CHAPTER I

RAMANUJAN AND PARTHASARATHY:

EXPLORATIONS OF THE SELF
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With Indian poets in English like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, Keki N. Daruwalla, poetry is a linguistic enactment of the creative encounter of their self with the familial, social, religious institutions, and personal and linguistic predicaments. Their predecessors like Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Henri L Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and others wrote under the influence of their English counterparts like John Milton, the Romantics, and the Victorians. Yet they exploited in their poetry their native mythologies, legends, and a host of other cultural allusions. In their own way, they achieved significant success in dealing with native themes through the English language. Sri Aurobindo's Savitri has added a new dimension to the epic because of its Indian sensibility and its encyclopaedic grasp of the totality of human experience and knowledge integrally related in the poem. His poetry, suffused as it is with a philosophical or mystical glow, shows the spiritual reality behind the material facade.
Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a collection of lyrics appropriating the chequered spiritual tradition of India. The mysticism of Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore strikes the modern Indian poets in English as far removed from the urban reality which impinges on their consciousness. The Post-Independence poetry in India has tended to reject romantic or mythic generalizations that deflect attention from everyday realities. Keki N. Daruwalla describes the scene and the situation of Indian poetry in English as follows:

What Indian poetry needed was someone whose writing approximated to the demands of the present-day world, who could bring into play a modern sensibility in confronting the confusion, bewilderment and disillusion of the times, someone who could transfer poetry from its bucolic habitat to an urban one, dump archaisms and the monotonous, jangling rhyme schemes of the earlier poets and adopt a form which could adequately display the subtle modulations of pace and the strength and sinews of free verse. Nissim Ezekiel was the first Indian poet to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom.
Ezekiel and the other modern Indian poets in English have given an ironic twist to their perspectives on cultural entities such as myth, legend, religion, and history. In so doing, they have tried to impart a sense of personal urgency and immediacy to their exclusively individual predicaments. They reveal themselves to be engaged in a quest for identity and the discovery of their self in terms of a personal revaluation of their roots. As S.C. Harrex points out, modern Indian poets in English like Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Keki N. Daruwalla, Parthasarathy have explored "aspects of Indianness in an Englishness that carries with it the benefits of Eliot and post-Eliot experiments in technique, imagery, tone and verse form. Important ingredients in the new poetry are recognizable characteristics of modernism: real speech, irony, urban consciousness, imagism, focus on the ordinary. These are seen as appropriate ways of responding to self, time and place, to a modern flux in the stasis of an ancient society."^2

Nissim Ezekiel is generally regarded as the inaugurator of modern Indo-English poetry. His famous poem "Night of the Scorpion" illustrates the truth of
Harrex's observation cited above. The poet fuses the traditional Indian attitude armed with prayers and incantations with the rationalistic attitude of the father who tries every cure within his reach. He achieves this synthesis by couching a specially Indian situation in colloquial style and maintaining a low-pitched tone and studied neutrality. Similarly, his contemporaries like Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, Daruwalla have achieved their own distinctive speaking voices. They have successfully incorporated their actualized insights in a poetic diction marked by colloquial idiom and conversational rhythms. Their attitude to their native cultural inheritance is tempered with the rationalism and scepticism of a typical modern intellectual. For them, the received authority of scriptures, moral standards, ethical norms, filial pieties, sacred marital ties, ardent faith in God become suspect and are subject to individual scrutiny and revaluation. Poems which employ the I-figure abound in them. A careful study of their poetry reveals not only the quests of the invented selves in the poems, but also, by implication, the poets' quest for a set of values which they earn and try to embody in their various encounters with secular
institutions, religious beliefs, ethical norms, and so on. They do not feel assured of their sense of belonging to their traditional roots. So they begin to examine them in the light of desacralized perspectives. As they are too keenly aware of the immediate reality, they treat of their cultural assumptions in a spirit of ironic mockery. Their creative urges are always fashioned by their sensitive reactions to the contemporary zeitgeist. They seem to respond to what T.S. Eliot has laid down as the function of poetry: "It may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed.... It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we really penetrate." The Indian poets' individual response to their collective unconscious in a sense reveals their self and unveils their poetic world.

William A. Sadler points out that "The self is not born whole; it grows through encounter with a world of others....The self is variously structured in terms of basic possible encounters which include the private, personal, and social modes of being in the world." The self is always defined in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile, that is, a threaten-
ing other, which must be discovered in order to be inscribed in poetry. The encounter of the self with the other involves a dialectical relationship between what Stephen Greenblatt calls "authority" and the "alien" where the alien is perceived by authority as something chaotic or negative. It is out of some experience of threat or effacement or undermining or the loss of the self that self-fashioning becomes possible. The encounter between the authority and the alien enables one to achieve a sense of identity which contains within itself signs of both the authority and the alien to be defined. A poet searches "for himself alone, within himself, in his relationships to other people, in his language and myths, in his dreams, in his creativity, and in his creations. These are all different routes to the many selves in which man (poet) must seek his identity."\(^5\) In the formation and expression of growing identity, there are selves which imply "a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires—and always some elements of deliberate shaping ...of identity."\(^6\) Changes in the intellectual, social, psychological and aesthetic structures of traditional modes are said to contribute to the generation of
identities. They operate in complex and dialectical ways and make an author self-conscious and produce in him "a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving." The writer as such embarks upon an adventure of choices in the course of his existential struggle to fulfill his inner necessities for freedom, self-relevance, and self-realization with reference to the constricting, rigid, authoritarian influence of his immediate world. Existence in a harsh, inimical, and alien world gives rise to the need for evaluation of one's experiences and make out a personal scale of values. Thus in a series of encounters with others, the individual develops self-identity, in various respects, which is reflected in his dealings with others and with situations from day to day. Indian poets in English like Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Kamala Das have employed the I-figure persistently. In this context, we have to examine the nature and identity of the central figure designated by the personal pronoun, "I." It is fascinating to study and determine how much of the poet's actual self gets reflected in his poetry through a succession of his projected encounters with the other. Is the I-figure a local fiction valid only in the dramatic context of the poem bearing
a questionable and fugitive resemblance to the poet who sits outside the poem? Or does the persona denoted by the I-figure reveal the dynamics of the evolution of the poet's self authenticated in the process of his constant interactions, confrontations, affirmations of the various factors that form his solid and very real environment? His personal, social, and spiritual relationships may compose this environment. While being sensitively responsive to the spiritual malaise of the age, the poet's self creates, at the same time, something worthwhile. Among other things, the major components of a poet's sensibility are imagination, the complex whole of his experiences in life, and the linguistic medium to embody his vision in a poem. Coleridge has classified imagination as primary and secondary. While primary imagination creates in the act of perceiving, Coleridge says that secondary imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and unify." In rendering their vision of life in poetry, poets invent the I-figure designate and obvious aliases for themselves.

While assuming a mask, the poet also tends to achieve objectivity out of his selective approach without
getting bogged down in the "reek of the human." Through the act of donning masks, the poet assumes what can be called an ad hoc self in order to find out what he is. With the aid of his imagination, the poet always seeks to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns of the Great Mind and the Great Memory. The poet, in other words, turns inward and introspective. The existential anguish, stresses and tensions, necessarily make him a centre of unrest and conflicts. "Outward events and circumstances are so engrossing that most people gladly dwell among them; but the artist turns away into the "abyss" of his own being to learn what is there and become reconciled with his own latent powers. In this way he is able to surpass his ordinary self, to achieve a preternatural level of being and perception." A poet, in essence, not only visualizes and dramatizes but also probes into the self in order to resolve certain inner tensions, seek solutions to some of his personal predicaments, and to ease his own tormented psyche in the increasingly urban context and complexity of his life. For example, Nissim Ezekiel, a fluent mask-wearer in his early poetry, shows how he feels alienated from the city of Bombay. In his constant dialogue with the city of
Bombay over the years, he traces the curve of his effort to forge a loving bond with it. As a young poet, he envisions it as an ideal city "fresh as brides,/Bright legends of a recent birth,/New orchids or unimagined seas?/" in his poem "A time to Change." The persona of another poem "Encounter" is face to face with a city where its street is like pandemonium. He feels that he is chained to commercial routine and mechanical existence. The impersonal city has devoured the individual identity of the speaker. He misses the warmth and comfort of personal communication:

The city pressed upon me; shops, cinemas and business houses/spoke in unambiguous accents. Only the people said nothing./ They bought the evening papers, hurried to a tube station,/ ceasing to exist./

(Collected Poems, 35)

The personae of such poems of Nissim Ezekiel as "Urban," "A Morning Walk," "Background, Casually," "Enterprise," "Hymns in Darkness," sections of "Edinburgh Interlude" are variously cast in the roles of an urbanite, an
itinerant idealist, an excursionist, a pilgrim, an introvert. Each poem traces the curve of a quest for self-knowledge, self-instruction, and self-definition and the imperative need for commitment, a sure index of the self. In the poem "On Meeting a Pedant," the persona speaks of the malaise of urban existence. Urban life causes inner turmoil, a feeling of vacancy, an aching sense of frustration and ennui.

Words, looks, gestures, everything betrays
The unquiet mind, the emptiness within.
(Collected Poems, 8)

"Urban" and "A Morning Walk" are exclusively devoted to the portrayal of personae who find the city a purgatory. Their attempts to find redemption are thwarted because the vast impersonal monster that the city is renders it impossible for them to keep contact with natural objects like hills, rivers, and trees which in their mythical contexts have provided man redemption, renewal, and spontaneous communion with the other, that is, nature. But the fact is that the real city, instead of showing the vitality conducive to renewal, is disrupted, dry and withered. This rift between the introspective observer
and the natural world in the vast city emphasizes alienation which cannot be resolved in terms of "innocence, freedom and depth of vision not found among the distractions of the city." 12

Both Ezekiel and Daruwalla explore in their poetry the sense of coming to terms with India and the changing pressures and priorities of living in India by means of irony absorbed into the structure of their poems. Though Ezekiel is not a religious person in a conventional sense of the term, his "Hymns in Darkness" shows an increasing concern with the nature of religious experience. Ezekiel does not, like A.K. Ramanujan, question the validity or otherwise of traditional faith. By using irony and urbanity as agents of precision, he presents certain configurations of experience which disclose the contradictions inherent in the Indian situation.

The poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla demonstrates its relevance to the contemporary Indian situation. Ezekiel's statement about himself could be extended to include Keki N. Daruwalla as well:
I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider; circumstances and decisions relate me to India.... 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." In "Hymns in Darkness," the speaker realizes that modern city life is so fragmented and tantalizing that all the age-old truths and values are of no avail in enabling him to arrive at self-definition. He assumes the role of a wise man endowed with an intuitive faculty, an inward eye, in the manner of the mythical god, Lord Siva. The urbanite remains a failure on several counts in his roles of a seeker of truth, a householder, an observer of cityscape, a social human being:

He speaks with his own voice. He listens with the third ear. He sees with the eye in the centre of his forehead.

It's all of little use.

(Collected Poems, 218)
Ezekiel's poetry is singularly free from sentimental clichés, abstract references to soul, spirit, Cosmic Self, and vague philosophical concepts or puzzling metaphysical disquisitions. It is down-to-earth, realistic, urban, and concrete. It shows the empirical self in its quest for coming to its own in the face of the knowledge of ancient wisdom obtaining as official tradition through the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, the Bible, and even the Buddha's Dhammapad. Ezekiel discovers that the spiritual prescriptions fall short of the urgent needs of practical life. In fact, as Bruce King points out, it is Ezekiel's review of Daruwalla's Under Orion (1970) and his relentless pursuit of the idea that poetry should be the result of moral, intellectual, and social intelligence expressed in new ways that has contributed to the concern, among those writers and critics associated with him, "with exactness of language, economy, craftsmanship, 'perception of environment,' forthrightness, intelligence and the evaluative comparison of poets." Ezekiel's view of poetry would seem to emphasize poetry as the communication of insight and experience, and as imaging the modern mind by being centred on the self's engagement with its environment. Whereas in Ezekiel a poem offers a negotiation with the modern world,
R. Parthasarathy's concern is with the present in its relation to the past. His and A.K. Ramanujan's main concern is with recovering a traditional culture. Whereas Ezekiel dismisses this problem as not relevant to himself, Parthasarathy cites Ramanujan as evidence to show that a lost tradition could be recovered and that it is essential for the Indian writer in English to do so if he should overcome a sense of alienation from his environment, past, and language. This study focuses on the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy and examines their cognition and carving out of their selves in terms of their repossession of their past and their response to cultural institutions and crises and the fusion of these responses with personal affinities, identities and crises.

Ramanujan in his poem "One, Two, Maybe Three, Arguments Against Suicide" alludes to the faculty of the third eye of Siva which burnt Manmatha, God of Love. As a poet-observer of Indian life, he has demonstrated the presence of a kind of inner eye with which he envisions such concerns as the rootedness of the present in the past and the instability of identity. This enables him to dwell upon the self in the context of
familial and other surroundings. He further explores the truth as well as the absurdity of the Hindu notions of reincarnation as seen through the eyes of modern science. It is significant to note that the title poem of the first volume called The Striders deals with an American water bug, the strider. It is described in its act of facile floating over the ripple skin of water. Ramanujan considers the insect superior to the yogis in terms of spiritual powers and vision. By a stroke of irony, the poet perceives the truth of the hollowness of the tall claims of the Indian yogis and the Western prophets in this "anti-dogmatic and empiricist age."  

So far, Ramanujan has produced three volumes of poetry The Striders (1966), Relations (1971), and Second Sight (1986). He makes use in his poetry of myths, legends, history, personal memory, contemporary politics, Hindu religious beliefs, Dravidian tribal culture in an ironical and sceptical manner. William Walsh praises Ramanujan as "the composer of an alert and grainy poetry whose touch is abrasive and whose sight is microscopic." Ramanujan's Weltanschauung is shaped by the taboos, superstitions, ethical
Injunctions of the Hindu society in general and by a typically conservative Brahmin society in particular. Though living as an expatriate in America, Ramanujan is very much alive to the joint family set-up with its pressures on the carving out of identity. With the past impinging on his consciousness, Ramanujan sets down to recreate the individual past in terms of the changing perspectives on the drama of familial life.

In evoking a picture of family life, Ramanujan draws upon memory which provides him with ready material in the resurrection of the individual past. Ramanujan's familial poems like "Snakes," the poems on mother-persona and father-persona like "Still Another for Mother," "Of Mothers, among other things," "Ecology," "Obituary" show a common pattern of the making of identity. The snake as the non-human other serves as a source of development of the child into a rational adult as in "Old Indian Belief." The father-figure wishing that his son should cast off his slough like a moulting snake as in "Moulting" reminds us not only of the relationship of past to present, but also of ironic comparisons between animal life and family life with the
idea presented therein that the family represents certain kinds of continuity. Ramanujan makes use of insects, birds and animals as the non-human other. The Zoo poems likewise are satiric in tone and draw ironic comparisons between the storks and the members of the family. "Zoo Gardens Revisited" concludes with a prayer to Lord Vishnu who incarnated himself as a lion, fish, and boar. If in "In the Zoo....." the storks were an emblem of the people, in "Zoo Gardens Revisited," the animals remind the poet only of animals. One of the themes of these poems is that the repression of the natural finds other forms of expression, especially in hurting others or the self. A poem like "Pleasure" depicts how the monk seeks perverse and painful death as a result of his repressed sexual desire.

In "Snakes," the persona recreates childhood snake-phobia and the idea of distanced parents. The child is left to himself to get over his phobia by wreaking psychological vendetta in his dream and the parents are only engaged in feeding a brood of ritual snakes. Though the mode of getting rid of fear is akin to a child's, it is also an act of assertion of individuality.
The clickshod heel suddenly strikes
and slushes on a snake: I see him turn,
the green white of his belly
measured by bluish nodes, ...

Now
frogs can hop upon this sausage rope,
flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,

and I can walk through the woods. 19

The father-persona figures in some of the poems
of Ramanujan as an authority and as a barrier to the
expression of the son's individuality. "Obituary" is a
parodic rendering of how a son carries out the funeral
rites of his father. The poem subtly traces the petty
incongruities connected with the annual rituals. It
shows a deliberate attempt on the part of the poet to
distance himself from the burden of the past and to
convert the experience into an ironic account by a
careful control of personal feeling. Bruce King says,
"Ramanujan uses a cool impersonality to avoid senti-
mentality; but something is felt under the surface of
the poem." 20 The usual quality of an amiable and
affectionate father is conspicuously missing in the
father-figure in such poems as "Still Another view of
Grace." The adult son in "Still Another View of Grace" swears by his allegiance to his cultural orientation and puritanic upbringing while denouncing the wily charms of a low-caste woman, probably a prostitute. He merely makes a show of being a stern orthodox Brahmin, but reveals himself to be an ordinary man succumbing to passion:

Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns
I shudder to the bone at hungers that roam
the street.
beyond the constable's beat. But there She stood
upon that dusty road on a nightlit april mind
and gave me a look. Commandments crumbled
in my father's past. Her tumbled hair
suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land.

(The Striders, 43)

But when the persona happens to be a father-figure, he is shown as fond, affectionate, protective, and provident as in "Excerpts from a Father's Wisdom," "It does not follow, but when in the street," "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears," "Son to Father to Son," "Moulting." In these
poems, the father-persona wishes his children to be spared the pinch of poverty. He rather overplays the jealous role of a father and acts as a peeping-tom:

I'll love my children without end,
and do them infinite harm
staying on the roof,
a peeping-tom ghost
looking for all sorts of proof
for the presence of the past.

Ramanujan's sense of history and continuity is derived from the Upanishadic trope of the seed, fruit and tree. In "A Poem on Particulars," he mentions the impossibility of regaining the past. While life is a continuity, it is difficult to trace the causes of the present to predict the future. Life is governed by the phenomenon of change which makes us go back to memory which in human life is discovered as falsified. Ramanujan carries his past with him as inner world of memories and laws. This world projects itself into the present, but in the encounter with the present not so much the heritage but the anxieties, fears and insights
consonant with the typically modern show forth in Ramanujan's poetry.

In portraying the mother-figure, Ramanujan shows an attitude of reverential piety and conveys an appreciation of her growth from a young beautiful woman into a caring mother. This view is conveyed in "Still Another for Mother," "Of Mothers, among other things." "Still Another for Mother" shows the persona trying to see his own mother in a foreign woman and reminisce his mother as a bride who brought a "silent house" to his father as dowry:

something opened
in the past and I heard something shut
in the future, quietly,

like the heavy door
of my mother's black-pillared, nineteenth-century silent house, given on her marriage day
to my father, for a dowry.

(The Striders, 14)

"Of Mothers, among other things" gives us a warm, sensuous, and ideal account of a young mother changing
into a solicitous mother for her children and becoming an old withered lady on whom sarees hang loose. The son-persona wonders at the old mother's powers of attention and concentration in her ripe old age. In realizing this picture, at once intimate and rooted in memory, the son-persona visualizes the mother in terms of an old eagle:

But her hands are wet eagle's
two black pink-crinkled feet,

My cold parchment tongue licks bark
in the mouth when I see her four
still sensible fingers slowly flex
to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.

(Relations, 5)

Devendra Kohli refers to the poetic sensibility of Ramanujan invoking the landscape of the mind and "the interior landscape in which memories of India are re-lived."22 The poems on the mother are about the relationship of memory to reality in which relationship and between past and present and various emotions are treated. While these poems depict the self in its attempt to
discover itself in familial relationships, they outline
the motif of a continually changing individual identity
manifesting itself in multiple selves which in their
turn compose the self. In a poem like "Ecology," in a
single imaginative grasp as it were, Ramanujan "manages
to suggest nature, human nature, family history, and the
current concerns about the need to preserve the environ-
ment for the future." This poem is distinctly Indian
in attitude and flavour. An ironic anecdotal story of
Indian family life, the poem brings out in a single
continuous sentence, an act of providential seeding
according to the mother's sacral view of nature and
also an endorsement of the ecological concerns relevant
to the future of mankind. "Ecology" attempts self-
fashioning in so far as it portrays the idea of heritage
rooted in personal identity and projects an identity of
the whole clan or mankind. Through the fashioning of
the self the poet reaches out to a sense of complex
interactions of meaning relevant to a given culture.
Fashioning one's self and being fashioned by cultural
institutions like the family seem inseparably intertwined
here as suggested by the metaphor of the providential
sprouting of the seed.
In Ramanujan's "Love Poem for a Wife.1," "Love Poem for a Wife.2," "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees" and a few other poems, the husband-persona fails to realize the full possibilities of his love for his wife. In "Love Poem for a Wife.1," the wife is depicted as an alien because of "unshared childhood."(9) The myth of the androgynous god, Siva, is only a mock-ideal in the context of the persona's married life in "Love Poem for a Wife.2." The wife remains a separate other and even causes the husband to feel the loss of his self and his identity:

I dreamed one day
that face my own yet hers,
with my own nowhere
to be found; lost; cut
loose like my dragnet
past.

(Relations, 28)

Having depicted the self in its relationship with the familial circles, Ramanujan goes on to attempt a satirical description of the Hindus in their reactions to and interpretation of the causality behind trivial
and daily occurrences in terms of religious beliefs and philosophical doctrines. Ramanujan is as much rooted in the Hindu ethos as he is a secularized modern man. William Walsh observes, "so much that is essential in India is constituted by religion. In India, religion enfolds body and soul from conception to dissolution. It is the secret premise of family thought and action. It saturates the speech, the hymns, the myths and stories and the idiom of daily life." 24 In a series of poems like "Conventions of Despair," "The HINDOO: he doesn't hurt a Fly or a Spider either," "The HINDOO: he reads his GITA and is calm at all events," "The HINDOO: the Only Risk," and "Prayers to Lord Murugan," Ramanujan creates conventional personae whose seemingly literal and facile, and at times, severely critical and ironical attitude, brings to light a whole complex of traditions, practices and tribal festivities. Punishment in hell for being a libertine, non-violence towards a spider or a fly owing to the fear that it may be an reincarnation of one's grandmother or grandfather, philosophic detachment towards ugliness and violence, restraint and taboos carried to the ridiculous extreme of heartlessness are exploited for their ironic and parodic purposes to expose the absurdity of dogmatic
adherence to religious prescriptions. "Prayers to Lord Murugan" is a fine piece of ironic exposure of the devitalized and de-mythicized contemporary world. To the god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war, and love, the speaker addresses a very unconventional prayer. He would be contented if only he could rid himself of the dead weight of the past now obtaining as a "proxy."

Deliver us O presence
from proxies
and absences

from sanskrit and the mythologies

Lord of answers,
cure us at once
of prayers.

(Relations, 61-62)

Zen-Buddhism to which Ramanujan veers round, holds that truth is not in the scriptures but in man's own heart if he but strive to find it by meditation and self-mastery. Ramanujan's "Chicago Zen" brings together the secular and the mundane concerns of a Chicago citizen in
his search for spiritual progress. But the world of reality alone, however, is not going to help in the formation of identity and self. While partaking of both the authority and the alien, any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss. Ramanujan may be said to be looking forward to a continuous exploration of his self:

Or was it me/ moulting, shedding/
vestiges,/ old investments;/
rushing forever/ towards a perfect/
coupling/ with naked nothing/ in
a world/ without places

Throughout Ramanujan's poetry we find that he aims at a picture of the self as Marginal Man within the limits of his erring senses. He claims for the Marginal Man of his poems no spiritual insight or inward powers. But he continues to err and correct himself in order to survive the existential complexities and contradictions of a paper world in search of identity cards. The values he earns conform, by and large, to the common denomination of average human experience.
Though Ramanujan and Parthasarathy share in terms of racial, linguistic, cultural and familial traditions, the latter tends to treat differently of his problems of linguistic choice, alienation from native roots, and love and marriage as possible source of self-definition. Ramanujan's sense of alienation springs from the fact of his being an expatriate living in America. Still Ramanujan's deep awareness of his native roots is intact. As he himself states, he is "an Indian living in America, teaching Indian languages to Americans, writing in English and Kannada myself, a translator feeling himself translated a little in each encounter—learned a good deal about myself, and about the Indian arts." But Parthasarathy in his long poem Rough Passage tries to gather together the bits of himself left around in places like London, the cities of Central Asia, Indian cities, especially his native city, Madras. In reconstructing the unity of his self by means of his encounters with the other in the form of the cities he happens to live in, his lady love, and his cultural roots, Parthasarathy addresses himself to the task of solving his bilingual predicament by trying "to initiate a dialogue between myself and Tamil past." No doubt his predicament is that he is placed between two traditions: the English which "forms a part of his
intellectual, rational make-up, and the Tamil of his emotional, psychic make-up." In all, Parthasarathy attempts to resolve his bilingual and bicultural predicament.

The persona of Rough Passage addresses himself to the task of taking stock of himself since his thirtieth year. In a series of encounters with the other, he reveals a pattern of disillusionment which causes in him a feeling of loss of his self and also of its partial recovery. This gives the persona an impetus to further the attempt at renewal. Rough Passage is divided into three parts, "Exile," "Trial," and "Homecoming." "Exile" defines the predicament of the persona as a cultural emigree in London. In trying to achieve an identity as an English poet, he actually experiences a culture shock. He discovers a dichotomy between linguistic and cultural roots under an alien sky:

He had spent his youth whoring after English gods.
There is something to be said for exile:
You learn roots are deep.
That language is a tree, loses colour
under another sky.  

Like some of the iterative images in the poem, the
tree-image serves as an organic image of the persona's
quest for roots. The persona's travel through the city
of London brings him close to the squalor and poverty
of Londoners. The city of London acts as his other
which shows him the need for returning home. In an
attempt to overcome the sense of alienation caused by
the British Raj, Parthasarathy has written "Exile," the
first part of Rough Passage, as "an epitaph for the raj
felt as an historical and personal experience."  

In London, the events of the day for him become
vocal through the newsboy. The newspaper in his own
native land acquires scriptural sanctity. Instead of
his recitation of the sacred hymns of Four Thousand
(a collection of Tamil hymns written between the fifth
and ninth centuries A.D.), he recommends for himself
the newspaper:

.... For scriptures
I therefore recommend
the humble newspaper; I find
my prayers occasionally answered there.

("Homecoming 14," 61)

In his return journey, the persona faces the same situation of poverty and squalor in Central Asian countries. His attempt to establish a rapport with the alien and hostile world of city does not come off. He becomes aware of his brown skin, and his lady love declares that he is a changed man:

Across the seas a new knowledge,
sudden and unobtrusive as first snow transforming the landscape,
rinses speech, affirms the brown skin
and the heart beating to a different rhythm. ('Querido,' she had said 'whatever common things our love fed on you have changed.')</n
("Exile 3," 17)

The persona realizes that the city of Bombay is the hostile other and he cannot interact fruitfully and communicate meaningfully with it in order to define his identity and discover a set of values conducive
to the definition of his self. But the city of Bombay unfolds itself in its true form:

.... I return
to the city I had quarrelled with,
a euphoric archipelago,
to the hard embrace of its streets,
its traffic of regulated affections, uneventful but welcome.

("Exile 4," 19)

He finds traces of Western influences still lingering in his native land obstructing the process of self-realization possible by means of an integration with the native roots and nativization of the English language in his creative work. Having completed the phase of exile in his career, the persona resolves thus:

I must give quality to the other half.
I've forfeited the embarrassing gift
innocence in my scramble to be man.

("Exile 8," 25)
In defining himself in viable terms, he understands that the intellectual side of his self should be supplemented and supported by the emotional side:

Feelings beggar description,

shiver in dark alleys of the mind,
hungry and alone. Nothing can really be dispensed with. The heart needs all.

("Exile 8," 24)

In "Trial," the persona tries to define his self in terms of his love for his beloved. He hopes to realize his individual identity in relation to the lady love, his other. Through the faculty of touch, he gains identity as it were, and he and his lady love embark on the fulfillment of their passions, "older than the stones of Konarak." ("Trial 8," 36) The lady love seems to embody for the lover "a galaxy."

Yet, by itself, your hand was a galaxy
I could reach, even touch
in the sand with my half-inch telescopic

fingers. Overwhelm the flight
of human speech.

("Trial 10," 38)
The intensity of the persona's love transcends the power of human speech. He is threatened by the prospect of love yielding to the physical decay of their bodies. Linguistic competence always falls short of the required degree to celebrate love which is, after all, "so perishable, trite."(38)

And words, surely, are no more than ripples in the deep well of the throat.

("Trial 11," 39)

Concern with the passage of time and the anxiety of death render the body of the persona a withered symbol of romantic bliss:

The clock was my simple, unromantic moon
I counted the digits

of the year on. And my fingers,
an open grave
with only the bones of your touch.

("Trial 12," 40)

In "Homecoming," the third and final part of Rough Passage, the persona gropes his way back to his
native roots. After whoring after English gods, he finds that his creative powers are enchained. At the same time, he finds, that the native Tamil is in a state of decay. The exploitation of Tamil for commercial purpose by the tinsel world is mostly responsible for the devitalization of the language. He does not lose hope. He exhorts his fellow-poets to scrape the bottom of their past by turning inward:

Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your past.
Ransack the cupboard
for skeletons of your Brahmin childhood.

("Homecoming 2," 48)

The persona thinks that he can achieve creative success in a little measure by taking interest in the quotidian and the ordinary aspects of his life.

.... you may then,
perhaps, strike out a line for yourself from the iron of life's ordinariness.

("Homecoming 2," 48)
The cultural past with all its glory is symbolized by the rock-cut temples at Mamallapuram near Madras. The temple structures attract only the shallow interest of tourists who are content to take snapshots.

Ramanujan and Parthasarathy have achieved a break-through by nativizing the English language in order to overcome the difficulties and problems that an alien language as a tool of their creative act imposes. What was often an unresolved predicament with the early Indo-Anglian poets, has become the chief concern of Parthasarathy and he has seriously addressed himself to the task of its resolution. In having acquired an awareness of the hiatus between the soil of the language he uses, that is, English and the language of his roots, Parthasarathy has achieved a definition of the self. Parthasarathy is confronted with the problem of resolving the tension between his intellectual allegiance to English and his emotional psychic make-up constituted by his native Tamil. Adopting and harnessing the English language for articulating his search for a wholeness of view of life involves the process of cross-cultural fertilization. In grappling with this predicament of
bilingualism, Parthasarathy has arrived at an individual idiolect in which he maps the significant phases of his autobiography. In the first part, "Exile," the tension is posed, and some kind of a resolution is anticipated in the third part of Rough Passage, that is, "Homecoming." There he has initiated a dialogue with his Tamil and foreshadows the possibility of his creative project in Tamil. "Homecoming," though written in English, has followed contemporary Tamil poetry, especially in its use of irony. "Homecoming 1" is regarded as a "paradigm of the entire Indo-English poetic milieu"32:

My tongue in English chains,
I return, after a generation, to you.
I am at the end

of my dravidic tether,
 hunger for you unassuaged.
I falter, stumble.

Speak a tired language
wrenched from its sleep in the Kural,
teeth, palate, lips still new
Commenting on this, M. Sivaramakrishna remarks, "if the Indo-English poet of the nineteenth century had his tongue firmly entrenched in English chains, it is the unchaining of this that is suggested by Parthasarathy's poem." In the larger context of the loss of tradition which is a typical feature of an anti-dogmatic and empiricist age characterized by the dissolution of the traditional genres, a poet like Parthasarathy gives expression to predicament as poetry, rooted as he is in a literary milieu in which the idea/experience dichotomy is compounded by and is in a sense an emblem of a culture/language diversity.

Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, and Parthasarathy have explored in their poetry the sense in which their selves could be fashioned. The sense of self-fashioning involves the apprehension of a sense of personal order or a characteristic mode of address to the world or a structure of bounded desires. An attempt at self-
fashioning through these would reveal the formation and expression of identity which is shaped by means of a dialectical resolution arrived at in terms of intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities. These poets have shown an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of their identity as a manipulable, artful process, thereby going against the grain of the Augustinian declaration. "Try to build up yourself, and you build a ruin." With the twentieth century recognizing the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity, the perception that fashioning one's self and being fashioned by cultural institutions like family, religion, state and so on are inseparably intertwined. The human subject is indeed the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. Thus a focus upon self-fashioning reveals not merely an epiphany of identity but a cultural artifact delineated by the social systems and the artistic concerns in force.

With the advent of Ramanujan and Parthasarathy, Indian English verse has acquired a capacity to adapt itself to the ecology of language, and thanks to the bicultural awareness of these poets, it has undergone a process of acculturation and increasingly aligned
itself with the literatures of India, thus acquiring an intertextual quality. The thrust of Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla is not in the direction of the shaping of indigenous tradition but in the direction of demonstration of its relevance to the contemporary Indian situation and while they explore a sense of coming to terms with India, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy show how far the English language can free itself from the umbilical binding cord provided by Britain.

Ramanujan and Parthasarathy have epiphanized broad configurations of their individual selves in the light of their own twist given to the tradition and culture of India. They bear out the truth of Robert Langbaum's observation: "... the epiphany...is a way of apprehending value when value is no longer objective... (it) grounds the statement of value in perception; it gives the idea with its genesis, establishing its validity not as conforming to a public order of values but as the genuine experience of an identifiable person." The quest for cultural moorings is a concern which the Indian poet in English in the twentieth century has engaged himself in without a sense of
romantic nostalgia about him. Parthasarathy puts across this proposition before us unequivocally thus:

How long can foreign poets provide the staple of your lines?
Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your past.

("Homecoming 2," 48)

Parthasarathy sees Tamil as inadequate to express his deep-rooted Dravidic psyche. Further the perception is that language itself is an inadequate mode to structure experience. Out of this predicament, Parthasarathy's poetry takes its shape. Sivaramakrishna says, "Rough Passage is in this sense a departure from the usual stance perceptible in contemporary Indian poetry in English—for it suggests that the discovery of cultural roots is inextricably linked not only with the choice of one's own language but also with the corresponding responsibility, as a creative writer, of cleansing the language of the tribe." 36

Ramanujan and Parthasarathy, by expressing themselves in an unobtrusive personal voice, have given us their vision of Indian reality by means of their
literary awareness in poems which trace the progress of the self through a graphing of the dialectics of rooting oneself in one's own soil. With a keen sense of irony, they observe a scene or event in a detached spirit in their poems that reveal the makings of their selves in almost miniature dramatic enactments.
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