
The Capitalist Context: Affective Alienation and Human Subjectivity in “The Railway Clerk” by Nissim Ezekiel

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Article Received: 28/12/2025**Article Accepted:** 30/01/2026**Published Online:** 31/01/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.01.490

Abstract

Nissim Ezekiel was the leader of the modernist revolution in Indian English poetry. He dealt with modernist issues such as 'alienation' and human relations and this made him the first one to break away from the traditional Indian techniques of language and style in poetry. Despite the popular perception of him as a poet with largely humanistic concerns, his poems also offer a coup d'œil at the economic and socio-political situation of the country during the era. The 'alienation' in Ezekiel's poems has mostly been analysed rooted in religious, communal or philosophical grounds, but his poems discuss the universal human experience of alienation from a material perspective as well. This paper looks at Nissim Ezekiel's poem "The Railway Clerk" through an integrated theoretical framework in order to foreground the hitherto-neglected material and affective dimensions of alienation in his work. Moving away from traditional philosophical or communitarian readings of Ezekiel's poetry, this analysis utilises Karl Marx's 'Theory of Estranged Labour' for developing the structural economic critique, while locating the resultant subjective experience using Sianne Ngai's notion of *Ugly Feelings*. The methodology proves that the four dimensions of Marxist alienation-alienation from the product, from the activity, from species-being, and from others-come into view and acquire palpability through the clerk's voice, saturated as it is with low-intensity, non-cathartic affects like monotony, irritation, and resignation. This paper concludes that the poem functions simultaneously as a structural socio-economic critique of post-independence Indian bureaucracy and as a powerful affective portrait of fragmented human subjectivity, thus inscribing the embodied experience of the modern alienated worker.

Keywords: Nissim Ezekiel, Alienation, Marxism, Affect Theory, Theory of Alienation, Human Subjectivity, Modernism**Literature Review**

“The Railway Clerk” by Nissim Ezekiel is well known for its humour, realism, and depiction of middle-class suffering in India after independence. In his critical note, Bijay Kant presents the poem as a seminal work of Indian English poetry that blends linguistic self-awareness, satire, and wit. According to Kant, Ezekiel is more interested in the everyday

struggles of the urban middle class—particularly as seen through the prism of failed language, duty-bound existence, and frustrated ambition—than in Indian myth or spirituality. He highlights the poem's insights on language learning and syntactical difficulty, arguing that it is a critique and parody of India's urban linguistic identity.

In the cultural context of India in the 1970s and 1980s, Vandana Dubey's analysis places the railway clerk's cinema going and social indulgence in line with the escapist trend of "masala" Bollywood films, which provided working-class people with momentary respite. In her interpretation of Ezekiel's poem, Dubey captures the psychological coping mechanisms used by the lower middle class in India through romanticised leisure, reflecting social realism. Overall, according to Vandana Dubey, the poem symbolises escape from the tedious office work life.

In a more comprehensive analysis of Ezekiel's poetry, Nitin Kacharu Jadhav highlights the poet's use of *concrete imagery* and a *realistic viewpoint* to convey his social consciousness. Jadhav places Ezekiel in the tradition of international modernists like Eliot and Pound, emphasising his subtle use of poetic devices to convey a lived Indian reality, by drawing on collections like *Hymns in Darkness* and *Collected Poems*. Jadhav claims that Ezekiel uses symbols, commonplace themes, and a realistic depiction of social dynamics to create a new urban consciousness in India. Keeping these instances that were consecutively taking place during the time of his hiatus it is the most plausible option to agree with Karmakar's argument that Ezekiel was a postmodern critic whose attitude towards the poor was sympathetic therefore, wanted to change the conditions of the lower class (21).

Shreyoshi Dhar traces the 'Lacanian Gaze' in Ezekiel's work and thereby claims rightly so that the self perception of a newly independent post-colonial India was one of extreme inferiority towards their own traditional communicative design (Dhar 46). The language of broken and somewhat unnatural English indicative of the Indian society's desperation to escape an alienation brought about by freedom of choice. This prompted him to articulate a form of estrangement that was notably distinct from his own experiences of alienation. The sense of isolation explored in this poem is rooted in Marxist ideology.

A study conducted by Zhu et. al on affective disorders and PTSD caused by COVID-19 states that emotions of anxiety and stress increase more in the absence of self disclosure. When individuals are faced with stressful situations outside of their control, being alienated leads to an inability to share the feelings and emotions being generated in the situation affectively (132).

Bhattacharya maintains that Ezekiel's poems exhibit a discernible tone of frustration, stemming from a profound sense of alienation, despite his unquestionable affection for India. Throughout his distinguished professional trajectory, he expounded upon this sensation of estrangement across various domains. Firstly, there was his individual experience of a sense

of social disconnection due to his minority status. Secondly, there existed a contemporary urban estrangement experienced by Ezekiel as a result of his privileged upper class upbringing wherein he continues to remain detached from and superior to the predicaments of the general populace. Lastly, there was a psychological alienation, characterised by a disconnection from one's own self.

The scholars discussed above and many others have substantially contributed to the understanding of Ezekiel's realism, satire, and cultural context, the critical gap remains in exploring "The Railway Clerk" through a rigorous theoretical framework that interrogates the systemic structure of capitalist labour and its affective toll. The poem's subtext of labour alienation, as theorised by Karl Marx, and its emotional manifestations—such as despair, exhaustion, and the craving for acknowledgment—have rarely been analysed in existing literature. Moreover, although emotional themes are acknowledged (e.g., escapism and fatigue), they are not critically examined through affect theory, particularly as proposed by scholars like Sianne Ngai, who conceptualise negative emotions (e.g., envy, anxiety, irritation) as structurally embedded affective responses under late capitalism.

This paper addresses this gap by integrating Marx's theory of alienation with contemporary affect theory to analyse *The Railway Clerk* as a poetic record of affective dissonance within capitalist modernity and not just as a socially realist monologue. In doing so, it repositions Ezekiel's poem within critical discourse that considers not only social conditions, but the emotional costs of structural oppression.

Introduction

Indian English Poetry, incipient in the early nineteenth century was defined by the quest for an 'exclusively Indian' identity. The initial two phases embraced a syncretic blend of conventions from British Romanticism and its Victorian successors. A critical turning point occurred in post Independence era (1947), which was characterised by Indian poets' exclusion of Romantic Idealism. This decisive shift is termed the 'Experimental phase' or 'the dawn of Indian Modernism'. Instead of mere imitation of modern British poetry, these post-independence era poets aimed to infuse words with the moral fibre, psyche and character of the contemporary Indian experience.

Nissim Ezekiel stands as the key figure in this Modernist literary movement. His relevance stems from his effort to remove the superficiality and artificiality prevalent in contemporary poetry. Recognised as the "Father of Modernist Movement in Indian Poetry", his role was consolidated through both, the honing of his own craft and the mentoring of peers and emerging poets in the modern literary landscape.

This study analyses Ezekiel's work through the lens of Marx's concept of 'estranged labour' and substantiates the effect of such alienation on human subjectivity by employing Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*.

"The Railway Clerk" follows an eponymous protagonist who articulates his dissatisfaction and discontentment with the lifestyle he is compelled to lead, as well as the challenges and obstacles he encounters. Despite executing the directives of his superiors, he is subject to censure in the event of any mishap. The poem is characterised by a blend of humour and pathos, lending to its realistic nature. The poem focuses on realism and pathos, with the humour stemming from Ezekiel's utilisation of characteristic Indian English spoken by the railway clerk.

Evolution of Nissim Ezekiel's poetic identity

Ezekiel's identity was marked by the duality of growing up in a Bene-Israel Jewish family and having to navigate the Bombay of 1920s, a primarily non-Jewish environment. It was a result of this existential rootlessness that despite his Indian origin, his subjective feeling of being an outsider persisted beneath. Subsequently, Nissim Ezekiel's self-discovery as an Indian can be discerned by analysing the recurring motifs and literary techniques employed in a selection of his poems throughout the course of time.

His first collection of poems, *A Time to Change (1952)* employs his characteristic casual and conversational style. Besides being a proclamation of change, as the title suggests it also focuses on, universally observed philosophical struggles concerning creative art and the work that goes into its creation. The quality that makes his poems particularly stand out is Ezekiel's addressal of such topics in the context of India specifically, which was not found in this specific early collection of poems. Ezekiel has gradually become a poet beloved to the masses of 21st century India, on the account of his indelibly 'Indian' poems over the years. This 'Indianness' was cultivated by him through minutely absorbing the essence of the country from the busy, crowded streets of Bombay, and the calming morning temple bell to the evening *Adhaan*. Additionally, even the city's buildings with cracks in their walls were the places where his words attempted to acknowledge the damage along with the acknowledgement of the hurt and suffering of the Indians.

Hymns in Darkness came out in 1972 after an eleven year long hiatus following the gradual intellectual estrangement between him and his Bombay circle of writers.

"I have made my commitments now.

This is one: to stay where I am,

My backward place is where I am." (Ezekiel, *HD* 181)

The above excerpt, from his poem, "Background Casually", which is part *Hymns in Darkness*, signifies Ezekiel's acknowledgement of the experiences that taught him about life and his acceptance of the circumstances in his relationships with the people in his personal life, such as the Bombay circle of writers.

While the book does not have the cohesive quality that was present in his earlier collections, it engages with a wide variety of topics. Despite this, one of the most striking details is contained in the thematic conception of the poems. In spite of finding the Indian environment unsatisfactory, he accepts it as his own.

Hymns in Darkness portrays the culmination of Ezekiel's identity as an Indian which is characterised by the complex acceptance of his belonging and the use of characteristic Indian English. Additionally, his composition of these poems in seclusion alongside a compassionate comprehension of the general populace serves to distinguish him as a forward-thinking and distinctive Indian poet. The social criticism is discernible in certain poems such as *Island* and *The Truth about the Floods* in his literary oeuvre. The poem *Island* pertains to Bombay and revisits the author's prior critique of the unsightliness of the metropolitan setting, which was also evident in some of his earlier poetic works. The second poem, *The Truth about the Floods*, vividly depicts the hardships endured by the villagers affected by floods, as well as the callous disregard exhibited by the government in response to their predicament. The primary protagonist of the poem is a journalist who embarks on a quest to uncover the veracity surrounding the catastrophic event. Both, *Island* and *The Truth about the Floods* have crucial aspects of social criticism and his realisation of being an outsider to the everyday conditions experienced by the Indian populace due his upper class Indian identity. Consequently, Ezekiel employs persona poems such as *The Truth about the Floods*, to illustrate the dichotomy between his own identity as an outsider and the India he seeks to portray in his writing.

Socio-economic Context: The India of 1970s

The years surrounding the publication of Ezekiel's later poems witnessed significant global transformations that had a profound impact on India, which had already been overwhelmed with issues of poverty and underdevelopment. The early 1970s were indicative of persistent global and domestic obstacles that had been influencing the trajectory of India since the mid-1960s. As industrialisation progressed rapidly, the Indian economy underwent diversification which intensified the widening gap between rural and urban areas due to the increasing development of infrastructure in urban regions, while agriculture and rural areas remained stagnant. The aforementioned gap is directly attributed to the implementation of the "trickle-down" economic policy that had been in effect since the country's attainment of independence and the prevalence of urban interest groups in the formulation of policies. The convergence of these factors resulted in the general populace bearing the repercussions, which led to a widespread sense of disappointment and loss of faith in the policies and commitments of the government.

This political and economic environment of India in the 1970s forms the context of Ezekiel's "The Railway Clerk". Despite its satirical portrayal and utilisation of a variant of spoken Indian English, "The Railway Clerk" illuminates the significant impact of working under a capitalist hegemony on an individual's subjectivity. The Dutt Committee report of

1969, confirmed the rise of crony capitalism caused due to the proliferation of the black economy. As a result, robust monopolies and oligopolies emerged in the economy, bolstered by political safeguards. Consequently, the circumstances surrounding the typical working-class individual had deteriorated significantly (S. Dutt et al.).

Theoretical Framework

Alienation has been defined as estrangement from things that are supposed to be intrinsic to human essence. This concept was initially introduced by Marx in his 1844 publication, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. It could be argued that his comparatively earlier work exhibits a more humanistic approach towards the matter of capitalist exploitation, as opposed to his later works such as the *Communist Manifesto* or *Das Capital*. The application of a human-centric approach renders the theory of alienation a pertinent framework for comprehensive understanding of the nature of isolation in “The Railway Clerk”.

During his formative years, Marx self-identified as a young Hegelian and subsequently utilised Hegelian concepts of alienation in the realm of economics. Marx draws his notion in part from Hegel's notion of self-estrangement of spirit. Hegel says that the spirit has to externalise itself in order to relate to itself and have it's spirit reflected back to it. Marx agrees with Hegel but he says that this structure is perverted under certain materialistic conditions and the materialistic conditions he's focused on here are those of capitalism.

Marx says that humans are essentially practical, active being , *Homo Faber* in Latin. We're always seeking natural laws to create beautiful, productive things in the world. He discusses four aspects of labour alienation as it occurs in capitalist society in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*:

- **alienation from the product of labour** (XXII), the product of the worker's efforts takes an estranged identity of its own and confronts the worker as something outside of his creation despite being a commodity produced by himself.
- **alienation from the activity of labour**, this is where the process of bringing about the existence of the product costs the worker his relation with the very process. Marx iterates, “for what is life but activity? – as an activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him. Here we have *self-estrangement*..”(XXIII). Marx focuses upon the gradual proliferation of dissonance between the worker and his activity caused by the agency of production no longer resting within the worker's own jurisdiction. Ultimately, Marx claims that this shift within the producer's sphere of life and work leads to self-alienation.
- **alienation from one's own specific humanity** (XXIV), the act of creating outside of immediate need for survival is what sets human subjectivity apart from other animals who build or work solely for survival. This “species being” is eroded as consequence of estrangement of the worker from his product and process of labour and that erosion is regarded by Marx as the third kind of alienation.

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- **alienation from others, from society** (Marx XXIV), the final result is alienation of from the other man. When the worker is alien to his own life, the alienation from life in society follows.

This four-tiered breakdown of alienation stems from the assumption that all acts of labour involve some sort of action that creates some sort of thing, performed by a human (rather than a work animal or a machine) in some sort of social setting (Horowitz).

The origin of affect is not contained within a single discipline or school of thought. Psychology and literary studies as well as many other fields include relevant and insightful studies upon affects and their connections to human. Anthropologists Daniel White and Andrea de Antoni associate affects with : “describing feelings that were sensed within and between bodies but did not always take linguistic or conceptual form. They called these ‘affect’” (1). White and Antoni posit that Affect is characterised by transitions in bodily sensations, which are not bound to be solely expressed by linguistic or cognitive methods. Unlike emotions like sad, happy or angry, etc affects are more naturally prone to evolving into forms dictated by external causes. These “fluid” (White and Antoni 2) feelings are further analysed through ‘Affect Theory’, which integrates diverse approaches from psychology and literature to gender studies and anthropology.

Analogously, Spinoza defined affects as agents which control the human body’s capacities (2). He asserted that affects hold the power to increase or diminish a human’s capabilities of acting upon decisions that are linked to the causes of their affections. Brian Massumi further adds to Spinoza’s ideas and iterates that emotions are registered as markers pointing towards change in bodily sensations as response to the external causes but affects are “pre-conscious modulations of intensity” moving along the body (Massumi 83-109).

To operationalise this analysis of these non-conscious bodily transitions in the context of bureaucratic labor, this work draws upon the critical concept *Ugly Feelings* by Sianne Ngai. Ngai defines ugly feelings as minor, non-cathartic, and politically ambiguous affects that refuse easy categorisation or dramatic resolution (3). Such feelings are particularly essential in that, unlike their grand, resolution-seeking counterparts (like rage or grief), ugly feelings:that are more often enduring states of mind which register institutional failure and disappointment over time (3). These document the slow corrosive effects of late-capitalist or bureaucratic systems rather than instances of acute trauma. The influence of Affect theory helps in the exploration of emotional influence on human experiences, social relationships and behaviours. It challenges conventional perceptions of emotions as incidental or illogical peers of human experience (Gajapathy 49). Sianne Ngai argues that lesser-valued negative affects—such as irritation, envy, paranoia, and boredom—are politically and culturally significant because they arise when agency is blocked or suspended in modern contexts. These non-cathartic emotional states offer deep insight into conditions of alienation and aesthetic experience (3). Therefore, here, affect theory helps illuminate how

“The Railway Clerk” conveys not just the intellectual concept of alienation but its emotional charge — the fatigue, resignation, and muted frustration that saturate the clerk’s voice and rhythm of speech. Ngai’s frame enables a forthcoming analysis the railway clerk’s inner distress not as a failure of character but rather as quotidian affective texture that results from his constrained circumstances.

Human subjectivity here is defined as the particular individual’s inner consciousness and sense of self, which is essentially determined by the external social and economic circumstances. This paper performs an integration of the three frameworks in arguing that the structural determinant of Marx’s estranged labour is what fragments the clerk’s subjectivity through alienation from his product and process. This structural fragmentation is then phenomenologically made real and visible through the pervasive presence of Ngai’s ugly feelings.

Therefore, the railway clerk’s subjectivity is a condition of affective dissonance, with the low-intensity monotony and frustration generated by his labor system defining his innermost sense of self. This integrated theoretical lens enables the paper to read *The Railway Clerk* both as a structural socio-economic critique and as a detailed portrait of a modern, alienated subject.

Reading Affective Alienation in *The Railway Clerk*

• Alienation from the product of labour

“It isn’t my fault / I do what I’m told” (Ezekiel 1.2-1.3)

Under a capitalist economy, individual is alienated from his product. The text’s opening lines portray this phenomenon where the clerk says that he ‘does what he is told’. Assuming that as an office worker he doesn’t exactly get up in the morning with a burning desire to plant himself into an uncomfortable office chair, scouring through endless an amount of paperwork, he is not passionate about his job. Jack Samuel has reiterated Murdoch in saying that agency is intrinsically related to having a capacity for making choices (14). Once this gets taken away, a person effectively loses a significant tether to reality. This is what happens with the clerk as well, he does as he is told and eventually become es detached and disinterested. This lack of interest is rooted in the coercion of the system that blindly makes him follow orders. For the clerk, somebody else owns the product that he creates or at least has a part in creating. That someone gives him directions which he follows with a complaint. The worker or the clerk here cannot afford the product that is being created, he has no use for it. In that sense, his end result derived from his job as a railway clerk or the possibility of it having any contribution is completely detached from him. This first step in the process of his alienation is the most crucial yet the most unnoticeable. It insults his capacity and creativity while making his job feel pointless beside making him money. This gives the first few lines and consequently the entire poem an air of a affectively detached lament. Ngai attributes this feeling of detached obedience as non-cathartic, low-intensity, and amoral states—what she calls “explicitly amoral and non-cathartic, offering no

satisfactions of virtue... nor any therapeutic or purifying release.” These affects do not culminate in dramatic revelation or moral clarity; rather, they persist as flat, dragging conditions that reflect the stalled, repetitive temporality of life under capitalism (Ngai 4).

The process of labour is another way in which alienation operates. Working as a railway clerk involves isolation, which comes from being confined within a tiny cubicle all day long with minimal human interaction. The workplace operation is deliberately designed to deny people their humanity. The clerk’s work involves submission to the higher authorities which is depicted in the way he is unable to demand overtime pay or question the two consecutive rejections of his leave application.

“This year, my leave application
was twice refused

Everyday there is so much work
And I don’t get overtime” (Ezekiel 1.4-1.6)

These repetitive grievances—about unpaid overtime, broken fans, failed promotions—mirror the kind of emotionally blunted dissatisfaction Ngai sees as central to post-Fordist labor regimes. These feelings are also signs of living under an Advanced Capitalist (AC) economy. Butler describes two domains that mark influence of Advanced Capitalism, the second domain is the socialisation processes which depends upon AC. These include, social status, market identity, success, etc. All these are considered ‘stressors’ that lead to a decrease in individual well being (2). This disintegration of individual welfare can be distinguished through analysing the affective responses of the clerk.

- **Alienation from the activity of labour**

Marx iterates how labour in which man denies and alienates himself becomes a ‘labour of self-sacrifice.’ This dehumanisation of the average worker is evident when Henry Ford says, “Why is it that every time I ask for a pair of hands somebody gives me a human?” This idea of a robot being the ideal worker has a long pedigree.

“I am doing my duty / but who is appreciating?” (Ezekiel 4.3-4.4)

The regulatory bodies in the workplace establish the expected level of effort from an employee, and any additional contributions are typically disregarded and unacknowledged. These lines express no rage, no active resistance, only a dull echo of complaint—sentiments that map precisely onto what Ngai calls “moods like irritation and anxiety... defined by a flatness or ongoingness” (4).

“My desk is too small / The fan is not repaired for two, three months” (Ezekiel 5.1-5.2)

Similarly, the railway clerk neither appreciated nor are his basic human needs in the workplace environment met. He has become a non-mechanical part of a mechanised system. It is them also inevitable that people within this system become alienated from other people.

- **Alienation from society**

This brings us to the third type of alienation- from society. Marx describes as such, “Thus through estranged relationship man not only engenders his relationship to the object and to the act of production, he also engenders the relationship in which other men stand to

his production and to his product and the relationship in which he stands to this men". (Marx 79-80)

This is seen happening where there is isolation between the workers who share common objective interests. "The Railway Clerk" depicts this through:

"My job is such, no one is giving bribe

While other clerk's are in fortunate positions

And no promotion even because I am not graduate" (Ezekiel 2.3-2.5)

The inherent competition also leads him to consider his co-workers as barely even acquaintances. He only mentions his "good friends" whom he occasionally meets to unwind. After this primary aspect, the alienation from his home and family is portrayed:

"I am living off in Borivali

my children are neglecting their studies,

how long can this go on?" (Ezekiel 5.4-5.6)

- **Alienation from one's humanity**

The fourth and final facet to be discussed in the poem is Estrangement from human nature itself. Marx claims that workers turn alienated from their 'species-being'. He suggested that there is a 'human essence' that separates humans from all other animals. The essence or spirit, i.e., humanities' 'species-being' is that humans engage in labour that is fulfilling to the core of the human soul as opposed to only helping satisfy basic survival needs. This can also be termed as loss of the autonomous self that modern societies are plagued with. Thompson has argued that the 'self' which is one of the core foundation of modern world has gradually disintegrated in today's society which has resulted from neoliberal economic and social transformation of 1980s (Thompson 8). So, according to Marx's early manuscripts, if workers are not in the adequate condition to produce beyond physical needs they are detached or alienated from the defining feature of human nature itself.

"Once a week, I see film

And then I am happy, but not otherwise" (Ezekiel 6.1-6.2)

Capitalism's excesses have led to individuals' emotions being drained and weakened, the authentic state of being and capacity to feel emotions where the baseline is normalcy or happiness has been taken away from people or workers under emotional capitalism (Lok 5).

The clerk experiences this as his life develops into an endless wait for the weekend to arrive, which is the only time he can relax while watching a movie. Through the exploitative system he has been coerced into wishing for nothing more than capital fulfilment. In Marx's words, "the clerk solely feels like himself" outside in a social environment and while immersed in his work he feels cut off from himself. He feels at home when he is not working and when he is working he does not feel at home. The final line thus, if viewed in this context contains a significant impact.

"I am only support" (Ezekiel 6.11)

In the lines preceding the above excerpt, The clerk asserts that while some of his acquaintances express a desire to seek employment abroad, he is unable to do so due to the

fact that his spouse's mother is bedridden or potentially paralysed, and he is the sole provider for his household. He has at best turned into a means of bringing in more capital. After being dehumanised over and over again externally he turns into a minor tool of capitalism from the inside as well. All the while his human essence continues to erode day after day.

When the process of engagement in the work that goes into creation is hindered, it has a damaging impact on an individual. This impact shows itself in the form of alienation in relation to work or labour as well as affective detachment. Ezekiel's clipped, almost monotonous phrasing mirrors the affective flatness of the clerk's life, thus engaging the reader not only conceptually but emotionally with the alienated condition. Khan et. al describe Ezekiel's attempt at illustrating the social reality of the middle class as the essence of "The Railway Clerk" (Waqar 65). The alienation that is depicted through Ezekiel's poetry is made intrinsic due to his use of a cold and impersonal tone to set the narrative alongside describing the characters living a detached city life (Kumar 2). Nissim Ezekiel's depiction of the Railway Clerk and his circumstances provides a lucid understanding of the four dimensions of alienation along with the affective responses these produce in the narrator and the reader.

The poem culminates into an anti-climactic resolution, where the clerk accepts his helplessness, while using his mother-in-law's dependency as a justification for his resignation to capitalist exploitation. The nihilism and inequality created by economic hierarchy have become shrouded beneath the promises of success and happiness gained after economic freedom (Rutherford 3). These affects do not culminate in dramatic revelation or moral clarity; rather, they persist as flat, dragging conditions that reflect the stalled, repetitive temporality of life under capitalism (Ngai 5).

Conclusion

This study has examined the works of Ezekiel and early Karl Marx in relation to each other, highlighting Ezekiel's unique perspective on alienation and Marx's humanistic concerns. Over time, Nissim Ezekiel underwent a transformation and developed into a poet who empathised with the plight of the ordinary individual and aspired to take action to alleviate it. Ngai's theory allows us to see how "The Railway Clerk" dramatises not just the structural alienation defined by Marx but the ambient, affective condition of stagnation, exhaustion, and minor irritation that saturate everyday life in a capitalist bureaucracy. While recognising his status as an individual who is not directly experiencing the aforementioned hardships, Ezekiel has defined the essence of an individual marred by capitalistic notions which keep him bound. This is the culture or belief in India post-independence that has led to isolation and loss of identity, according to Ezekiel's ideology. He has posited an amalgamation of ideas in the sense that one must never lose their traditions and let their practices be overcome by notions outside of their origin (Bite).

Thus, upon witnessing the gradual erosion of the idealistic facade of unhindered progress and development in a post-independence nation, he endeavoured to delve into the underlying foundations of that nation - namely, its populace. The impact of alienation under capitalism renders the worker(s) incapable of asserting agency in their work of production or personal life. This incapacitation leads to negative affects which Sianne Ngai characterised as emotions or “signs that not only register visible different registers of problem...but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner” (Ngai 3). As long as the worker alienation persisted so do these negative emotions, in fact the one commonality among the emotions described by Ngai is their ability to endure as opposed to the “weaker” emotions like rage. These result in a loss of the human subjectivity of the worker, alienation and it’s affects bring about a disintegration of spiritual essence making the person under capitalism feel separate from their body and out of touch with their human side (Abdullah et al.). This study has discussed a poem that exemplifies an Indian English poet’s attempt to convey his sincerity towards a country no longer alien to him, which on account of Sianne Ngai’s affective framework of *ugly feelings* perfectly aligns with universally experienced worker alienation, defined by Marx. According to Collette, “in advanced capitalist societies, the nonhuman becomes indissociable from a regime of cybernetic ‘machinic enslavement’, overcoded by capitalism and co-conditioned by power relations” (3). Consequently, these frameworks have highlighted how human subjectivity which is the identity of an individual in relation to their surroundings ideas, beliefs, has devolved due to advanced capitalist economy rampant in post-independence India.

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