma" surfaces again largely herein. Even the title poem projects a sensual picture of the fair-sex:

Don't she says, don't,  
conniving all the same.

Short of tearing her clothes  
he's using all his force,

Soon, he's had what he wanted,  
soft, warm, and round.

(P.221)

In " Background Casually " he depicts her as a seductress : " And then a woman came to tell / My willing ears I was the son / Of Man ". In "The Couple" he further reinforces the same sordid

image of a woman. The poet senses that not only he but also others are "trapped in the desire to see her naked" since she is "without a cage to her name", and "waiting for her / hawker or mill-worker, coolie or bird-man ("On the Ballasis Road" P. 188). He "cannot even say I (he) care(s) or do(es) not care / perhaps it is a kind of despair"; it evinces his ambivalence towards her. Miss Pushpa T.S. is an example of an unattached urban damsel in the poem "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.". The Poet has described the sexual repression of the Muslim girl who shows the obscene picture-book to the poet's daughter in "How the English Lessons Ended".

In "Poem of the Separation" Ezekiel describes the metamorphosis that had dawned upon him following his marriage; "my life had burst / and merged into yours. "Ten thousand miles away, / you (beloved) become a shower of letters", he grumbles, and further wistfully recalls "rough happiness you (she) lightly wear(s) / supported by your (her) shoulders / breasts and thighs" in order to satiate his carnal desires.

Finally, "Passion Poem" consisting of nine lyrics also highlights the complex image of woman. The persona views her from secular and religious, subjective and objective

points of view. In the opening lines : " You arrived / with sari clinging / to breasts and hips./ I put a kiss upon your lips/...." , of the first lyric " Monsoon ". Ezekiel compares "monsoon" with carnal love and thereby implies that just as the monsoon rains in India are essential for the preservation and continuity of life, so is " carnal love ". Contrary to this secular approach, the allusion to the love-play between Krishna and Radha, in "A Marriage" he introduces the religious aspect of love -- " Krishna's tricks / are not for him / nor Radha's wiles / for her. / They have a different truth / within a kingdom of their own ". He realizes the need to resolve the conflict between man and woman and so in the concluding lyric he implores:

All night I talked to you,  
 a troubled dream  
 of many words  
 and not a single kiss.  
 Let us not quarrel again,                    ("Quarrel" P.216)

The two poems, " Ganga " and " Tone Poems ", tell about the passive role of woman. Ganga accepts her menial status without complaint ; she gets stale food and clothes from her master as a recompense to her drudgery. He finds that the passivity is combined with a gentleness in the woman in " Tone Poem"; he describes her gentleness in the following lines : "Yours breasts are small / tender / like your feelings", and later in the lines "You are gentle, / your gestures / do not disturb / the air".



Herein, there are also a few poems in which Ezekiel has expressed his feelings towards art and poetry. For example in the poem "For Satish Gujral" he takes to task the artists who "Martyr meaning / in the flux / to lonely / and heated visions whoring / after truth". In another poem "Advice to a Painter" he satirises those artists who "By lots of paints ...../ Plan a trip abroad,..../ Plan the publicity." to grab international name and fame. He gives them a sound advice: "Be voracious with your (their) eyes and appetites :/ the will to see, the passion in the act of love".

Ezekiel's religious attitude surges in both "Tribute to the Upanishads" and "The Egotist's Prayers". In the former, he realizes the need to dig up "The secret locked within the seed". In the latter, he entreats God to kick him because "there is no other way / for me (him) to learn / your (His) simple truths". He firmly expresses his belief that "He is the Saviour, the Maker of this world".

In a good number of poems, Ezekiel also talks at great length about India which will be taken up in the next chapter. In fact, Indian themes figure largely in this volume. Thus, the volume contains all the major preoccupations that characterise his earlier publications along with his growing consciousness towards the country.

Ezekiel's widening of interests and themes is also evident in Latter-Day Psalms (O.U.P., Delhi, 1982). There is a distinct preference for the spiritual theme and exploration of the psycho-philosophic problems herein.

The title poem, "Latter-Day Psalms", is remarkably different from his own earlier poem "Psalm 150" and also other early religious poems. These psalms present him as an unorthodox but deeply religious man. Ezekiel's impatience with the older forms of belief is expressed in these and all these psalms are an answer to the psalms of The Old Testament :

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

(P.256)

As a matter of fact, in all these psalms the poet appears to lack the mood of trusting humility that characterises their Biblical counterparts. For instance, he pronounces that "The ungodly are in the same con- / dition, no more like the chaff / which the wind driveth away / than the godly". Contrary to "Psalm 23" of The Bible he does not believe that God is his shepherd and expresses his doubt : "Is the Lord my shepherd ?". Similarly, contrary to "Psalm 102" of The Bible he asserts that :

.... no labour is altogether  
 in vain  
 It is not vain to rise  
 up early ,  
 to sit up late,  
 to eat the bread of sorrow. (p. 260)

His tirade, nevertheless , is directed mainly towards the church and the psalmists rather than God. Believing in the superiority of God Ezekiel categorically says : " Salvation belongeth unto the / Lord. It is not through one or other church." He further says that the "Psalmist exaggerates" and falsifies the truth. His firm belief " To tempt God and seek to / prove him is sheer folly" brings forth his faith in the invincibility of God. He longs to make " a different noise with / Latter-Day Psalms" ; he perhaps wishes to portray an exact picture of God and religion.

At places Ezekiel seems to doubt God's munificence. This in fact, is the doubt of every modern man. His suspicion , however , is overpowered and subdued by his complete belief in God. He eulogises God ; " How excellent is thy name / and thy glory above the / heavens ". He entreats the Lord to "hear out of thy (His) holy/ hill . Save us(them) from ourselves". The paradox subtly reinforces the psychic breakdown of a modern man.

Furthermore , spirituality is also explicit in " Counsel " as well. To know one's self is a Christian theme. True to it, Ezekiel tries to grasp his own follies, observes silence, and keeps his mind steady to know his "self" . The concluding lines of the poem : "And bear your restlessness with grace" is full of religious overtones.

Ezekiel's bantering remarks about women are also to be found in some of the poems except the poem entitled "Minority Poem". In this particular poem he has portrayed woman as a mother figure, as in " Night of Scorpion ". The persona mentions Mother Teresa's altruistic services among the diseased and the poor in West Bengal. Herein, the persona identifies Teresa with the Virgin Mary : "..... her guests die visibly in her arms ". Nevertheless, by and large he views woman as an embodiment of sex in a good number of poems. In the poem "Hangover " he observes that the woman wear " see-through dress and show-nothing sari " for the erotic slaughter of the men. In "Jewish Wedding in Bombay " he holds the woman as an object of sex ; herein "..... she / kept saying let's do it darling / so we did it ". The poet's sexual image of the women culminates in "Nudes 1978". He boldly accepts that he is " given up , to nakedness , / a pleasure in itself, " and so their "limbs (are) intertwined " with each other. She not only incites but also instructs him as to how to perform the sexual act. Without a

trick of conscience she is " sure he (the poet) would be quite/ amused to know that I (she) / am (is) here with a stranger, / free, frank " ; this shows the breakdown of moral code. Most of the sonnets reiterate the poet's earlier belief : " Woman you are a great woman-beast".

In addition, in "Nude 1978" and in a few other poems he deals with the theme of, art and artists. In the former, the poet plays on the various distinctions between nudeness and nakedness. He appears to maintain that whereas nakedness is a state of being in which one is shorn of clothes, nudeness is a compliment to art. The question : who is a false poet ? is answered in "Warning -- Two Sonnet". Herein, Ezekiel says that the false poets are those "who cheat with words / instead of money". Such poets are " caught by critic-cops at dead of night ".

Like the earlier volume, this volume also captures a cross section of Indian urban life which will be dealt with separately in the following chapter.

Finally, Ezekiel's most Recent verse (1983-1988) is a mingled web of good and bad. Though there is widening of range and interests, there are frequent descents into banality and triviality as well. Why ? In the poem "Sub-conscious" while

pointing out the reasons he also conveys his earlier concern for poetry implicitly. His poetic faculty declines partly because he has "lost the art of listening" and partly because he has not turned for long to it. The personified Poem here declares :  
 " You do not love me any more / Unloved, I cannot stay alive ".  
 Thus, he has personified an abstraction to have a dialogue with it and comprehend its true nature in the true spirit of a philosopher.

Even in this last phase the sexual image of woman continues to haunt his poetic imagination. His obsession with the physical charm of women is explicit in the poem "Torso of a Woman". However great the image "torso of a woman" does not appeal to him. Being a realist he supports that "the woman Plainly needs / her common arms and leg". In the poem "Woman & Child" he speaks his understanding of a woman who like a child is often maltreated and victimised by indifferent males. In the fifth poem of "Ten Poems in the Great Anthology" he describes his sexual experience with her obliquely :

Bitten by bugs in her friendly bed,  
 He sent her the next morning  
 Instead of a bouquet of flowers  
 A packet of the New Tik --20. (p.275)

Still in another poem he depicts that she easily allowed him to

"touch her breasts" . He scorns the sexual restraints in the poem "Acceptance " . His sexual urge is so much powerful that he stares at the girl wearing " blue - yellow - green sari " who comes out "From the squalid / of a narrow lane leading to a slum " . ("Beauty and Povert " , "From Edinburg Interlude", p. 290 )

In the poem, " The Way it Went " he again comes out with his conflicting attitude towards the institution of marriage. Soon after the honeymoon he feels burdened to find himself " Daddy - O " and after some time "Grand papa " as well. The concluding lines : " O well I'll be damned / is all that I can say " , makes his stance clearer on this issue.

Ezekiel's love for the animal reappears in one of the recent poems " Death of a Hen " . Unlike the crows who caw " to celebrate the event " since chance has " offered them an early gift " the persona weeps to see the hen which has been " swept aside by a passing car " . The event triggers in his mind the complex philosophy of life and death :

..... why it(Fate) gives  
or takes away. (p. 288)

On the whole the poems of this period lack the thematic density of the poems of earlier anthologies. Notwithstanding, his concerns remain unchanged even at this juncture of his poetic journey.

The foregoing survey reveals that Ezekiel has all along been changing his attitudes, resulting in his conspicuous growth as a man and a poet. In his poetry, there is the truth of acknowledging what is felt and experienced in its complexity, contradiction, pleasures, fears and disillusionment in the language of everyday parlance without any preconceived idea of what poetry should say about the poet and life. Furthermore, even when he begins with concrete ontological realities in his poem he quite often orients himself towards the acme of abstraction and complexity. Nevertheless, almost all his major recurrent themes and preoccupations appear to have received ambivalent but highly realistic treatment in his poetry. For instance, in an early poem he has rebuffed sexual passion :

Debtors to the whore of love,  
Corrupted by the things imagined  
Through the winter nights, alone  
The flesh defiled by dreams of flesh,  
Rehearsed desire dead in spring,  
How shall we return ? (p. 3)

Diametrically opposite to it, in the latter poems he holds it as the fountain - spring of human blessedness. That perhaps is the reason that sex predominates in his poetic world. Further, surprisingly, the ambivalence is found to be not only confined to themes but is also extended to the manner of presentation. In other words, whereas in many poems such as "To a Certain Lady", "Two Nights



Of Love", " Nakedness I & II ", "Nudes 1978" etc. it is depicted overtly and candidly , in a few others, such as " An Affair ", "Failure" , "Lines" , "Progress", "Fruit" etc., it is treated covertly and symbolically. The same paradigm is observable in the handling of other themes -- marriage, animal's love , and religion as well. All this shows the poet's indefatigable fascination for treating the same themes at different conceptual levels to precipitate the true nature of the ultimate truth. His highly contemplative meditation and an ambivalence expressed in a casual and colloquial style may be underscored as his major marker as a poet.

Following Donald Davie's suggestions to the scholars of Commonwealth Poetry : " We must read these poems less for what they say than for how they use English to say it "<sup>18</sup>, we shall attempt to investigate and establish Ezekeil's stylistic identity in his use of some of the " Schemes ". Thus, the scope of this brief study, HOWNESS, is antithetic to the present obsession with "whatness"<sup>19</sup> prevalent among the majority of contemporary critics.

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18

Donald Davie, "Enjoy the African Night", review of Young Commonwealth Poets, ed. Peter Brent (London: William Heinemann, 1965) in the New Statesman, 10 December, 1965, pp. 934-36.

19

Emmanuel Narendra Lal, op. cit., p.15.

An exhaustive analysis of the language of Ezekiel's poetry is necessary for this study. To this end, we shall take recourse to systemic linguistics, inaugurated at the turn of the century by Malinowsky and further developed and refined by J. R. Firth and M. A. K. Halliday. To be more precise, Hallidian exegetical model, based on the basic tenets of systemic linguistics, which has yielded excellent results in interpreting many texts in the past will be obeyed. Having ascertained Ezekiel's predilection in Chapter I in the ensuing Chapter II his two-fold Indianness is probed. Chapter III is an in depth study of the syllabic, morphological and word structure of his lexis, its typology and its arrangement. Finally, the conclusion sums up Ezekiel's idiosyncratic stylistic features apart from examining the relevance of the methodology used in the exegesis of his verse.

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CHAPTER - 2  
THE BELATED INDIAN SELF

## CHAPTER-II

### THE BELATED INDIAN SELF

Nissim Ezekiel's verse seems to spring from the very soil of India ; his spirit, although it employs the English language as its vehicle , has no other tie with the West. What Edmund Gosse wished to receive from Sarojini Naidu "...was , not a rechauffee of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some penetrating analysis of native passion of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a <sup>1</sup> soul". Ezekiel, though not exhorted by any giant litterateur of his time, surprisingly in his verse, is found to unravel the heart of India. He too has expressed the same desire in one of his interviews : " I think inevitable it is so , or at any rate a general feeling that some Indian element in his poetry is essential to its authenticity. It is unlikely to ignore it completely and write as if he is from any other country. Subconsciously, something from his environment, from his readings, from his contacts with other Indians might enter his poetry and provide an Indian element ..... some Indian <sup>2</sup> connection strengthens the work's living presence." His poetry contains a rich wealth of information about India and its people, especially of urban background. Not for nothing Chetan Karnani asserts that " The typical strength of his poetry arises from the

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<sup>1</sup>  
Edmund Gosse, "Introduction", The Bird of Time, Sarojini Naidu (London: William Heinmann), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>  
N.D.Dani, "An Interview With Nissim Ezekiel" The Journal of Indian Writing In English, xiv,2(July86),119.

fact that he has his ideas firmly rooted in Indian soil." <sup>3</sup> In this chapter we shall highlight Ezekiel's distinctive imprint of Indianness often encountered in many of his later poems.

To begin with, there are two distinct but contrary strands easily indentifiable in Ezekiel's poetry. On the one hand, in a couple of poems his own commitments and devotion to the country are expressed. On the other hand, contrary to our expectations, its people, places, cities, religions, rituals and poverty are satirically poetized in a good number of poems. These two mutually contradicting strands at once bring out his ambivalent attitude which has already been found inherent in many of his themes in the preceding chapter itself. Ambivalently, he finds himself part of the scene which he neither loves nor hates.

To discuss the first strand, not many of his poems overtly register his profound infatuation for the Indian soil. His deep regard and love for the mother earth, however, is found expressed in unequivocal words even in some of his prose writings. For instance, in the following lines :

In the India which I have presumed to call mine,  
I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all  
the darkness Mr. Naipaul has discovered. I am not a  
Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider:  
circumstances and decisions relate me to India.  
In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am  
an Indian .4

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3

Chetan Karnani, Nissim Ezekiel (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974), p.139.

4

Nissim Ezekiel, "Naipaul's India and Mine", New Writing in India (London: Penguin, 1974), p.88.

taken from his reply to V.S. Naipul's An Area of Darkness (Andre Déutsch, 1964). The same fervour and enthusiasm for the country is to be noticed even in some of his poems as well. Its echo apparently reverberates in the following lines of his autobiographical poem "Background Casually":

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. ✓ (P.181)

How intimately and inseparably country's landscape has captured his vision is further explicit in the following lines of the same poem: "The Indian landscape sears my eyes / I have become a part of it". The similar stand is apparent in "Island" wherein he asserts :

I cannot leave the island,  
 I was born here and belong. (P.182)

Still further in "The Egotist Prayer, VII" the same commitment is reiterated with more vigour :

Confiscate my passport, Lord,  
 I don't want to go abroad.  
 Let me find my song  
 Where I belong. (P.213) ✓

An intense urge to know the country's "roots" through familiarizing himself with its various philosophical strands is evident in the following lines of "Family 4" (of "From Songs for Nandu Bhende"):

Time is ripe for Sai Baba.  
 Time is ripe for Muktananda,  
 Let father go to Rajneesh Ashram.  
 Let mother go to Gita class.  
 What we need is meditation.  
 Need to find our roots,.....✓ (P.243)

The same zeal can also be traced even in one of the recent poems entitled "from Edinbrugh Interlude, XXI". While roaming in Edinbrugh, Bombay's mangoes continue to haunt his imagination:

I have not come  
 to Edinbrugh  
 to remember  
 Bombay mangoes,  
 but I remember them.  
 even as I look  
 at the monument  
 to Sir Walter Scott,  
 or stroll along  
 in the Hermitage of Braid.

Perhaps it is not the mangoes  
 that my eyes and tongue long for,  
 but Bombay as the fruit  
 on which I've lived,  
 winning and losing  
 my little life. (P.293)✓

Herein, through the metaphor, "Bombay mangoes", Ezekiel has conveyed his intense love for the country; he has immortalised his native city as well. All these poems, thus, bring out his endless love and reverence for India. His nationalistic spirit runs through all these poems.

Ezekiel, however, has portrayed the panoramic picture of the Indian urban life much more than his love

and commitment to the country. His poetry is a vast gallery of portraits of various facets of India — its people, their beliefs and social condition, its urban centres and so on. We come across in his pages the railway clerk as in "The Railway Clerk", suffering men and children, as in "The Truth About the Floods", the waiting whore in "On the Bellasis Road". native Miss Pushpa in "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.", a monkey charmer in "Entertainment", the corrupt saint in "Guru", the inhibited but wayward Muslim girl in "How the English Lesson Ended", the suspected maid servant in "Ganga" and the common boy in "Truth About Dhanya". Beggars, saints, sadhus, healers, yogis, the urban girl, the English boss etc., all come to life in his pages. Thus, he has focussed mainly on the lower middle class.

A glance through Collected Poems 1952-1988 evinces that the Indian themes become more frequent only from The Exact Name (1965) onwards. In the early poems places such as London, Rome, Moscow, China, Gethesemene etc., and people such as Homer, Cain, Rimbaud, William Carlos Williams, Alexander etc. recur; his attention roams more abroad than in his own native country. During this early phase Indianness remains at the subdued level, exhibited meagrely. Contrary to it, in the later poems he talks more frequently about the places and people of the country itself. Explaining the cause of this shift in his



poetry Gieve Patel rightly observes that " The reiteration in poem after poem of the desire to break out of self-regarding loneliness ends in Ezekiel throwing himself into what's around him: India, Bombay more especially, the here and now. From The Exact Name (comprising poems 1960-64) onwards they are always present ".

In "Night of The Scorpion" Ezekiel celebrates the event of a scorpion biting which is quite common in mud-walled and thatched houses in Indian villages during rainy seasons. In this poem he expresses the typical Indian traditional popular Hindu - Buddhist folk belief pertaining to scorpion's biting apart from the other three views.<sup>6</sup> "The peasants" who "came like swarms of flies" represent this belief in the poem. Whilst they chit-chat about " the sum of evil / balanced in this unreal world / against the sum of good ", they raise fundamental questions regarding the very nature of Reality and the roles of good and evil in life—questions with which the six major systems of Hindu philosophy are basically concerned. The lines " May the sins of your previous birth / be burned away tonight, they said " allude to the doctrine of rebirth and 'karma' which is essentially part of Indian faith; and so is the belief expressed in " May the poison purify flesh / of desire, and your spirit of ambition ". And when they buzz " the name of God a hundred times / to paralyse the Evil one ", they express

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<sup>5</sup>  
Gieve Patel, "Introduction", Collected Poems 1952-1988 (Delhi:Oxf. Univ. Press, 1989), p.xx.

<sup>6</sup>  
M.K.Naik, Dimensions of Indian English Literature (Delhi:Serling Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1984), pp. 35-36.

their faith in its eminently practical aspect. However, when the peasants declare, "with every movement that the scorpion made / his poison moved in Mother's blood", they are certainly not the spokesmen of either Indian metaphysics or faith, for this is the voice of sheer popular superstition. But in a rustic mind metaphysics, faith and superstition together form a seamless whole, and secure in this well-integrated world-view, the peasants sit "around / on the floor with my mother in the centre / the peace of understanding on each face". Thus the rural Indian folk belief is convincingly enshrined in this poem.

" In India " Ezekiel sharply reacts to the social degradation and squalor of the country :

Always, in the sun's eye,  
 Here among the beggars,  
 Hawkers pavement sleepers,  
 Hutment dwellers, slums,  
 Dead souls of men and gods,  
 Burnt-out mothers, frightened  
 Virgins, wasted child  
 And tortured animal,  
 Suffering the place and time.

(P/131)

In other sections of the poem he gives a graphic account of the low status of Indian women, " who sit about and do not drink ". Flirtation is allowed to men but not to women, who are more often than not, the passive victims of male lust. East-West tensions — the conflict of the two cultures — is also brought out by the

episode in which the English boss tries to seduce his Indian secretary. Further, the follies and the foibles of all the major three religions — Hinduism, Islam and Christianity— are also depicted in the following lines of the same poem :

The Roman Catholic Goan boys  
 Confessed their solitary joys  
 Confessed their games whith high-heeled toys  
 And hastened to the prayers.

The Anglo - Indian gentlemen  
 Drank whisky in some Jewish den  
 With Muslims slowly creeping in  
 Before or after prayers.

(P.132)

The lines underscores his secular bent of mind; to him all the religions are equal. He has secularly taken Hinduism to task in " Background Casually ".

The doctrine of Indian hotels and restaurants and the infected food that is served over there to the customers is highlighted in " Irani Restaurant ".

Ezekiel is a very Indian poet is evident from the way he has described a flood in Bihar. Though the subject is occasional, the treatment is universal in its evocation of the pangs of human suffering. In the opening lines, the poet creates the atmosphere of the flood-stricken areas :

For a visitor  
 to the flood - affected areas  
 of Balasore, Mayurbhanj and Cuttack  
 in North Bihar and Orissa,  
 it is a job to get at the truth.  
 Meet any official,  
 he will claim his district,  
 sub-division or block  
 is the 'worst hit',  
 and pass on a hand - out  
 with statistics of relief -work. (P.185-86)

In this way, he creates the authentic atmosphere of paddy fields with knee-deep water, and states how "all the houses had collapsed". But there is apathy and indifference among government officials. The villagers would not talk to the reporter because they mistook him for Government official. There is suspicion and distrust. Ironically, the relief work is organised by students who come with their two-in-one and Hindi pop film-songs. Ezekiel's pen evokes a grim picture of the poverty of the country in the following lines :

The villagers ran to them.  
 They slapped their bellies  
 and whined,  
 "I have not eaten for three days,"  
 "My husband has been washed away."  
 "My parents have abandoned me,"  
 "My son is dying,"  
 "I cannot find my daughter." (P.187)

But to all this poverty, there are only excuses and evasions; the entire blame is placed on Nature. These lines bear witness to Indian fatalism realistically.

Ezekiel's intimate knowledge of the Indian experience is evident in the poem entitled "Entertainment". Monkey show is a very common sight in Indian bazars. The following lines describe one such typical gathering :

The monkey - show is on :  
patient girl on haunches  
holds the strings,  
a baby in her arms.  
Two tiny monkeys  
in red and purple pantaloons  
prepare to dance.  
Crowd collects,  
forms a circle.  
Naked to the waist,  
the Master of ceremonies  
drums fenzy, cracks whip,.....

x            x            x            x            x            x            x

Children laugh, the untouchable women  
smooth stheir hair. A coolie  
grins at me ..... (P.193)

In the concluding lines he records the social psychology :

Anticipating time for payment  
the crowd dissolves.  
Some in , shame, part  
with the smallest coin they have (P.194)

Thus the " Masters of the Ceremonies " are made to suffer and groan under monetary crisis.

Ezekiel has got the power to perceive the pain and the pathos of the middle class Indians. For instance, in "The Railway Clerk" he dwells on his poverty :

Every day there is no much work  
and I don't get overtime  
My wife is always asking for money.  
Money, money, where to get money ?  
My job is such, no one is giving bribe,  
while other clerks are in fortunate position,  
and no promotion even because I am not graduate. (P.184)

Herein the poet records the rampant bribery which has become the go of the time in all the govt.offices. Further, nowadays many people <sup>are</sup> suffering from the anglophilia of going abroad; this is also voiced herein. Most of his friends can go abroad but he cannot because:

My wife's mother is confined to bed  
and I am only support. (p.185)

The poet and the journalist, like the railway clerk, also wish to fly abroad in search of a fortune :

I tell you, we should have left  
this country twenty years ago.  
Now it is too late. There is no future for us.  
(" Occasion " P.277)

The poverty of the toiling "South-Indian-middle-aged balding man" brings to them the above realization.

R.K. Narayan takes to task all types of charlatans, quacks and tricksters in many of his novels. He, nevertheless, also justifies their presence on account of certain social need they fulfil. They all represent the age - old tradition and belief. But Ezekiel differs in this and casts aspersions on them. "Guru" is a fine example in this regard. The poet recognises the fact that the modern Indian society is built upon fraudulent ways, and the recognition especially arises when he takes a close look at the world around him and his immediate surroundings. It is once again an affirmation of inseparability from one's ethos, one's surroundings. This leads to moralising as well. When the poet describes the guru he also exposes his vices and hypocrisy :

..... the saint is still a faithless friend,  
 Obstinate in argument,  
 ungrateful for favours done  
 hard with servants and the poor,  
 discourteous to disciples, especially men,  
 condescending, even rude  
 to visitors ( except the foreigners)  
 and over - scrupulous in checking  
 the accounts of the ashram.  
 He is also rather fat. (P. 192)

From the foregoing discussion it can be safely inferred that Ezekiel's sensibility is typically Indian; without it he would not be able to capture such a realistic picture of Indian society in his verse. He has reacted with great sensitivity and compassion to the evils of the country.

Ezekiel's Indianness is two fold in some of his later poems in the sense that not only the contents but even the language of these later poems are typically Indian. The linguistic features, in fact, have added force to Indianness since they represent his deeper understanding of the Indian society. Indian English has certain features of its own on account of which it has been given various labels viz., 'pidgin English', 'Babu English' and 'Bazar English'; it has often been looked down upon as a sub - standard variety of English. Remarkably, in over half a dozen poems Ezekiel has performed interesting experiments with this 'sub-standard' variety of English. Not many poets have dared to exploit it for composing poems. R. Parthasarathy rightly observes "After Furtado, Ezekiel is the only poet to have seriously considered the use of pidgin English, notable in poems like "A very Indian Poem in English", " Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.", and " The Professor <sup>7</sup>". Kamla Das too has, of late, begun to use it in her verse. In these poems Nissim Ezekiel has reproduced the idiolectal features of English used by the Gujarati speakers. Some of these features however, for example, the use of present progressive tense for simple present tense, un-English collocations for lexical items, and literal translation of phrases and idioms etc. are pan-Indian features of English used in India. In his "Very Indian English Poems" all these Indian-English features are present in plenty.



Interestingly, these Indian-English traits are to be found only in his "The Very Indian English Poems". Of these, the employment of present continuous tense for the simple present is predominant. The following lines of " Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. " illustrates it :

Friends ,  
 Our dear sister  
 is departing for foreign  
 in two three days,  
 and  
 we are meeting today  
 to wish her bon voyage.  
 Miss Pushpa is coming  
 from very high family. (P.190)

In the standard and normal use of English a Britisher would have definitely used simple tense in the above mentioned lines. As a matter of fact, use of present continuous tense is a predominant feature of Indian English. Apart from it the two phrases : "In two three days" and " coming / from very high family " are typically Indian. Such literal translation of phrases, idioms and un-English collocations of lexical items which abound in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan are explicit in the following lines of " Professor " :

If you are coming again this side by chance,  
 Visit please my humble residence also.  
 I am living just on opposite house's backside (P.239)

All these Indian-English features even appear in one of the recent " Very Indian English Poems " called " Soap ". In all these poems Ezekiel has even imitated the rhythm of the Indian languages. Furthermore, these linguistic features have also augmented the colloquial and conversational tinge of his poems to which he seems to have tended more in these later poems. In this regard Ezekiel closely resembles his African and West Indian counterparts. Bruce King rightly observes:

As most educated Indians have tried at speaking approved British English, there has been no attempt by poets to use local varieties in the way Nigerians and West Indian writers of serious literature mix dialects, patois or various shades of supposedly substandard English..... Ezekiel's poems might be seen as a step towards using local speech in serious verse.<sup>8</sup>

Lexical borrowing is another Indian - English feature which has been invariably used by many creative writers of the country. Like the linguistic features discussed above this also appears only in the later poems published after The Exact Name (1965). This feature, however, appears in only those later poems in which the above mentioned Indian-English features do not appear. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in one of his early poems, "The Crows" (Sixty poems, 1953), the lexis is drawn from French language and an attempt is made to

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Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English (Delhi:O.U.P.,1987),p.101.

create a multilingual poetry. Contrary to it, a small part of the lexicon of his later poems comprises of words taken from various Indian languages, especially from Sanskrit and Hindi. These words have further imparted his later poems a halo of Indianness. The examples of such lexical borrowing are too numerous to be enumerated. Nonetheless, we will cite a few. The Word 'Guru' (P.191) is used as the title of one of his poems. Further, in the same poem the word 'ashram' (P.191) also appears. The Muslim girl wears 'burkha'; (P.200) in a poem entitled "How the English Lesson Ended". In the Poem "Rural Suite" there is a mention of 'bhikshuks' (P.197) and in "Ganga" the common nouns 'chapati' (P.202) and 'pan' (P.202) occur. In one of the recent poems, "From Edinbrugh Interludes", the common nouns 'pundit' (P.290) and 'Maharaja' (P.290) are found. Except 'burkha' which is a Persian word the rest are taken from Sanskrit. All such words have become inseparably assimilated into Indian linguistic culture. Ezekiel's greater use of Sanskrit lexis may have some significance. Furthermore, his later poems also contain proper nouns of Indian places and persons, such as 'Bombay', 'Bihar', 'Orissa', 'Dhanya', 'Ganga', etc. This further contributes to the overall Indian atmosphere of his poetry.

To sum up, it is crystal clear from the preceding discussion of Ezekiel's verse that his Indianness is a

belated phenomenon. To put it in other words, Indianness manifests itself only in the poems composed from 1965 onwards till the date. Bruce King not only attested this fact but also explains the cause of this shift in the following lines :

Ezekiel's focus had shifted from the quest for integration to an acceptance of the actualities and ordinariness of life. The senses, survival, even worldly prize become worthy of attention. The task was now to describe the real and this led him to a greater use of Indian subject matter. 9

In his verse he primarily depicts the predicament of lower and middle class urban people of the country. He has dealt more with the economic, religious, and the family aspects of the society than that of its political and judicial institutions. All this appears to be in accordance with Gosse's cherished desire (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). His Indianness, however, is two-fold; it has exhibited itself in both thematic and stylistic realms. As regards the latter we have already observed that it has some distinctive Indian elements which contradict Rahman's assertion:

The controversy raging in many corners regarding the use of essentially Indian English, quite distinct from the British or American English, seems to be a futile one. There is nothing like Indian English. 10

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Bruce King, op. cit., p.101.

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Anisur Rahman, Form And Value in Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel (New Delhi: Abhinav Pub., 1981), pp. 76-77.

Our analysis and report of Ezekiel's poetry clearly points to the vibrant existence of Indian English. Ezekiel's Indianness, however, much more than that of language, is Indianness of thought, feeling, and imagery, much more intrinsic than in the works of any other Indian-English poet.

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CHAPTER - 3  
FROM TRADITION TO FREEDOM:METRE

## CHAPTER - III

### FROM TRADITION TO FREEDOM : METRE

To separate form or technique from Ezekiel's poetic content is a simplistic division, but it helps as a useful starting point. In the modern times when the thick clouds of formlessness have rather darkened the world English poetry in general and Indian-English poetry in particular, he displays enviable command not only over the precise and everyday vocabulary and syntax but also over the handling of both traditional and free verse metres, various rhyming patterns, stanzas, and devices such as alliteration etc. The conventional metre along with rhyming, the two indispensable components of his early poetry, substantially contribute to the overall musical charm of his poetry besides serving as one of the primary correlatives of meaning. Similarly, free verse does the same function in this later poetic phase. This relationship between various metres and meaning remarkably characterises his verse. Further, while reinforcing the meaning, metre also establishes some sort of "distance" between poet and

subject and reader by interposing a film of unaccustomed rhythmic ritual between the observer and the experience. In fact, both traditional and free verse metres are the primary techniques of the artifice in his poetry.

Though Ezekiel has an endless fascination with the sonic potential, Nissim Ezekiel has also used graphic potential, albeit sparingly, throughout his poetic career. It is to be noted that in his early poetry, i.e. up to The Exact Name (1965), he adheres to the classical practice of the use of capital letters initially in every poetic line except a few of the prose poems, viz. "Cain", "Reading", "Declaration" and so forth. He does not, however, stick to the same practice in his later poetry. From The Exact Name (1965) onwards in all free verse poems he has used capitalization to mark off semantic units at the level of sentences rather than poetic lines. The following lines of "The Night Of Scorpion" and "Tone Poem", which belongs to later phase and cited below to exemplify this fact

- (1) I remember the night my mother  
 was stung by a scorpion. Ten  
 hours of steady rain had driven him  
 to crawl beneath a sack of rice.  
 Parting with his poison —  
 flash of diabolic tail in the dark  
 room — he risked the rain again.  
 The peasants came like swarms of flies

(P . 130)



(2) Your breast are small  
 tender  
 like your feelings.

This is poet's world ;  
 your love  
 the pooh in me  
 and in others.

You smile  
 at dirty jokes.

(p. 203)

That capital letters occur initially only in the initial words of every sentence and not in every poetic line, is evident in the above example. Thus, he has endowed capitalisation with a distinctive semantic role. In fact the use of capital letters in the first word of sentences of the poems written in free verse is to be found in some of the early free verse poems as well. He, however, follows this norm consistently from The Exact Name (1965) onwards till the date demarcating two distinct halves, the early and the latter, in his poetry. Surprisingly, in the later discussion in the same chapter it is to be noted that these two distinct practices pertaining to the use of capital letters go hand in hand with two distinct metres ( conventional and free verse metres ) used in the two distinct phases. Apart from this, in some of the poems capitalisation is also used to express emphasis. Further, in a few

poems ,for example "Something to Pursue ", and "A Time to Change" even the topographic devices are used ; the subtle changes in the tone and temper of the central motifs in of these poems is expressed through corresponding topographic changes .

Undoubtedly, Nissim Ezekiel is a poet of sonic potential . He has composed his poems for public recitation ; he has been reciting his poems in India and abroad as well. Unlike many of the contemporary poets and critics with their ears trained to listen only to the printed page , or at best to the cassettes of poems , his keen ears seem to be trained to discern as well as convey the subtlest nuances of meaning using this particular resource. There is a perfect harmony between the content and the rhythm, the inner and the outer music in his verse. Both the traditional verse form , the strict regular type dominating the English poetry from Renaissance down to the turn of the present century , and free verse form, a predominantly modern phenomenon, have been used with a certain confidence and a degree of success. In fact, these two distinct verse forms not only characterise but also demarcate two distinct phases : (1) the early phase extending upto 1965 i.e till the publication of The Exact Name (1965), (2) the later phase beginning from The Exact Name (1965) itself. Whereas, the former characterises his early poetry the latter characterises his later poetry. Although both the metres appear in some of the earlier volumes in The Exact Name

(1965) they appear in the perfect balance marking it as the phase of transition in Ezekiel's poetic career. He is a versifier par excellence and his poetry shows considerable mastery of poetic craftsmanship, especially metrical harmony. His idiosyncratic metrical pattern has served as a model for many contemporary Indian-English poets who are incurably infected by the canker of present day formlessness.

The lyric impulse frozen  
What is the poet but a bore ? (p. 70)

asserts Nissim Ezekiel in "The Stuffed Owl", one of the earliest poem written during 1950 - 51. While as a tyro during 1948 - 51, free verse figures largely in his poetry. Out of the nine poems of the first phase (1945-48) only in two poems, "Heart - hardening" and "Report", he has used iambic bi- and trimetre respectively. The rhyme scheme and the stanzaic patterns of these poems are simple. In another set of poems composed during (1950-51) the same simple, metre i.e di-iambic, appears in "I Wore a Mask" and "I Told the Thames" and triambic in "Tribute". All these three poems, however, share the same simple rhyme scheme. In a sonnet, "Psalm 151", of second set he has used trochaic tetrametre. Its complex rhyme scheme, ababbcbcdedefgfg, foreshadows the ensuing complex rhyming of the subsequent collections. On the whole,

traditional verse forms, which culminates<sup>later</sup> in The Unfinished Man (1960), lack the suppleness and cadence in the earliest poems on account of the absence of metrical regularity and modulation. Subsequently, the rhythm appears laboured and halting and monotonous. The same is the case with 'prose rhythm' of prose poems viz., "Cane", "Creations", "First Theme and Variations", and "Second Theme of Variations".

Ezekiel's longing for "a singing voice and a talking voice" continues in "A Time to Change" (1952). Almost all the poems of this volume are crafted carefully so much so that it appears as a foil to the formlessness and rhythmlessness which has spoiled much of Indian 'modernist' poetry. Adil Jussawala says that Mr. Ezekiel is perhaps the first Indian poet to consistently show Indian readers that craftsmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter. Compared to the early two sets of the poem the present collection witnesses greater and restrained use of conventional metre. Table 1 (page, 62) shows this. In this volume Ezekiel uses iambic pentameter and tetrameter with considerable flexibility. A change in tone is followed by a corresponding modulation in metre. For instance, in "Robert" trochaic metre is employed in the line (5) to impart a conversational tint to its import. The simple alternate rhyme, abab, appears in all the poems except "An Affair" which contains an enclosing rhyme, abab. Herein, rhyming is functional rather than mere ornamental.

TABLE 1  
A TIME TO CHANGE (1952)

SL.NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	METRE	RHYME SCHEME
1	Robert	Iambic Pentametre	ab ab
2	An Affair	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ba
3	History	Iambic Pentametre	ab ab
4	The Old Woman	Iambic Pentametre	--
5	Failure	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab
6	Year's End	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab
7	Planning	Iambic Pentametre	ab ab

Besides the conventional metre the volume also exhibits Ezekiel's mature handling of the free verse as well. The most captivating is the rhythmic skill in many of the poems composed in free verse. The strong, supple, and flowing rhythm, for example is to be found in "The Double Horror":

Corrupted by the world I must infect the world  
 With my corruptin. This double horror holds me  
 Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake, denounced  
 Only by myself, to others harmless, hero  
 Sage, poet, conversationalist, connoisseur  
 Of coffee, guide to modern Indian Art  
 Or Greek antiquities. Only being what I am  
 Hurts, and hurts the world although it does not know.  
 (p. 8)

"To a Certain Lady", a poem on the marriage theme, is technically adventurous, though not completely successful. The free verse has imparted naturalness to its basic conversational tone: "At first you hesitated, in your white blouse....". The rhythm, however, becomes more insistent:

Drop your fear and come with me,  
 The best defence in love is just defencelessness.  
 (p. 27)

The strong iambic beat of the line is very skilfully managed, suggesting the invitation is to a formal dance. The fourth section which introduces the quarrel is technically the most interesting part of the poem:

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N. P. Acharya, "Achievement and Failure in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry", The Journal of Indian Writing in English, XIV, 2 (July 1986), 76.

Lady, don't nag.  
 If you want that expensive lipstick  
 Buy it, for God's sake - not mine -  
 I mean, really, why should I approve of it ?  
 And that goes for dresses, hats, shoes,  
 Slips, knickers and brassiers.....  
 (p. 29)

The wobbly rhythm imitates the gushing forth of anger of a man. Perhaps Ezekiel got the idea of the structure of this poem from music in which discords are often employed but are finally resolved. The fourth section of the poem is a discord both thematically and metrically. In the fifth and the final section the discord is resolved; the quarrel is over, the rhythm becomes smooth again. And the poem, unlike Ezekiel's later marriage poems, ends on an optimistic note. And the final prayer -- perhaps because the idea of the structure of the poem has come from music -- mentions music :

Teach us, Love, above all things, fidelity  
 to music.....  
 (p. 30)

Significantly, some of the more fascinating and arresting free verses in the volume deal with poetry. In this volume also he tries his hand at prose rhythm in a few poems, such as "Preferences", "Reading", etc. but again without much success.

In his new poems in the collection "Sixty Poems" (1953), Ezekiel tends towards greater and also

perfect traditional rhythm to impart his verse a thrilling lyricism. The new poems contain a couple of interesting experiments. The poems " For William Carlos Williams " shows how well and sensitively he can copy a poet with whom he has nothing in common. "I do not want/ to write/ poetry like yours", he says right at the onset, and then goes on to describe the experience of reading a Williams's poem using the characteristic free verse of that poet :

I feel the flesh  
Of the poem  
Firm  
And the bone hard .

It comes to me.  
Beloved poem,  
I love it  
And then I let it go.

(p. 46)

However, in over fifty per cent of the total poems of this volume he uses conventional metre and rhyming is evident in the Table 2 (page, 66 ). The greater use of conventional metre is followed by the greater complexity of rhyme and stanzaic pattern. There is also greater metrical regularity and modulation as well. For instance, in line(13) of " The Crows " there is switch over to trochaic metre to add colloquial elements to the poem. Similarly, in "Song" trochaic metre in line(16) adds and naturalness to the persona's sincere implorings. It is but natural, however that free verse does not prosper in this volume perhaps because of his preoc-



**TABLE 2**  
**SIXTY POEMS (1953)**

SL.NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	METRE	RHYME SCHEME
1	The Stone	Iambic Pentametre	aab aba a
2	The Crows	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab cc
3	Song	Iambic Tetrametre	ab acc
4	Situation	Iambic Pentametre	aab bc eddcei; aabbcc
5	Lines	Iambic Tetrametre	-
6	A Visitor	Iambic Pentametre	abab
7	Marriage Poem	Iambic Tetrametre Iambic Trimetre	ab cb ab
8	Boss	Iambic Tetrametre	-
9	Two Nights of Love	Iambic Tetrametre	-
10	A Poem of Blindness	Iambic Pentametre Iambic Trimetre	ab ab cca

cupation with conventional verse. Like the preceding volume the prose poems, which ceases to appear further, remains immature considerably lacking in poetic force.

The Third (1958) shares many of the features of the preceding collection Sixty Poems. A comparison between the Table 3 (page, 68) and the preceding Table 2 illustrates that Ezekiel's mixes metres more in this volume than the earlier volume. For instance, in the poem "Insight" and "Song of Desolation" he has mixed iambic tetra and trimetre. In "At Party" iambic pentametre is mixed with iambic trimetre. He, in fact seems to create a rhythmic pattern which is closer to everyday rhythm. This perhaps is the reason that many of the poems are shorn of rhyming.

Free verse appears scantily and often lapses into discursiveness for example, in "For Her" and "The Cur" leaving behind its natural suppleness. By and large, the verse of the volume is halting and rhythmically insensitive to a degree in common with his contemporaries and successors as well.

The Unfinished Man (1960), though the smallest among all his poetic anthologies, is "the most perfect books of poems written by an Indian in English..... Ezekiel at his most

TABLE 3  
THE THIRD (1958 )

SL. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	METRE	RHYME SCHEME
1	Portrait	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab
2	Division	Iambic Tetrametre	abcdbd
3	Admission	Iambic Pentametre	ab ab
4	Paeon	Iambic Pentametre	-
5	Tonight	Iambic Tetrametre	-
6	In The Queue	Iambic Tetrametre	aa bb cc dd; ee ff gg hh
7	At Party	Iambic Pentametre Iambic Tetrametre Iambic Trimeter	ab bc ac
8	Two Adolescents	Iambic Tetrametre	aa bb cc dd ee; ff gg hh ii
9	Encounter	Iambic Tetrametre Iambic dimetre	six lines of stanza rhyme with the lines of another
10	Insight	Iambic Tetrametre Iambic Trimeter	ab ab
11	Song of Declaration	Iambic Tetrametre Iambic Trimeter	ab ab
12	Sparrow	Iambic Tetrametre	-
13	Sonnet	Iambic Pentametre	-
14	Situation	Iambic Pentametre	ab ab
15	For Love's Record	Iambic Pentametre	-
16	Road Repair	Iambic Pentametre	-
17	December '58	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab

honest and the lyrical best"<sup>2</sup>. Similarly , Chetan Karnari is also of the view that " All poems in this collection carry the mind away in one sweep with a sense of musical delight. The musical,metrical<sup>3</sup> line used in all the poems tends to create a somnolent effect." The fact that Ezekiel has brilliant mastery over traditional prosody is evident in all the poems of this collection. It also brings out his concern for lyricism in his verse. Like the Augustan bards, he has a drive towards conformity and regularity in metrical composition. This is clear from Table 4 (page,70 ).

Traditional iambic metres, rhyme scheme, and the regular stanza is perfected and used with dexterity and competence in this volume. It is, therefore, rather difficult to agree with Christopher Wiseman's contention that Ezekiel " is rarely completely comfortable with regular metre and rhyme and uses it too rigidly and inflexibly, often allowing it to dominate and distort his content". His further observation that Ezekiel's voice "once liberated from formal shackles, has<sup>4</sup> continued to strengthen and deepen" is not pertinent. Wiseman also

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<sup>2</sup>  
Adil Jussawalla, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, V(July 1968), 69.

<sup>3</sup>  
Chetan Karnani, Nissim Ezekiel (Delhi: Arnold Heninmann Pub. Pvt. Ltd.. 1974), p.56.

<sup>4</sup>  
Christopher Wiseman, " The Development of Technique in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel ", Journal of South Asian Lit., XI, 3-4(Spring Summer 1976),251.

**TABLE 4**  
**THE UNFINISHED MAN (1960)**

SL. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	METRE	RHYME SCHEME
1	Urban	Iambic Tetrametre	abc abc
2	Enterprise	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab a
3	A Morning Walk	Iambic Tetrametre	abc abc a
4	Love Sonnet	Iambic Pentametre	abbabcdcd;ababca
5	Commitment	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab
6	Morning Prayer	Iambic Trimetre	ab ab
7	Event	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab
8	Marriage	Iambic Tetrametre	aa bb
9	Case Study	Iambic Pentametre	ab aa bb
10	Jamini Roy	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab

finds the sound patterns in this volume "astoundingly rigid". He complains that there are "very few foot-substitution — even of the common trochee and anapest " to vary" the heavy iambic impulse". Further he adds: "When one compares these poems with the metrical poetry, say, of Philip Larkin or Auden, it is clear that Ezekiel is just not using the regular forms with any degree of subtlety or variety; that the forms are, in fact, constricting and limiting the content, not energizing it ; that they are being applied mechanically....."<sup>5</sup>

A close analysis of the poems contradicts Wiseman's contentions. In the strict metrical regularity, the poems resemble the seventeenth and the eighteenth century English verse. However, monotony is not there, for there are ample modulations to suit the changing tones of the poems. At times, he has achieved complete freedom of speech even while using a rigid metrical form. "Case Study", a poem dealing with fiasco of a man, illustrates it. The poem is in iambic pentametre and a six-lines stanza form with the difficult rhyme scheme of abaabb. Unlike the off-rhymes of Yeats's later poems, these rhymes are full rhymes. That this has not hampered the colloquial vigour and conversational tone is evident in the very first line: "Whatever he had done was not quite right". The metrical scansion of the first stanza of the poem given —

- 1)        x / x / x / x / x /  
 His marriage was the worst mistake off all.
- 2)        x / x / x / x / x /  
 Although he loved his children when they came,
- 3)        x / x / x / x / x /  
 He spoilt them too whith just that extra doll,
- 4)        x / x / x / x x x /  
 Or discipline which drove them to the wall.
- 5)        x / x / x / x / x /  
 His wife and changing servants did the same —
- 6)        x / x / x / x / x /  
 A man is damned in that domestic game.

(p. 125)

reveals his masterly versification ; sound echoing sense, the stresses naturally falling on the right syllables. The rhythm is both strong and subtle , regular but rigid. The scansion of the two lines (3,4) that come in the middle of the stanza shows just now discussed in the preceding stanza, shows that the first line is regular iambic pentametre but the second has only three stresses, the line consisting of three iambic feet separated by two pyrrhic feet. This gives the stressed syllable unusual weight and that in turn augments the alliterative effect in " Or discipline that drove them .... ", specially because even the earlier stressed word, "doll", is alliterative. Thus the rhythm reinforces the meaning here and makes us feel the children's strong reaction to the father's alternation of "doll", or "discipline".

The rigid and the inflexible use of metre at times is not without justification. For instance , in

" A Morning Walk " the rigid metre with its complex rhyme scheme abcabca is quite appropriate to the constricting , claustrophobic life the poem describes. Here is Ezekiel's powerful description of the city of Bombay :

x / x / x / x /  
 Barbaric city sick with slums,  
 x / x / x / x /  
 Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,  
 x / x / x / x /  
 Its hawkers, beggars, iron - lunged,  
 x / x / x / x /  
 Processions led by frantic drums,  
 x / x / x / x /  
 A million purgatorial lanes,  
 x / x / x / x /  
 And child - like masses , many-tongued,  
 x / x / x / x /  
 Whose wages are in words and crumbs.  
 (p. 119)

The power of these lines owes not a little to the inflexible regularity of the metre. The total absence of foot-substitutions, the heavy iambic pulse and the mechanical movement are all deliberate ; and used very effectively indeed.

Similarly, iambic tetremetre in the first three stanza with just a few variations in "Marriage" further illustrates this point. The protagonist's mental state during the happy days soon after marriage is described in the third stanza. The regular cadence and the archaic image create a dream-world of almost pre-lapsarian innocence.



X / X / X / X /  
 I went through this , believing all,  
 X / X / X / X /  
 Our love denied the Primal Fall,  
 / X X / X / X /  
 Wordless we walked among the trees,  
 X / X / X / X /  
 And felt immortal as the breeze.  
 (p. 124 )

In the next stanza the shattered metres follows his shattered dreams :

X / X / X / X /  
 However many times we came  
 X / X / X / X X /  
 Apart , we came together. The same  
 X / X X / X X /  
 Thing over and over again.  
 X / X X / X /  
 Then suddenly the mark of Cain  
 X / X / X / X /  
 Began to show on her and me.  
 (p. 124)

Herein, the rhythm is jerky, the sentence structure works against the metre, and the last sentence spills over to the next stanza. After the regular smooth versification of the earlier stanzas ,<sup>7</sup> this very effectively enacts the breakdown of the marriage. "Enterprise" is also worth mentioning. The dactylic feet at the beginning of the epigrammatic inference not only reinforces the maxim but also imparts it a conversational flavour easily doing away the monotony of iambic tetrametre of the poem. All this go to establish him as one of the masters of conventional metre. Though the thudding regularity of iambic metre is widespread in the anthology, it does not diminish the flow of rhythm.

<sup>7</sup> N. P. Acharya, op. cit., 84.

The volume appears at such a critical juncture when the critics had begun to suspect the metrical mettle of Indian-English poets. Bose, for example, at this time is critical of the lack of metrical potential of most of the Indian-English poets and finds it difficult to visualise how the Indian-English poets

can develop as poets in a language which they have learnt from books and seldom hear spoken in the streets or even in their homes, and whose two great sources lie beyond the seven seas. A poet must have the right to change and recreate language, and this no foreigner can even acquire. As late as 1937, Yeats reminded Indian writers that 'no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue': to the great majority of Indians this admonition was unnecessary, but the intrepid few who left it unheeded do not realize that 'Indo-Anglian' poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere.<sup>8</sup>

Ezekiel's verse proves that his is not learnt merely from books but has rather been heard, spoken as it is in the streets of Bombay or in his home (too intimately, perhaps to be used as it is in poetry). Not for nothing R. Parthasarathy asserts: "Apart from Ezekiel, the poets have little or no use for traditional English prosody, though five of them have had formal training in English literature".<sup>9</sup>

8

B. Bose, "Indian poetry in English", The Concise Encyclopaedia of English and American Poets and Poetry (ed.) Spender and Hall (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p.143.

9

R. Parthasarathy, "Introduction" Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (Delhi: Oxf. Univ. Press, 76), p.10.

The Exact Name (1965) after The Unfinished Man(1960) appears as an anti-climax. His endeavour to name the essence of the things seems to go hand in hand with his endeavour to perfect free verse as well. On the whole , in this volume also his obsession continues for the conventional metre. Table 5 (page,77) evinces this truth.

" Paradise Flycatcher " is a beautifully modulated poem, "Virginal" is a fine sonnet, tender and touching, completely free from that irony which is Ezekiel's defensive shield against sentimentalism. "Poetry Reading" is good, while " Perspective " is a masterpiece. These poems also prove that regular metre are not constricting and rhyming is both simple and complex as well. The poems are all marvellously crafted.

" Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher ", a wonderfully orchestrated poem, is considered one of his finest poems. Ezekiel has brought together in the poem his two pet themes, poetry and love, alongwith his nascent enthusiasm for animals expressed herein through a bird. Its tone becomes impassioned and exultant as the feelling rises to a crescendo . The two poems, "Progress" and "Fruit" present woman as an object of sex. In the former there is an irony in the title and in the use of words like

**TABLE 5**  
**THE EXACT NAME ( 1965 )**

SL. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	METRE	RHYME SCHEME
1	Philosophy	Iambic Pentametre	aa bb a
2	In India II	Iambic Tetrametre	aaab
3	Perspective	Iambic Pentametre	ab ab cd cd
4	Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher	Iambic Pentametre	abba acd cdd
5	Poetry Reading	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab
6	Beach Scene	Iambic Trimetre	-
7	The Visitor	Iambic Trimetre + Iambic Tetrametre	-
8	Virginal	Iambic Pentametre	-
9	Paradise - Flycatcher	Iambic Tetrametre	-
10	Love Poem	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ba
11	Fruit	Iambic Tetrametre	abba cd cdd
12	Platonic	Iambic Tetrametre	....aa
13	Art Lecture	Iambic Tetrametre	ab ab

"upgraded" and "wise". The poem is a poignant comment on the human condition where "to progress", "to become wise" is to fall off from "high - minded" ideals. The taut rhythm, the movement, charges the words, particularly in the first stanza, with feeling and imparts the poem its poignancy and power. The latter is noteworthy for the use of false rhyme at the end which subtly conveys the deceptiveness of a woman.

The technical experiments of the volume begins with "Night of the Scorpion". The narration is colloquial in diction and tone, and it approaches the movement of free verse, but in spite of the numerous run-on lines and minimum of syntactic marks (punctuations) the formal rhetorical devices create a technical tension within the poem. The verse moves at a controlled pace and is faithful throughout to the rhythms of sophisticated urban middle class speech. Its flexibility is revealed in the lines(16 -31). Out of the total 48 lines, 15 are regular tetrameters and seven pentameters. The result is less than satisfactory, being too good for good natural free verse and too free for good formal verse. It is, however clear that Wiseman has a point to prove — viz. that "Night of the Scorpion" is a transitional poem, making the change from a closed to an open form in Ezekiel's poetic career. The demands on ingenuity made by

this type of traditional metrical mode are , of course, such as to ensure that it will not always be strictly adhered to in practice.

Ezekiel's poetry from Hymns in Darkness (1976) is composed in another rhythm ; in a rhythm which is closer to the natural human speech rhythm. This volume and all other subsequent volumes till date have continued to defy reader's expectations of the classical charm of his early verse to be found till The Exact Name (1965). Though a few poems, such as "A Subject of Change", "Background Casually", and "Mind" conventional metre is still used , by and large, from this volume onwards free verse figures largely in his poetry. Although he uses free verse in the later phase in common with many of his contemporaries, yet unlike them he does not write verseless poetry ; his free verse is also metrically structured. In his poetry one may say in Eliot's words, " there is no escape from metre ; there is only mastery" (Reflections On Verse Libre). The enormous range of expressions and varieties of the free verse in this collection to be found in two of the poems entitled "Entertainment" and " The Railway Clerk ". Herein we shall investigate and examine metrical complexity of the former to ascertain as to how conscientiously he uses this free metrical rubric in his recent poems.

- (1) The monkey - show is on:/^
- (2) patient girl on haunches
- (3) holds the strings,
- (4) a baby in her arm./^
- (5) Two tiny monkeys
- (6) in red and purple pantaloons
- (7) prepare to dance.
- (8) Crowd collects,/^
- (9) forms a circle./^
- (10) Naked to the waist,/^
- (11) the Master of Ceremonies
- (12) drums frenzy,/^ cracks whip,/^
- (13) calls the tricks/^
- (14) to earn applause and copper coins.
- (15) The circle thickens/^ as the plot thickens,/^
- (16) children laugh,/^ the untouchable women/^
- (17) smooth their hair./^ A coolie
- (18) grins at me,/^ his white teeth
- (19) gleams in the sunlight./^
- (20) Only the monkeys are sad,
- (21) and suddenly
- (22) the baby begins to cry.
- (23) Anticipating time for payment,
- (24) the crowd dissolves.
- (25) Some, in shame,/^ part
- (26) with the smallest coin they have./^
- (27) The show moves on.

Metrical Scansion

(1.1)	X	(4)	(1)	(PAUSE)				
(1.2)		(2)	(2)	(2)				
(1.3)		(2)	(1)					
(1.4)	x	(4)	(1)	(PAUSE)				
(1.5)		(1)	(2)	(2)				
(1.6)	X	(2)	(2)	(2)				
(1.7)	X	(2)	(1)					
(1.8)		(1)	(1)					
(1.9)		(2)	(2)					
(1.10)		(4)	(1)	(PAUSE)				
(1.11)	X	(4)	(3)					
(1.12)		(1)	(2)	(PAUSE)	(1)	(1)	(PAUSE)	
(1.13)		(1)	(2)	(PAUSE)				
(1.14)	X	(2)	(2)	(2)	(1)			
(1.15)	XX	(1)	(1)	(PAUSE)	XX	(1)	(1)	(PAUSE)
(1.16)		(2)	(1)	(PAUSE)	XX	(2)	(2)	(PAUSE)
(1.17)		(2)	(1)	(PAUSE)	X	(2)		
(1.18)		(2)	(1)	(PAUSE)	X	(2)		
(1.19)		(3)	(2)	(PAUSE)				
(1.20)	X	(2)	(3)	(1)				
(1.21)	X	(2)						
(1.22)	X	(3)	(2)	(1)	(PAUSE)			
(1.23)	X	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)			
(1.24)	X	(2)	(2)					
(1.25)		(2)	(1)	(PAUSE)	(1)			
(1.26)	XX	(2)	(3)	(PAUSE)				
(1.27)	X	(2)	(1)					



The above <sup>e</sup>material analysis is done using "measure" as the unit, not "foot" of the traditional metre. The analysis reveals a complex interaction of measures in the creation of the natural form of the poem. Lines(1) and (4), on comparison, show the same metrical structure. To put it in other words, both have a four syllable-measure followed by one syllable measure terminating with a pause. This similarity seems to serve as a refrain in the poem. The metrical relations between lines(8) and (9) are noteworthy. Line(8) deals with the gradual increasing crowd and (9) with the doubling of the crowd as an aftermath of the master's action dealt in line(8). Interestingly, the one syllable-measure of the line(8) is found to be two-syllable measure in the following line(9). Further, a series of tricks played one after another by "the Master of Ceremonies" to win the kudos and attention is described in the same uniform metre thereby showing his control over its rhythm. The various acrobatics that he plays are conveyed in the same metrical length. Furthermore, the pauses used in between them subtly denote the interactive pauses occurring in between the various tricks of the performer. The same metrical device is used to describe the medley of crowd watching the spectacles in lines(16), (17), and (18). The climax of the plot and the increasing crowd is forcefully communicated in line(15). Metrically speaking, this particular line is the thickest line; it is followed by another line with almost same metrical thickness.

Here again the metre seems to closely follow the theme. Further, the two halves of these lines almost echo one another thematically and metrically as well. As the crowd takes to wings in the fag of the poem its metrical density also lessens. Thus we see that the rhythm is most natural and tends to mimic the natural rhythm of everyday human speech.

It is interesting to note that in the first half, while perfecting traditional prosody, Ezekiel is found continually experimenting with "prose rhythm" from beginning till the publication of The Third (1958). Similarly, in the second half of his poetic career also while consistently striving to master free verse he is seen manipulating complex Vedic metre in "Hymns in Darkness", and Japanese haiku, a lyric form that represents the poet's impression of a natural object or scene in exactly seventeen syllables, in a poem by the same name. Free verse, however, figures largely in the later poetic work beginning with "The Hymns in Darkness" (1976) thereby characterising the later poetry. The ample modulation of improvised accentual syllabic metre coupled with the extreme metrical complexity enacts the natural narrative rhythm in some of the recent poems viz. "To the Sun", "Death of Hen" etc. published after The Latter Day Psalm (1982). The metrical brilliance observed in the

preceding detailed analysis of "Entertainment" continues to recur in the later phase. By and by he manages the ease and the flow of the natural speech rhythm so well in later poetry that it questions Chetan Karnani's fear: "Unless Ezekiel returns to the discipline of traditional form.... he will not be able to maintain his hard-earned reputation"<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, he also seems to be quite indifferent to Thomas Hardy's exhortation — write on the old themes in an old styles— to Robert Graves. It appears that some time in the future Ezekiel will come out with another Unfinished Man (—) composed only in the free verse and again setting a model for the upcoming poetry of the ensuing decade.

To sum up, his poetry reveals a gradual evolution of his skill as a metrical artist. His protracted penchant for the singing line which has held his attention for nearly four and a half decades has compelled him to command both traditional and free verse. The traditional metre alongwith functional masculine rhyme and well structured stanzaic patterns of various kinds characterise his early poetry. As a matter of fact traditional metre and rhyme appear to co-operate with each other in this phase to communicate musically. As regards his idiosyncratic metre, Tables (1 to 5) show that in over 63 per cent of the poems of this phase he has used iambic tetrametre. However, perhaps his spirit of prosodic experimentation and fascination for everyday speech rhythm seem to have compelled him

to take recourse to free verse, a kind of verse which resembles to a degree the ordinary speech. In fact, his search for an alternative to the traditional formal form of verse can be seen even at the outset of his poetic voyage in the employment of 'prose rhythm' which is also surprisingly closer to day-to-day natural speech. Although Ezra Pound advocated that a poet should use not only every day vocabulary but also speech rhythm, he himself did not follow his own poetic dictum so far rhythm is concerned; he swerved to the ideogramic method. Ezekiel, unlike Pound, follows his <sup>(Pound's)</sup> precept by choosing free verse in later poems. Gieve Patel's observations: "The rhymed and regularly metred poems of which there are many in the earlier book, slowly make place for free verse"<sup>11</sup>, is right. But his further observation: "... they continue to reappear, and almost always the occasion is introspective one"<sup>12</sup>, perhaps, is not tenable. The traditional metre appears only in a couple of poems which appears at the beginning of The Hymns in Darkness and is not seen at all in subsequent publications. If not for the free verse, then at least for the di-dum metre no other Indian English writer of the century has done so much to stamp his own image in writing of his own time. He, indeed is one of the most prolific versifiers of contemporary Indian English poetry and perhaps the most effective.

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11

Gieve Patel, "Introduction" in Collected Poems 1952-1988, Nissim Ezekiel (New Delhi: Oxf. Univ. Press, 1989), p. xxvii.

12

Ibid.

CHAPTER - 4  
"THE BEST POETS WAIT FOR WORDS"

## CHAPTER-IV

### "THE BEST POETS WAIT FOR WORDS"

In "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" the poet-persona observes that "The best poets wait for words" as the lovers and birdwatchers wait with bated breath for beloveds and birds respectively. This observation equally applies to Nissim Ezekiel. In his poetry "time worn words in print /retain its primal meaning"; they contribute to his creative onrush providing it with newer and fresher semantic contours. He seems to believe that nothing but

Authentic words alone remain  
Undying roots beneath the snow,  
To send the twig and flower again,  
Response to spring's creative flow.  
(*"Year's End"*: p.31)

His predilection for words continues throughout his poetic career which spans over four and a half decades. Furthermore, in "Prayer" he entreats God to "Let words be intimate with brain".  
In a recent poem entitled "Waiting"<sup>1</sup> he reveals how the words engaged his attention right at the beginning of his poetic career:

In the beginning,  
not one word  
for hours  
In the end  
Enough words  
for a whole poem.

In the course of his poetic odyssey, however, words have begun to respond to him. What Juan Ramon Jimenez longs :

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<sup>1</sup>  
Nissim Ezekiel, "Waiting" *Creative Forum*  
(Delhi: Bahri Pub.) I,1(March 1988),9.

Let my words be  
 The thing itself,  
 Newly created by my soul. (p.127)

(quoted as an epigraph of The Exact Name ) also seems to be Ezekiel's sincere concern. In fact, many poems attest his predilection for words. In what follows we shall focus on the distinctive lexical aspects of Ezekiel's that personal style which has brought him unique position among the contemporary Indian-English poets.

To begin with , the Syllabic Structure of Ezekiel's poetry has its own distinctive linguistic features. Table 1 shows the extreme syllabic simplicity of his lexis of forty poems culled from the different phases of his career as a poet.

The word-syllable ratio , as is evident from the Table 1 (page, 88-89), shows that 77.57 per cent of lexical items are monosyllabic. To put it in other words , there is a very high frequency of monosyllabic words and this is a characteristic of everyday language with its informality and colloquialism. For instance , in everyday use of language many words, such as "examination" , "mistress", "laboratory" etc. etc., are clipped into monosyllabic forms "exam", "lab", "miss" etc. etc. respectively. Conversational lexis is also an evidence of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon character of Ezekiel's words. These

TABLE 1

WORD SYLLABLE RATIO

Name of the Poem	No. of Words	No. of syllables	Ratio
Year's End	67	93	72.04
2. Planning	121	139	87.05
3. Failure	68	82	82.92
4. Situation	124	149	83.22
5. Lines	48	57	84.21
6. Boss	57	67	85.07
7. Tribute	85	97	87.62
8. Squirrel	58	67	86.56
9. After Rain	78	98	79.59
10. Townlore	74	97	76.28
11. The Recluse	75	97	77.31
12. Sparrow	111	149	74.49
13. Sonnet	99	136	72.79
14. For Love's Record	131	161	81.36
15. Urban	118	141	83.68
16. Morning Prayer	60	95	69.47
17. Jamini Roy	87	123	70.73
18. Commitment	98	123	79.67
19. Philosophy	138	190	72.63
20. Night of Scorpion	289	370	78.10

...cont.



Name of the Poem	No. of Words	No. of syllables	Ratio
21. In India VI	99	135	73.33
22. Poet, Lover, Bird- watcher	162	194	83.50
23. Paradise Flycatcher	148	194	76.28
24. Art Lecture	122	155	78.70
25. Virginal	114	136	83.82
26. Fruit	58	71	81.69
27. Lawn	171	218	78.44
28. In the Country Cottage	96	119	80.67
29. Subject of Change	126	150	84.00
30. Island	139	182	76.37
31. The Railway Clerk	199	266	74.81
32. Entertainment	114	148	77.02
33. Poverty Poem	112	136	82.35
34. Healers	113	151	74.83
35. Latter day Psalms I	162	203	79.80
36. Latter day Psalms IV	94	114	82.45
37. Latter day Psalms VII	112	134	83.58
38. Sub-Conscious	79	94	82.29
39. To the Sun	79	94	84.04
40. Death of a Hen	62	78	79.48

Average = 77.57 %

Anglo-Saxon words are typical of everyday conversation; they are characteristically associated with his particular style. It is perhaps because of the predominance of such a vocabulary, apart from everyday syntax, phrases and idioms, that his poetry gives the impression of a face-to-face encounter. Thus, Ezekiel's poetry does not suffer from what Russel says is the Indian-English poetry's characteristic weakness — "heavy Latinism" :

Another important trait of Indian English poetry is its infatuation with multisyllabics which are symptoms of a heavy Latinism that spoils the cadence of Anglo-Saxon English or the colloquial grace that marked off fresh poetry from pedantic.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, it is also perhaps on account of this that a feeling of rush of ideas grows while one reads his poetry.

The simplicity of syllabic structure is reinforced by the simple Morphological Structure of the lexis. There are very few words which have undergone complex derivational process.

Three dominant suffixes appear in his words — "Un-", "-ness", "-ing". This is clear in Table 2 (page, 91-92 ). Both "un-" and "-ness" continually recur and almost with the same frequency throughout his work. The former perhaps contributes to the ambivalence which is interwoven with most of his themes. Besides, it is an economising device as well. Using this morpheme Ezekiel has everywhere avoided the negative

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A. Russel, "Language Use in Contemporary English Poetry", in R.K. Singh (ed.) Indian English Writing (New Delhi: Bahri Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1987), p.55.

TABLE 2  
MORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

Sl. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	'UN - prefix	- NESS suffix	-ING participle
1	Year's End	Undying	—	Undying
2	Planning	Unseen Unknown	—	Arresting
3	Failure	Ungreeted Unrenewed	—	Waiting
4	Situation	Unconsciously	Loneliness	—
5	Lines	Unmark	Hardness	—
6	Two Nights of Love	Unconfined	Godlessness Loveliness	Threshing Singing
7	After Rain	—	Wetness	Creaking Dripping
8	For Her	Untouched Unready	Nakedness	Knowing Binding
9	Townlore	Unbarricaded	—	Sprawling Rushing
10	The Problem	Unseen Uncreative	Dumbness Emptiness	—
11	Portrait	Unspoken Unbroken	Sadness	Suffering
12	Admission	Unanswered Ungrided Unblessed	Nothingness	—
13	Prayer	Unseen Unheard Unredeemable	Nakedness	—
14	What Frightens Me	Unstable Uncertainty	Weakness	—
15	Road Repair	Unturned Unbend Unrepaired	—	Staggering Working
16	December '58	Unblamed	Darkness	Starting Seeking
17	Commitment	Unloved	—	Searching Growing
18	Event	Undisguised Uncertain Undefined	Nakedness Motionless	—
19	Philosophy	Uncontrolled	Commonness Nakedness	—

... cont.

SL. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	"UN - " prefix	" - NESS " suffix	"-ING" participle
20	The Visitor	Unlikely	Ordinariness	-
21	Virginal	-	Loneliness Sadness Liveliness	Wedding
22	Hymns in Darkness	Undecieved Unredeemable Unchanging Uncounted Unsmellable Unfathomable	Youthfullness  Darkness	-  -
23	Counsel	Unripe	Nothingness Restlessness	-
24	Healers	Unplanned	-	-
25	Warning -Two Sonnets, I	Unrevealed	Subconsciousness	Dying
26	Minority Poem	Uneasy	Self-forgetfulness	-
27	Nudes 1978	Undressing(v) Unstressed Unsuspected Unreal Unmasked Unposed Unembarrassed	Nakedness  Frankness  Darkness	-  -  -
28	Latter-Day Psalms	Ungodly Unmindful Uneasily	Righteousness Goodness Happiness	-
29	A Different Way	Unsuitable	Quietness Stillness Holiness	-
30	Cleaning Up	Unexpected	Darkness	-

particle 'not'. This also seems to be related to the poet's temperament, to the way he looks at things. Furthermore, Ezekiel has often been branded as a contemplative-meditative poet and this fact is almost supported by the plentitude of "-ness" suffix; and it can be taken as a linguistic index of his mind given to abstraction. The participle "-ing", on the other hand, while frequent in much of his poetry, is replaced in the later poetry by another suffix "-ity". There are some other affixes too, for example "in-", "im-", "-less", "-hood", and so forth but they are much less frequent.

Finally, the use of archaic verb form is remarkable. He has consistently, albeit sparingly, used them in the religious poems both early and later. Its single appearance in the early phase is to be found in the following lines of "Lamentation" :

My tongue speaketh no matters.  
The words of the wise are wasted on me. (p.72)

However, its use is frequent in "The Latter-Day Psalms". Archaism has imparted an aura of antiquity and religiosity by virtue of its association with English of The 1611 Bible.

We now proceed to investigate the **Syntactic Properties** of Ezekiel's lexis. Table 3 (page,94-95), though based on

**TABLE 3**  
**SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES**

SL. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	TOTAL NO. OF WORDS	NOUNS			NO. OF ADJ.	NO. OF VERB	NO. OF ADV.	RATIO: CON/TOTAL
			ABS	CON	TOTAL				
1	Year's End	67	15	8	23	7	8	nil	56.71
2	Planning	121	12	5	17	12	22	4	47.10
3	Failure	68	14	5	20	9	99	1	58.82
4	Situation	124	11	4	15	6	23	6	40.32
5	Lines	48	9	6	15	6	7	nil	58.33
6	Boss	57	8	8	16	10	7	4	64.91
7	Tribute	85	9	5	15	2	20	3	47.51
8	Squirrel	58	6	6	12	6	6	2	44.82
9	After Rain	78	11	6	17	12	11	nil	51.28
10	Townlore	74	8	10	18	13	7	1	52.70
11	The Recluse	75	15	8	23	9	8	nil	53.33
12	Sparrows	111	15	12	27	10	13	2	47.74
13	Sonnet	99	13	11	24	12	14	2	52.52
14	Love's Record	131	12	11	23	8	22	2	41.98
15	Urban	118	20	11	31	6	16	6	50.00
16	Morning Prayer	66	19	6	25	8	5	nil	57.54
17	Commitment	98	12	10	22	12	13	4	58.16
18	Jamini Roy	87	13	9	22	12	15	nil	56.32
19	Philosophy	138	24	10	34	14	15	2	42.85
20	Night of Scorpion	289	46	34	80	13	36	4	46.02

Cont.....

SL. NO.	NAME OF THE POEM	TOTAL NO. OF WORDS	NOUNS			NO. OF ADJ.	NO. OF VERB	NO. OF ADV.	RATIO: CON/TOTAL
			ABS	CON	TOTAL				
21	In India-VI	99	14	8	22	14	7	2	45.45
22	Poet Lover Birdwatcher	162	19	18	37	11	25	6	48.78
23	Paradise Flycatcher	148	16	22	38	16	15	7	51.35
24	Art Lecture	122	15	12	27	11	23	3	52.45
25	Virginal	114	11	8	19	4	22	5	43.85
26	Fruit	58	8	4	12	13	7	1	51.72
27	Lawn	171	29	13	42	10	21	5	45.61
28	In the Country Cottage	96	9	7	16	11	15	3	37.81
29	Subject of Change	126	19	10	29	14	15	4	50.00
30	Island	139	24	11	35	12	19	5	51.07
31	The Railway Clerk	199	19	15	34	11	24	11	44.72
32	Entertainment	114	16	18	34	10	21	1	57.89
33	Poverty poem	112	5	8	13	9	21	8	45.53
34	Healers	113	16	9	25	2	19	2	60.17
35	Latter-Day Psalms -1	162	17	10	27	13	16	4	39.45
36	Latter-Day Psalms-3	94	12	8	20	2	12	3	39.36
37	Latter-Day Psalms-7	112	11	10	21	7	13	2	38.39
38	To the Sun	79	3	1	4	6	19	6	40.73
39	Sub-Conscious	79	5	3	8	4	13	7	40.50
40	Death of a Hen	62	8	7	15	5	12	3	56.45

a broad count, provides ample insights into the workings of the poet's mind as manifested by the syntactic densities of his lexis.

In the first place, it is interesting to note that the ratio between the total words and the content words is an average fifty per cent — a rather low percentage for the content words. This ratio accounts for both the simplicity and the suggestive power of Ezekiel's poetic craft; he communicates much by using few words. To put in other words, the rather low percentage of content words does not reduce the semantic density or richness of thought in his poems.

Further, the table also displays the dominance of nominals over other syntactic categories in a large number of his poems. In fact out of the forty poems in the table only in seven poems verbs outnumber the nouns. Whilest in the noun dominated poems adverbs are almost nonexistent, in verb dominated poems they however, do appear quite understandably. The relatively less percentage (17%) of verb dominated poems suggests that Ezekiel is not a poet of action. He, in fact, appears to be a poet who in his poetry is permanently meditating on simultaneously existing objects. A still further categorization of nouns into concrete and abstract nominals establishes



Ezekiel's philosophic preoccupation with conceptual entities. The data once again supports the critical observation that there is a dominance of contemplative-meditative strain in Ezekiel's poetry. Not only that, even a glance on the title of the poems proves his intellectual obsession for abstract ontological realities.

In the employment of adjectives, Ezekiel's involvement with painting is only too evident. Although he is not a painter like the pre-Raphaelite poets, for example D. G. Rossetti, Morris etc. the colour adjectives are found in plenty in some of his poems. Why? It is perhaps because of his avocation as an art critic that colour adjectives outnumber others. For example, in "On Bellasis Road" he first observes the lady as colour only :

I see her first  
as colour only,  
.....  
poised against the faded  
red of a post-box:  
purple sari, yellow blouse ,  
green bangles ,orange  
flowers in her hair. ( p. 188 )

In "Entertainment" also the "two tiny monkeys / in red and purple pantaloons" attract his attention. His this preoccupation with the colours has found a total expression in "Paradose Flycatcher" -- it is so replete with colour adjectives that one may call it a poem in colours.

To balance our discussion of his lexis we must have at least a brief look at some of the significant grammatical words as well. In this regard, his use of pronominals as one of the devices to obtain impersonality in his poems deserve special mention. In some of the poems, for achieving this impersonality, he has used a persona and a third person to state that the persona is one of them. For instance, in poems like "Urban" and "A Morning Walk", we find Ezekiel using the device very effectively. In "Case Study" he even makes his protagonist come to the speaker, the "I" persona, for exhortations. All this makes for greater detachment and objectivity, greater clarity and perception. The use of the first person plural "We" in poems like "Enterprise" and "Commitment" serves the same purpose. The "I" persona is used in certain personal poems like "Love Sonnet" and in the poems where the poet is careful to stress the universal nature of predicament described therein.

The frequent use of personal pronoun "I" alongwith other possessive determiners is a characteristic of uneducated speech, especially rustic speech. Ezekiel has perhaps exploited this rural linguistic feature in "The Night Of Scorpion" to impose on the speaker of the poem a mask of rusticity. This becomes clearer when we compare it with other poems in which he either delays pronominals or even sometimes

drops them. Its minimization often stands for educatedness and urbanity. In a similar vein, we may also observe the poet establishing close affinity with the sufferings subjects through the use of excessive possessive pronouns, as for example in this poem.

While talking of Ezekiel's use of pronominals, the use of pronoun "he" even for the lower animals is worth mentioning. In almost all of the poem, particularly from "The Night of Scorpion" onwards, he uses third person 'human' pronouns to denote even lower animals. This humanization of animals using the pronominal 'he' evinces his love and sympathy for the animals, which has been observed by several critics.

Ezekiel's creativity is to be found also in the linguistic process called Compounding in addition to suffixation which we have already discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Apart from borrowing words from the other Indian languages (already discussed in Chapter-II ) he has taken recourse to compounding as well to enrich and enhance his poetic diction-store . In his endeavor to express hitherto unexpressed ideas he has coined words through the linguistic process called compounding - a recognisable feature of everyday language. The need to extend the available resources of language to name the new objects in everyday life often results in many compound coinage e.g. "time-table" , "sunbath" , "lipstick" etc. etc.. It

is interesting to note that they would not have come into being if objects had not made demands on the language. The same fact operates behind compounding that appears throughout Ezekiel's poetry. He has been able to clothe many of the nebulous ideas in the garb of compounds successfully and precisely.

His linguistic simplicity is not only confined to the syllabic and morphological levels but it is apparent at the word-formation level as well. Out of approximately one hundred and ninety compounds, hardly eighteen are three-word units. In this way, morphologically speaking, his compounds are shorn of the complex compoundings of a poet like Gerald Manley Hopkins -- an unforgettable name in compound coinages. Furthermore, out of the total one hundred and ninety a good number of them have been taken from everyday speech. So his compounds are both borrowed as well as invented.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel's own-coinages have remarkably fused together two ideas to form a novel poetic concept. To mention a few of them e.g "drum - emotion", "dream - baiting", "shop - soiled", "wine - dark", "dream - window", "dog - day", "actor - bridegroom", "friendly - foe", "food - love", "woman - beast", "callous - sensitive", "critic - cops" and "dog - shit". Let us analyse some of these in order to understand their hyphenation potential. One of them, "drum -

emotion" is to be found in " The Recluse " -- one of the earliest poems written during 1945-48.

In these haunts of entertainment  
I am sad, unawakened  
By the clouds of drum - emotion. (p.80)

Through this compound Ezekiel names the artificial kind of emotion triggered by the sophisticated sound apparatuses in most of the five star hotels. Another compound "critic - cops" used in the following lines :

..... Counterfeiters  
caught by critic - cops at the dead of night  
(p. 233)

in the poem " Warning : Two Sonnets " may be noted. The alert and scholarly critics are likened to the alert and attentive police cops and are distinguished from the so called critics of the day. All these compounds attest his creative potential and prove his capability to forge new semantic meteors in his verse.

It is interesting to note that at the fag end of his poetic career there is an abrupt change from compounding to Splitting in some of the poems. The earliest and the single instance of splitting is "rendz - vous" in the poem, "Emptiness". This kind of splitting in the later phase is to be found in "Family 4" (from "Songs from Nandu Bhide "). Here, through

splitting the word "psychiatrist" into "Psy - chi - a - trist", the poet evokes the disconnected, disjuncture, and paranoic mental states of the persona.

A different kind of splitting, however, appears in "The Latter - Day Psalms". The example of such a splitting is as follows :

Blessed is the man that walketh  
not in the counsel of the con -  
ventional, and is at home with  
sins as with wife. He shall  
listen patiently to the scorn -  
ful and understand the sources  
of their scorn. (p. 252)

This unusual splitting of words by placing part of the word at the end of a line and the remainder at the beginning of the next line is often a device to add overtones of meaning in the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh and E. E. Cummings. As a matter of fact, it is really difficult to imagine any linguistic process without any semantic motivation.

Finally, we shall have a look at the Typology and Placement of the lexis. It provides ample insight into the range and nature of the poet's figures of thought. Broadly speaking, majority of his lexis is drawn from mainly three spheres :

(1) Religion and Philosophy

(2) Nature, and

(3) Everyday Urban Life

Words such as "prayer" , "redemption" , "salvation", "sin" , "Cain", "Shiva", "Krishna", "Zen", "Gethsemne" , "Buddhism" and so forth are taken from the wide world of religion and philosophy. The medley of religious words coming as they do from different sources perhaps indicates Ezekiel's secular and rational bent of mind. To the second group belongs words such as "hills" , "rivers" , "mountains" , "dawn" , "clouds", "flowers", "trees" , "Springs" , "monsoon", "rain", "fruits", "grapes", "sun", "moon", "snakes", "cows", "elephant", "monkeys" etc. etc. These represent the natural world. To the third group belongs the large chunk of his diction. Words such as "sprawling town", "skyscrapers" , " metal road", "trains", "tramlines", "buses", "tandem cars", "cold beer", "western music", "apartments", "see through dress", " five star hotels", "Cuban dancer", "red coated waiters", and many like this are crowded in his poetic canvass and prove his fascination for the urban theme in his poetry. Such loaded vocabulary undoubtedly shows that he is a delineator of the predicament of urban life. To this group belongs a sub-group comprising of the words viz. breasts, buttocks, thighs, lips, hairs, arms etc. describing the feminine

shape of the woman. This group bears out his preoccupation with matter of flesh ; which is predominant from the beginning to the end in Collected Poems (1952-1988). Thus, the catalogue of words shows his major concerns as well as his attitude to poetic diction. In this regard, he seems to work and think like Eliot who measures out his verse in coffee spoons.

The categorization discussed in the preceding paragraph has a definite bearing on the images and symbols in Ezekiel's poetry . Corresponding to these three types of lexis there are three distinctive world of imagery and symbolism and not two as Dr. A.Rahman seems to aver : ".... there is a juxtaposition of the two world of images in the poetic corpus of Nissim Ezekiel. At one extreme, we find the pagan woman and the putrid city standing as the symbol of defilement and , at the other, there is resplendent nature symbolic of essential vigour, vitality and innocence ..... these two sets of images, representing two sets of values in contradiction to each other, are the basic constituents of the poet's search for meaning in life and poetry". The set of lexical categories just now made refutes his this observation. Ezekiel has skilfully turned the commonplace vocabulary into powerful images and symbols and has injected layers of meaning in his verse. Thus, Dr. Rahman's further observation about the use of images and symbols in Ezekiel's poetry: "Even a casual reader of Ezekiel's poetry will



mark that he is not an imagist poet by any means or manner"<sup>4</sup> is not really pertinent.

Coming to the structuration of poems, Ezekiel takes recourse to mainly two devices : first , use of the single lexical set throughout the poem; secondaly, use of mutually contrasting lexical sets in the poem. The first device is widespread in a majority of his poems. A lexical set is a group of words which belongs to the same semantic field despite their independent and distinctive semantic existences. Ezekiel has tied these overlapping extreme outer ring of the lexemes to create a unified., and powerful hyper semanticized verse. for instance, in " In India IV " all lexis is drawn from the city to portray the sad plight of a metropolitan damzel obsessed with the materiality of the modern world. The lexical set of this particular poem comprises words such as "English boss" , "Long evenings" , " large apartments", " cold beer " , "Western music" , "lucid talk of art and literature" , "British courtesy" , "blouse", and "elevtor". All the components of the lexical set of the poem except the last mentioned appear to enact the central motif of the poem . Howevwer , the word "blouse" seems incompatible in the lexical set because it evokes a sense of a

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A. Rahman, op. cit., p. 42.

traditional Indian woman instead of an image of a bob - haired, lip-sticked, jean - T- shirt metropolitan dream-beauty. The word "blouse" is so much Indianized in the process of nativization of English in India that we often fail to focus on its original French meaning;

Blouse. [- Fr. (bluse), of unknown origin]  
 1828 1. A short loose garment of cotton or silk, resembling a shirt, worn on the upper part of the body;  
 2. A woman's loose bodice usu. tucked into the shirt at the waist  
 1870;

Contrary to this , Ezekiel uses the same word in its typical Indian sense in a poem entitled " Ganga " :

We pride ourselves  
 on generosity

to servants .....  
 .....  
 once a year, an old  
 sari, and a blouse

for which we could  
 easily exchange a plate.

or a cup and saucer. (p. 202)

This example illustrates the cautions with which he chooses the word knowing their both historical as well as contemporary meaning.

The juxtaposition of two contrasting lexical sets is another device but used sparingly in his poetry. For instance, the poem "Urban" is wrought using two mutually contrasting lexical sets drawn from the natural world and the urban world. One of the lexical sets comprises words such as "hills", "rivers", "winds", "dawn", "night", "sun", "rain", "wave of sand", "beach", "tree" and so forth. All these words are taken from nature and trigger a sense of eternal and enviable peace and pleasure. The other lexical set consists of words such as "broken roads", "circles", "city", "burns", "traffic", "kindred clamour" etc. etc. evoking a contrary sense of the humdrum of city, which in modern times appears like a cauldron on a burning hearth. Thus, Ezekiel projects the central motif subtly and forcefully using these mutually contrasting lexical sets.

To sum up our discussion of Ezekiel's poetic lexis, we can infer that it is in perfect unison with his themes. Lexically speaking, his poetry is colloquial and conversational. Such a stylistic effect is introduced in his poetry through the careful use of simple syllable, simple morphology, and on the top of all simple compounding. His poetry

displays how careful he is in the selection of words as well as in the formation of lexical sets. The colloquial charm of his poetry is further reinforced through frequent use of appellations, exclamations and interrogatives. He seems to subscribe to Ezra Pound's doctrine that poetry should use the words and even the rhythms of natural speech, and not only the "specialised diction only". His preference for the literary use of colloquial and familiar speech is evident in the following lines of "A Time to Change" :

So in our style of verse and life  
The oldest idioms may reveal  
.....  
Be as original as when the world was made.  
(p. 4)

He strongly expresses his aversion to the so called big poetic words in "Something to Pursue".

..... and fools  
Are big with words, pregnant of theory.  
(p. 19)

Consequently, we come across very ordinary kind of words in his poetic cosmos ; and his poetic diction generally has the ease of prose but it often rises to brilliant ironic and lyrical effect. His overall approach to lexis, like metre in the preceding chapter, is original, inventive and realistic as well adding a halo of freshness to the imports of his verse. He has been really successful in making the ordinary and worn-out words carry out the stupendous task of constructing his idea-complex.

## CONCLUSION

## C O N C L U S I O N

Nissim Ezekiel's poetic endeavour over the past four and a half decades has won him a prestigious position in the post-Independence Indian-English poetry. What perhaps have won him this pre-eminence are the three factors he himself had predicted as the characteristic determinants of good poetry—<sup>1</sup>  
"Literary stamina, intellectual strength, and social awareness"

(underlined by him in his essay on Keki Daruwalla). In this dissertational exposition we have lighted upon a number of linguistic indices which fairly directly correspond to these factors and indicate the schematic components of his distinctive style.

The survey of his major themes in Chapter-I and his 'belated' Indian self in Chapter-II show him as a realist with an intellectual and philosophic world-view towards ordinary events and issues of everyday metropolitan life. What he declares at the very outset of his poetic journey :

Not to hanker for a wide god-like range  
Of thought, nor the matador's dexterity.  
("Dedication", p.39)

reveals his satisfaction with realism which has remained his signature throughout his poetic marathon. In another poem entitled " Night Piece " (belonging to the same volume though to

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cited in A. S. Guha, "Nissim Ezekiel's India " The Journal of Indian Writing in English, XIV, 2(July 1986),18.

somewhat later period ) he has reiterated his same commitment for the here and the now :

That I must wait and train myself  
 To recognise the real thing  
 And in the verse or friends I make  
 To have no truck with what is fake.  
 (p. 59)

So his poetry abounds in real, living portraits with love, sex, marriage, man-woman relationship, love for animals and a certain kind of alienation as his recurring preoccupations. This restrained semiotic canopy evinces his deeply held fascination for the immediate society in his immediate vicinity. Had he not been tethered to it he probably would have soared into the romantic sky while riding on the wings of poesy. His social awareness, however, becomes acuter and more accurate as he turns to the Indian themes in his later poems, that is to say in the poems such as those written since The Exact Name (1965). Even the language of these later poems, the sub-standard spoken variety (of Indian-English), too adds to the quality of his realism. Notwithstanding the ruminative and philosophic predilections he hardly severs his nexus with the mother earth full of all sorts of ugly realities. Like Wordsworth's skylark he remains "True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home" (Wordsworth: To a Skylark). Furthermore, without a hitch he expresses both beauty and blemishes in categorial terms giving us an impression of being

an ambivalent man. So ambivalence does not come in his quest of realism ;it rather appears as an instrument in assessing the reality. If in his theme and their treatment he is a realist, in his technique,he is a tireless modernist .So critics hold him as the first among the Indian modernists to come out with an anthology —A Time to Change (1952)—replete with modernity, and one who is the harbinger of "new poetry" in the country.

Chapter-II illustrates Ezekiel's urge to express himself in an unconventional but highly realistic medium, for e.g. 'bazer' or 'baubu' English spoken in the streets of Bombay with its characteristic grammatical features .Again, it is evident from our preceding discussion that his language is permeated with features such as literal translations of typical Indian idioms and phrases, collocations, and the syllabic rhythm of Indian languages . This is an evidence of Ezekiel's growing poetic consciousness towards colloquialism in his later phase. In this way, his belated Indian self is seen to be clothed in an ordinary spoken Indian-English, particularly in "Very Indian English Poems". All these linguistic features which appear to be some sort of reflex of his thematic preoccupation may be accepted as the elements of his distinctive stylistic identity.

Chapter-III also exemplifies his inventive and modernistic zeal . At the very beginning of his career , he



experiments with several meters, mainly three metres, viz. free verse, traditional verse, and the prose rhythm as well. But in the subsequent collections, he appears more preoccupied with the traditional verse than with other metrical forms. Consequently, he comes out with The Unfinished Man (1960) which abundantly displays his finesse in the handling of traditional verse form. In this collection his individual stamp, i.e. his stylistic identity, is evident in the use of iambic tetrameter in over sixty three per cent of his poems. The success of traditional metre, however, does not keep him tied to it, and we soon find him experimenting with other rhythms in the ensuing publications. Thus even in his later phase beginning with The Hymns in Darkness (1976) he is again seen working with many metrical resources such as the Vedic metre, Japanese haiku, and poster and postcard forms but striving to command free verse in particular. He, thus, retains the same enthusiasm for discovering his own distinctive tone. Unlike his contemporaries, his free verse is not verseless; it is full of metrical complexity which exactly captures the changing tones of the narrative. He has been able to command this verse form also to a great extent. Surprisingly, corresponding to the free verse he has adopted an altogether different pattern of capitalisation which resembles closely the use of capital letters in the prose medium. In this way, the traditional verse with rhyme and free verse can be accepted as markers of his

stylistic identity in the early and the later phase respectively. Finally, his switch over to free verse from traditional verse once again suggests, besides his inventiveness, his fondness for colloquial rhythm. His literary stamina and predilections are thus apparent at the metrical level as well.

The examination of anatomy and typology of his lexis and word frequency ratio etc. in chapter-IV furnishes some more elements of his stylistic identity apart from providing support for some of our intuitive reactions to his themes and techniques. The predominance of mono-syllabic lexis is a clear reflex of his colloquial vigour. The sustained use of "-ness" suffix throughout amply demonstrates Ezekiel's obsession with abstract philosophical entities which are further reinforced by the predominance of abstract nominals in almost all his poems. The frequent recurrence of "-un" suffix throughout suggests his ambivalently complex attitude towards worldly things. Further, the use of humanising pronominals truly indicates his humanistic concern even for the animal world. And still further, the great frequency of words pertaining to sex and the female body show that very often his:

.....motives are sexual  
aesthetic and friendly  
in that order .....("Motives", p.154),

Finally, his compound coinages which seek to name the unnamed idea-complex show his inventive ability too. And his careful culling of lexis from a limited and ordinary world is due to his penchant for democratising the language of poetry. Thus Ezekiel's physiological and psychological reflexes have well-defined corresponding linguistic indices which account for his own particular style — a style which has been a model for several Indian-English poets.

Ezekiel has also successfully incorporated various repetitive and syntactic devices which augment the conversational ethos of his poetry. His irregular repetitions of words, phrases, clauses, and lines bring it very close to the everyday language. Similarly, the broken syntax and sometimes elision of the auxiliary verbs and other grammatical words as well, also achieve the same effect. Surprisingly, we find a flood of meaning gushing forth in his poems. How come "His is meditative poetry, a poetry of statements"<sup>2</sup>. How come "the lines convey a sense of resonance, a sense that the statement has been dredged up from experience, that the truth has<sup>3</sup> been learnt at some cost". It is perhaps because of the consistent and skilful monitoring of meaning through diverse figures, such as personification, irony, metaphor, simile, oxymoron and so on. Since the scope of our dissertation

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<sup>2</sup>  
Eunice de Souza, "A Poet's Journey" The Times of India, April 16, 1989.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid.

is limited, we have not probed into all these levels and the complete range of both schemes and tropes. An in-depth analysis of all these levels and can, in fact, provide us even his style-print.

The pertinence and validity of the linguistic methodology, we have employed in this study, has been established by considerable research and by vital studies that have used it to ascertain the probable authorship of anonymous writings. Thus, it has also proved to be a good alternative to the impressionistic schools of criticism which have been more pervasive in critical scholarship. For instance, many critics have acknowledged the fact that Ezekiel has drawn on heavily, particularly in his early verse, on the contemporary Western writers, notably Rimbaud, Yeats, Auden, and Eliot etc. They have proved the claim by only giving the evidence of thematic resemblance between him and the others. But thematic resemblances only show that certain themes are universal. Under the circumstances, one can prove the bearing of one poet relative to other only by examining and establishing the linguistic correspondences and divergences. Only with some such objective methodology we can think of quantifying the " Objective Form " of Ezekiel's verse.<sup>4</sup> The methodology would be of immense help in all such critical ventures.

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A. Rahman, Form and Value in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1981), P.13.

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TH-3314

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