Chapter Two
Heritage as a Source of Creativity

Identity crisis, an inevitable consequence of a divided heritage, has been one of the most prominent motifs in the postcolonial verse in English. As regards both Derek Walcott and Nissim Ezekiel, alienation constitutes a prominent strand in their preoccupations as poets. They may not totally be obsessed with it, but quite self-consciously return, time and again, to the treatment of the issue, in their quest for self-acceptance and wholeness.

To Weisstein, the primary components that constitute any standard literary work are, "subject matter (Stoff), theme, motif, situation, image (Bild), trait (Zing) and topos" (129). Stoff, as defined by Elisabeth Frazel is

... a well-delineated story line [Fabel] existing prior to the literary work, a 'plot', which, as an internal or external experience, as a report on a contemporary event, as a historical, mythical, or religious action, as a work already shaped by another writer, or even as a product of the imagination, is
treated in literary fashion. (qtd. in Weisstein 136)

The "stoff" with regard to the works of the poets in question tends to appear as fairly universal, their main burden being the dual heritage of alienation/sense of belonging, division/union, oscillation between two cultures/attempt to close the cultural divide, personal frustrations and disillusionments and obliquely, the quest for establishment of a self-identity.

Writing in "Blues" Walcott records an agonizing moment of his youth, vividly etched in memory:

Those five or six young guys hunched on the stoop that oven-hot summer night whistled me over. ... You figure right! They beat this yellow nigger black and blue. (1-4, 15-17)

Ezekiel's "Background Casually" also recounts a similar experience punctuating the hidden animosity that marks the divisions in humanity at times: "A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears. / I grew in terror of the strong" (10-11).
Van Tieghem also speaks of "the role played by ... [the poets'] own genius, their ideal and their art, in the variations they have played on a common theme" (89). Any reader of Walcott and Ezekiel will come across themes peculiar to the West Indies and Indian societies as well as common themes, such as the quest for identity explored in countless ways, and subjected to varied treatments. Niven is not far off the mark when he highlights the futility that marks the process of labelling, in the context of contemporary socio-cultural dynamics in relationships:

It may be becoming altogether inappropriate to speak in terms of rational labels .... The impermanence of cultural rootings and the cross-fertilization of art, society and politics in the modern world ... make rational descriptions redundant. (1107)

On the contrary, Wellek, a critic of great merit, finds validity in the study of an author, against the backdrop of the milieu to which he belongs:

The most obvious cause of a work of art is its creator, the author, and hence, an explanation in terms of the personality and life of the writer has been one of the oldest and established methods of literary study. (75)
A thematic survey of Walcott's and Ezekiel's poetry has been undertaken in this project under a broad definition of the problem of heritage.

Walcott's very parentage — being the son of an English father and a black mother — places him at once in an odd situation:

Mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word Ashanti as with the word Warwickshire, both separately intimating my grandfather's roots, both baptising this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian. (Walcott, Dream 10)

As a corollary of the chasm between the cultures he has inherited at birth, Walcott faces another profoundly disturbing kind of alienation in the spheres of religious, cultural and sociological milieux. For instance, he finds himself an integral part of a poor minority group of uncultured and happy-go-lucky methodists "a genteel, self-denying Methodist poverty" (Walcott, London 6) in a land, where the dominant majority are Catholics.

Walcott has a thorough grounding not only in European history, art and literature, but also in his Africa-based culture of Saint Lucia. He is born partly
white, while most of Saint Lucians are black. By temperament, he is passionately drawn to the refined English culture, especially its literature, while living in an island where the mass of the people speak nothing but a French Patois. The words of the protagonist, Shabine in "The Schooner Flight", could just as well be an ironic account of the poet’s own plight:

I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
And either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.

(40-43)

These lines call to mind, in the first place, how the West Indian poet combines in himself several contrary features and disparate elements, when viewed in terms of his lineage of culture, class, colour and nationality.

Walcott’s "A Far Cry from Africa" discusses the conflict between his loyalties to Africa and Britain respectively. The title of the poem itself underlines the poet’s cultural alienation from the African mainstream. The poet’s thorough self-awareness of his own identity crisis, resulting in hybridism in whatever he experiences, has occasioned some of the most poignant
moments of Walcott’s verse, bordering on the masochistic: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both,/ Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" (26-27). The poet’s divided heritage precludes him from identifying himself directly with any one culture, thus triggering off in him instantly a sense of rootlessness and isolation.

Walcott’s poem "A Far Cry from Africa" is interesting on account of the scrupulous sense of objectivity, even while presenting a cultural divide, showing an African tribe in a strikingly negative light: "A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies, / Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt" (1-2).

Neither are the European imperialists totally presented in any favourable light: "... the worm, colonel of carrion, cries: / "Waste no compassion on these separate dead!" (5-6). It is interesting to note that the poet characterizes even the powerful white colonizer as a parasitic cowardly worm heartlessly feeding on carrion. With the result, Walcott’s feelings with regard to his European and African racial heritage, remain, singularly ambiguous.
The closing stanza of the poem poses a pertinent question, highlighting the ambivalence of the protagonist, in respect of the language and culture he has to choose: "... how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" (29-30).

In Another Life, Chapter One, Walcott looks upon himself as a "prodigy of the wrong age and color" (23) and a "monster" produced by "... The dream / of reason" (21-22) and makes a poignant observation in Chapter Twenty-one: "I saw with twin heads, / and everything I say is contradicted" (101-02). In Midsummer XIX, Walcott's bias is even more explicitly spelt out:

I saw in my own cheekbones the mule’s head of a Breton,
the placid, implacable strategy of the Mongol,
the moustache like the downturned horns of a helmet;
the chain of my blood pulled me to darker nations,
though I looked like any other sallow, crumpled colon
stepping up to the pier that day from the custom’s launch.
I am Watteau’s wild oats, his illegitimate heir. (8-14)
In fact, Walcott is caught between the two cultures, as is poignantly brought out in "Codicil":

Schizophrenic, wrenched by two styles.
One a hack's hired prose, I earn
my exile. I trudge this sickle, moonlit
beach for miles,
tan, burn
to slough off
this love of ocean that's self love.
To change your language you must change
your life. (1-7)

The self-conscious agony, resultant of Walcott's divided self finds an expression through the convoluted syntax in Midsummer LII:

I heard them marching the leaf-wet roads of my head,
the sucked vowels of a syntax trampled to mud,
a division of dictions, one troop black,
barefooted,
the other in redcoats bright as their sovereign's blood;
their feet scuffed like rain, the bare soles
with the shod.
One fought for a queen, the other was chained in her service, but both, in bitterness, travelled the same road.

Our occupation and the Army of Occupation are born enemies, but what mortar can size the broken stones of the barracks of Brimstone Hill to the gaping brick of Belfast? (1-11)

In "Mass Man" Walcott describes a carnival which painfully evokes the memory of his sense of alienation: "'Join us,' they shout, 'O God, child, you can't dance?' / But somewhere in that whirlwind's radiance / a child, rigged like a bat, collapses, sobbing" (10-12).

However, Walcott turns out to be neither a permanent quester who cannot make up his mind nor a perenniel straddler of issues. There are several assertions made in his voluminous body of verse which vouch for the fact that the poet shows preference and loyalty for his abiding West Indian heritage. In "As John to Patmos", for instance, he declares, "So I shall voyage no more from home; may I speak here / This island is heaven" (8-9).

The crux of any informed interpretation of Walcott's art consists in an understanding of the
complexity of the geographical, historical and cultural elements which have influenced him. It is highly rewarding to approach Walcott as a writer and an artist, taking into consideration, the backdrop of his culture and geography. Rita Dove has enumerated the historic reasons which have contributed to the multi-faceted dimensions and layers that go into the making of the West Indian culture:

To get a hint of the complexity of the West Indian identity crisis, first look at a map. Register the distances between islands ... and imagine the small towns trying to imitate suburban America, the capital cities wishing they were Washington or at least Havana; imagine the tiny communities separated by distances we find insignificant but they experience as absolute. Then look at a history book: the waves of conquests from Spain, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain; the African slave trade, the influx of cheap peasant labour from India and China. Imagine the Babel of languages, the frictions arising from different religions, eating habits, body gestures. Above all, imagine the northwestern hemisphere leaving its weight on the rest of
the world, telling them that their ways are primitive, shameful, wrong, and must be changed. (qtd. in Hirsch 298)

The above comment highlights the dynamics of language, location, history and ethnicity at work in the Caribbean and its collective impact on an extraordinary sensitive soul like that of Walcott. However, rather than using poetry as an artistic medium for voicing such identity-related issues, Walcott exploits his own grossly anomalous situation as a metaphoric means and a uniquely relevant objective correlative for lending shape to his artistic themes.

It is little wonder that Walcott's muse continues to be on exile, though unremittingly embarked on an odyssey, through an uncharitable ocean of the complex history of his inheritance. To Paula Burnett, there is a certain uniqueness about the Caribbean as the locale of art: The meeting point between three continents — Europe, Africa and America — and between three poetic traditions — The British, the West African, and the North American which transforms its poets and writers into "philosophers for the modern world", in their urge to form a cohesive identity, to turn "negatives into positives" and to assert "a cultural self without the denial of that assertion to others" (xxxii).
Walcott's transformation of those "negatives" does not seek, though, to locate a "positive" response in a stable cultural self, but fabricates a positive artistic gesture out of the exploration of such instability.

Ezekiel too, to a remarkable extent, is aware of his alienation from the mainstream of the Indian ethos as he belongs to the Mumbai Jewry, known as the Bene-Israel of the Konkan area. The Bene-Israel Jews in complexion almost generally like Europeans, are supposed to be the descendants of refugees who reached the Mumbai coast after the destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Thus, Ezekiel finds himself in a paradoxical situation, which, in social and cultural terms, is unique in itself:

> I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider. Circumstances and decisions related me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian. (qtd. in Parthasarathy 37)

Nevertheless, it is not out of any zealous sense of honour, loyalty or love that Ezekiel lays his claim to Indianness. There is almost a subtle tone of ironic condescension about the following lines from Ezekiel in "After Reading a Prediction":

> ...
This is the place
where I was born. I
know it
well. It is home,
which I recognise at last
as a kind of hell
to be made tolerable. (13-19)

In an interview given to Devinder Kohli, Ezekiel has gone on record that his attempts over a span of three decades to become a part of India has been a failure, saying, "I see a great difference between a real Indian and my Indianness .... We've lived in India only for 2000 years. A Jew can never be a 'real' Indian or a 'real' Ch Inaman" (Hammer 67).

Undoubtedly, the above remarks seem to assign certain priority and privilege to ethnicity over nationality. In the poem entitled "A Small Summit", Ezekiel confesses with a rare degree of candour, his conflicts arising as a result of his self-conscious assumptions of superiority:

Do I belong, I wonder,
to the common plain? A bitter thought.
I know that I would rather
suffer somewhere else
than be at home
among the accepted styles.

I cannot bear the view,
although it seems important
somehow either to endure it
as a fact of self-created history,
or to work upon its nearest
particulars in the light of love.

To work upon - that's the point
but can I do it? (13-26)

The above passages make it abundantly clear that
to Ezekiel, "Indianness" is an intellectual issue that
is arrived at through a compromising kind of intricate
logic verging on politics rather than on any emotional
belief stemming out of utterly psychological need.

Being a typical product of an inertia of cultural
dynamics, Ezekiel, in "Background, Casually", makes a
critical observation of whatever is obtained in Indian
scenario: "But undernourished Hindu lads, / Their
prepositions always wrong, / Repelled me by passivity"
(12-14).

However, it should be stressed here that Ezekiel's
seemingly anti-Hindu stance has absolutely no malice in
it. What he finds striking about the Hindus in
particular, and Indians in general, is their meekness and non-resisting passivity. There are also other instances in Ezekiel's art, which provide instances of his feeling like a misfit in India.

In the same poem, the protagonist speaks of the challenges he comes across in getting adjusted to his environment in India, after his unsuccessful sojourn in England:

How to feel it home, was the point.  
Some reading had been done, but what  
Had I observed, except my own  
Exasperation? All Hindus are  
Like that, my father used to say,  
When someone talked too loudly, or  
Knocked at the door like the Devil.  
They hawked and spat. They sprawled around.  

(36-43)

Neither is there anything maudlin or sentimental about Ezekiel's reflections on Mumbai, his native city. His poem "Island" presents a robust no-nonsense picture:

Unsuitable for song as well as sense  
the island flowers into slums  
and skyscrapers, reflecting  
precisely the growth of my mind. (1-4)
Critics have already taken note of Ezekiel's sense of judgement: "If he sounds harsh it is only a reflection of the city's harshness" (Chacko 78). If Ezekiel's early poetry is critical of the Indian way of life and culture, his later poetry rebels against an equally closed view of the Jewish way of life. For instance, he comments on his Jewish wedding in the poem, "Jewish Wedding in Bombay", "... I don't think there was much / that struck me as solemn or beautiful" (20-21).

The same disparaging, unemotional tone can be detected in the following lines of the same poem, dwelling on certain specific aspects of Jewish life and culture:

Even the most orthodox, it was said, ate beef because it was cheaper, and some even risked their souls by relishing pork. The Sabbath was for betting and swearing and drinking. Nothing extravagant, mind you, all in a low key, and very decently kept in check. My father used to say, these orthodox chaps certainly know how to draw the line.
in their own crude way. He himself had drifted into the liberal
creed but without much conviction, taking us all with him.
My mother was very proud of being 'progressive'. (24-32)

Perhaps such a kind of ironic perception runs in the very bloodstream of Ezekiel, as it were. There are distinct traces of non-conformity of behaviour about several of his own ancestors.

Ezekiel is, thus, quite aware of the features which distinguish his society, ancestry, religion and, above all, the hypocrisy of behaviour of his own sect. Nevertheless, discontented with both the Jewish customs and Indian culture, the poet wants to take refuge in an alien land which could accommodate him with all his eccentricities and idiosyncratic, non-conforming behaviour. In his youth, on leaving his native city of Mumbai, he found himself in a bigger metropolis, London, where he spent more than three years, only to realize that he was a misfit there. In his autobiographical poem, "Background Casually", he confesses,

The London seasons passed me by.
I lay in bed two years alone.
And then a Woman came to tell
My willing ears I was the Son
Of Man. I knew that I had failed
In everything, a bitter thought. (26-31)

Looking back, the poet finds that those days in a basement room in London were utterly discomforting, and miserably solitary. He utters in "London",

Cold and bare it held
a real turbulence
in check, for growth
that could be almost
measured with the seasons. (4-8)

Those days of privation and solitude continue to haunt the psyche of the poet-protagonist even in adulthood, often lending him unsavoury metaphors to his poetic art, and serving as a repository for suitable imagery to depict the misery of the present. The poem continues:

Sometimes I think I’m still
in that basement room,
a permanent and proud
metaphor of struggle
In "Edinburgh Interlude", he recalls "Bombay mangoes" as representative of what is ideal about this earthly life, whether he succeeds in winning or losing them. It becomes obvious in these lines that the post-protagonist wants to measure the degree of his success or failure in life, only in terms of what he could achieve or lose as a result of all his exertions in Mumbai. In short, Mumbai turns out to be the one city of his life that would define his triumph or defeat, happiness or pain:

Perhaps it is not the mangoes
that my eyes and tongue long for,
but Bombay as the fruit
on which I've lived,
winning and losing
my little life. (123-28)

It is interesting to note that while Walcott feels in "A Far Cry from Africa", he is "poisoned with the blood of both" (26), Ezekiel, is of the view that he was born and groomed in a land which he recognizes "at last / as a kind of hell" (17-18) in "After Reading a Prediction". In a sense, both Walcott's and Ezekiel's
poems reveal profoundly personal, and perennial quests for identities which cannot totally ignore certain unreconciled presences of their own split 'selves', deep within them.

Homi J. Bhabha highlights the ambivalence lying at the core of the colonial presence in the following terms:

... a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different - a mutation, a hybrid. (153)

Both Walcott and Ezekiel steer a middle course, leaning more on acceptance of the "mutation" or "hybrid", rather than outright rejection. As regards Griffith's analysis of 'split personality', any such controversy between cultures is a non-issue: "... Syncreticity is neither a threat to identity, nor a denial of the uniqueness of post-colonial reality" (443).

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the works of Walcott and Ezekiel do not, on the whole,
subscribe to Griffith’s view, but merely assert that hybridity of cultures in an individual, does drag him along, cut off from all cultural moorings, ultimately landing him in a dangling state, as a victim, who, most probably, is bound to face an identity-crisis.

In a sense, Walcott has reconciled himself to a neutral, non-aligned stance of "betweenness", which does not offer any well-defined clue to his art or life. The Presentation Speech made by Professor Kjell Espmark at the Ceremony of the Nobel Prize Award to Walcott acknowledges the divided heritage, amply manifest in his art:

Walcott’s art arises from the crossing of two greatly differing traditions, the first a tradition he allowed himself to be adopted by, the European lineage from Homer via Dante, the Elizabethans, and Milton to Auden and Dylan Thomas, an elaborate tradition discernible in lavish metaphor and luxurious sound and rhythm, the second a domestic ageless tradition, an elementary language where, like a new Adam, the poet gives things their names, perceiving how the speech sounds take shape — as in a passage in the autobiographical
Another Life: "I watched the vowels curl from the tongue of the carpenter's plane, / resinous, fragrant". Derek Walcott's extraordinary idiom is born in the meeting between European virtuosity and the sensuality of the Caribbean Adam. (1)

The poem "Cul de Sac Valley" highlights the challenge Walcott faces as a poet in the context of his dual but conflicting heritage. There is something inexplicably alien about Walcott, from the point of view of the Caribbeans:

Exhaling trees ... hissing: what you wish from us will never be, your words is English, is a different tree. (10-13)

Such an inability to bridge his poetry with the native dialect is symptomatic of Walcott's dilemma as an artist. However, the fact remains that Creole is "a tongue they speak / in, but cannot write" (16-17). Walcott realizes his error and corrects it instantly, applying rules of language and idiom and shouts: "Mohaut! Forestiere! And far, / the leaf-hoarse echo / of Mabouya! And, ah!" (23-25).
Now that the language rift has been bridged by Walcott, Mahaut, Forestiere and Mabouya, the mountains of Saint Lucia, come to him like tame dogs:

The hill rises and eats
from my hand, the mongrel
yelping happily, repeats
vowel after vowel. (46-49)

With this grand, symbolic gesture on the part of the poet, the damage done by his earlier abandonment of the island gets considerably amended and "... the sap of memory / races upwards" (52-53). Walcott drives home also the fact that Creole is inextricable from the culture of Saint Lucia and by fusing Creole to English, he makes clear his stance as a successful straddler between two distinct cultures.

Ezekiel also faces certain conflicts, and like Walcott, opts for the wisdom of choosing the middle course of compromising ambivalence. Writing in "The Heritage of India", he observes:

Marathi was my mother tongue but I never really learnt it: Judaism was my religion but I not only rejected it in early youth but all religions with it .... I cannot imagine living permanently outside India but it does
It is not because the poet finds a seemless compromise for his gnawing riddle that he feels emboldened to embark on his art, but rather because of his inner maturity of vision which can press into service both the divided parts of his split self and make them function in unison. This vision of Ezekiel is not quite dissimilar to that of Walcott. Both the poets do not emerge as masters of compromise but as master artists who can turn their divided selves into a source of vital, creative energy. Deep within their souls their split splinters continue to rankle, burn and hurt. Yet for the world outside, their inner splits continue to supply inexhaustible sources of poetic vigour and vitality. As Ezekiel puts it,

'It is not easy because there is too much to unify, too much that resists integration, conflicts and contradictions, for example, between my Jewish racial soul and my Indian choices. I cannot ignore the first nor deny the power of the second. A compromise is not good enough but there is some refuge in being creative, using both as raw material for
direct as well as oblique expression.
(Heritage 167)

Walcott and Ezekiel do not reject any of the cultural hues of their inheritance. Even the resultant inner tensions in them do not drive them to nourish any suggestion of abandoning their respective social or cultural positions. The tensions in Walcott and Ezekiel do not also necessarily lead to any active synthesis or schism as a mode of solving problems, but simply tend to persuade their inmost selves to strictly adhere to a creative, deeply rewarding, middle course.

To Martina Michel,

... the relationship between the imperial centre and the various (semi) peripheries continues to be a hierarchical one. At the same time, however, ... the marginalized other has her or his own voice, which works towards subverting essentialist and unifying classifications. (93)

When these 'essentialist' and unifying 'classifications' are subverted, the inevitable consequence is the instant collapse of the static notion of identity, as echoed in the words of Said:
Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism. (xxviii)

Though both Walcott and Ezekiel choose the middle course, there is a vital difference between the two. While the former becomes part and parcel of the landscape and seascape of the West Indies, the latter survives only as a lingering stranger in India. As for Walcott,

He is very much a West Indian writer who fuses as intently on the complexities of the Caribbean — its 'schizophrenic' hybrid of cultures, its tarnished history, and present shortcomings — as he does on the staggering elemental beauty of his native Saint Lucia. In one sense or another his native ground is always where he begins and where he
continually returns in his writing. (Hartman 3)

The following lines from "As John to Patmos" vouch for the passion and tenderness Walcott entertains for his home:

As John to Patmos, among the rocks and the blue, live air, hounded
His heart to peace, as here surrounded
By the strewn-silver on waves, the wood’s crude hair, the rounded
Breasts of the milky bays, palms, flocks,
the green and dead
Leaves, the sun’s brass coin on my cheek, where Canoes brace the sun’s strength, as John, in that bleak air,
So am I welcomed richer by these blue scapes,
Greek there. (1-7)

Some critics have succeeded in perceiving the true source of Walcott’s poetic art. To Alan Shapiro,

As a West Indian ... writing in English, with Africa and England in his blood, Walcott is inescapably the victim and beneficiary of the colonial society in which he was reared. He is ... unable to satisfy his allegiance to one
side of his nature without at the same time betraying the other. (17)

The following lines from Chapter One of Another Life hint at the poet's divided-self:

The child's journey was signed.
The ledger drank its entry.
Outside the cemetery gates life stretched from sleep.
Gone to her harvest of flax-headed angels,
Of seraphs blowing pink-palated conchs,
gone, so they sang, into another light:
But was it her?
Or Thomas Alva Lawrence's dead child,
another Pinkie, in her rose gown floating?
Both held the same dark eyes,
slow, haunting coals, the same curved ivory hand touching the breast,
as if, answering death, each whispered "Me?"
(158-70)

The poet does not recognize which one of the children would survive. He even wonders whether the dead is living still or the living one, dead. In spite of such a deep-seated conflict over his heritage, Walcott becomes one with Saint Lucia:
O Martinas, Lucillas,
I’m a wild golden apple
that will burst with love
of you and your men,
those I never told enough
with my young poet’s eyes
crazy with the country,
generations going,
generations gone,
moi c’est gens Ste. Lucie.
C’est la moi sorti;
is there that I born. (146-57)

The above poem, "Sainte Lucie" bears ample witness
to Walcott’s complete merger with his native island and
culture. Nathan Odell puts it in a striking metaphor of
profound harmony:

Walcott has used his poetry to reintegrate
himself into the world of St.Lucia. He
constructs an island where not only is
everything harmonious and soluble, but his
poetry is also allowed to enter into the
symbolic cycle of the island. Through this the
whole of the island, Walcott, and his poetry
become one thing. (5)
Being a lover of the islands, Walcott assumes the right to criticize certain aspects of the Caribbean islands. "The Man Who Loved Islands" is an example of an outsider's perceptions of the Virgin Islands. It is an imaginary plan for filming a movie about a "man who loved islands" featuring Hollywood stars, James Coburn and Sophia Loren. Walcott's poem is an implicit indictment on the director's efforts to present only the romantic, dramatic and colourful aspects of the Caribbean, ignoring the darker, negative aspects, realizable only when viewed from a realistic perspective. Calling the plot "chaos of artifice", Walcott says, "There must be something with diamonds, / emeralds, emeralds the color of the shallows there, / or sapphires ...." (28-30). However to him,

All these islands that you love, I guarant-ee we'll work them in as background, ...
... if
we blow the tanker up and get the flames blazing with oil, ...
... that lyric stuff
goes with the credits if you insist on keeping it tend-
er; .... (57-58, 60-62, 69-71)
In contrast, Walcott's *Midsummer* VI is an insider's view of the island of Trinidad. Although much of the description of the island is apparently disparaging, the protagonist finds the night genuinely "companionable". "I can understand / Borges's blind love for Buenos Aires, / how a man feels the streets of a city swell in his hand" (25-27). The poem also asserts Walcott's inalienable affinity for the islands despite all their violence and vulgarity: "But I feed on its dust, its ordinariness, / on the faith that fills its exiles with horror" (14-15).

In the case of the Indian poet, Ezekiel feels like being an outsider on most occasions in his own home. In his interview with Beston, he confesses, "I did have a feeling of things loaded against myself, with no prospect of getting strength and confidence. My background did make me an outsider" (15).

The "squalid crude city" Mumbai is the very text and context of many of Ezekiel's poems and "A Morning Walk" is symbolic of his singular obsession with the place and its ubiquitous misery and harsh seasons, desperate struggle for survival and latent despair:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued
whose wages are in words and crumbs. (15-21)

Perhaps a cardinal element that contributes to Ezekiel’s sense of alienation, is the fact that he does not belong to the majority community of the city, a fact of which the poet is highly self-conscious: "Not being Hindu, I cannot identify myself with India’s past as a comprehensive heritage or reject it as if it were mine to reject. I can identify myself only with modern India" (New Writing 90).

Personal scepticism on the part of Ezekiel also does come in the way of his identifying himself with India and Indianness. To quote his own words, "I love India, I expect nothing in return, because critical, sceptical love does not beget love" (New Writing 90).

A note of distaste too stands out adding to the poet’s disillusionment with India, as can be deduced from "Hymns in Darkness". Further, there seems to be an innate revulsion on the part of Ezekiel to the very daylight noises and sights that greet a good number of Indians:
In a single day
I'm forced to listen
to a dozen film songs,
to see
a score of beggars,
to touch
uncounted strangers,
to smell
unsmellable smells,
to taste
my bitter native city. (141-51)

Talking about Ezekiel's "creative discontinuity", William Walsh explicates the paradox of Ezekiel's position as a perennial outsider in the Indian context. The critic notes with ample justification that the principal reason why Ezekiel continues to live as an Indian consists in little more than a sheer act of his will. For, being endowed with an extreme sensitivity bordering on the squeamish, a critical apprehension of the dominant philosophies of the place, an inveterate tendency to distance himself from anything garish, loud, vulgar or offensive, it needs an indomitable will on the part of the poet to continue to live in Mumbai all his life. All the same, being so critically ironic as an artist, no other place in the world perhaps will warrant
the services of a poet like Ezekiel whose objective, uninhibited, denunciating comments and left-handed compliments turn out to be peculiarly relevant and suitable to the Mumbai scenario:

Nissim Ezekiel in the Indian scene is a permanent expatriate, but one who has freely elected to stay. Displaced by his own spiritual past, he is in place by an act of the will. His eye is familiar with, but at a distance from, the object, and his specifically Indian poetry is both inward and detached, a combination making for a peculiar strength and validity .... One is aware of a double impulse in the poet, which on the one hand keeps him at a distance from his environment as he clutches his private history and aspiration, and which on the other, by means of a free and painful act of will, reconciles him to his environment. (14)

India leaves Ezekiel intensely conscious of his separateness as an Indian, and, consequently, extremely susceptible and alert to other attractions. In "Two Images", he raps out,

Fish-soul in that silent pool
I found myself supported
by the element I lived in,
but dragged out with the greater ease
by any fluttering fly
at the end of the hook. (7-12)

Further being essentially a sceptic, the Indian penchant for certain emotional beliefs and sentimental rituals bordering on the superstitions leaves Ezekiel often thoroughly disenchanted.

"Night of the Scorpion" highlights the fact that Ezekiel's father too was highly sceptical of several popular Indian beliefs, should one take the 'persona' in the poem for the poet himself:

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.

With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.

My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
I watched the holy man perform his rites

to tame the poison with an incantation.

(8-10, 16-17, 36-38, 42-43)

Strangely enough, Shirish Chindhade finds a

correlation between D.H. Lawrence's obsession with the

total attraction between the sexes and Ezekiel's

preoccupation with the landscape of his native city:

Just as Lawrence attempts to delineate a love-
hate relationship between his lovers,
similarly [sic] such relationship seems to be
developing between the poet and the world of
material reality around him, Bombay being its
epitome: he would like to go away from his
underworld and be one with it simultaneously:
a subtle dilemma and a subtle paradox. (40)

Ezekiel has never ceased to feel being an exile,
even after his life-long domicile in India, for the
simple reason that he does not feel at home here. In
"Poster Poems", Ezekiel says,

I've never been a refugee
except of the spirit,
a loved and troubled country
which is my home and enemy. (33-36)
Neither does Ezekiel feel at home anywhere else in the world. He gives expression to a similar love-hate relationship in "Edinburgh Interlude" with regard to Edinburgh in Scotland:

The food, the fevers are the same
I have become
part of the scene
which I can neither love nor hate. (7-10)

Restlessness marks whatever Ezekiel wrote and most of his poems convey this perennial, unquenchable quest for something that eludes his grasp constantly. Bruce King attributes some kind of a quest or pursuit in respect of Ezekiel's inner agitations: "whatever it is Ezekiel seeks, it is always just beyond reach, just beyond understanding" (Three Ind. Poets 43).

Perhaps nowhere else in his poetry than in "Background, Casually", that Ezekiel has spelt out his final and considered verdict on the issue of his identity as an Indian citizen. Yet, it should be noted even here that these words do imply a very obvious and trenchant irony. India is Ezekiel's choice for stay, it is true, but it is not so much his choice because it is fascinatingly wonderful because it is familiar to him despite its backwardness. There is a definite tone of
condescending acceptance of the place implicit in
"Background, Casually":

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

The greater stress here seems to relate to the
strength of his commitment as the person who makes his
final choice, rather than on the quality of the place.

Again in "Island" Ezekiel affirms his allegiance
to India calling it essentially an "island" perhaps with
his tongue in his cheek, like only a Ulysses could do:

I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong.

Even now a host of miracles
hurries me to daily business,
minding the ways of the island
as a good native should,
taking calm and clamour in my stride. (19-25)

In poems like "The Egoist's Prayer VII", Ezekiel
makes a confession, albeit slantingly, of the temptation
raging within him to leave the shores of India from time to time:

Confiscate my passport, Lord.
I don't want to go abroad.
Let me find my song
Where I belong. (41-44)

Ezekiel declares further that he would stay "Where he is", perhaps only like a cynical but loyal wife who would neither love the husband nor leave him.

Thus, in the poems of both Walcott and Ezekiel, we find instances of admission of conflicts over the issue of identity on account of the remarkably divided heritage of the poets. It is also interesting to note that the poets deliberately choose to be striders when they cannot but carry along with them opposed strains, opting for "betweenness".

However, it must be noted that in the case of Walcott, there is a generous and unequivocal acceptance and admiration for the English language, and an equally inveterate emotional affinity for the Caribbean culture in which he finds himself totally at home in spirit, marking the merger of the poet's microcosm with the macrocosm of his Caribbean space. In the case of Ezekiel, on the other hand, there is a sentimental and
emotional acceptance of India as the motherland no
doubt, but also pronounced reservations with regard to
his Indianness. Despite his embracing the Indian
citizenship, Ezekiel does not find any final stay or
peace with himself in India, exemplified by the
recurrent reiteration of his quest for something else
which till the very end, eludes the poet's grasp. In a
sense, the Caribbean poet seems to be nearer to the
point of anchor of his spiritual voyage, while,
relatively speaking, the Indian seeks to be still
struggling in high seas of tumultuous conflicts.