Chapter One
Introduction

Derek Walcott of the West Indies and Nissim Ezekiel of India, who, at first sight, appear to be more dissimilar than any other two poets writing in English in the twentieth century, have been chosen here for appreciation, analysis and comparison. Walcott hails from Castries, Saint Lucia, an isolated volcanic island, a former British colony. Ezekiel was born and brought up in Mumbai, the most sophisticated, commercial metropolis in India, lying on its west coast. Walcott is of mixed Black, Dutch and English descent while Ezekiel is a Bene-Israel Jew.

A critical analysis of the drama of his own life and the poetry of his feelings studied against the backdrop of his region has been one of Walcott’s principal themes in art. To him, his experience as an individual, in a nutshell, has become a part and parcel of what it really means to be a West Indian.

The first and simplest pleasure offered by Walcott’s poetry is the sense of being alive and out-of-doors in the West Indies — sand and salt on the skin, sunlight and space, the open beach, sea-grapes and sea-almonds and
liners and islands — where 'the starved eye devours the seascape for the morsel of a sail'. (Reddy 77)

It is the rhythm of the life-flow against the backdrop of the landscape and the seascape of the West Indies that constitutes the warp and woof of Walcott’s poetic fabric.

On the other hand, life in a sprawling city, sexuality, challenges in marital life and alienation from the majority inform the main corpus of Ezekiel’s poems. However, the vital strand common for these two outstanding artists of our times is their peculiarly divided heritage. Three motifs can be called ‘central’ in each of them. In Walcott, they are the Caribbean where he lives, the English language and his African origin, while in Ezekiel, the Mumbai city where he lives, the English language and his Jewish identity.

Several Commonwealth writers of the fifties chose to migrate to the West, rejecting their own societies as provincial, backward and uncreative. Walcott too left for the United States, but for different reasons.

In 1958, he was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship which took him to New York where he worked on drama. He returned to the West
Indies as he was disenchanted with the situation in the United States. But he has now gone into virtual exile in the United States. (Gowda 145)

In contrast, Ezekiel stood firm and chose to stay in India. The similarity between them consists in the fact that both the poets used their personal dilemmas as the raw material of their art. Both had also a phenomenal ability to rise far above the reach of the majority of artists of their respective lands and register a unique impression on the national psyche of their respective nations, by the sheer energy of their vision and force of their personalities.

The similarity between the poets will emerge to the fore with a greater clarity and precision if their respective positions in the Commonwealth Literature are defined and juxtaposed.

The official confirmation of the nomenclature of Commonwealth Literature was adopted in a conference held in Leeds University with the inauguration of a new journal, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (Ray, Preface) in 1964. The term 'Commonwealth Literature', though loosely used, came to be in vogue since the 1950s primarily to denote the literature in English, generated
in the Commonwealth countries. Over the recent decades, Commonwealth Literature has gained increasing currency all over the world and has emerged perhaps as the single largest area of exciting academic studies and research. "The term, despite its suggestion of an umblical link with a colonial past, remains widely acceptable and popular" (P.K.Rajan, Preface 2). It denotes a whole body of literature written in the Commonwealth countries, conceived in terms of politics and geography. Nevertheless, it has been widely felt that the phrase is in danger of becoming increasingly absurd in the absence of a contextual commonalty of experience and response. Ironically, the attempts to replace it by more daring epithets like 'post-colonial literature', 'new literatures', 'world literature written in English' etc. tend to generate even greater problems.

The controversy over nomenclature notwithstanding, Commonwealth Literature attracts more and more active interest and diligent research all over the world:

In recent years several new literary centres have emerged, and looking at the quality of writing being produced at these centres one would say that many important writers of the later part of the twentieth century are going to be from these centres. It is time that the
comparatists and other specialists including modernists started exploring this poorly charted area and developed critical approaches for its study, analysis and evaluation ... a writer writing in English is also contributing to English language and literature, and therefore he must be able to stand comparison with at least his contemporaries writing in English both in his own region and in other parts of the world. (Amanuddin 25)

An antique New Zealand poem entitled "Sons of Allegiance" reads thus:

Shakespeare Milton Keats are dead
Donne lies in a lowly bed

........................................
They are gone and I am here
    stoutly bringing up the rear
Where they went with limber ease
    toil I on bloody knees
Though my voice is cracked and harsh
    stoutly in the rear I march
Though my sons have none to hear
    boldly bring up I the rear.

(qtd. in Pearson 38)
Begun thus, emulating the British masters, toiling "on bloody knees", Commonwealth poetry is increasingly getting content with "stoutly bringing up the rear", asserting its own identity.

In the opinion of an insightful critic, any supine imitation of the western models will be suicidal for a native artist:

"Hero-worshipping the British poets, and piously imitating their form and metre, even at times their themes and moods, the Indo- Anglian poets of the nineteenth century recollected their emotions almost in futility."

(Alphonso 34)

Present-day Commonwealth poets, while not denying the greatness due to the British creative writers who managed to forge a formidable poetic tradition in the past, are not prepared to degrade themselves by utterly effacing themselves. In the words of an Indian writer,

"i am my brothers part of the stream
flowing downhill from you
shakespeare used this language
blake yeats n hopkins too
ae hart crane thomas n ginsberg"
we are dreamers n visionaries
our consciousness milk of paradise.
(qtd. in Amanuddin 26)

Almost every contemporary Commonwealth poet writes with definite loyalties to his region or race, to the speakers/users of the English language and to the poets of the English language.

Nevertheless, national traditions within the broad umbrage of the Commonwealth tradition cannot be ignored in any discussion of Commonwealth Literature. Still, writers do not seem to agree on what constitutes national or regional traditions, for the parameters defining such conversions are highly arbitrary and vague. Moreover, some writers believe in the individual or national voice while some others in the cosmopolitan voice.

New Zealand poets such as R.A.K.Mason and Allen Curnow seek themes in the "peculiar character of the country, the individuality of New Zealandness while later poets such as James K.Baxter and Louis Johnson look for a private reality, an individual truth" (Gurr 122). W.H. Pearson sees in these later poets, a "growth towards maturity and freedom from the preoccupations of time and place evident in these older poets" (38). The
Canadian poet and critic A.J.M. Smith finds traces of both nativeness and cosmopolitanism in Canadian poetry. He also refers to what he calls an "eclectic detachment" in Canadian poetry — the capacity of Canadian poets to "draw freely on diverse cultures and traditions" (23).

However, "eclectic detachment" is not peculiar to Canadian poets alone, but applicable to writers of the entire gamut of Commonwealth Literature.

Poetry is also not a guidebook for a tourist or a "sociological survey bundled up in verse" (Smith 23). In the view of an Indian writer,

To create an identity is part of the essential business of the artists; to arrive at, or even to contribute towards a declaration of literary nationality, is not necessarily relevant to his concern and may even infringe on the honesty of those concerns. (B.Rajan 93)

Miriam Waddington's emphasis on the human element in Canadian poetry is in line with the doctrine of eclecticism in art, as can be deduced from the residual truth of an apparently partisan statement such as the following one: "The truth is that the Canadian writer is neither abroad nor in the backwoods. He is, as
A.M. Klein understood twenty years ago, in the world with other men, other writers" (125).

An Australian critic’s comment also underlines the same truth: "Our best poetry is written by poets who know they are human beings by necessity and Australians by accident" (Alec King 330). A.M. Klein’s comment on the local colour in Canadian poetry too underscores both the above views, "The writer who is more concerned with his writing and not with his passport, neither stresses nor ignores that background" (qtd. in Waddington 126).

Most Commonwealth poets seem to veer around the view that while a writer may develop a national identity, such an identity cannot be his passport that makes him a good writer necessarily. He should give greater importance to his creativity than to his region, race or sex, for even while working within the confines of time and space, a writer tends to transcend them. In the view of a modern critic,

Ethos and landscape are mere themes as are love, death, seasons, and the poet must move from personal, private and local experience to general and universal if he is aiming at reaching a larger audience ....(Keshav 2)
Paradoxically, it is quite possible to seek the essence of human experience while dealing with an immediate theme, as Amanuddin observes:

My national heritage? I recognise only human heritage. I was born in India but now I am fast progressing towards the citizenship of the universe. Would you like to join me? You don’t need a passport, only an attitude. (25)

A writer finds his thematic base, not necessarily within the confines of a geographical or social landscape of his region or even his own personal vision, but in the stature of his creative genius. Incidentally, he also turns out to be a manipulator of words and an experimenter of modes.

However, a set of valid standards is necessary in order to evaluate Commonwealth poets, and such critical parameters tend to set them against their own regional conventions and traditions, for a definition of their art:

True, one reads them because they tell us about the way their countries are evolving; true, one reads them because they enrich our pleasure in the English language, but in the cold light of judgement one reads them for
their supranational qualities in their work. One reads them because they bring new ideas, new interpretations of life for us. One reads them, in short, because they are good writers. The standards of judgement are not national standards. Standards of the critic must be cosmopolitan; only the best must be praised. (Jeffares xiv)

The most obvious common element in the Commonwealth poetic tradition is, of course, language. To William Walsh, "Language ... is the substance of literature and its modification is the spring of literary development" (West Indies 63). Such a nexus between language and literature cannot be ignored in any literary evaluation. It is a paradoxical truth that amongst the multi-lingual societies of Asia and Africa, the use of English for creative expression comes as natural as often in mono-lingual country. Several poets of the West Indies and India find in English a natural medium of their creative expression in lieu of the languages of their respective regions. While an Indian writer can fall back on a three-thousand year-old native literature, the African writer is the proud inheritor of a phenomenally rich oral tradition equally old, and often "the communal creative genius" (Senanu 168) which
dominates the African poetry in contrast to the individualistic creativity in the west.

To the Whites of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Rhodesia and South Africa, English is the only natural medium of expression. Even such writers have been making conscious attempts to eliminate the colonial context and the legacy of the exiles from their art. It is interesting to see how Alec King, an Australian critic objects to even the label of "Australian poetry": "... our language is English and our poetry is essentially English poetry" (323). The words of Judith Wright, an Australian writer, on the other hand, smack of greater self-assurance, and hence, applicable to most of the other Commonwealth writers as well:

We are beginning to write, no longer as transplanted writers, nor as rootless men who reject the past and put their hopes only in the future, but as men with a present to be lived and a past to nourish us. (11)

As regards the region of the West Indies, it has no definitive and exclusive culture. Its peoples have always arrived there as travellers, immigrants or exiles from Africa, Asia and Europe. Louis James’s words highlight the paradox and complexity of the culture of the West Indies:
Any claim that there is one West Indian voice, at least as yet, does not bear examination ... although the great majority of West Indians have an African background, the peculiar circumstances of Caribbean history, its slavery and its emancipation, its educational and governmental systems, have all been within the European system. Further, the concept that "European" culture has a national identity in opposition to that of the Caribbean has the dangerous elements of racial mythology. (89-90)

Although verses were written in the West Indies during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, they were categorized as 'minor English poetry', for poetry of that period, apart from the folk songs of the slaves and peasants, smacked of only the works of the poets of England, employing the language of the ruling class. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Lorna Goodison and Louis Simpson spring most readily to mind as the English poets of the last decade of the twentieth century, in terms of international acclaim. At the popular level, 'dub poetry' — a form of performance poetry having its roots in popular Jamaican culture — has also attracted an international audience, thanks to such poets as Jean Binta Breeze, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Mutabaruka.
In terms of form and content, Caribbean poetry in English took a recognizable turn in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

This development was related to the general socio-political thrust of this period, manifested in the labour unrest that swept through the Caribbean in the late 1930s, followed by the appearance of political parties and agitation for self-government. This spirit was also fuelled by an apparent opening up of ideas and possibilities, including opportunities for travel and study, in the immediate postwar period. (Baugh, Memory 242)

By this time, Caribbean poets had learned to describe the local scenery, but it was only during the forties that the landscape was used as a metaphor for personal feelings. Protest poetry also was becoming increasingly common during the forties:

It was a decade of good but minor writers who had learned how to use some of the freedom of modern poetry, in contrast to traditional forms of verse, to suggest a West Indian voice and attitude. (King, W.I.Lit. 118)
Although in poetry, craftsmanship remained still largely indifferent and the will to utterance too hasty, there emerged a truly new liberating spirit abroad, with the imminent collapse of colonialism:

Anti-colonialism, the necessity for Caribbean self-definition, protest against social ills deriving from considerations of class, colour and economic status, assertion of the dignity and beauty of the black person, willingness to take poetic nurture from local cultural roots — these were some of the themes that brought a new immediacy to Caribbean poetry in English and hinted at its potential to challenge and disturb rather than merely soothe or divert. (Baugh, Memory 243)

Foremost among the poets of this crucial period of transition are Una Marson, George Campbell, Frank Collymore and A.J. Seymour.

Particular to the region of the West Indies are its varied multi-racial composition and the lack of visible, evolving continuity between the inhabitants and the culture of their origin. Critics like Bruce King are well aware of the incongruities between the contrastive constituents of what commonly passes for the West Indian identity:
West Indian literature has been concerned with such contrasts as the poor and middle class; history and the present; the desire for and suspicion of education; dispossession and freedom; racial difference and creolisation; metropolitan and regional culture; local pride and embarrassment. (W.I.Lit. 7)

All the same, King does not fail to take note of the common integrating elements in the art of West Indies:

Common themes include the search for 'roots' and for identity, social and historical injustices, feelings of imprisonment, the desire for order, the discovery of traditions or a folk culture, and the creation of a new society. (W.I.Lit. 8)

Towards the close of the 1940s, time seemed to be getting ripe enough for the advent of a major voice like Derek Walcott in the world of art in West Indies. Those who were quick enough to surmise the genius of Walcott's poetry even as an eighteen-year-old with his self-published collection, were soon to be proved right. By the late 1960s, it became abundantly clear that Walcott was sure to rise to fame.
Further, growing political activities in the islands led to the birth of several new literary circles and periodicals. According to James,

One literary circle formed in Barbados around Frank Collymore; A.J. Seymour led another in what is now Guyana; in Trinidad the leading activists were C.L.R.James, George Padmore and Alfred Mendes. The Jamaican group included Philip Sherlock, Edna Manley, Roger Mais and V.S.Reid. Out of these groups came the literary periodicals that gave the emergent writers a public voice, and a forum for criticism. *Bim* was published in Barbados from 1942 as the organ of the Young Men’s Progressive Club, and is still flourishing as a Caribbean enterprise. *Focus* came out in Jamaica in occasional volumes from 1943, edited by Edna Manley and others. *Kyk-over-Al* (1945-1961), under the editorship of Seymour in Guyana, attempted to explore West Indian culture in its wider aspects, although it lacked the professional expertise of the economic and social sciences being drawn on since 1965 by the publications of the New World groups in the Caribbean. (26)
Several expatriate Caribbean writers are given encouragement and financial help under the B.B.C.'s programme Caribbean Voices, edited by Una Marson and then Henry Swanzy.

The contrasting strains in West Indian poetry of this period can be seen from A.J. Seymour's "Over Guiana, Clouds" and Wilson Harris's poem sequence, From Eternity to Season (1954). Seymour tries to see his nation as a complex of many elements, geographical, historical and racial: "The races fade into a brown stained people / And the Guiana spirit arises, stretching / As a young giant begins to open his eyes" (qtd. in James 27). Wilson Harris's poetry which lacks the absolute control of Seymour's, penetrates to a deeper level.

In Harris's poem "Spirit of the Fall", the experience of seeing a girl with a torn dress by a well, and tasting the water she draws, occasions the birth of sensuous consciousness, necessary to anyone awakening to full human and rational identity. Yet this marks only one stage in a continuing process, where nothing remains static: "So man in his unreconciled drama stands / where the future can never be ground ..." (qtd. in James 28).

While Seymour and Harris tended to write long poems, the Barbadian poet Edward Brathwaite made a
heroic attempt at the epic genre, with the publication of the first part of his Rights of Passage in 1967. Basically, the poem is the epic of the expatriate Negro, opening with Africa's vast tracks of time and space, the original locale of the Negro peoples, capable of communicating their emotions and sensibility, in which one could even feel the authentic speech rhythms of the blacks:

Drum skin whip
lash, master sun's
cutting edge of
heat taut
surfaces of things
I sing
I shout
I groan
about .... (qtd. in James 29)

Though the verse gets often stultified, scattered into phrases, and split between lines, in order to startle the readers accustomed to conventional cadences, it is not meant to progress jerkily, but to simply reflect the spontaneity of the colloquial speech.

At the opposite end of the poetic spectrum to Brathwaite is A.L. Hendriks, the author of On this Mountain (1965), who always views man against the
backdrop of a social context. Though Hendrik is personal and private in the vision of his art, his verse is mannered and sentimental:

This thin and oval stone, cold upon the brown earth
is not dumb, nor is the grass, nor the curved stick
lying smooth by the brook's edge; you may listen
and through the unapparent sense learn from them
a new music, secret, and played on no instrument. (qtd. in James 31)

Yet despite all their differences, Hendrik and Brathwaite share the same West Indian trait in common, namely, a peculiarly acute awareness of the relationship between man and his locale along with Walcott, Seymour, Harris and many others.

The quest of Caribbean writers for their own authentic voice is rendered peculiarly difficult, because of the influence of their cultures of England and the United States on their poetic imagination which has been far more unremitting and pervasive than their own African strain of culture. Much as the Caribbean
writer may struggle to contain or discuss his European legacy, he still must be able to discriminate and make his choices meaningful. For, he must still respond to the pressures of a society, where closely knit communities make protest difficult or even dangerous.

Though Caribbean poetry has gradually emerged from the shadow of English poetry on the whole, the award of the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature to Walcott was, in effect, a recognition of the growing ascendancy of the Caribbean poetry in English as a whole, in a space of five decades.

That Derek Alton Walcott has all along been writing remarkable verse and the quality of his literary output and sensibility mark him out for such an overwhelming recognition probably never occurred to many till the actual announcement in 1992. Walcott, who had always wanted to be a poet, won the honour quite deservedly, after about five decades of sustained work having written poetry and drama of a high order, which probed into the past, interrogated the present and formulated the possible lives of the progress in the future of the West Indian’s life and culture and evoked pictures of a New World that held up its hybridity as a badge of courageous affirmation of its unique identity.
The editors of Remapping Culture clearly recognize the supremacy of Walcott in the literary horizon of the Caribbean:

The New World is Walcott’s lodestar, or constant that guides and directs his movements and his path as well as his destination. In poem after poem, essay after essay, he defines and refines his New World in such a way that it is no longer and in no way a mestizo, mulatto, the fall-out of a long, hateful and subsequently apologetic colonial encounter and history; but the gift of that history to a New Man who makes no attempt to either incriminate or exculpate that history. The New World and the New Man, ever nascent, ever fresh, tread a different path, recreate a new tradition joyously affirming the emergence of a new species, not a mutant of the old but a branching of the genus. The joy is so intense that it more or less erases the elemental rage that the New Man often enough feels against racial prejudice, historical injustice and contemporary apologia. The joy is a binder to the fragments carefully collected and put together; and Walcott, the New Man, and his
poetry, the New World, embody this joy. (Vijayasree 110)

The tang of every blast of the Caribbean breathes a new warmth into the overall design and texture of Walcott's verse and its endless slapping of the undulating waves finds resonance in the rhythmic, clapping assonance of his poetry.

India has always constituted one of the principal strains of Commonwealth Literature. The place and status of Indian English poetry before and after independence have constituted a major subject of controversy.

To R.Parthasarathy, Indian poetry in English "did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India" (3). On the one hand, P.Lal and Adil Jassawalla join hands with R.Parthasarathy in denouncing the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and his contemporaries. However, yet another school of critics like V.K.Gokak and C.D.Narasimhaiah lauds the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu. To Gokak, for instance, Sarojini Naidu is the Yeats of India and Sri Aurobindo a great innovator in the art of versification (qtd.in Das 18). C.D.Narasimhaiah compares Sri Aurobindo to Joseph Conrad who has broadened the descriptive range of the English language:
It may be said of Sri Aurobindo that he made the English language accommodate certain hitherto unknown areas of experience both through his prose work, "Life Divine" and through his epic *Savitri*, not to speak of the numerous translations from Sanskrit poetry and drama as well as his other less known but important works. (Swan 29)

In bold relief, there are also sceptics who denounce outright post-Independence Indian English poets beginning with Nissim Ezekiel: "To some purists the best post-1947 poets in English would appear as pseudo-Keats, second-rate Tennyson, third-rate Hardy, and fourth-rate Eliot" (Das 19).

But according to Mahapatra, "It was actually with the departure of the British from India that a new seriousness in the intentions of poets and novelists writing in English became evident" (36).

Yet another Indian critic makes a pungent comment:

There is a further irony: the farther India is leaving behind the colonial period, the stronger seems to be the literary Indians' mastery over the language of their erstwhile masters. (Satpathy 52)
Modern India is a synthesis of many cultural crosscurrents and the modern Indian, in Mulk Raj Anand's words, is conscious of "the double burden on my shoulders, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalaya of my Indian past" (67).

Several books of Indian English verse came to be written only after Independence and Nissim Ezekiel has been virtually a trend-setting path-breaker in this regard. Ezekiel started his career as a poet publishing poems in English magazines. Fortune Press brought out A Time to Change, his first collection in England in 1952. To Bruce King, "... this may be considered the beginning of the canon of modern Indian English poetry" (Mod. Ind. Poet. 15). Commenting on Nissim Ezekiel, Gajendra kumar has observed in his typical fashion:

Nissim Ezekiel shot into literary limelight on account of his craftsmanship, critical sensibility, a sense of discipline and devotion and mastery to [sic] Indian English poetry. He was considered to be the first Indian English poet to acquire such a dignified professional proficiency. The poet made an effort to nurture a new kind of poetic mannerism free from the precincts of provincialism and colonialism. During 1960s
while the English poetry was on the edifice to break a fresh ground from formality to openness, Ezekiel pioneered the parallel platform. He excelled the modern poetry with modernistic attitudes and rejected the old fashioned facets of poetic text and context.

Since Ezekiel’s publication of his first book in 1952, considerable ground has been covered on the Indian literary scene, in the form of major works, journals, events, personalities and awards: "There are perhaps thirty poets recognized to be of worth, a number of younger poets aspiring to that title and probably several hundreds who have published volumes of poetry in English" (King, Mod. Ind. Poet. 4).

More significant than the achievements of individual poets, is the rapidity with which Indian English poetry has founded its own unique self-sustaining tradition, with readily recognizable models, periods and influences. Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, R.Parthasarathy, K.N.Daruwalla, Jayanta Mehapatra, Kamala Das, Vikram Seth and Eunice de Souza have been among those who have taken poetry into a new plane. Significantly, poets of India offer a wide variety in terms of voices, perspectives, forms, issues and themes.
There are identifiable periods too, when Indian poetry took new directions, such as the focussing on the actuality of the personal and familial life by Kamala Das and Ezekiel in the early '60s, or the experimental poetry of J.P. Malhotra, Kolatkar, Nandy, Chitre and Mahapatra which began to appear in the '70s. A renewed, more detailed, satirical and yet essentially compassionate focussing on communal and family heritage has come in vogue, still more recently.

M.K. Naik raises a pertinent question and suggests possibly an appropriate answer in his book:

Wherein exactly lies the genuine Indianness of Indian poetry in English? This Indianness may take several forms and shapes, and may appear in a work of art in diverse ways — obvious and subtle — but it is a quality which is unmistakably present in the finest work of all Indian writers, whether they write in their mother tongue or in English. (72)

The poets no longer feel apologetic for writing in a language that is not their own, and also, no longer feel enthralled to any foreign culture or a foreign sensibility, as they are simply conscious of a sense of an 'Indian' reality.
On the whole, Indian English poets have increasingly tried to evoke the sense of "Indianness" both in content and language of their poetry. Ezekiel's "Very Indian Poem in Indian English", "Good-bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.", Keki N.Daruwalla's "The Professor Condoles" and R.Parthasarathy's "Incident at Ahmedpore Station" can be cited as a few examples of such a kind of verse.

Superstition and folk beliefs which exist in Indian society constitute a favourite thematic strand of recent Indian poetry in English. Nissim Ezekiel handles such a theme with superb irony and subdued mockery in his "Night of the Scorpion", where a mother is stung by a scorpion and the sceptical father tries "... every curse and blessing / powder, mixture, herb and hybrid" (37-38). The peasants swarm in and pour out superstitious beliefs and suggestions. Subsequently, the mother's reaction, "Thank God, the scorpion picked on me / and spared my children" (47-48) circumvents in ironic terms, both the above-quoted responses.

Indian setting, Indian subject-matter and local colour are not employed in Indian verse in English purely as external devices. Kashiprasad Ghosh, for example, sings of the Ganga, but his Ganga is practically indistinguishable from the stylized and
standardized, soft-flowing stream figuring in any piece of conventional description of nature. A.K. Ramanujan's "A River" is very much the authentic article, with "the wet stones glistening like sleepy / crocodiles, the dry ones / shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun" (12-14). It is a river which carried off

... three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda, as usual. (23-26)

Poems like "Night of the Scorpion" and "A River"

by their visions of an everyday Indian reality expressed in an unobtrusive personal voice stood out in the reader's mind as signposts indicating the directions poetry in English was likely to take in future. (Parthasarathy 188)

According to Paniker,

Indian poetry in English necessarily refers to two parameters: Indian and English. Indian may mean, either, written by Indian citizens, or written about Indian subjects, or even simply expressing Indian sensibility. This implies that there is a sensibility that is identified
with the land and people of India. National sensibilities are ultimately based on racial and cultural factors. Whether they are inherited or acquired is another moot question. 'English' may be taken to suggest that a certain form of English language is used, or to imply that the culture of the English people of England is at the back of it, to the extent the literature of England is a point of reference for its understanding, appreciation and evaluation. (137)

Derek Walcott and Nissim Ezekiel have been seminal influences on much subsequent Commonwealth poetry in English. Between them, and in their different ways, they have effected a sustained and searching engagement with the colonial experience and cultural identity. Both have been assiduous explorers into new poetic possibilities. While Walcott has stamped his Caribbean local authority on English/European forms and modes, and defined his identity in terms of a multicultural reading of Caribbean experience, Ezekiel has been more concerned with city life, sexuality, problems of marriage and the need to overcome alienation. In different ways, each has extended the horizons of English and in the same process validated the poetic potential of Commonwealth poetry. Hence, most of their poems lend themselves to a
highly rewarding comparative study, as such an investigation is likely to throw light on some of the most interesting features of their art by making mutual illuminations quite rewardingly new.

The first chapter, Introduction, highlights the fact that the two poets under discussion are poles apart in their nationalities, their ways of expression and choice of themes but show some similarities in their peculiarly divided heritage. Both being poets of the postcolonial era, Commonwealth Literature is taken up here for a general discussion, focussing essentially on West Indian and Indian literatures.

Chapter Two, Heritage as a Source of Creativity, shows how the poems of Walcott and Ezekiel present personae on a perennial quest for identities. The poets cannot be totally indifferent to the unreconciled elements of their split cultural selves. Though Walcott and Ezekiel do not reject any of the cultural hues of their inheritance, their art invariably tends to exhort their inmost selves to adhere strictly to a reasonable middle course. In Walcott, there is all the same, a strikingly generous and unequivocal acceptance — even admiration — for the English language and culture, but a curiously inveterate emotional assertion of the Caribbean culture which in him, for a good measure, is
rooted in Saint Lucia, with the result, his personae often find themselves totally at home there. In the case of Ezekiel, while there is some vague sentimental acceptance of India as the motherland, there is also a pronounced reservation on account of its "backwardness", perhaps suggestive of his innate preference for his profoundly self-conscious semitic origins.

The Third Chapter, Landscape and the Seascape dwells on the bulk of the primary preoccupations of the poets taken up for comparison, highlighting the harmonious blend of artists' thoughts with the landscape and seascape. The chapter also studies the images used by the poets to express mutability of existence, association of the microcosm with the macrocosm and the poets' love/hate relationship with regard to their homelands.

Walcott's poetry abounds with seascape images. This chapter analyses the bond between Walcott and the sea. To Walcott, the sea is his first love and a lasting, powerful influence. To him, the ocean is an agent of change, a mirror, a blank texture and a book. Ezekiel's sea poems amount only to a few. His use of the sea as a poetic metaphor is traditional. To Ezekiel, the sea also stands for the vacuity of his own life and for the nightmare of death.
In Walcott, the Caribbean sea and the islands, their fauna and flora, all constitute the objective correlative of his art. There is an unmistakable stamp of the macrocosm in most of Walcott’s space-conscious body of verse. Above all, there is an undeniable rhythm of the sea waves finding its way into several of his sea poems. Ezekiel was born and brought up in the coastal city of Mumbai, yet his sensibility remains essentially and steadfastly urban and cityward-bound and there is a surprising scarcity of sea imagery in his poetry in comparison.

The Fourth Chapter, Womanscape deals with the treatment of women by the poets under discussion. The artists explore the man-woman relationship from the male point of view and they compare women to seascape, landscape and inanimate objects, but with a difference. Both present a detailed anatomy of woman’s bodyscape and fail to attribute any human feeling to her. According to the poets, the woman is an embodiment of corruption, defilement and cruelty. While there is a genuine love affair in the case of Walcott, Ezekiel’s love poems are based on mere "lies". Walcott’s sexual poems are autobiographical and physical, while there is a tendency to spiritualize sexual experience in Ezekiel’s poems. The poets suffer from a secret sense of guilt after the
deed is done, but the sense of mortification is not so great in Ezekiel as in Walcott. Though the poets have umpteen affairs with several women, surprisingly, they do have their own special women. Ezekiel’s marriage poems subscribe to the view that marriage is necessary for everyone, despite all its shortcomings.

The Fifth Chapter, The Poets as Craftsmen deals mainly with the craftsmanship of Walcott and Ezekiel. The vibrant Creole of Walcott’s native Caribbean lends his poetry an ineffable richness, texture and a definitive local habitation. Ezekiel’s poems written in Swadeshi Angrezi, on the other hand, are strikingly significant for their exuberant wit and humour, though the ironic distance the poet assumes from the personae in them renders him callous and indifferent.

This chapter also studies the quality of influence on their canonized works. There are undoubtedly interesting instances of mimicry in both of them, despite their pronounced originality in the conception and design of their art. Several of Walcott’s poems begin with conspicuous markers of intertextuality as epigraphs, quotations and dramatic allusions. There are numerous instances which also suggest biblical and mythological influences on the artist. As regards Ezekiel, his poems reveal identifiable traces of
influences from Yeats, D.H.Lawrence, T.S.Eliot and Browning. There are several poems which carry unmistakable biblical echoes, especially from Psalms and The Proverbs. Besides underlining the similarities between the poets, the chapter seeks to analyse the nuances in respect of colour imagery and light-and-darkness imagery.

Chapter Six, Summation, summarizes in a nutshell, the salient conclusions drawn at the end of each chapter of the dissertation for a comprehensive comparison of the andro-centric works of these two postcolonial poets.

The research methodology followed throughout the thesis is based on the sixth edition of MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. The approach adopted has been eclectic, by and large, suggested by eminent comparatists like Weisstein.