CHAPTER - III

THE POETRY OF R. PARTHASARATHY:
THE IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE SEARCH FOR ROOTS

Among the contemporary Indo-English writers
R. Parthasarathy (b.1934) stands out as the most conscientious and scrupulous poet both in choice of subject matter and expression. His days at school and at University, as he himself admits, 'were of intense infatuation with England and English Literature.'(1) His love of that language and place was such that he dreamt of belonging to that great heritage. But, in reality it was not so because his love of mother tongue and Tamil culture was equally intense.

Parthasarathy's professional sincerity, obviously, influenced his love of English language and culture; sharpened his literary sensibilities and made him introspective about his own creativity. He became more and more critical of his own language and culture. He was quite sensitive to the drawbacks of Tamil language. It is at this stage he could neither adopt fully the English tradition as his own, nor does he discard his Tamil past. Of this dilemma his poetry is born. It is in a way a statement of his encounter with Tamil tradition. Obviously the statement is made in an alien language. But the aspirations of the poet clearly indicate that he is dedicated to a kind of renovation of his own language. There lies in this act of dedication a hint of the poet's commitment.

Apparently the crisis is academic; but it gathers larger dimensions as we go ahead reading his poetry. These dimensions point at a profounder crisis of identity in the poet's life. The poet's reflections on his linguistic crisis gradually yield place to excruciating statements on existential concerns of his life. This shift affords us most crucial and instructive glimpses into poet's alienation and commitment as well. Bruce King, a noted English critic, rightly observed, "Both (Adil Jussawala and R. Parthasarathy) have written long poems based on their lives and the need for a commitment which will overcome their continuing sense of alienation."(2) Parthasarathy emphasises

(2) Modern Indian Poetry in English, King Bruce, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1987, p. 231.
the sense of his rootlessness in English language which stands, in a way, as a wall between himself and the tradition of Tamil culture. The language he chooses to write in is alien.

He confesses in the following lines that:

He had spent his youth whoring
After the English gods.

(Exile - 2) (3)

The main problem that Parthasarathy faces in his life is that of alien culture and literature. Here one finds him lamenting the loss of his Tamil identity. He cannot go back to his roots, as his language has lost its original vitality. As a creative writer reflecting on the life and culture of his time, he transforms his concerns into poetry. For Parthasarathy, his own language sounds outdated; he feels that the present state of his language is far from satisfactory. The English language over which he has considerable mastery is not his own. The culture that he breathes and the language that he has at his command have no mutual harmony. He himself belongs to a small group of English language poets in India.

It is this problem that makes him feel uprooted from Tamil culture. Parthasarathy doesn't want to keep himself aloof from it. Unlike Ramanujan he views this state with great concern. For Parthasarathy it was inevitable on his part to

adopt English language and literature because of his great infatuation for them.

A conscious writer as he is, he finds the Tamil tradition and culture, though outdated, is holy when placed against the culture of the alien land. When he turns towards this land, he finds it to be a sort of barren land, a waste land. In the search for his cultural identity, he reminds us of T.S. Eliot. But the only difference is Eliot bemoans the loss of universal values whereas Parthasarathy laments the loss of his identity.

Parthasarathy is a poet who looks at life and the world with a sense of responsibility. He chooses to review his predicament through the medium of poetry. His only volume Rough Passage published in 1977 is a book in which "all poems form part of a single poem." He says that 'it is a product of twenty years' labour.' This volume describes the poet's journey through life. The poem comprising three sections contains the poet's reflections. These reflections include the poet's attempts to analyse and probe the nature of the medium he uses and the nature of his own creativity and its relevance. The poet, unlike many Indo-English poets, severely subjects himself to the task of educating himself. The Rough Passage marks this aspect of Parthasarathy's life.
Ezekiel in a similar situation accepts the present lot of his life as it is. Like Ramanujan, Parthasarathy too has his roots in Hindu tradition while Ezekiel doesn’t belong to that culture by birth. If Ezekiel intends to adopt this Indian culture as his own, and wants to belong to this, Parthasarathy like Ramanujan is already part and parcel of this culture by birth. Therefore, the sense of loss experienced by Parthasarathy and the nostalgic feelings thereof cannot be found in Ezekiel. In this respect the crisis that Parthasarathy faces is his own.

He thought that the knowledge of English language and literature that he acquired staying in England would make him settle there as an English poet. But this became only a disillusionment when he became conscious of the drawbacks of his Indian heritage. When he returns to India the feeling that he is an exile becomes strong in him. The difficulty he faces now is changed, it has not remained as it was. It has all its modern complexities. In this circumstance he finds himself alienated to a greater extent and feels much more uprooted.

He feels that the Indian tradition strongly because of his birth in this country. Hence his awareness being an exile overwhelms him. At this stage he feels his inability to communicate meaningfully.
This kind of conflict which we witness in Parthasarathy is normally faced by other Indo-English poets and search for self identity can commonly be found in their works. But each poet reacts to this in his own way when it comes to use an alien language for poetic expression, but it all depends how much one involves oneself. Each poet, as we know, has his own way of approach to life. After all poetry expresses one's own experiences in life.

The Indo-English poetry is obviously a manifestation of Indian sensibility. The success or failure of poets like Parthasarathy and Ezekiel lies in the process of assimilation, of what they experience and what they learn. The Indian poetry in English has steadily built up a tradition, shooting forth its roots in national consciousness.

As we begin to study Parthasarathy's poetry we find that there is a strong autobiographical element. In this respect he comes nearer to Ezekiel, though both of them differ individually in their respective sensibilities. Their cultural background is also different. Obviously, Parthasarathy has strong cultural roots in the soil while Ezekiel has nothing of that sort to claim as his own. Parthasarathy feels that he is alienated from his tradition and hence he is an exile. Such a problem does not appear to bother Ezekiel. As a member of a Hindu family Parthasarathy recalls his childhood memories and
his own age old tradition nostalgically while Ezekiel is unable to do so as he has none of such roots in Indian tradition. In this respect Ramanujan has his Tamil roots but his attitude towards it is different. Besides, Parthasarathy and Ramanujan have regional and religious elements common to them by their birth. But Ezekiel has none of them.

The "Rough Passage" with its three parts namely 'exile', 'trial' and 'Home-coming' tells us about his alienation, eventually about his commitment. The section of 'exile' is about the poet's feelings of alienation and the problem he faces at the age of 30. The stay in an alien land and his education there has eventually brought forth disillusionment in the poet's mind and has made him keenly conscious of his Indianness. But, on his return to India the sense of alienation still persists in him as the country seems no different from the West. He finds himself that he has lost his moorings at that stage.

The loss of identity is most crucial in the 'exiled poet.' This is reflected here in the first part of the poem. He begins to 'take stock of his life' at the age of thirty and continues to review his own self as man and poet. Hence the poem distinctly appears to be "a graph tracing the poetic process" which is rightly "instinct with the broad leit motif of an imaginative odyssey in quest of the self."(4)

The first part of 'the Rough Passage' which is named 'Exile' expresses the poet's dissatisfaction. Because the poet feels much about 'whoring about English Gods.' It is this fact that makes him say that there is something to be said for 'Exile'. It is at this stage he is sharply conscious of his tradition and culture.

You learn roots are deep
that language is a tree, looses colour
Under another sky.

(Exile - 2)\(^{(5)}\)

While he stayed in London the poet looks back and 'takes stock of his life'. He realizes the significance of his Indian affiliations. Here his Indian past draws our attention to intellectual allegiance to an alien language and consequently it draws attention to his futility. Through a period of thirty years things at last have taken a certain shape, and have settled at last. He says:

At thirty the mud will have settled:
You see yourself in a mirror.
Perhaps, refuse the image as yours.\(^{(6)}\)

(Exile - 1)

There are one's own joys and woes one experiences during one's growth. In the process of growth from adolescence

\(^{(5)}\) 'Exile' from Rough Passage, New Poetry In India O.U.P. Delhi: 1977. p. 17.
\(^{(6)}\) Ibid., p. 15.
to adulthood, the poet finds a change in himself and becomes aware of his predicament in an alien country, where one cannot find oneself deeply rooted in the soil. It is only for intellectual pursuits one goes abroad, gets oneself equipped and comes back to one's native soil.

The poet cannot belong to London though he spends quite some time there for higher studies. There, the life is mechanical and dull. The leisure time was spent in meaningless talks in the basement, discussing Ravi Shankar, the renowned sitarist, smoking or emptying wine bottles.

Despite his strong love for English, the poet could not resist his fascination for his own Tamil land, poetry, because he thinks his roots are in his own native country and his own native language. This is the feeling of the poet.

In the poem he describes that the London suburbs are like 'pockets, bursting with immigrants'. This alien land is no more a paradise to these immigrants. In the lanes one finds here smoke and unwashed children. This reminds us of the unwashed children of 'The Waste Land'. He can't even change them, because he heard someone saying:

'It's no use trying to change people, They'll be what they are.' (Exile - 2)

(7) Ibid., p. 18.
All moves in a cycle of monotony. The life has become meaningless, the words have lost dignity. The entire situation is deteriorated.

In Exile - Part 3, the poet makes a panoramic survey of his journey. The poet's journeys through ancient cities of Europe and Asia provide a background to him. With a repentant frame of mind he re-enters the city of Bombay 'a city he had quarrelled with'.

All the ancient cities look blank with their 'empty streets' and slight drizzles. There is dust around these places with famished children stopping the people. These city walls are familiar with their old look in places like Istambul and Jerusalem and the desert stretches over Syria and Iraq. The poet who feels exiled in these places during his journey hopes to get some solace in the city of Bombay, but here too he is disappointed.

The city of Bombay like any cosmopolitan township has its constant flow of automobiles and people:

The streets are noisy, and trees on Malbar Hill blind with dust. Spring had gone unnoticed except for the fountain of colour in the park. (8)

(Exile - 3)

The poet indicates here that in Bombay the spring is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is colourless. If at all anywhere the colour is to be found, it is

(8) Ibid., p. 19.
in the fountains in the park. This city which is situated on the shores of the sea looks "like a hand at rest." The poet tries to convey here the cold, impersonal nature of the city inspite of its mobility. The entire city is commercialized but the poet says quite ironically:

'Between us there is no commerce' (9)

(Exile - 3)

Even a close look into the city brings him frustration. The old stone buildings remind him of the old cities, elsewhere.

On his return, he finds that everything has remained the same. His notion about the city's improved status draws a blank picture. Bombay offers him:

its traffic of regulated affections, uneventful but welcome. (10)

(Exile - 4)

He says he doesn't find any warmth in the city, all is done in a matter of fact way. It is mechanical and regularized under a system without having real concern for any one.

The poet then enters into the very heart of the city where he finds it reeling under heavy load of smoke. This indicates industrialization, and its pollution over human life.

Its rickety legs break wind, pneumatically, of course in the press of traffic. (11)

(Exile - 5)

(9) Ibid., p. 20.
(10) Ibid., p. 21.
(11) Ibid., p. 22.
There is so much of smoke that one cannot distinguish between the cigarette smoke and the smoke coming out of factories. This has made an adverse effect on nature. The city of Bombay offers nothing to the poet in his quest of solace. It only intensifies his feelings of exile.

He finds himself in a peculiar situation as if belonging to a minority community while moving around the suburban parts of the city. There are many types of people living here out of sheer necessity. There are slums where people from different parts of the country dwell in pitiable conditions. They speak their own language and live life in their own way.

I am through the city
No better than ghettos, the suburbs.
Their language is a noise. (12)

The people living in Bombay suburbs are either semi-urban, or semi civilized. The language used by them in slums 'is a noise' says the poet. This language has no dignity. It sounds as a hotpotch of different languages. For the poet his mother tongue is the only language that comes by instinct. And therefore he feels that the people speak no language here, they only produce noise. Further, it is a very common sight like any Indian city that animals are found roaming about in streets. In the streets of Bombay too there stands a cow in the busy street 'combing the traffic.'

(12) Ibid., p. 22.
The poet is thus fed up with this ugly sight, full of chaos, and therefore, wants to get some relief. He looses 'the knot' of his 'English tie', as he feels suffocated and turns away towards the sea.

The poet even on the sea shore feels isolated being away from his native place. Any city in India whatever may be the size of it or the grandeur, the poet feels himself quite an outsider in these places. The sea, sailing ships, their masts, the golden sands, - all these project poet's romantic nostalgia towards his native place. He feels that even the sails while moving before him on the sea 'wipe off the odour of land.' The poet is haunted by the memory of his native land here. He feels that he is an exile in his own country.

Parthasarathy reacts more or less in the same manner to Goa. With its green surroundings, far stretched rivers and houses and streets, it fails to attract him. There are churches being a place of Christian domination. Once a place of Portuguese rule still bears its stamp on old statues and antique cathedrals. They do not serve any purpose now, the poet says except that:

'I stop to take a picture:
a storm of churches breaks about my eyes.'

(13) (Exile - 6)

The city has plenty of these religious places unlike his own native place which is known for temples and their ancient

(13) Ibid., 23.
'Gopurams'. These churches also perhaps remind him of his earlier sojourn in London. Even in Goa, a part of his country he feels the alienness which reminds him of a foreign land.

For the poet the city is part of his own consciousness, and his responses accordingly, pass through the alternate feelings of being a 'stranger, an 'observer', and a 'performer.'

From Bombay Parthasarathy now comes to Madras:

Madras is an old city situated on the wide Marina beach on the one side and Fort St. George and San Thome on the other. This city was once known for spicy things. Those things included cinnamon and cloves among other spices.

The city was an old land known for its antique civilization humming with its activities. As Goa is a city of many churches, Madras is a city of temples.

'The eyes ache from feeding too much
On the ripe fruit of temples.'

(Exile - 7)

There was ample evidence of temples and their religious influence on the life of people. Their life was shaped by the sentiments of religious teachings. This indicates that the people in Madras are not only religious but also orthodox in their way of life.

(14) Ibid., p.
But this ancient city has undergone a change in modern times with the construction of new bridges, and buildings. Even the life style of the people is changed:

The hourglass of the Tamil mind is replaced by the exact chronometer of Europe now. (15)

(Exile - 7)

With the passage of time, the Tamil mind has also undergone a change. The people here are becoming more and more westernized in their outlook and in the way of life.

With feelings and concern the poet further states that the old time goddesses also have adopted to modern ways:

Now cardboard-and-paper goddesses (naturally high breasted) look down on Mount Road
There is no fight left in the old beast. (16)

(Exile - 7)

The poet is carried away by the feelings of an exile so much that he realizes futility of life even in his own native land. His own city of Madras looks strange and alien. He finds no difference. Everywhere in big cities life is the same. The city's social clubs, the rich and the poor are also the same.

The sky is no different
Beggars are the same everywhere. (17)

(Exile - 7)

(17) Ibid., p. 25.
India has her rich tradition and culture. But it also has been influenced by the West. The poet bitterly reacts to this change he has found all the way during his return from the alien land to the land of his own. His exile which he has imposed on himself, has only proved futile.

In the last part of 'Exile' of 'Rough Passage' Parthasarathy visits Calcutta, another major Indian city. This city of textile mills and other industries lets out smoke and this has turned the sky grey. It oppresses the eyes. In this busy city humming with activities all around, one finds poor people like porters, rikshaw-pullers, roadside barbers, hawkers, fortune-tellers, and idle ones—all form an interesting and amazing scene. They are mostly found in the streets and around railway stations. He encounters this ugly sight when he returns to this place with a hope.

A little further, at close distance, there is Jadavpur. The poet's 'tongue' becomes 'hunchbacked with words'. Soon there is smell of gin and cigarette ash. There is a lot of desire to pacify hunger and one's heart is full of carnal desires. There is so much darkness in the alleyeys of mind. This mind is hungry and alone. This also indicates that the poet has been in exile to find wisdom for himself. He could not achieve this. In order to progress in life qualitatively he dislodged himself. He wandered through the cities like Bombay.
Panjira, Madras and now has entered into Calcutta. But even at the age of thirty, at an age one normally attains intellectual maturity, Parthasarathy feels that he has not been able to achieve what he wanted to achieve. Because of this, there is a sense of frustration in him. This realization makes him sad.

The years have given me little wisdom.
And I have dislodged myself to find it
(Exile - 8)

The poet feels further that he should struggle hard and scramble to be man:

Accidently these words of the poet 'scramble to be man' are highly suggestive of Ezekiel's famous Yeatsian phrase 'the unfinished man'. Parthasarathy aims at becoming a complete man through his poetry like Ezekiel.

The poet's attempt throughout the 'exile' is to become a complete man. In this struggle the poet has 'forfeited the gift of innocence'. The poet is in a mood to evaluate himself in this part of 'exile'. He says:

I must give quality to the other half
I have forfeited the embarrassing gift
Innocence in my scramble to be man. (19)
(Exile - 8)

There is a constant attempt on the part of the poet to look into himself, in order to define what he is.

(19) Ibid., p. 27.
The 'Exile' on the whole unrolls the map of poet's excruciating poetic journey which as he says is not yet ended. The first part of the 'Rough Passage' thus deals with the question of language and identity and dwells at length on the necessity of having roots.

It is the anguish of the exiled Indian, that he should have roots in his tradition.

In 'TRIAL' the poet highlights his personal life in the context of love. For him now the personal love, is the only point of certitude and shelter amidst turmoil of life. He has a strong desire to live life vigorously.

The poet thinks of his mortal life and for him death is the only relief. It is very difficult to think suddenly stopping as if 'stopped and cut off.' This is the life where a person clutches to a straw with the only hope of survival. He experiences love but does not know how to unlock the gates of this magic world.

I grasp your hand
in a rainbow touch

(Trial - 1)

The idea of love for him is like the rainbow, so attractive, impressive, and absorbing. This love in the poet blossoms from the early childhood. The poet goes back

(20) Ibid., p. 31.
to his childhood days through a family album. It is in a moment of despair he discovers his childhood with all the nostalgic feelings. As a child the poet sat amidst other family members with 'bobpins and ribbons' over his 'unruly hair'. It is a contented and happy life with an amount of innocence in it. It is an intimate study of the family life with arms around the near and dear ones.

Then he describes school days which were highly memorable:

School was a pretty kettle of fish: 
the spoonfulls of English 
brew never quite slaked your thirst. (21)

(Trial - 2)

To the grown up poet, now the school looks like 'a pretty kettle of fish'. The children always are moving with activities of one kind or the other. It was in those days the poet had learnt English in a small measure which never satisfied his thirst of learning the language.

Thus, the school days rolled on rapidly with its own amazement and curiosity. There was a rapid growth from the childhood to manhood which shaped amidst the 'juicy folklores', of the domestic cook. And suddenly the poet realizes his growing into manhood, furling like a flag. It was only the death of the father that once again made the poet conscious of his childhood.

(21) Ibid., p. 32.
In a family life it is the father who is at the centre of the house and his death makes the members orphans and they begin to feel a greater sense of responsibility. At the root of family life there is love, there is affection, there is fellow feeling which make life meaningful. This strong family bond is built upon the mutual affection and love. Thus, the poet recalls the days of his childhood.

The poem having thus given us glimpses into the poet’s childhood, it now turns to describe his youth.

In youth one has always urges to go out for various attractions. The 'youth weighs heavily like the noon.'

Passion quicker than candles, burns, smoking the glass of our bodies \(^{(22)}\)

(Trial - 3)

It is in this youthful experiences in the dark alleys that leave marks on hands and lips. Experiences during young age will always remain memorable.

In the prime of youth when one sets on searching joy in life, it is the beloved's body that becomes the source of supreme joy. It is the way of living life vigorously when passion over powers one. It becomes adjustable and moulds itself at the response of the female counterpart.

Your flesh was the glass that cupped its hands over me. Hours glowed to incandescene. \(^{(23)}\)

(Trial - 4)

\(^{(22)}\) Ibid., p. 33.
\(^{(23)}\) Ibid., p. 34.
This very change is fascinating and the world looks more enchanting. The very thought of the beloved is like blowing of 'live coals'. One feels that by remembering the beloved the distance is cut down and the beloved is close at hand.

These passionate feelings are further intensified in physical contact of the woman. The poet describes the very act of man-woman relation with great passion and with extreme sensuality.

I am all fingers when it comes to touching them (24)
(Trial - 5)

In this act of union there lies supreme ecstasy. Though this stage is only half the way to the real joy, the poet feels it is wholesome.

The sensual description the poet gives here is extreme erotic and highly exhilarating.

Tonight I breathe on your skin. (25)
(Trial - 6)

This makes him intoxicated and he fails to see anything around him except his partner. It is all clouds over. The woman besides him is the embodiment of love.

During these moments of life the poet forgets the world around. Even the night becomes darker than ever it is. The thought of 'passionate love' turns intense in the 'dark night'. The night is congenial for making love.

(24) Ibid., p. 35.
(25) Ibid., p. 36.
This togetherness due to love creates a world exclusively of its own and makes one unable to live single in the course of time. A fellow feeling thus has been formed in this, and the single life becomes invisible as seen 'through this 'opaque lens'. It is the touch that brings the body into focus and further:

restores colour to inert hands,
till the skin takes over
evasing angularities, and the four walls
turn on a strand of hair."(26)
(Trial - 7)

Every time it gets dark the poet feels that he goes 'weak in the knees', thinking of his beloved. Every night that beloved becomes an erotic sculpture of our ancient caves of Belur. This also means rare unique and incomparable. This experience after the nightfall in man's life itself is beyond comparison. These ancient sculptures are also known for their bold poses. It is then, these feelings arise in the poet's mind:

My hands fill up, slowly,
with your breasts.
Curve to the pressure of spheroids'.(27)
(Trial - 8)

According to the poet beloved's hair violently fallen in the dark becomes one with the prevailing darkness. This instantly gathers the room in a knot. This entanglement of two bodies indicates the human bondage. This is the completion of

(26) Ibid., p. 37.
(27) Ibid., p. 38.
relationship between man and woman in life. The consummate relation is the strongest bondage that indirectly strengthens his love, cordiality for humanbeings.

That is to say it is the human passions that give meaning to life, which ultimately turns a house into a home. This sustaining element in life is ancient and traditional, perhaps older than centuries old erotic sculptures of Konarak. The poet tries to tell us of the love life he experienced in his youthful days, and makes us aware of the fact that this is only a repetition of our old and ancient tradition. The poet now turns to describe his encounter with his beloved. Here he rightly says:

Your hair tumbles in the dark,
instantly gathers
the room in a knot. (28)

<i>Triai</i>  
(Exile - 8)

There is nothing to hide between the man and the woman. It is all joy. The passionate act is further intensified:

'It's you I commemorate tonight.
The sweet water
of your flesh I draw
with my arms as from a well.' (29)

(Trial - 9)

(28) Ibid., p. 38.
(29) Ibid., p. 39.
During the trial, the frustrated poet tries to have some sort of spiritual shelter which he finds in love. He feels that love brings human beings together. This togetherness establishes a strong bond among the people. The poet, therefore, begins recalling his childhood love nostalgically. Not being fully satisfied he turns to the family love which is a sustaining element in life to establish intimate relations with one another. Then he speaks of adult love. In the poem, the poet is 'living it all again.' But here too he realizes that he could not have contentment at any of these stages of manhood. He laments that he has not been able to derive any inspiration or vitality from his past.

My past is an unperfect stone:
the flaws show. I polish
the stone, sharpen the lustre to a point.\(^{(30)}\)
(Trial - 15)

Here the poet's referring to the stone is quite significant. One has to return to one's past for ultimate solace and contentment. The poet is still a lover of Tamil tradition. It is only by sharpening that 'stone', by reviving the old tradition, one can hope for better things in life. Thus, he wants to see that something significant would come out.

\(^{(30)}\) Ibid., p. 45.
'Home Coming', the third and the last part of the long poem, deals with the poet's return journey to Tamil tradition. The poet's spiritual circuit is complete. The estranged creativity of the poet has come back to seek its solace in his maternal Tamil culture.

In this context Parthasarathy's poetry seems to have a single theme. Which reveals itself in the poet's recurring preoccupations, the crucial preoccupation being the basic question of language as a mode of identity. The loss of identity in this respect is the result of as much of cultural alienation as that of his infatuation for a foreign language. This feeling of his predicament is reinforced by the urban landscape with the city at the centre, and the newspaper as its linguistic fulcrum. Finally, both the loss of identity and the inadequacy of language are sought by accepting simple and small things of life he says, "I have exchanged the world for a table and chair."

'Home Coming' expresses the poet's urge to go back to his native land. To speak in Hegelean term: If, the poet's whoring after English gods' is the 'thesis', the discovering of roots acts as 'antithesis' and the 'synthesis' of these two forms the theme of 'Home Coming.' This is indicated by the poet in the union of the Tamil hourglass with the European chronometer.
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. (31)

(Home Coming - 1)

The 'Home Coming' is therefore for the poet is a return to his land. Being satisfied with his creativity and fascinated by the potentialities of the English language, when he turns to his mother tongue he is disappointed to see that it is much impoverished. Here he is confronted with the sterility of his mother tongue. His staying away from the native land for many years made him learn English at the cost of his mother tongue and now when he returns, he is still in the chains of dravidic roots but while using his mother tongue he falters and stumbles. His choice of the Tamil language is almost negated. Now Tamil for him has become old and tiresome to use:

Speak a tired language
wrenched from its sleep in the Kural
teeth, palate, lips still new
to its agglutinative touch. (32)

(Home Coming - 1)

(31) Ibid., p. 49.
(32) Ibid., p. 49.
All this suggests that there is a kind of conflict between English and Tamil sensibilities. In Parthasarathy's case it is not that English is an alien auditory mode to express his deep rooted dravidic psyche. It is now his own language which he realizes that it is in decay, and thus becomes a hurdle to lips. It is as old as third or fourth century 'Kural', the Tamil work. It is a language through which the poet has been brought up, and he neither can own it nor can disown it. This feeling lies in the very logic of the experience he tries to evoke here.

The poem suggests that the poet's discovery of cultural roots is linked not only with the choice of language but with the corresponding responsibility of cleansing it. When he looks at it, he feels frustrated. The language is only a noise. It has lost its charm and strength. So he expresses his dislike for his own land.

To live in Tamil Nadu is to be conscious everyday of impotence. There is the language, for instance: the bull, Nammalvar took by the horns is today an unrecognizable carcass quick with the fleas of Kodambakkam. (33)

(Home Coming - 2)

(33) Ibid., p. 50.
The language and its communicative strength has become ineffective. It has lost its old charisma through the passage of time. The old Tamil language, in the eyes of the poet, is now a bull which has been reduced to an unrecognizable carcass with the fleas of Kodambakkam. The ancient Indian culture has been in decay because of its disuse through the passage of time. The poet can neither accept it nor can he discard it, though he is a part of this heritage.

The poet now only asks us to go back to our antiquity to study and understand those scriptures and hymns for our nourishment. We have enough of external influences coming from far off countries. He therefore says:

How long can foreign poets provide the staple of your lives?\(^{(34)}\)

(- Home Coming - 2)

The poet now thinks that they should turn inward, "Let us scrape the bottom of our past" he says. The time has now come to ransack the cupboard 'for skeletons of your Brahmin childhood.'

This is a small solace to the poet in his poetic journey inspite of the fact that he has to face an acute linguistic crisis.

The poet now describes what he feels on his return journey. His coming back to his people throws light on how the

\(^{(34)}\) Ibid. p. 50
poet reacts to his family bondage. He came back to the family fold on a specific occasion. The occasion of the family reunion was the death of the grandfather. It was in March '59 that the entire family got together to mourn the death of the grandfather. All relatives, cousins, distant cousins arrive in crowded buses. On such a sad occasion, everyone revives his or her relation with fainter memories:

the dust of unlettered years
clouding instant recognition.\(^{(35)}\)

(Home Coming - 3)

After some time the people freely mix with one another sitting on choultry steps cross-legged for a chat, and eat their familiar food, rice and pickle in the noon. It is a scene of typical south Indian life at home with its traditional way of eating to the fullest satisfaction.

The girl once young with her long skirt and a liking for tamarind, has now grown into a mature lady of 40 years with three daughters.

There are reunions; there are also separations in the family. One such occasion was faced by the poet when he lost his father. It was a stunning experience full of sorrow which hit him hard like a stone.

\(^{(35)}\) Ibid., p. 51.
At the burning ghat
relations stood like exclamation point (36)

(Home Coming - 4)

It is in the death of our dearest ones, the significance of life is realized intensely. The poet says it is while burning the body that 'the relations stood like exclamation point.'

After the death of the father the son becomes the master of the house. The poet therefore says:

I was my father now.

(Home Coming - 4) (37)

And the responsibility of the household rests on the shoulders of the son.

And after me
my unborn son, through the eye of this needle of forgetfulness.

(Home Coming - 4) (38)

This way the life continues. But this is done in quite an insignificant way that one hardly realizes that everything is a temporary arrangement. This agony has been voiced forcefully by the poet.

(36) Ibid., p. 52.
(37) Ibid., p. 52.
(38) Ibid., p. 52.
The images used by the poet sharply focus the fact of life and death. The images of brittle glass and stone are effective. The sorrow engulfs the whole family and yet, 'Through the eye of this needle of forgetfulness' the life continues. The poet's agony of the predicament and his silent resignation to the inevitable render his poetry poignantly memorable.

The poet then goes to show some serious evidence of his roots in this land. He was born in a coastal town by the Arabian Sea. The land was full of rains and water all around.

I see myself in you
as you bend, daily our world
to yours.

(Home Coming - 5) (39)

His life has become a part of his environment. He says that he chased the sun from morning to evening from the eastern window to the western window.

It is not easy for the poet to extricate himself from tradition, from the family fold. He places himself in the midst of these 'inevitable links'; tries to understand and recognise himself. It is like looking for oneself before the mirror in the bathroom. It is his desperate attempt at 'watching himself' 'looking for himself'. This also is an attempt to speak in Ezekiel's terms "to define oneself" and to come to terms with oneself.

(39) Ibid., p. 53.
When the poet comes back to his native land, he finds that everything has changed. He finds no longer the 'smell of the old turmeric days of Nanjangud.' 'Now no girl marries at any early age of twelve'. He recalls the childhood days when he 'used to move around' holding the 'border of his mother's saree'.

The Vaikai river once a pride of the city, has now become 'a sewer'. The language is turned into 'an unrecognizable carcass'. The scene of the family reunion in 'Home Coming' is visible only through 'cl0uded recognition.'

Even amidst frustration, Parthasarathy has moments of pride. He feels proud of the glorious past of his country. He admires those magnificent rock-cut temples, great king Bhagiratha who brought the Ganga down from heaven to the earth. Further, he ironically suggests that it is the place for busy tourists all round the year for snapping photographs with cameras round their necks.

Further the poet, standing on the street in the evening looking at the traffic (he) feels that all the glory is now vanished. The traffic piles up in the evening when he turns towards home. It gets night "The pavement turns informer hearing my steps. A pariah dog slams an alley in my face."

This despair prepares him to accept 'small changes'. He has nothing to complain:
I have exchanged The World
for a table and chair. I shouldn't complain.
(Home Coming -10) (40)

The poet feels that the life in his native Tamil
Nadu like the life in advanced countries has become hectic.
It is full of worries and tensions. In such a situation he
finds himself almost suffocated. 'The sun' here, he says,
'rises and sets mechanically' without any purpose or meaning.

It's dogfight
all over. Noises, noises.
(Home Coming-11) (41)

The life in the city besides being noisy makes
one miserable. It becomes unbearable. The poet travelling
daily in a bus, and getting down at the doorsteps feels the
very act dull, mechanical. He gets tired by the time he
reaches home and utters in disgust:

A bus spits me out at my doorstep:
I enter awkwardly - the day,
an indigestible lump in my throat.
(Home Coming-11) (42)

In the poem the poet gives the impression that his
fulfilment lies in identifying himself with his Tamil past.
But fortunately he has been endowed with the gift of writing

(40) Ibid., p. 58.
(41) Ibid., p. 59.
(42) Ibid., p. 59.
poetry in English. It has almost become an infatuation. Intellectually and emotionally he has accepted the language. But at the same time the love of his mother tongue overpowers him. He feels, he is guilty of neglecting his mother tongue. But when he ventures to try his hands at writing poetry in his language he gets repulsed by its sheer poverty and impotence.

He went for the wrong gods from the start
And marriage made it worse.
He hadn't read his Greek poets well.

(Home Coming-12) (43)

On the one hand he feels guilty of writing poetry in English because it is an alien tongue. On the other, he cannot try his hands at writing Tamil poetry because of its linguistic poverty.

But in all his literary pursuits Parthasarathy is completely English. He taught English literature, kept himself occupied in creative writing in that language, and he continues to review the works in that language, and still attends literary conferences time to time. Even then he feels that he can no longer shine in that language. The reason is he does not inherit it unlike Tamil.

The poet gives the impression that he ardently wishes to be a poet in his own language, the language he knows right from his birth. But at the same time he sharply feels the

(43) Ibid., p. 60.
barrenness of his language. As he turns to English he succeeds in using that language but soon he realizes that all his success is not that worthy. Because, he feels a great dislike for becoming a poet in that language. To be a poet, according to him, means "to fatten oneself on the flesh of dead poets":

What's it like to be a poet?
I say to myself, 'The Son of a bitch fattens himself on the flesh of dead poets.'

(Home Coming-12) (44)

This predicament of Parthasarathy is puzzling to an average reader. Being placed between two traditions, he cannot wholly accept or renounce either of them. The poet is sorry for 'whoring after English gods'. He has recognised its merits. He comes back to his language but finds it a carcass. Hence his dislike and hatred at both the levels are obvious.

He ardently loves to return to the sacred books of his land. But he soon finds them to be a 'dung heap' "of old texts and obscure commentaries."

From his fingertips ooze ink and paper, as he squats on the dung heap of old texts and obscure commentaries.

(Home Coming-12) (45)

His 'eyes get peeled off' when he looks at this tradition, old and outdated and still holy like the 'cowdung of the native place'.

(44) Ibid., p. 60.
(45) Ibid., p. 60.
Looking for himself he tries to see whether he could adjust himself with the present state of affairs. In this attempt he finds himself quite mature. Sitting on the sea-shore of his native Madras, with 'a glass of beer', he broods on his own self. He realizes at this juncture:

However there is no end to the deceptions I practise on myself:

(Home Coming-13)\(^{(46)}\)

He thinks at that moment that life is deceptive, whether he is alone or in the company of friends. This kind of cheating in life continues.

But the poet has come to terms with himself even within such a disappointing situation. He reconciles with the frustrations in his life. He is no longer himself as he goes on looking at himself. He feels tired. He has come home an exhausted man. But he is not without aspirations even at this stage.

In such a situation he is forcefully driven to compromise and reconciliation. The situation has completely changed from an 'ancient house' to bare 'flat' to which he has come to live in. There is also a change in the cultural aspect of life. A new life style has since been adopted by the people.

His experience of forty long years tells him that the modern tradition is born of the changes made in old tradition

\(^{(46)}\) Ibid., p. 60.
of ours. But he finds that his native tongue has remained absolutely impervious to these changes.

For Parthasarathy, going back to his roots is the only alternative open to him at present, because he realizes this when the question is asked: "How long can foreign poets provide the staple of your lines?" He also thinks, that the alternative of choosing one's own language for poetic creation is a course fraught with difficulties. He feels that the situation is too miserable, for his language is in decay and is 'impotent'. The "Home Coming" therefore marks the poet's return to meaningful simplicity.

Earlier, he realizes that his language has lost its vitality which once was nourished by Nammalvar. Now it has become, through the passage of time, inflated and vapid. Thus, he feels that he is unable to express what he actually means.

The balloon of poetry has grown red in the face with repeated blowing.

(Home Coming-14)(47)

The poet here thinks that the Indian way of using rhetoric has completely inflated and blown the language out of proportions. Hence the word has naturally lost its meaning.

(47) Ibid., p. 63.
It has become, gaudy, seemingly meaningful yet vapid. The poet is not been able to create anything new; anything of his own. The ancient Indian scriptures according to the poet, have lost their power to provide any inspiration to the reader today. Therefore, the poet out of indignation suggests that it is better to go for the newspapers.

For scriptures
I therefore recommend
the humble newspaper.

(Home Coming-14)\(^{48}\)

The poet thinks that the newspaper has some practical purpose of its own. In the present context, it is more meaningful, and more relevant.

He considers this is the only practical solution to the problem.

I find
my prayers occasionally answered there.
I shall, perhaps, go on
Like this....

(Home Coming-14)\(^{49}\)

Parthasarathy doesn't want to recommend scriptures because they have been rendered into meaningless platitudes. We have to regain the vitality through our Vernaculars. He therefore thinks that the poet should try to restore the pristine vitality to poetry. He feels that his language could

\(^{(48)}\) Ibid., p. 63.
\(^{(49)}\) Ibid., p. 63.
attain vigour and vitality through the day today relevant speech of the common man. The newspaper is an appropriate instrument for restoring vitality to the language, because it is a fitting modern medium for communication. So the poet feels that the language of the newspaper proves to be more meaningful than the language of scriptures.

Now the poet seems to arrive at a kind of ironical contentment in 'Home Coming' after he gets disillusioned with the impoverished state of his own native heritage and language.

In this way this section of the poem records the poet's grappling with the linguistic crisis that he has experienced in his life. He has also made it clear that he is driven to accept the little simplicities of life.

Hereafter I should be content,
I think, to go through life
with the small change of uncertainties.

(Home Coming-14)(50)

The poet at last rather likes to taste bitter 'uncertainties' than being fed on 'satiating certainties'.

(50) Ibid., p. 63.