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Male Poets, Female Personae: A Comparative Study of Selected Poems of Nissim Ezekiel and Susheel Kumar Sharma

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Abstract

This study examines how male poets Nissim Ezekiel and Susheel Kumar Sharma authentically inhabit and articulate female consciousness in selected poems, exploring Ezekiel's "Night of the Scorpion," "On Bellasis Road," and "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." alongside Sharma's "A Lament," "Me, A Black Doxy," and "Bubli Poems." Grounded in feminist literary theory, it investigates how these poems convey women's moral, emotional, and existential experiences while advancing the feminist ideal of equivalence. Central to this analysis is the Indian aesthetic concept of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* or *madhumati-bhumika*, which universalises individual emotion and fosters empathetic communion with female subjectivity, aligning philosophically with John Keats's concept of Negative Capability, wherein the poet suspends selfhood and judgement to fully immerse in another's consciousness (Keats 21). Through this cross-cultural lens, Ezekiel and Sharma transform intimate experiences of maternal suffering, social marginalisation, physical labour, and the pursuit of autonomy into emotionally resonant, universal narratives. Despite their male positionality, both poets achieve profound empathetic depth, effectively bridging Indian aesthetic thought and Western poetic sensibility to produce nuanced and authentic portrayals of female personae in contemporary Indian English poetry. This study highlights how their works contribute meaningfully to feminist poetics by challenging gendered boundaries and elevating women's voices in a traditionally male-dominated literary landscape.

Keywords: Female consciousness, Maternal suffering, Female subjectivity

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The Ethics of Representation and Feminist Equivalence

The idea that an author can transcend the boundaries of personal identity – of caste, creed, or gender – to inhabit the consciousness of another has been central to the philosophy of art and authorship. The creative imagination, by its nature, aspires towards universality. When a poet writes of love, grief, or alienation, the experience becomes human rather than individual. The capacity that enables such a transformation was described by John Keats as Negative Capability, the poet's ability "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 21). It is precisely this quality that allows an author to feel and express the sensibility of a subject that may lie outside personal experience. Shakespeare's understanding of Ophelia's anguish or Dryden's Cleopatra's dignity does not diminish because of their gender; rather, their imaginative sympathy transforms the experience into a universal expression of human struggle. This very possibility of empathetic authorship forms the basis of the present study: whether male poets can, through imaginative and ethical sensitivity, voice the inner world of the feminine consciousness. The focus shifts from the identity of the author to the authenticity and ethics of representation. If feminism seeks equality in life and thought, then literary representation must also be judged by its fidelity to the principle of equivalence. The poet, as moral and imaginative agent, is expected not merely to portray but to understand the woman's experience, to participate in her being without appropriation or dominance.

The early foundations of feminist thought are not restricted to female voices. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) converge on a single moral insight: intellectual and moral equality are not contingent upon gender. Wollstonecraft asserts that "the mind has no sex" (42), while Mill calls subjugation "wrong in itself" and injurious to the progress of society (45). Together, these texts create a moral bridge connecting male and female advocacy for equality, establishing a philosophical foundation on which both genders can participate in feminist reasoning. The shared goal is not inversion of hierarchy but restoration of balance – the principle of equivalence.

This idea becomes essential in judging whether a poet, irrespective of sex, succeeds in writing from a space of equality and empathy.

With the twentieth century came the interrogation of gender as a constructed and performative category. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, formulated the idea that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (267), exposing how social norms and structures produce gendered subordination. Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* complements this idea by defining existence as freedom and responsibility, where identity forms through conscious choice (Sartre 87). Read together, these ideas suggest that the poet’s act of representation must acknowledge both structure and freedom – structure in understanding the social conditions shaping women’s lives, and freedom in portraying women as conscious agents capable of self-definition. The poet’s responsibility, therefore, is not to imagine women as symbols of virtue or suffering but as subjects negotiating freedom within constraint.

Subsequent waves of feminist theory refine these ethical expectations further. First-wave feminism, rooted in legal and moral equality, laid the groundwork for humanist reasoning. Second-wave feminism, influenced by thinkers such as Betty Friedan and Kate Millet, expanded the critique to cultural, domestic, and psychological domains, demonstrating how ideology and language encode gendered hierarchies (Friedan 15; Millet 11). Third-wave and poststructuralist feminists, including Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, examined language, desire, and identity, emphasising multiplicity and difference as constitutive elements of experience (Kristeva 136; Irigaray 89; Cixous 881). Meanwhile, postcolonial feminist critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warned against the universalisation of Western feminist discourse and emphasised the situatedness of women’s voices (Mohanty 338; Spivak 83). Taken together, these trajectories of thought produce not merely a historical narrative but a set of evaluative principles for authorship. A poet becomes feminist not by identity but by attitude – through an ethical openness to otherness, through recognition of structure and struggle, and through the capacity to translate emotion into shared human understanding. Representation, in this sense, becomes an act of justice. When the

poet allows the female persona to think, to feel, and to question, the poem participates in the feminist project of equivalence.

Feminist criticism itself has consistently raised questions about who speaks for whom, and how voice and agency are mediated through literature. The central tension lies between representation and appropriation. Does a male author who writes from a female perspective illuminate her condition, or does he risk silencing her by speaking on her behalf? Poststructuralist theory helps answer this question by suggesting that meaning is not fixed but dialogic. The female persona in a male-authored poem can become a site of dialogue rather than possession – a space where gendered consciousness is explored rather than defined. The poet's ethical responsibility is thus to allow multiplicity, ambiguity, and agency to emerge within the text, aligning with the feminist demand for voice and subjectivity. The framework that arises from these converging traditions can thus be articulated in simple yet profound terms: authorship must be measured by ethical imagination, awareness of structural inequality, and respect for autonomy. When these are present, representation transcends gender. The poet's sensibility – his or her capacity to feel deeply and justly – becomes the true measure of feminist consciousness. As Keats's negative capability implies, the poet's self dissolves into the subject not to dominate but to understand. Mill's moral reasoning, Beauvoir's existential ethics, and the poststructuralist celebration of difference converge to affirm that literature achieves feminist value not through identity politics, but through empathetic universality.

Therefore, the theoretical foundation of this study rests on the principle that poetic imagination can serve as a moral and feminist act when guided by ethical awareness. The male poet who writes of the feminine condition does not violate the boundary of experience if he does so with humility, insight, and authenticity. Feminist theory, in its varied forms, has supplied both the questions and the criteria: How is voice constructed? How is agency represented? Does the text reproduce subordination or restore subjectivity? The answers to these questions form the evaluative core of this research. The poet's gender is incidental; what remains essential is whether the poetry upholds the feminist principle of equivalence – the recognition that human experience, though diverse in form, is shared in its dignity and worth.

Comparative Analysis

Representation of Maternal Suffering: "Night of the Scorpion" and "A Lament"

Nissim Ezekiel's "Night of the Scorpion" and Susheel Kumar Sharma's "A Lament" unfold as poetic meditations on endurance, sacrifice, and the intricate interdependence of womanhood and human sensibility. Both poets, though male, transcend biological identity to engage deeply with the emotional and existential terrain traditionally associated with the feminine. They represent, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests, not a "sexed consciousness," but a shared existential condition through which pain and care acquire universal significance (Beauvoir 301). Their poetic voices participate in the humanistic ideal that John Stuart Mill framed in *The Subjection of Women* (1869): the ethical equality of human beings grounded in the ability to feel and reason beyond the barriers of gender.

Nissim Ezekiel's "Night of the Scorpion" demonstrates a community's collective consciousness as it converges around a mother's agony. The speaker recollects with almost cinematic clarity:

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.

("Night of the Scorpion" lines 1–4)

The poem opens with an atmosphere of foreboding that situates the mother's suffering within both natural and moral orders. The villagers' arrival – "The peasants came like swarms of flies / and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times / to paralyse the Evil One" (Ezekiel, "Night of the Scorpion" lines 5–7) – introduces a chorus of ritualistic empathy. Here, superstition becomes a communal mode of response to suffering, reflecting a patriarchal cultural framework in which women's bodies are sites of spiritual testing. Each line of prayer – "May the sins of your previous birth / be burned away tonight, they said" (Ezekiel, "Night of the Scorpion" lines 8–9) – transforms the mother's body into an arena of cosmic balance, echoing the cyclical burden of pain assigned to women within traditional societies.

Ezekiel's genius lies in his restraint; he refrains from overt moralisation, allowing irony and observation to expose the quiet heroism of his mother. As the peasants invoke divine justice, the father's rationality intervenes: "My father, sceptic, rationalist, / trying every curse and blessing, / powder, mixture, herb and hybrid" (Ezekiel, "Night of the Scorpion" lines 10–12). The juxtaposition between blind faith and scientific scepticism mirrors India's transitional ethos between tradition and modernity. Yet, amidst these conflicting masculinities, the woman remains central – silent, enduring, and luminous in her moral strength. After twenty hours of torment, she utters only one line, a crystallisation of motherhood itself: "Thank God the scorpion picked on me / and spared my children" (Ezekiel, "Night of the Scorpion" lines 45–46). In feminist terms, Ezekiel's mother embodies what Adrienne Rich calls "the politics of motherhood," wherein suffering is not submission but an act of profound ethical consciousness (Rich 113). She neither protests nor resigns; she transforms affliction into affirmation. The poet's perspective is one of reverent empathy, not pity. His portrayal moves beyond sentimentality to a moral recognition of the woman's strength. The scorpion, rain, fire, and darkness become metaphors for human endurance. The poem's moral centre rests not in the ritual, the father's science, or even the poet's narration, but in the woman's brief, redemptive speech – a triumph of spirit over circumstance.

In Sushil Kumar Sharma's "A Lament," the register of suffering shifts from physical to psychological, from communal superstition to existential inquiry. The poem opens with the immediacy of loss and maternal anguish:

It was not so easy to give you birth, O child!
 Today I saw you jumping from the Yamuna Bridge
 To end your life which you felt was loathsome.

("A Lament" lines 1–3)

The contrast between the labour of birth and the act of self-destruction creates a wrenching dialectic between creation and negation, hope and despair. The mother's voice – intimate, retrospective, and accusatory – unfolds through a long monologue that traces the emotional geography of motherhood. She recounts her bodily suffering, "Moving from one doctor to another, from clinic to clinic / Weathering all seasons, consuming all those nauseating pills"

(Sharma, "A Lament" lines 4–5), not as complaint but as testimony to endurance. Unlike Ezekiel's mother, whose pain is mediated by others, Sharma's mother narrates her own ordeal, reclaiming voice and agency in the very act of lamentation.

The psychological depth of "A Lament" situates it closer to existential and poststructural feminist thought. When the mother asks, "Why didn't you hear that baby before escalating / Those wires and crossing the railing? / Why had I to live and you to die?" (Sharma, "A Lament" lines 8–10), she confronts the absurdity of freedom that Jean-Paul Sartre defines as "a being condemned to be free" (Sartre 28). The mother's anguish thus becomes an existential reflection on freedom, choice, and responsibility – her child's freedom to die, her compulsion to live. Sharma's poetic empathy is not built on sentimental sympathy but embodies what Beauvoir calls "the transcendence of subjectivity" – the ability to inhabit the Other's condition without appropriating it (Beauvoir 319). In its structure and diction, "A Lament" mirrors the fragmentation of grief. Memory, faith, and despair intertwine as the mother revisits her own near-suicidal past:

I had gone to the Ganges once in December
 And had sat down on its banks in the wee hours
 And then moved into it when was unable
 To think of anything beyond.

(*"A Lament"* lines 15–18)

This confession reframes suffering as cyclical and inherited – a mother's past pain re-emerging in her child's despair. While Ezekiel's poem culminates in the purification of maternal sacrifice, Sharma's poem resists closure, leaving grief suspended between memory and meaning. Yet the repetition of "Life was precious for me / You were precious for me, O child" (Sharma, "A Lament" lines 19–20) reclaims the sanctity of existence as an act of moral defiance.

2.2. *Portrayal of Female Subjectivity: "On Bellasis Road" and "Me, A Black Doxy"*

Nissim Ezekiel's "On Bellasis Road" reveals a rare moment where the male poetic consciousness perceives the woman not as a static symbol of sensuality but as a dynamic subject resisting stereotypical containment. The poem opens with the simple act of seeing:

I see her first
as colour only,
poised against the faded
red of a post-box.

(“On Bellasis Road” lines 1–4)

The male gaze initially fragments the woman into colours: “purple sari, yellow blouse, / green bangles, orange/flowers in her hair” (“On Bellasis Road” lines 5–7). Yet Ezekiel’s sensibility moves beyond sensory fascination, sensing “her as a woman, / bare as her feet / beneath the shimmer” (“On Bellasis Road” lines 8–10), enacting a moral awakening and inward empathy akin to Keats’s negative capability – the capacity “to remain in uncertainties, / Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats 1817). The moment of seeing allegorizes modern alienation and classed femininity: the woman on Bellasis Road, a prostitute, embodies invisibility and resilience. The poet’s consciousness oscillates between proximity and estrangement:

Then I look at her ...
the colour disappears,
she’s short, thin and dark
without a cage to her name.

(“On Bellasis Road” lines 15–18)

The absent “cage” metaphor evokes vulnerability and autonomy; she owns nothing, not even social protection. Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” resonates – her condition is socioeconomically constructed (Beauvoir 295). Ezekiel’s restraint, aware of her “as low as she can go” (“On Bellasis Road” line 19), translates suffering into moral visibility without pity. His refusal to moralise –

I see her image now
as through a telescope,
without a single
desperate moral
to keep it in focus –

(“On Bellasis Road” lines 20–24)

– expresses ethical humility, acknowledging representation’s limits, echoing John Stuart Mill’s humility that men “cannot know what women are or what they could be” (Mill 80). The poem’s final lines – “Of what use then to see and think? / I cannot even say I care or do

not care, / perhaps it is a kind of despair" ("On Bellasis Road" lines 25–27) – express an existential awareness akin to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: consciousness recognizes its failure to fully coincide with the Other. Ezekiel dramatizes male self-reflexivity confronting empathy's limits, neither claiming to speak for the woman nor silencing her, but feeling with her and accepting ethical asymmetry.

Susheel Kumar Sharma's "Me, A Black Doxy" extends this empathy more dialogically. Adopting the prostitute's voice, the poem collapses speaker-subject hierarchy, embodying Mill's granting of voice and moral agency. It opens with a biblical echo:

Ain't it prophesied in the Holy Book:
 'None eye pitied thee ... but thou wast cast out in the open field'
 (Ezekiel 16:5)

("Me, A Black Doxy" lines 1–5)

The scriptural invocation ironizes patriarchal religion, situating the speaker within rejection and redemption theology. Colloquial grammar – "Ain't me alone in this world / Wonders me every day and every night?" ("Me, A Black Doxy" lines 6–7) – asserts authentic marginalised selfhood. Where Ezekiel hesitates near pity, Sharma indicts exploitation:

He 'ven bites my teats;
 Leaves me bruised with hickeys ...
 Me ain't paid the agreed amount;
 'Is my money black?"

("Me, A Black Doxy" lines 10–13)

This questioning destabilises binaries – sin/purity, black/white, man/woman – making "black" a metaphor for racial, economic, and moral othering. Yet Sharma's persona reclaims moral authority:

My skin is black
 My soul ain't black
 My money ain't black
 Their acts is black

("Me, A Black Doxy" lines 14–17)

This inversion embodies Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism," embracing fixed identity to resist hegemonic narratives (Spivak). Sharma's poetics realise what Ezekiel gestures toward – transcending gendered boundaries through imaginative sympathy. His male

authorship affirms Keats's negative capability, dwelling in the woman's pain without reduction to spectacle. The speaker's closing affirmation – "Me is the Lord's faithful bride / And, thou art the man" ("Me, A Black Doxy" lines 52–53) – shifts biblical accusation from God to man, re-centering divinity in her subjectivity. Echoing Nathan's rebuke to David ("Thou art the man," 2 Sam. 12:7), Sharma's prophetic empathy challenges patriarchal guilt in feminist theology.

Juxtaposing Ezekiel and Sharma reveal diachronic evolution in male poetic responses to female suffering. Ezekiel, mid-century Bombay poet, internalises modernist perception crisis – observing, reflecting, despairing. His woman marginally shapes moral awareness. Sharma, postcolonial and postfeminist, crosses the margin, speaking through the woman, using her idiom to indict systemic inequities. Both fulfil feminist sensibility criteria differently: Ezekiel through humility and ethical doubt; Sharma via imaginative embodiment and radical empathy. Their poetics satisfy feminist equivalence by articulating shared humanity without erasing difference, demonstrating male poets' creative self-effacement in articulating women's truths. Ezekiel's despairing detachment and Sharma's assertive identification together illustrate the philosophical trajectory from Mill's liberal humanism to Beauvoir's existential feminism.

2.3. Portrayal of Contrasting Female Identities: "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." and "Bubli Poems"

Nissim Ezekiel's "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." and Susheel Kumar Sharma's "Bubli Poems" offer contrasting portrayals of women, reflecting different societal contexts and ideological concerns. Ezekiel's poem presents Pushpa through the fragmented, digressive narration of a male speaker, whose admiration blends humour and irony. Pushpa is depicted as an embodiment of sweetness and agreeability: "Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling / even for no reason // but simply because she is feeling" ("Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." lines 1–2). Her charm is both external and internal, emphasised as a socially desirable quality: "Coming back to Miss Pushpa / she is most popular lady // with men also and ladies also" ("Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." lines 3–5). Social admiration frames Pushpa's character, though her agency remains

limited as her identity is largely defined by others' perceptions. The humour arises from the narrator's digressions, such as the memory of a visit to Surat:

Surat? Ah, yes,
 once only I stayed in Surat
 with family members
 of my uncle's very old friend,
 his wife was cooking nicely. . . that was long time ago
 ("Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." lines 45–49)

Through these digressions, the poem situates Pushpa within the male gaze, reducing her presence to comedic storytelling.

Pushpa's compliance further reinforces traditional gender expectations. Whenever she is asked to do anything, she responds affirmatively: "Pushpa Miss is never saying no. / Whatever I or anybody is asking // she is always saying yes" ("Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." lines 12–14). This portrayal reflects patriarchal values in which women's worth is measured by their ability to accommodate and conform, rather than by their own desires or achievements (Moi 21). Feminist theory characterises this as the "male gaze," where women are positioned as objects to be observed rather than as autonomous subjects (Mulvey 837). The poem's humour and irony do not subvert this construction but underscore it. In contrast, Sharma's "Bubli Poems" represent a female protagonist with agency, self-awareness, and the capacity to challenge social constraints. From the outset, Bubli is depicted as dynamic and self-reflexive:

Her name is Bubli.
 Though she does not know
 What she is bubbling with
 Yet the village lad knows.

("Bubli Poems" lines 1–4)

Bubli navigates her environment with curiosity and intentionality, negotiating social, cultural, and personal constraints. Sharma foregrounds her interiority, highlighting her struggles with societal expectations and the pursuit of autonomy. She is aware of her desires and consequences, thus a subject rather than an object. Bubli's feminist perspective is evident in her questioning of gender norms and experimentation with dress:

One day Bubli was standing before the mirror
Putting on a jeans and jacket and shaking her hips
She was trying to be a local Katrina.

(“Bubli Poems” lines 20–22)

Her mother enforces conformity, quoting scripture:

“The woman shall not wear that
which pertaineth unto a man,
neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment:
for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.”

(“Bubli Poems” lines 23–26)

Bubli’s critical response questions such dogma:

If she were wrong; after all they award degrees
That are so important; does it matter if she wears
A jeans; so many girls, even Christians, put it on
Are they all wrong? Are they all going to Hell?

(“Bubli Poems” lines 27–30)

Sharma portrays Bubli’s resistance to authority, foregrounding rationality, autonomy, and equality – the core of feminist discourse. Bubli’s struggle extends to sports, where institutional norms limit her:

She could be nominated to represent the district;
But her dress was a problem; she was playing wearing a // Salwar and
kurta; she needed a skirt.

(“Bubli Poems” lines 35–37)

This sharply contrasts with Pushpa’s social compliance, illustrating feminist assertions of autonomy and self-realisation as articulated by bell hooks (hooks 45). Bubli also questions systemic patriarchy and gender hierarchy:

Why should a wife bow down to her husband?
When will this discrimination stop?
Is male soul different from the female one?

(“Bubli Poems” lines 38–40)

This awareness aligns with feminist existentialism’s calls for self-definition in oppressive systems. Bubli’s life is a complex negotiation of social expectation, desire, and spiritual aspiration:

She moves from one shrine to another
She changes her tracks like a train //
Or like a soul changes its dress.
(“Bubli Poems” lines 45–48)

Her internal conflicts, striving for freedom and responsibility, further complicate her subjectivity:

Every time she looks for sweet water
 She finds herself gulping seawater;
 She has been waiting for the moment
 When the zenith comes into her life
 And she becomes the guiding star
 And the eyesore and the bright star.

(“Bubli Poems” lines 50–55)

Together, these poems explore the spectrum of female representation in Indian English poetry – from Pushpa as socially admired yet constrained to Bubli as actively autonomous. Sharma’s feminist ethical engagement foregrounds interiority and resistance, while Ezekiel’s poem highlights external observation and patriarchal compliance.

3. Postcolonial Fractures: Indianness, Poetic Styles, and the Symbolism of Marginalised Bodies in Nissim Ezekiel and Susheel Kumar Sharma

Looking closely at ‘Indianness’ in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and Susheel Kumar Sharma reveals a postcolonial identity marked by hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance – entangled in the colonial inheritance of English as both a tool of subjugation and self-expression. Ezekiel, a foundational voice in modern Indian English poetry, often employs ironic, understated diction to mimic the cadences of Indian English, blending urban detachment with rural echoes to critique cultural stasis. In contrast, Sharma’s 21st-century free verse adopts a raw, creolised idiom – infused with Hindi rhythms, Biblical allusions, and street vernacular – to voice visceral urgency, transforming personal lament into collective indictment. This comparison looks at how they handle sidelined people – like the hurting villager, the sex worker, and the woman climbing social ladders – through postcolonial eyes. Their images and symbols mirror splits between old ways and new ones, local faith and Western logic, male control and women’s growing power.

In Ezekiel’s “Night of the Scorpion” and Sharma’s “A Lament”, postcolonial Indianness emerges as a fractured identity, entangled in the interplay of ancient traditions and modern rationalism,

articulated through the colonial legacy of English. Ezekiel's poem, framed as a child's wide-eyed recollection, employs flat, ironic diction mimicking Indian English to depict a rural scorpion sting as a microcosm of cultural paralysis: peasants invoke karmic philosophy - "May the sins of your previous birth / Be burned away tonight" (Ezekiel, lines 18-19), while the rationalist father resorts to futile experiments, blending superstition and science in tragicomic futility. The scorpion symbolises diabolical forces merging Hindu and Christian motifs, underscoring the postcolonial tension between indigenous belief and Western scepticism – a stylistic choice that Ezekiel's detached irony amplifies, rendering the scene a wry tableau of unresolved hybridity. Sharma's urban lament, by contrast, shifts to individual despair in fragmented free verse echoing Hindi vilāp through repetitive questions - "Why did you have to die?" (*A Lament*, lines 38, 41, 45, 47) and sacred geography – Vindhyaal, Ganges – framing maternal pilgrimages and the son's Yamuna suicide as reversals of self-sacrifice. Modernity's high-rises amplify isolation through stark, imagistic contrasts (towering concrete against flowing rivers), yet karma's shadow persists as a symbol of enduring guilt, transforming collective ritual into personal torment. Stylistically, Sharma's emotive repetition and vernacular fusion contrast Ezekiel's clinical observation, yet both reveal postcolonial Indianness as an unresolved wound: Ezekiel's irony critiques rural stasis, while Sharma's raw urgency indicts urban disintegration, with shared symbols of natural toxins (scorpion, polluted waters) evoking the poison of colonial disruption.

In Ezekiel's "On Bellasis Road" and Sharma's "Me, A Black Doxy" the figure of the Bombay prostitute becomes a stark embodiment of postcolonial abjection, marginality, and defiant self-assertion, articulated in the coloniser's tongue yet refracted through contrasting poetic styles. Ezekiel's speaker first perceives the woman as pure chromatic spectacle – "purple sari, yellow blouse, green bangles, orange flowers" (On Bellasis Road, lines 5-6) – a vivid postcolonial collage against the "faded red" postbox, only for color to dissolve into socio-racial judgment: "short, thin and dark without a cage to her name" (On Bellasis Road, lines 14-15). The gaze, mediated "through a telescope," remains affectively numb, a stylistic device of ironic distancing that produces ethical paralysis characteristic of

urban modernity's detachment; the prostitute symbolises hyper-visible erasure, her body a canvas of commodified exoticism under the male, colonial eye. Sharma radically re-voices this figure in creolised, Bible-inflected Black English that fuses Ezekiel 16:5 with street dialect and feminist reclamation, contrasting Ezekiel's polished restraint with explosive, rhythmic repetition ("Me not alone," "Me ain't alone") and rhetorical questions that transform victimhood into collective indictment. Imagery of the bruised body – teats, hickeys, belly dance – shifts from spectacle to site of labour, while symbols of inverted morality (the "whiteness" of her soul and money against clients' "black" acts) culminate in prophetic reversal: "thou art the man" (Me, A Black Doxy, line 61). Both poems thus expose the prostitute as the ultimate postcolonial subject: hyper-visible yet erased, commodified in English, and condemned or redeemed through the very language that marginalises her. Ezekiel's chromatic symbolism underscores detached voyeurism, whereas Sharma's corporeal motifs demand empathetic reckoning, highlighting Indianness as a battleground of racialised desire and gendered resistance.

In Ezekiel's "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." and Sharma's multi-part "Bubli Poems", the figure of the upwardly mobile Indian woman is satirically dissected through the fractured lens of postcolonial English, exposing the persistent collision between performative modernity and entrenched patriarchy – a tension amplified by their divergent styles. Ezekiel's mock-eulogy, delivered in deliberately mangled Indian English—"You are all knowing, friends, what sweetness is in Miss Pushpa" (Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S, lines 8-4)-celebrates the "internal sweetness" and unquestioning acquiescence of the "most popular lady" who "is never saying no" (Ezekiel lines 38, 39). The speaker's rambling digressions and syntactic dislocations ironically unmask a male gaze that reduces female agency to obliging smiles and "good spirit," rendering Pushpa an object of affectionate yet patronising farewell as she departs "for foreign" to "improve her prospect"; symbolically, her "sweetness" evokes colonial-era stereotypes of the docile native, trapped in linguistic mimicry. Sharma's Bubli sequence extends and radicalises this critique across seven sections, employing a fragmented, accumulative free verse that traces a rural girl's

metamorphosis into urban commodity and pseudo-feminist icon – contrasting Ezekiel’s concise satire with expansive, narrative layering. Beginning with innocent bubbling “She does not know / What she is bubbling with” (“Bubli Poems” lines 2-3) Bubli’s trajectory – from village bhajan-singer to college victim of sexual gossip, bar dancer, cheerleader, tennis champion in ever-shorter skirts, and finally temple-questioner – maps the violent commodification of female bodies under neoliberal “empowerment” through vivid, escalating imagery (flowing saris to micro-skirts). Repetitive refrains “Bubli is bubbling” morph from naïveté to hollow performative joy, while intertextual symbols from Deuteronomy and Trupti Desai underscore the hypocrisy of imported freedoms that merely re-inscribe patriarchal control in modern attire. Where Ezekiel’s irony remains affectionately detached, Sharma’s accusatory tone – punctuated by abrupt shifts and interrogative bursts – indicts a society that grants “rights” only to consume women differently. Together, both poems reveal postcolonial femininity as a site of perpetual mis-translation: sweetly compliant in Indian English or explosively “liberated” in globalese, yet still trapped within the same male script, with shared symbols of effervescent “bubbling” signifying both vitality and entrapment in the postcolonial marketplace.

Conclusion

The comparative study of Nissim Ezekiel’s “Night of the Scorpion,” “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.,” and “On Bellasis Road,” alongside Susheel Kumar Sharma’s “A Lament,” “Bubli Poems,” and “Me, a Black Doxy,” demonstrates a sustained male engagement with feminist sensibilities, articulated through ethical reflection, empathetic observation, and nuanced attention to women’s interiority. Across these works, both poets raise fundamental questions about women’s agency, moral and emotional autonomy, and the social structures shaping their lives. Ezekiel interrogates the ways women navigate tradition, social expectation, and communal norms, whereas Sharma explores their capacity for self-definition, resilience, and moral assertion. These inquiries serve as the guiding framework through which the poets examine female experience and offer literary interventions into gendered social dynamics. Both authors address these questions through complementary strategies.

Ezekiel emphasises ethical recognition and empathetic observation, portraying women as subjects of moral and emotional significance within societal frameworks. Sharma foregrounds women's active negotiation of social and personal constraints, highlighting their capacity for ethical and existential autonomy. These strategies allow the poems to articulate feminist principles without reducing women to symbols or moral exemplars, permitting their lived experiences to emerge with complexity and integrity. The literary execution of these strategies exhibits a high degree of *mādhumatī*, the Indian aesthetic principle that allows the poet to immerse in multiple emotions and perspectives without imposing personal judgment or forcing resolution. Ezekiel situates women within communal and ethical dynamics, while Sharma emphasises their interior reasoning and existential agency. This aesthetic approach reinforces the criteria of feminist equivalence, demonstrating that empathy, moral recognition, and narrative openness are central to a literary engagement with gender equality.

Regarding effectiveness, Ezekiel's feminist sensibility manifests primarily through ethical portrayal and moral observation, cultivating awareness of women's endurance and dignity in socially constrained contexts. Sharma extends this further by granting female figures narrative voice, reasoning, and existential agency, aligning with contemporary feminist discourse on autonomy and equality. Together, these works illustrate a continuum of male feminist engagement in Indian English poetry, where moral insight, empathetic immersion, and narrative *mādhumatī* converge to interrogate and reimagine social and gender hierarchies. Ultimately, these six poems affirm that male authors can engage meaningfully with feminist thought by raising critical questions of agency, morality, and equality, and responding through ethically invested narrative techniques. By articulating women's vulnerabilities and strengths, and situating them as moral and existential agents, Ezekiel and Sharma realise the potential of *mādhumatī* as a mode of literary empathy, confirming the possibility of a gender-conscious poetics that recognises, respects, and amplifies the complexity of women's experiences in contemporary society.

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