



Humanistic Approach in R.Parthasarathy's Poetry

Dr.P.Phanikumar

Lecturer in English

Department of English

Sri Venkateswara Vedic University

Tirupati

R.Parthasarathy(1934) is an Indian poet, professor, critique, short story writer. With his vision he has broken the old ways and created new grounds of Indian English poetry. His works include **Poetry from Leeds** (1968), **Ten Twentieth century Indian Poets** (1976) and **Rough Passage** (1977). He was not only a British Council scholar at Leeds University where he did a course in Linguistics, as he was awarded the Ulka poetry prize of "Poetry India" 1966 but also. He is a member of the Advisory board for English of the National Academy of Letters, New Delhi. His poems centre on cultural conflicts, violence, immigrant's oppression and suppressions, Indianism, Tamil local feelings. An attempt made in this paper aims to enhance the humanistic approach towards his poetry.

His **Rough Passage** was thirty seven sequences in three parts namely, 'Exile, 'Tamil' and 'Home Coming'. It could be moving expression of a poet trying to come to terms with himself. It is the longest autobiographical poem in Indo-Anglian Literature. In these poems, he makes an attempt to resolve the tension his mind, against the conflict between Indian and European culture, which is the vital force behind Parthasarathy's poetry. Also 'Exile' 'Trial' and Home coming is to be read as one long poem. It is entitled as Rough Passage. It is sympathy to the loss of rootedness, through this English language education and poetry which place a wall between himself and the traditions of his own culture.

It has been symbolizing the poet's rough passage in England, and a 'rough come back' to India, where he faced the problem of cultural re-entry and re-adjustment. Thus, he feels that he has become a stranger to the traditions of Indian culture and thus has lost his roots. Adding after returning to India feelings of dissatisfaction and exile remain as India seems no different from the west, and he is exiled within his own country.

It is clear that the poet has conveyed the humiliating experience, racial ignoring and the constant consciousness of being a segregated exile in the foreign, in one's own country. He appears to be voicing the disillusion of the common wealth immigrants who find themselves uprooted on the Western soil derided as "wogs". The British insult for foreigners, to describe the ruling Indian elite shown his alienation, his sense of foreignness. In **Rough Passage**, the titles of the three separate sections namely "Exile", "Trial" and "Home coming" are self-explanatory.

In spite of the author's declaration that "Exile", the first part of **Rough Passage** dwells upon the question of language and identity upon the need for roots, 'Trial' the second part 'celebrates love as a reality here and now' and that 'Home-coming', the third and final Dart explores after the tortuous labyrinths of solitude and disillusionment, critics have, time and again, refused to accept these divisions as organic than formal". 'Exile' is an epitaph for the Raj, felt as a historical and personal experience the event is one of the fundamental happenings to the Indian of the poet's generation. It sharpens their awareness, enlarges their areas of response of nonrelationship with their environment. "Trail" is against the turmoil of nonrelationship, personal love holds forth the promise of belonging.

"Homecoming" derives its sustenance from grafting itself on to whatever he finds usable in the Tamil tradition. 'Exile' searches the impact of the West on India in terms of foreign setting and the poet's personal development. Experience does not always make for knowledge you make the same mistake. Do the something over again.'You' in the poem stands for Parthasarathy who attempts to do something to carry the dialogue with his Tamil past. He feels like a cart in the hot tin roof in an alien foreign land and sense of futility and loneliness overwhelms him. The strength he gets from his Tamil language is gone. An introspective study shapes him and makes him understand the loneliness of his dreams about England and that gives disenchantment and disillusionment with his early

English Utopia. There is something to be said for exile you learn roots are deep that language is a tree, loses under another sky.

A knowledge of disappointment overwhelms him and finally that goes to selfquestioning. "What have I care Where for from a thousand miles? The sky is no different Beggars are the some everywhere the clubs Are there, complete with bar and golf-links".(p-22-23).

Though he is interested in the foreign country called 'England' at the early period of his life, he changes his attitude and mind when he is in the foreign country and realizes the loses of his own motherland. Ultimately, the loss is nothing but his love, compassion and brotherhood toward his mother country called India. It is reflected in R.Parthasarathy's essay "Whoring after English Gods'. He states that "the affair with the English language has been prolonged and tempestuous. It's over now, and I have, as the phrase goes, settle down with Tamil"(1970:32)

After getting disillusioned with the English language and the country England, he returned home,

" I return to the city I had quarreled with a euphoric archipelago, to the hard embrace of its streets its traffic of regulated affections, uneventful but welcome.(p-19)

It is universal truth that the cultural gap between the East and West, seems impossible to be bridged.

This is brought out in the following passage: "Through the holes in a wall, as it were lamps burned in the fog In a basement flat, conversation Filled the night while Ravi Sankar Cigarette stubs, empty bottles of stout And crisps provided the necessary pauses".(p-15)

It implies a connection of the poet with his cultural past in sharp contrast to cigarettes, stout and crisp, which provide western situation. The image 'fog' suggests that lamps in the fog may burn but fail to illumine. They appear like holes in a wall, which compare the poet's futile efforts to bring down the culture-wall. The intellectual allegiance to a foreign language and the emotional apprehension of its futility becomes his predicament, which is central to the design of the poem. He was conscious of the loss of half of his life, he is determined to 'give quality to the other half. He thinks that his life has come full circle. He has glimpsed the truth in the following lines: "Nothing can really be dispensed with. The heart needs all.(p-24) The metaphor of 'exile' is a pet theme for

third world writer. There is a personal balance between the rewards and demands of the two worlds of home and exile.

It implies the pain of separation and alienation. So, it suggests the rough ups and downs of this myriad kaleidoscopic human life. The hard bitterness of being an exile on western soil, makes one think of returning to one's native land. The poet feels the importance of selfassessment at the age of thirty, when omissions and imperfections should be objectively appraised: " As a man approaches thirty, / he may take a stock of himself. (p-13).So that, "I must give quality to the other off" (p-25) He was born and brought up from a Tamil past but got intensive education in English in cosmopolitan city called 'Bombay' and later at Leeds University. As Bruce King suggests in his book Modern Indian Poetry in English that " the greatest cultural shock came upon him when he was in England' (1987:232) thus, he says "The best poetry draws upon accepted cultural myths and uses language which reverberates with cultural associations from the past" (1987:234)The poet understood that he had been disconnected from his roots: "you learn roots are deep that language is a tree loses colour under another sky" (p. 15)

During his early life, he perceived England as a clean country but re found that England was a dirty and quite unlike from his previous ideal of it: "lanes full of smoke and litter with puddle of unwashed English children" (Ibid)

Brace king says "The speaker in 'Exile T moves to madras where, despite returning Tamil Nadu he remain alienated" (1987:238) So, the poet considers himself a misfit when he finds that even Tamil Nadu is blindly aping the West and the old values seem to be dwindling. The poet is surprised as : "What have I come here for from thousand miles?" (p.22) The sense of isolation and disillusion are presented in Parthasarathy is Rough Passage. They are considered as modern man's predicament. Although modern man appears to be surrounded by all sort of company, his heart remain barren and starved : "Shiver in the alleys of mind, hungry and alone." (p.24) Poem 2 o f Exile' establishes the external reality of England where the poet feel frustrated in his attempt at discovering anything uncommon. The poet records his impressions in the following lines: "However, the most reassuring thing about the past is that it happened"(p-15)

This above given stanza reflects and registers poet's keen perception of the reality. Poem 5 registers that frustrating discovery: "Birds, too, struggle, pressing thin feathers against the glass of air"(p-20) The glass of air is a vivid and striking image which is suggestive. The poem reflects that the poet encounters the impact of the West in the home land. The last poem of 'Exile' symbolizes his experience in Calcutta, the city that testifies to the decadence of the dusty appearance: "A grey sky appresses the eyes: porters, rickshaw-pullers, barbers, hawkers fortune-tellers, loungers compose the scene"(p-24) In Calcutta he discovers what he has attained during the last thirty years: "The years have given me little wisdom" and I've dislodged myself to find it"(Ibid) The final of 'Exile' carries a universal truth: "I've forfeited the embarrassing gift, innocence in my scramble to be man"(p-25) This shuttling between the local and the particular and the universal in the depiction of both geographical localities and mental progress adds dynamism to the development of the poem. In the second part 'Trial' the poet recalls the beloved and remembers his association with a lady from the day of his seeing her photograph: "Over the family album, the other night, I shared your childhood (p-30) His love poetry conveys the whole range of feeling that his remarks suggest, from the ecstasy to transcendence to the passion, to the feeling of being cleansed by sex, to the Poignant bitter-Sweet of memory, to the anguished sense that doom cannot be staved off. There is a melancholy note throughout his poetry. The same theme is noticed by William Walsh when he observes in his essay "Two Indian poets": "Disappointment is his principle theme, whether with edgy compositions of love, with the insoluble problems of poetic composition or as with disappointment with an irritable but unprotesting glumness, a slightly more recognition of the way things are" (1974:P.14) The youth is passion and desire toward the beloved and their union is urgent and correspondingly brief. The poet says in his own words: Under the heavy lens of noon passion, quicker than candles, burn, smoking the glass of our bodies". (p-31). The poet recollects his love-affairs in several different sections of 'Trial' when "But in the dark, hands lips have marked the spot wetouched"(p-31) and "our bodies scrape hone for passions. Older than the stones of Konark"(p-36) The 'aching joys' are no more and all its dizzy raptures are things of the past. The poet adds: "I have put aside the past in a corner, an umbrella now poor in the ribs"(p-37) A note of melancholy and regret to poet's life indicates his thought about the poet. It made him confess, "I am not myself in the present I only endure A reflected existence in the past"(p-43) As he proceeds towards the end of the 'Trial',

thoughts of death become more frequent. He understands that the idea that has helped his love-affairs has been 'the chill promise of a home'.

He accepts his mistake with the past and tries to remove it: "My past is an unperfected stone the flaw show. I polish the stone, sharpen the lustre to a point" (Ibid)

His thought included in the lines is that thought the attempt to redeem the past by love has remained unsuccessful but the attempt still continues... Parthasarathy is softening down the harsh of the style in this section. He is in India, the poet's hometown, and the members of the poet's ancestral family living in the countryside. Poem 1 sets the tone of acceptance which exhibits the poet's attempt to realize and appreciate the by gone: "of the dead I speak nothing but good" (p.29)

"The dead" symbolizes the poet's traumatic past in the alien countries, on one hand, the dead members of his ancestral family, on the other he recollects them before he enters their country. When he there is a fresh renewal of the youth in his mind: "I grasp your hand in a rainbow of touch" (Ibid)

His experience of love asserted in the poem3: "But in the dark, hands and lips have marked the spot we touched" (p. 31) "Trial" is a section of recollection of the poet's youth. The love-making is described in the following line: "A nipple hardens on the tongue (p-33) The poem finds a present analysis of the experience: "Now, only the thought of you I blow on burns distance to a stub" (p-32) In the poem 2 the poet turns the pages of his family album, and goes through a kind of psychic purgation: "pugged you turned the corner in a child's steps"(p-30) in poem 6, the poet says, "soon, it will reflect nothing" (p-34) 101 and in poem7, The lyric experience is celebrated: "The four walls Turn on a stand of hair"(p-35) "The above lines find the poet two extremes namely sentiment euphoria of love experience and its ecstasy was not permanent. The sequent of Trial gives the past and bring meaning to the present: "with lamp/and pen I blow the dust off my poet".(p-37) This awareness and recognition of the opposite extremes in human experience gives Parthasarathy's poem's a note of genuine sincerity. His attempt is to bring out and give the truth. This is observed in poem 10, Parthasarathy says: "Thus celebrate Something so perishable, trite".(p-38) It is a poetic

retrial, a re-living of the "octopus poet" The hard bitterness of the past is affixed on every word of the poem. The collection called 'Trial' is a poem of sequence of pain. Parthasarathy accepts it: "being accustomed to pain is of no help"(p-43) He makes use of his experience positively. However, the last poem. Hints at a new phase in the poet's life. It tells the entry of new being, "my five - year old son"(p-44)

He states, "To live in Tamil Nadu is to be conscious every day of importance."(p-48) He sums up his condition accurately that he feels inadequate in the use of Tamil. In "Home Coming 1", his attempt to relearn the classical form of his mother tongue fails as he finds that Tamil has been debased in films, he says, "hooked on celluloid, you reel down plush corridors".(p-47) "Tamil" has changed to be flea-ridden Parthasarathy attempts to evoke his Tamil past and his poem on *Vaikai* river as in 'Home coming' 8 " No one has any use for *Vaikai*, river, once, of this sweet city.(p-54) In 'Home coming-12' he asks the most important question: "what's it like to be a poet"? while fattening(p-58), and "...himself on the flesh of dead poets" (Ibid) Parthasarathy prompted by this kind of slavish imitation on the part of poets today, makes an ironical comment: "Where would His Eminence be but for the poets who splashed about in the Hellespont or burned in the Java sea".(p-59) In 'Exile', time was bound to the diurnal drudgery of cities, with its newspapers and trains. In Trail* time was the eternal present of intimate physical love. In 'Home coming', time means recognition and perception. He looks for relationship through reflection and gains the ledge that the self can perceive itself only in relation to others: "Now that all silver at the back of faces I have loved has worn off silent eyes saccadic. I store at myself (p-52) 'Home coming-3 is a crucial poem providing a meeting-ground for past and the present: There is a sense of reconnection with the vital past. It has been clouded over by the intervening years in countries. It appears to pervade throughout the section. The tortuous rhythm and ironical metaphor indicative of anxiety, agitation and dissatisfaction give place to quieter metaphors of safety and satisfaction: "Three daughters floating like safe planets near her".(p-49) 'Home coming 4 is an important milestone in the development of poet's mind and art. His past comes to an end: "I crashed, a glass house hit by the stone of father's death"(p-50) Here "end" means that the end is only a part of the continuous cycle: "And after me, my unborn son "(Ibid) The poet cannot breathe the past, the tradition and the memory of his Father, "Old I smart under your absence The long years break out in a sweat Down the spire of pillows'1 .(p-51)

Bibliography:

- 1) Parthasarathy R. *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* , Oxford University Press, New Delhi,1976
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Ibid
- 4) King Bruce. *An Anthology of Indian English Poetry*, Oxford University Press New Delhi,1976
- 5) www.wikipedia.com

