CHAPTER II

ALIENATION AND THE NEED TO BELONG

... I stood
Among them, but not of them.
('Childe Harold')

The wandering hero of Byron's classic poem experiences the tension between his sense of isolation or alienation and his need for real fellowship. This feeling or state of mind is 'central to man's existence.' It has been the concern of psychologists, philosophers and sociologists who have viewed it in multi-dimensional perspectives. To them, alienation or Entfremdung includes both normal and abnormal states of mind, religious and secular connotations. The idea of estrangement is fundamental to any concept of alienation - whether man views himself as a stranger either to God, or to himself or to society or to the product of his labour.


2 Philosophers over that man's birth estranges him from God. His sense of dissatisfaction with himself leads to self- alienation and coupled with non-conformist views alienates him from society. Marx developed the theory of alienated labour. In Abnormal Psychology, it is seen as a cause for insanity. All ideas on this subject owe much to Schwartz's findings during the All-India Seminar on Alienation, University.
Man's isolation, his loneliness has always been a compelling theme of literature. Hamlet stands as the classic example of almost every kind of alienation. In the twentieth century, though the world has shrunk due to super-sonic means of communication, man still feels alienated and cannot communicate either with himself or with others. In literature this has resulted in the poetry of self-introspection where the self starts a dialogue with its own self in the Yeatsian manner and sometimes reaches a point of violence with a breakdown of rational communication as in confessional poetry. In the Brechtian theatre, there is a deliberate attempt to alienate the audience from the action of the play and its emotional identification is prevented through use of appropriate stage effects. In Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, its negative potential which includes the uneasy sense of emptiness and anonymity is imaginatively explored.

The cause of self-alienation in life or as projected in literature is difficult to pin-point. It includes the inability to communicate with one's self or with society and entails a certain dissociation from social values. This is because the self is unclear about its own norms and those in society, or it is dissatisfied with its own

1 'Verfremdungseffekt' or V-effekt, the effect of strangeness and unfamiliarity in a theatrical production.

2 Their writings revolve round the theme of alienation. Camus' novel, *The Stranger* is representative of the existential dilemma of non-relationship as also Sartre's play, *No Exit*. 
imperfections. It also feels different from others because of its views and interests. Kaufmann sees education as an alienating factor as it shows "how what is familiar is not comprehended and how what seemed clear is really quite strange." 1

In the case of R. Parthasarathy, A.K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel, the sense of alienation can be attributed to their English education and their writing in English in a country in which hardly 5% of the people know English. However, Ramanujan and Ezekiel do not make their choice of language for creative expression the reason for their alienation as Parthasarathy does. They are more concerned with the problem of self and its relation to culture and tradition and the quest for identity. Parthasarathy stands unique in that he sees the language of creative expression as an alienating factor and as being intrinsically linked with the quest for self-definition.

Where Michael Hamburger, the English poet with a three hundred year old German ancestry chooses to be an outsider in England, and Ezekiel, an insider without losing his 'outside' vantage point, Parthasarathy yearns to be an 'insider' and be part of the main stream of Indian (Tamil) culture and life. 2 However, he feels that this is not possible because of his intense love for English which

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1 Kaufmann, p.xiv.

persists even though he wants to affect a 'home-coming' to Tamil. What he has achieved is only a partial resolution of his dilemma through 'grace of exile.' This includes a mature acceptance of his condition without violent protest.

To Parthasarathy, Rough Passage (1976) is the result of "certain historical and personal circumstances." Like many Indians with an English education, Parthasarathy became 'hypercritical' of everything Indian and felt certain he would feel very much at home in England rather than in India, and that the English language would help him to 'belong' there. However the English experience was one of utter disenchantment. To quote the poet himself:

In England, at last, history caught up with me, I found myself crushed under two hundred years of British rule in India. I began to have qualms about my own integrity as an Indian ... Here was an England I was unable to come to terms with.

'Exile,' the first section of the three-tier poetic edifice Rough Passage was written between 1963 and 1966 and recreates in vividly poetic terms the agonising experience of non-relationship with one's environment. In the words of the poet:

At the impersonal level, it opposes the culture of Europe with that of India. It explores the

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3 R. Parthasarathy, pp.45-46.
consequences of British rule on an Indian, especially the loss of identity with his own culture and, therefore, the need for roots.

This sense of 'alienation', of exile due to crisis of English for communication through art, Parthasarathy shares with some African and Indian poets who have made it a theme of their poetry. Examples from their works serve to counterpoint Parthasarathy's stance. Derek Walcott looks at this problem with startling directness and intensity:

How choose between the Africa and the English tongue I love.
Betray them both, or give back what they give.
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

E. Braithwaite sees the loss of Africa itself swamped by European civilisation with a profound sense of tragedy in 'Emigrants'. In heightened rhetoric, he views the negro as having to live in perpetual exile through no fault of his:

no home for the negro out of Africa
Where then is the nigger's home?
In Paris, Buxton, Kingston
Rome?
Here?
Or in Heaven?
What crime
his dark
dividing skin
is hiding?

1 'Talking and Reading Poetry', Expose, p.4.


What guilt
now drives him
on?
Will exile never
end?

Kamala Das, in forceful colloquial language, resolves the dilemma of conflict of culture and language with disarming frankness in her oft-quoted poem 'An Introduction:'

Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in Any language I like? The language I speak Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest, It is as human as I am human.  

Adil Jussawalla in 'Scenes from the Life' sees the Indian's use of English from the point of view of the Englishman, enraged at its abuse:

You're polluting our sounds. You're so rude, Get back to your language, they say.  

The Indian is called 'a colonial ape' while being warned against English Literature 'which puffs him up, narrows / his eyes.'  

Parthasarathy's attitude is a striking contrast to these. He does not rise to vehement assertion or negation

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1 P.Lal, *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, p.104. This is an effective rejoinder to the mother-tongue votaries. Chapter I, pp.5-6.


but maintains an objectively critical stance. He makes the loss of identity the theme of 'Exile' and attributes this to the worship of 'the wrong gods,' resulting in his alienation from his native language and culture. In 'Exile 1' this is seen in the non-recognition of the self as it looks at itself in the mirror:

You see yourself in a mirror
Perhaps, refuse the image as yours...

The refusal to accept oneself for what one is, is intensified in 'Home-Coming 10' where the self is still frantically trying to find itself, oppressed by a tragic feeling of loss of identity:

... Pick up
my glasses and look for myself in every nook and corner
of the night...

The self-analysis that begins the section 'Exile' - 'As a man approaches thirty he may / take stock of himself' - is also the 'confession' of the 'alienated native' about his English experience. The objective stance intensified by the neutral tone has Eliotan overtones and parallels the search for meaning and pattern in life as in Eliot's later poetry. This is obvious when the section is compared to Section II of An Unfinished Biography, which has been omitted in the final version of 1976. The passage is a direct address to the poet's self and is transparently autobiographical as seen in line 1 itself:

You were born in '34
But belonged to another age:
The only language you speak
Is not the language of your people
The sorrows of Kannagi
Of the famed anklet.
And the city her passion burned
To the ground, the emperor
Who charmed a sea with stone temples,
The immortal Kural.
The poet Kamban
Their language is unknown to you.
In the cities of the west
You pursue happiness.¹

The pursuit of happiness in the western cities, forsaking native treasures is an underlying theme of 'Exile'—the emphasis is on the 'experience' away from home and not on the 'losses' incurred as in the quoted passage. What is underscored in almost every poem is the physical displacement from home, from one's own state and country. The locale in each of the eight poems is different and the poet-self travels through a panoramic landscape spanning the colourful distance between East and West. In one deft and comprehensive stroke are included the hot sands of Africa, 'the city walls in Istanbul and Jerusalem, / Deserts in Syria and Iran', the coastal cities of London, Goa, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. It is all vividly depicted with an eye for precise detail. This compelling attention directed to the lands away from home serves to play down the 'human element' or 'state of mind' of the self in exile. However this can be regarded as an oblique device used to remind the reader of the person involved. The cataloguing helps to foreground the stray but meaningful utterances indicative of the 'sense of exile'.

There's something to be said for exile. Between us there is no commerce. I am through with the city. What have I come here for from a thousand miles?

These lines from sections 2, 3, 4 and 7 respectively of 'Exile' throw light on the self's attitude to the feeling that troubles it and gives the 'sense of continuity' to the theme. In 'I am through with the city' and 'Between us there is no commerce' is the forceful rejection of his 'native' city which is a 'euphoric archipelago' capable only of 'hard embrace' and 'regulated affection.' But he is forced to return to it and the questioning 'what have I come here for from a thousand miles' persists, for the 'sky is no different / Beggars are the same everywhere'. But this 'sameness' which he perceives as common to London, Bombay or Madras does not mitigate his sense of being different, being isolated. And this implied contrast shows not merely his physical displacement but his intellectual and emotional estrangement due to his inability to communicate in his own homeland.

Yet, the self makes a sincere attempt to reconcile itself to its state of unease. 'Exile' described as 'Whoring After English gods' has taught painful but meaningful lessons:

You learn roots are deep;
That language is a tree, loses
Colour under another sky.

The paradox is that there has been a loss of identity which has affected a partial discovery of the same. The 'love
affair' with the wrong gods with its romantic aura has enabled the self to realise its nativity. The phrase 'under another sky' is rich in suggestion. While it can denote both cultural and linguistic displacement, the direction of the displacement is not clear. Is the Indian 'under another sky' because of his anglicised sensibility and use of English in India or because he is in England? This again takes on a double meaning as he, an Indian becomes un-Indian because of his English, and even the Indian sky is alien to him. In the context of Parthasarathy's English experience he is 'under another sky' in England and after the disillusionment there, comes back to India and ironically is still 'under another sky.' Only the mature realisation that 'there's something to be said for exile' emerges.

His awareness of the racial discrimination practised in England is expressed with quiet dignity: "'coloureds' is what they call us over / there." R. Parthasarathy refrains from using the word 'nigger' which Jussawalla uses in 'The Exile's Story':

... Smacked Nilofer for calling Eric 'nigger'
and she so dark herself,...

As A. Panicker points out he is the 'poet of polish and poise' and therefore avoids any violence in words or tone even to delineate so agonising an experience as exile.

William Walsh compares Parthasarathy's situation to that of Henry James. Only where "James could construct a coherent identity as he had discovered a context hospitable to his nature and responsive to the peculiar demands of his genius," Parthasarathy only feels a double rejection. England rejects him and he rejects it, his dreams of a bright future in England shattered by the rude encounter there. He also rejects himself as he lacks what he thinks the most important aspect of culture, namely language. In 'Homecoming' he does effect a return to the language and culture he rejected - 'My tongue in English chains / I return, after a generation to you.' However, it is not a smooth come-back - 'I falter, stumble. Speak a tired language / wrenched from its sleep in the Kural.' He finds that what he knows of his mother tongue is archaic, taken from the ancient classic Kural and cannot accept his language in its present state - rid of its old-world dignity.

This twofold rejection results in an identity-crisis, a common theme in modernist literature. This self-alienation, the inability to come to terms with one's self is poignantly expressed in 'Trial 14' where even love offers no balm to the uneasy soul. He confesses to having looked for succour, for a means to overcome his sense of rootlessness, but without success:

Other stairs and rails
have guided me, always
with the chill promise of a home
only the heart isn't hospitable, anywhere.

The warmth and affection of home is totally absent, for even
home becomes a cold, inhospitable region which cannot instil
the sense of belonging.

The poignancy of the poet's situation is intensified by
his reluctance not only to accept his milieu but also himself.
There is a fleeting sense of non-recognition, he is incognito
to himself expressed ruefully though with finality in
'Homecoming 6:'

I am under lock and key, for good
often confront a stranger
in the scratched glass, older perhaps,
who resembles my father.

He has an identity, in so far as he is his father's son,
otherwise he is estranged from himself (as in Ramanujan's
'Self-Portrait'). This apart, the kind of identity sought is
not definite. 1 What emerges is the significance of the
experience to the maturing of the soul. A certain loss,
'forfeiting of the embarrassing gift of innocence in the
scramble to be, man' is involved but with a simultaneous
acquisition of the Wordsworthian philosophic mind, the
acceptance of life for what it is. The 'hurt' to the ego as

1 Is it an individual, national, regional or global
one? The section 'Homecoming' described as a 'dialogue with
his Tamil past' may make it an individual and regional
identity. In the final analysis, it is a human identity in
relation to community and self, at home in one's culture
and language that is desired.
a result of the foreign experience is necessary to realize the intrinsic value of one's own racial identity, of one's cultural roots. 'Exile' thus recreates in poetic idiom, the deeply felt need of any human being and more so of the sensitive artist to 'discover himself.' Identity, in the sense of one's 'true and active selfhood' is the ultimate concern of a committed creative artist like R. Parthasarathy for he has no existence without it.

As man, the self feels the painful loss of personal roots and arrives at the mature realization that it cannot escape from its own culture. Only a return to the womb can make for self-discovery. A foreign language and culture cannot offer sufficient intellectual and emotional sustenance. This is intensified in the case of Parthasarathy as he is a sensitive creative artist. In 'Homecoming 2' he feels deeply the break with his tradition and is convinced that a foreign muse cannot inspire him for long:

...How long can foreign poets provide the staple of your lines?
Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your past.
Ransack the cupboard
for skeletons of your Brahmin childhood
(the nights with father droning
the Four Thousand as sleep
pinched your thighs blue). You may then,
perhaps, strike out a line for yourself
from the iron of life's ordinariness.

The lines clearly reflect his belief in tradition as a source of poetic inspiration. This return to the 'Brahminic past' is effected in such memorable pieces as 'Homecoming 2,'

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1 In the essay 'The Making of a Tradition,' The
3, 8 and 9. The irony is that the language is English and Parthasarathy's felicitous use of it makes his agonising over the choice seem needless. Further, the English experience has also been necessary to develop his personality as man and artist. 'Nothing can really be dispensed with. The heart needs all.' Hence, his description of 'Homecoming 2' as a 'Tamil poem written in English' can hardly be accepted.\(^1\)

In terms of technique, the theme of 'Exile' is emphasized through the skilful use of tense and pronominals, and in a lesser way of imagery. This section lends itself for a linguistic analysis to underscore the thematic motif. It illustrates Mark Schorer's classic statement equating form and content:

> Technique is the means by which the writer's experience which is his subject matter compels him to attend to it, technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning and finally evaluating it.\(^2\)

Experience is thus patterned, ordered and unified in a work of art. The synthesis is seen in the effective merger of form

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and content, not of one becoming the other but coalescing with the other.

Like *The Prelude*, but on a miniature scale, Rough Passage is an 'act of memory.' There is a journey into the past, to haul rich treasures for the present. But ironically enough, it is the wrong past, a past worth forgetting unlike in Wordsworth where the past is crystallized in 'spots of time.' The attempt to vivify the past shows "his obsessive anxiety to confirm to the feel of experience at a given moment." The tension between the nostalgic remembrance of the past and the pressing demands of the present is revealed not merely in his revisions but also in his unobtrusively skilled manipulation of grammar especially in the use of tense. Though Turner points out that the English verbal group offers little for stylistic variation in its structure, there is scope for this in the choice of tense. Wetherill sees tense as "central to grammatical analysis ... a sign of time relationship, the link in time between speaker and subject spoken about." He adds that tense study is a "useful objective way of pinning down the temporal patterns of a particular work ... a means of gathering preliminary or supporting information for interpretation."
The study of tense thus becomes significant in Rough Passage as it has been conceived as a single poem and distinguishes between an English past, a Brahminic (Indian) past and a 'present' Indian experience. The predominant tense is the present. Watherill calls it 'universal present.' This shows the effort of the artist to simplify experience and tone down intensity. It also shows that 'experience' of the past continues into the present. However, the oscillations between the present and the past tense reveal the journey of the mind from past exile (the physical exile) to the present exile (psychological) which had its genesis in the past and continues into the present. The present tense gives vividness to the moment of here and now and yet of the past, and the past tense to differentiate the moment of 'then,' the English experience.

In 'Exile 2' this use of tense is striking. The narration of the English experience is in the present tense for its impact on the individual exists in the present. The description of the Middle East scene is poised skillfully on both tenses, a definite distinction made between the English past (till line 21) and the Indian present (Line 22 to the end of the poem). Poems 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are totally

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1 Used about 89 times in 'Exile', 97 times in 'Homecoming', and 73 times in 'Trick' as against roughly half the number of the use of the past.

2 Watherill, p. 80.

3 Watherill makes this a characteristic of Eighteenth Century Literature. Parthasarathy shares with the Augustans the overscrupulous attention to craft.
'present' in tense and time, suggesting that the Indian experience still continues and does not merely belong to the remote past. These shifts in time affecting a unified vision is reminiscent of the 'stream of consciousness' technique in fiction. It is the timelessness of the experience that is emphasised as the action is in the mind of the protagonist.

The use of the personal pronoun is also significant. The lyricism gains in intensity through the use of the first person 'I' and becomes romantic when 'I' is identified as the poet. Wetherill points out that the use of the I Person implies subjectivity and bias, that of the III Person omniscience and objectivity, while the use of the II Person creates at the same time a feeling of distance or distancing and subjectivity. It is in the II Person usage that there is a direct address to the reader resulting in the feeling of involvement on his part. In the first three poems however, a certain objectivity is achieved in using the II or III Person to characterise the narrator himself as in 'Exile 1:'

...You see yourself in a mirror, perhaps, refuse the image as yours...

Here 'you' refers to the poet-narrator and the reader as well. The use of 'you' is meant to be all inclusive: the one addressed is all humanity and therefore includes the addressee

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1 Wetherill, p.11.
2 Wetherill, p.11.
3 In 'Trial,' 'you' refers to the beloved and does not have this universal implication. In 'Homecoming 2,' 'you' refers to the speaker himself.
as well. In a lyrical framework, and in the context of the theme of exile, this interpretation is possible.

The non-acceptance of self is shown through a disowning of self by not using 'I'. It is relevant to note that in speech habits in the vernacular sometimes instead of using 'I' the name of the speaker is used by the speaker himself for giving the impression of strangeness and distance. In this context, the use of the II person or III person for 'I' accentuates the distance between the speaker and the self that he wants to disown. The self in its self-ironic posture places itself outside the experience.

The use of 'he' for the purpose of distancing or detaching oneself from the object viewed even though it is self, is most effective in 'Exile 2':

... He had spent his youth whoring after English gods.

This is a very transparent reference to the narrator himself. This use of 'he' for 'I' indicates the speaker's refusal to accept this part of his life, his English experience about which he feels uneasy. It is only when he accepts this unpalatable past that the pronoun changes to 'I' as seen in poems 4 to 8. This is also evidence of the poet's maturity. This is forcefully brought out in 'Homecoming 12' when 'I' and 'he' are used to show both involvement and distancing.

1 The intensity of the feeling is also seen in the use of the word 'whoring' which suggests the horror and guilt involved in the worship of a foreign language.
His own personality is offered as an object for self-examination:

I see him now sitting at his desk ...

... He went for the wrong gods from the start ...

... How long it had taken him to learn he had no talent ...

... 'What's it like to be a poet?'
I say to myself, ...

... Where would His Eminence be but for the poets who splashed about in the Hellespont or burned in the Java Sea?

It is not merely the use of pronouns that illustrates the theme of 'exile' but also the recurrence of the city image. Though the poems actually refer to different cities, what is perceived is their similarity in the emotional passivity that characterises them. His pictures of the city, as in Auden are far from ideal (except the picture of Goa). In 'Exile 2' he describes the city as 'no jewel / lanes full of smoke and litter.' In 'Exile 5' he sees the city as 'reeling' under the 'heavy lens of smoke.' While Auden and even Ezekiel invest the city with a human quality, R. Parthasarathy gives an objective and precise description, emphasising his rootlessness as he is not at home in any city - be it London, Bombay or Madras. The city image thus serves to emphasise the theme of non-belonging even as it paradoxically affirms the truth that the poet cannot find his roots in the rural set up.

In 'Exile' the progression of thought in spite of the linear visual pattern is cyclic - the narrator at the
beginning of this section has turned thirty and at the end of it he is still thirty and continues to do the 'stock taking.' This self-examination is a never-ending process and suggests that exile never ends. It is a perpetual state of mind. The recurrent references to 'fog' 'mist' and 'haze' also show that the self cannot see itself with clarity.

The irony in Parthasarathy's delineation of the state of exile is that what began as a feeling of non-relationship due to the brooding awareness of the loss of linguistic and cultural roots culminates in the extension of that feeling to the general pattern of life and art. And this serves as a point of contact between these poems of exile and the poems of Ramanujan and Ezekiel dealing with the same theme.

Unlike Parthasarathy or even Ezekiel, Ramanujan is proficient in three languages - English, Tamil and Kannada - but feels no alienation because of his choice of one or the other. He translates fluently from one to the other and is equally at home in all. Raghavendra Rao sees the poet as being 'alienated' on many counts. The poems analysed see

1 Parthasarathy does not use exile in the sense of 'penal banishment' but only as a period of long absence from one's country and extends it to include a 'state of mind.'

2 Ezekiel observes: 'Ramanujan is a distinguished translator from the Tamil and the Kannada. He can also translate brilliantly from the language he doesn't know if he has the necessary collaboration'. 'Two Indian Poets', The Illustrated Weekly of India, June 18, 1972, p.43.

the condition as a result of his critical stance, his awareness of his loss of identity through a failure of the past tradition to continue into his present expatriate state except through memory.

Like the poet Sharatchandra, A.K.Ramanujan is permanently settled in the United States and is the paradigm of the educated Indian who is troubled by a sense of loss of his native roots in his expatriate state. However he is not to be compared to Naipaul who has a three hundred years' family history in the West Indies and cannot really be called Indian. Ramanujan's stay abroad is just over fifteen years and he keeps constantly coming to his homeland to participate in seminars and conferences. In his poems, he is quiveringly alive to his Indian past and tries to recover it with a feeling of nostalgia. It seems as if he is totally dependent on his native roots for emotional and artistic sustenance even though he is grafted to an alien tree.

It is relevant to parallel Ezekiel's and Ramanujan's domicile status. Though Ezekiel belongs to a race which has been ostracized and much maligned all over the world, he does not make his Jewishness a theme of his poetry but insistently dwells on the general human need to belong, to establish harmonious relationships with one's environment and acquire an identity of one's own. Ramanujan is an Indian in the U.S. without his own living native tradition to back him there. However, he does not express any overt desire to 'nativise' himself there. Unlike Ezekiel, he is overconscious of his Indian past. The theme of his poetry is not the need to belong in an alien set-up but the need to
belong to his own tradition which appears alien to him because he perceives the disparity between things as he would like them to be and things as they are. His outside position gives him the freedom to be hurtlingly frank about the inside story and he does not err on the side of sentimentality or adopt the whining schoolboy attitude. His brutal exposure of life in India especially the non-existence of genuine family relationships and Indian attitudes which are confused versions of orthodoxy and modernity make him a realistic poet.

It is not out of place to compare Ramanujan with the novelist, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the reputed German married to an Indian who has made India her home and writes freely about her adopted land. If A.K. Ramanujan is the 'outside-insider' viewing India under a microscope, Jhabvala in her fiction reveals herself to be the sensitive and at times all knowing 'inside-outsider'. If Jhabvala is strangely silent about the West though not about East-West encounters, A.K. Ramanujan is equally strangely silent about the West where he has settled permanently. Their inverted stances have had the same result: as a German she is hypercritical of the contemporary cultural and value confusions in India, while Ramanujan shares the same attitude about the India of his past. Their heart verges on to a scathing realism with undercurrents of cynicism.

The constant needling recollection of a past that is impossible to recover in the present circumstances is a theme of much of Ramanujan's poetry and has given rise to
the feeling of alienation. Like Shastrichandra, he is a poet who has taken India with him in his imagination. Every nook and corner of the landscape of the past is explored with the slickness of a detective and the result is a ruthless exposure of its glaring ills. There is ample evidence in his poetry to incriminate this Indian past, people by such figures as aunts who pick the corpse of their own mother, cousins looking for a cousin on every swing, Maharajas gambling to lose, tattooed rickshaw-wallahs, jaundiced unborn daughters, and even grandmother taking revenge. The saving grace is that the sense of nostalgia for the past remains because in his expatriate condition it is almost totally lost to him and he can recover it in his alien milieu only by an act of memory.

Where Parthasarathy avers that the resurrection of a Brahmin past can nativise his anglophile sensibility, Ramanujan has no such reasons for recollecting the Hindu past in his poetry. There is no cleavage of the past into an Indian and English as in the case of R. Parthasarathy. In fact almost next to nothing of the American way of life enters his poetry. Again there is no hackneyed East-West, love-hate confrontations either painful or joyous which make for fiction bestsellers. It is almost as if the poet has deliberately cheated critics for whom the theme of alienation in Commonwealth and Black Literature is a choric refrain.

What then is the reason for the insistent dwelling on the Indian past? In the blurb of Relations, his second volume of poetry it is stated that Ramanujan belongs to that "select
band of writers whose poems admit their readers into another culture where another language is spoken." The implications of this statement deserve scrutiny.

It is difficult to accept that Ramanujan so felicitously used his poetic pan to satisfy the curious thirst of the foreigner for lore from India when there are more obvious and effective means than poetry to admit the foreigner into Indian culture. In pre-Independant India, English was used by the Indian to present the social scene to the ruler in order that he may take political action. Or it was used to recover in attractive ballad or lyric form the wonder that was India in her epics and legends. In post-Independant India, English has become an indispensable tool of pan-Indian communication and is the 'open Sesame' to coveted career openings at home and abroad. Ramanujan, in such a situation, has no doubt found it easy to use English for his critical and creative expression but it remains a point of speculation to say that he wrote in English to paint a picture of India to the foreigner. Even a balanced critic like Ezekiel suggests that Ramanujan's audience is non-Indian and succumbs to the intentional fallacy. In such a situation the fictional mode is a more obvious and fruitful choice than poetry if audience response is the criterion.

1 Raja Ram Mohan Roy's treatise on social evils like Sati.
2 Toru Dutt's Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan and Sarojini Naidu's very Indian poems on 'Palanquin Bearers', 'Bangle Sellers', and 'Coromandel Fishers'.
3 'Two Indian Poets', Illustrated Weekly, June 18, 1972,
Ramanujan's choice of poetry to view critically the Indian personal past is due to his keen urge for self-expression - an intrinsic reason that is more acceptable than the extrinsic consideration of a non-Indian audience.

The blurb also raises the baffling question of the inter-relations between culture and language which is the theme of Parthasarathy's poetry. If a knowledge of Indian culture in all its beauty and antiquity has to be given to the foreigner, poetry in English is possibly the last resort, especially Ramanujan's which recaptures critically a personal past. Numerous are the books on Indian culture, philosophy, history and religion and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is paid to do the job. Ramanujan's poetry contains only stray references to Tippu Sultan, royal harems and Maharajas which are popularly associated with India. These hardly warrant the use of the word 'culture' which is so rich and complex in its association. Many of his poems give us an unforgettable glimpse of the concrete reality of everyday life. No veil of decorum is drawn over the sordid details that throw light on the crassness of a decadent and hypocritical social and cultural set-up in which there is a tragic loss of human values and human relationship. This cannot be interpreted as culture which is a projection of positive values.

This repetitive dwelling on 'losses' in terms of the past experience points to the conclusion that what A.K.Ramanujan intends to do in recollecting this past in his personal experience is to expose the topsy-turvydom of human
life and the values apparent in it. In: the failure to come to terms with this world which had a tremendous impact on his impressionable psyche manifests itself in the feeling of alienation, the feeling that one is isolated and cannot relate oneself meaningfully to one's environment and reconcile appearance and reality. The self thus becomes a stranger to its own past as it is alienated from the society which nurtured it, by virtue of its differing sensibility and values. The self-alienation is intensified in Ramanujan's case because of his physical displacement. However this physical distance from his native roots gives him the advantage of objectification, the aesthetic distance which manifests itself as a withering critical gaze into the inglorious past. He is almost like a surgeon who probes the flesh deeper and deeper to discover cancerous tissues with relish.

Even as the past social set-up is unpalatable to the sensibility of Ramanujan, his own personal identity remains incognito to his piercing gaze. This agony at the non-recognition of one's self is however couched in ironic terms in a short poem 'Self-Portrait' which starkly confronts the problem of self-estrangement.

The poem is actually one periodic sentence divided into nine lines of irregular length. That the self does not need more than this to dwell on its identity seems to be the cold cryptic implication. It is a kind of mockery of the tomes devoted to the study of the self by philosophers, psychologists, literatours, sages and savants. The poem
impresses through its sheer brevity:

I resemble everyone
but myself, and sometimes see
in shop-windows,

despite the well-known laws
of optics,
the portrait of a stranger,
data unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

The parenthetical subordinate clause 'despite the well-known laws / of optics,' has a wider marginal space and the poem still means much without it. The opening line 'I resemble everyone' contains the startling paradox of the self looking like everyone else except its own self. This contradicts the poignant and at times despairing cry of the self to be its own self, to be recognized for what it is - an autonomous being with no affiliations in terms of self-identity with its milieu. The romantic gaze into the glass of shop-windows has nothing of narcissism in it and is rudely deflating to the ego. The reflection does not reveal the true identity of the self. The tragedy is that the image of the self is realized as something strange, alien and remote, something that defies identification. And this recognition of the self as 'not-self' is a blatant defiance of the science of optics where the laws of reflection clearly establish a relation between subject and object or image, the latter being a counterpart of the former. The image reflected in the glass of shop-windows bears no resemblance or likeness to the self of flesh and blood. There are no points of convergence, of similarity as there is when one speaks of sleep as an image of death. Even as one moves towards the
reflected self in the glass and seems to have no self-

identity, there is a 'volta face' at the end of the poem, so
typical of Ramanujan's style. The self resembles its father
who is its maker.

The poem stands as a brilliant example of Ramanujan's
dualistic vision of life. While he stubbornly refuses to
invest the 'I' with an individual identity, he is forced to
give it a familial identity at least in respect of its bodily
self. However, he does not speculate on whether the 'like son,
like father' principle extends beyond physical resemblance.

It is significant to note that in every day Indian life
family resemblances in terms of appearance and behaviour are
usually cited to establish individual identity. Exposed to
such a situation, what the poet protests against is the loss
of individuality in thus identifying the self. The loss is
so great as to replace even the self by his father. Again
'date unknown' shows a sly humour and audacious frankness as
the persona admits that he does not know the time when his
portrait was conceived.

The irony is also self-directed. The self cannot
recognise itself in spite of its resemblance to its creator,
this being the only means of establishing its identity. In
ironic tone and with a tinge of ruefulness, the poem depicts
the alienation of self from its own image. This estrangement
is not the result of clash of cultures or expatriation. It
is self-created and can be dispelled only by the efforts of
the self. It can also be said that the self desires its
autonomous status and protests against a collective or
familial identity.

The self-stranger antithesis is expressed more vividly but without any brooding discontent or cynicism in a poem like 'Christmas'. Here identities are merged and the distinction between self and stranger becomes blurred. Describing the 'leap of greens' and 'A shock of leaf / upon Christmas ayes' with 'birth bewildered parrots' on bare branches, the poet is mystified:

For a moment, I no longer know
leaf from parrot
or branch from root
nor for that matter,
that tree
from you or me.

This conclusion of not being able to invest the objects viewed and the subject with distinct individual identity is an echo of the earlier lines 'A skinny Janus / My tree is two in one.' The dualism that normally baffles is the life-force of this poem; there are no pessimistic or ironic overtones. The poem lives through the sheer felicity of description that eclipses the philosophy.

In 'Conventions of Despair', unlike in 'Christmas' it is the idea that matters. The poem juxtaposes tradition and modernity, the necessity and compulsion of being modern is in conflict with the near tragic inability to 'unlearn conventions of despair'. His traditional Hindu upbringing is posed against the antithetical life style of a technocratic and permissive society for which his adopted land stands as the archetype.
The first eleven lines of the poem epitomise modern living:

Yes, I know all that. I should be modern.
Marry again. See strippers at the Tease.
Touch Africa. Go to the movies.

Impale a six-inch spider
under a lens. Join the Test-ban, or become The Outsider.

Or pay to shake my fist
(or whatever-you-call-it) at a psychoanalyst.
And when I burn

I should smile, dry-eyed,
and nurse martinis like the Marginal Man... .

The self reveals its awareness of the character of such a life and the ingredients that go to make it. The obligations are listed in clipped style after the colloquial intimacy of the beginning 'Yes, I know all that'. The first-hand knowledge of such a life is evident in the rapid itemising in lightning succession.

The repetition of the structure, verb plus complement - 'Marry again' or 'Go to the movies' - gives a staccato quality to the listing, and points to the fragmented nature of modern living. The poem moves to an ironic climactic point when the self ironically is asked to become an Outsider after conforming to all that modernity expects - marrying again, indulging in visual titillations, travelling to dark continents, indulging in futile scientific experiments and protesting against destructive inventions. It seems to be the paradox of becoming a stranger à la Camus style. This shows alienation to be a crucial problem of the West. The Hindu self prefers to be an outsider to this materialistic and fragmented culture and chooses to 'find its hell in its
Kulsreshta invests the self with an "essential passivity that allows it to resemble others over an indeterminate stretch of time." The term passivity is elastic enough to include all aspects of the self and becomes a "positive state of being which allows the self the necessary freedom and transparency to manipulate subjective and linear time, use personae, bring the equations of one's relationship into a vivid focus and even observe itself as an object."  

This conceptual frame is not fully realised in 'Conventions of Despair' for the self resolves to find its 'particular hell in its hindu mind.' Thus the interpretation of self has to be within the limitations that are set by the epithet 'Hindu'. The resolution to do something and embark on a voyage of self-discovery does not smack of passivity in the ordinary sense. The rejection of modernity is an act which positively reveals the self's determined stand on the choices facing him. It is not a brooding disenchanted self allowing the external world to impinge on its consciousness without any reaction. The self in the poem is actively critical and is keenly aware of itself, aware of the rivalry, and conflict of different selves within it and tries to discover its authentic self. To find the true self, the rest...
have to be suppressed or rejected. The self, asked to embrace the cult of modernity with its attendant fragmentation and its insidious power to alienate, rejects it and opts for its traditional orthodox identity in order to find salvation. This rejection of the modern thus becomes part of its unreal self even as its fortunes in accepting the 'conventions of despair' of the Hindu self are quiveringly real. The renunciation of modern and all that it means is the beginning of life for this real self.

The second half of the poem becomes a case study of despair of the true self. As in the case of Ezekiel's poems, the axiomatic dictum that is operant here is that a commitment to one way of life (here Hindu) implies alienation from the other (Western). As Panicker points out, it is not merely the traditional versus modern but also the Indian-Western antithesis that inspires Ramanujan's genius.¹ The poem illustrates the doctrine of Karma that binds a Hindu. It is not 'salvation by works' but 'the way of obedience' to the demands imposed by a particular existence as a necessity for all those who seek to escape from the involvement in the fruits of action, namely rebirth.² Hence to suffer hell is part of the discipline of action. The self portrays with ruthless vividness the horror of undergoing


physical torments in hell:

must translate and turn
till I blister and roast
for certain lives to come
in those boiling craters of oil.

Ramanujan’s eerie sense of humour is seen in referring to his vocation of translation in the context as part of the God-ordained plan from which there is no escape. What follows is a past-present-future continuum depicting the life of the self from birth to death with promise of a ‘peacock feathered’ future. ‘Eye’ and ‘see’ form the significant words in this section. The self is immersed in the boiling craters of oil only ‘eyedeep’ and has a vision of life with ‘liddless eyes.’ This suggests the endlessness of the vision as also its timelessness as the eyes being without lids cannot shut them and be without sight. The vision is no Utopia and is poetically described in starkly realistic terms bringing out the agony and pain that the self experiences in hell. The vision includes ‘frog-eyed dragons’ once his ‘dream dark queens’. Those whom he cherished and loved and considered beautiful have been metamorphosed into ugly monsters in hell. The seeing eye here is no fractured eyeball of the confessional poets.

1 To Milton, hell is a place of physical and mental torture. Also Hell is where Satan is. In The Mahabharata (as described by C. Rajagopalachari, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1952, p. 416.) hell is a dark, weird and gloomy place with blood and mutilated bodies, filled with unbearable stench. To Sattra, ‘hell is other people’. Ramanujan sees it as a place of physical suffering and horror and also includes ‘suffering in the mind’. 
The sarcasm about the future is impossible to ignore in the verbal felicity that is the hallmark of Ramanujan's poetry. The 'crow foot yoke of Tomorrow' suggests nothing ideal or wonderful but only ugliness rearing its head in the tragic loss of traditional values as seen in the action of the grandchild 'bearing its flesh to the pimps'. This vision of the future has nothing ideal about it and bears no relation whatsoever to a 'peacock feather future' with its overtones of dazzling beauty. But Ramanujan's intellectual dexterity is in the underlying meaning of the peacock feather - it stands as a symbol of the vainglorious - and that is what the future is: a vainglorious dream. The self is cornered and is forced to nurse its age-old despair and continue to live 'in this many-lived lair of fears, this flesh.'

The skilful patterning of the poem points to this inevitable acceptance of life for what it is. The first eleven lines impress by their syntax, short lines which end abruptly and give the impression of frog-leaping from one idea to another without any continuity. The second part of the poem is an artful exercise in discontinuities, the lines run on freely and the thought and lines on the page do not end abruptly but flow from one into the other. It is interesting to note that in effecting the transition from one way of life to another in line twelve he uses the short line and then the long line which symbolises the continuity of a hoary tradition:

... But, sorry, I cannot unlearn
conventions of despair.
They have their pride.
I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my Hindu mind;
must translate and turn
till I blister and roast...

The poem is one of those rare poems of Ramanujan which
reach to a conclusion. The self has battled for convention
in unequivocal terms. It cannot accept the Western
technocratic and materialistic culture because of its
allegiance to the Indian. In rejecting it, he has preserved
his Hindu identity even if it is incompletely done and thus
saves the self from the maelstrom of cultural confusion.

The desperate need to cling to one's identity is
expressed even if obliquely in a poem like 'Images', which
does not have Hindu overtones as in the previous poem. In
the brief span of nine lines, the crucial problem of loss
of identity is raised. It is inevitable that the ordinary
self of the persona is a nonentity to a celebrity:

After Meeting a Celebrity
I will pass from his mind
as image from a mirror...

The fleeting image of the self in the celebrity's mind is
testimony to its 'not-self' quality. It has nothing
worthwhile in it to be remembered - paradoxically, the
celebrity is remembered for forgetting the narrator-self
and also because he has a social identity by virtue of his
deeds. However, the experience of forgetting faces and

1 The Striders, p.44.
therefore people is not peculiar to the celebrity alone. 
Ironically the self forgotten by him in turn cannot recognise 
anyone:

... Some days
Walking is a blow
of light;
and walking a sleet
of faceless acquaintances.

The phrase 'faceless acquaintances' underscores the lack of 
identity of those other selves and the self's inability to 
invest them with 'a local habitation and name'. The verbal 
brilliance is in the antithetical use of 'blow of light' 
and 'a sleet of faceless acquaintances' where light 
presupposes recognition and warmth, and sleet, the blinding 
cold which literally and figuratively impairs sight and 
therefore allows no recognition of identity. The universal 
implication is that loss of identity is an inevitable hazard 
that the self faces in the journey through life.

'Faceless' is an oft-repeated word in the volume. In 
'Case History' it finds expression as 'faceless women' in 
the 'body-house' and in 'The Fall', of finding that even 
'faceless men have fingers in a row'. The epithet signifies 
loss of identity, of being without a face, without an 
individuality of one's own. And this possibly is a worse 
tragedy than the dubious identity that the self gets, of 
being acknowledged by its father in 'Self-Portrait'.

1 The Stridere, p.47 and p.51
It is in the 'Hindu poems' that the jelly-fish fluidity of the self is highlighted. The self is hardly in a state of passivity as the Scriptures advise. It is beset with conflict and the outward calmness is only a deceptive mask. Kulesrashtra corroborates this view:

The Hindu poems attest through a developing process of implication, that the persona or the mask cannot provide a consistent armour to the self because it can never fully cope with the variety and depth of inner life brought into interplay in one's encounter with reality.\(^1\)

The mask may be looked at only to become aware that one need not be troubled by what one is. The self has to learn to accept itself with all its flaws but without losing the desire to perfect itself. This suggests that if the self cannot operate on the same wavelength as other selves, it has to accept its difference or alienness as almost a pathological condition inherent to its nature.

The one Hindu poem in The Stridars, 'A Hindu to His Body' is an apostrophe to the body and at first sight appears to be based on the dichotomy that some philosophers aver exists between body and soul. The obscurity inherent in such dualistic concerns is seen in the puzzling title itself: If the Hindu is addressing his body, is he outside it, a disembodied creature presumably? Or is it the Hindu with body and soul addressing only one part of himself? The poem built on this obscure base which is confusing even to

\(^1\) Kulesrashtra, p.184.
philosophers fails to satisfy but holds together as a work of perfect craft because of the richness of its diction.

It maintains that the central inescapable fact is that the body is the repository of all sensuous apprehensions. Examples of the rich diction are many. The phrase 'curled in womb and memory' which suggests not only physical birth but also the sense of nostalgia is reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'Ode to the Intimations of Immortality'. The charming juxtaposition of 'a pear's silence in the calyx' and 'the noise of childish fist' with the effect of synaesthesia, combining visual and aural appeal, is striking. The beauty of the last line which is a facile but picturesque rendering of the doctrine of rebirth is noteworthy:

... when you muffle
and put away my pulse

to rise in the sap of trees
let me go with you and feel the weight
of honey-hives in my branching
and the burlap weave of weaver-birds
in my hair.

The poem is not a realisation of Ramanujan's 'touch alone has untouchables' but a vivid concretisation of the fascinating power of the body to apprehend the world of the senses in all its varied minutiae. By implication, the soul is temporarily exiled from the body whose fingers can even clutch at abstract human feelings as grace, malice, expressed through bodily gestures as 'ruffling someone else's hair' suggesting warmth and affection. Ramanujan's art does not seem to differentiate between the concrete and the abstract as when he speaks of fingers:
... to hold in the dark of the eye
through a winter and a fear
the noise, the shape of a breast,
a fear's silence in the calyx
and the noise of the childish fist.

The verb 'hold' is usually used with concrete, material objects
as for example holding hands, the sense that is implied here.
But the poet stretches its semantic elasticity and the
collocation of winter and fear is unusual. The meeting point
is in their coldness: the freeze of winter and the cold shiver
due to fear. Also a childish fist can produce no noise but
yet it can be apprehended.1

The second part of the poem is a plea on the part of the
Hindu to be taken with the body: 'You brought me: do not leave
me behind.' Separation is painful and the persona suggests
here that the alienation from sensory perception should never
take place for even in his rebirth he would like to be a tree
to savour the exotic richness of the life of the senses.2

The element of mystification in the poem in such a line
as 'my un kissed alien mind' can serve to puzzle the reader.
The ambiguity in the use of the word 'alien' is hard to
decipher. The Hindu's mind is alien in one sense because it
is detached from the sensuous delights that the body enjoys
which are foreign to its nature as it is supposed to prefer

1 D.H. Lawrence's richly sensuous poem 'Baby Running
Barefoot', An Anthology of English Verse, Madras, Oxford
University Press, 1978, p.31. The baby feet beating across
the grass are compared to two butterflies ... 'soft little
wingbeats uttering.'

2 An obvious parallel is Keats' 'O! for a life of
sensation rather than thought.'
the contemplation of spiritual matters. The Hindu's mind can also be 'alien' or 'strange' to the body because it no longer thinks like a Hindu. Where a traditional Hindu would ardently desire freedom from rebirth, here he craves a fresh lease of life to enjoy the sensual pleasures of earth. The Hindu self uses this shock technique to express its unorthodox stand, its deliberate estrangement from traditional orthodoxies. The poem while it impresses because of the unerring diction, suffers in quality because of the half-baked philosophy. This is evident in the other 'Hindu' poems also.

In 'THE HINDOO: he doesn't Hurt a Fly or a Spider either', the question of identity is evident even in the title. The use of 'he' serves to distance the poet though a Hindu, from the protagonist of the poem. The I Person is used throughout the poem to characterise the poet-narrator. The reason for the gentle behaviour of the Hindu is because of the belief in rebirth - his grandmother could have been reborn as a spider:

It's time I told you why
I'm so gentle, do not hurt a fly.

Why, I cannot hurt a spider either, not even a black widow,

for who can tell Who's Who?
Can you? Maybe it's once again my
great swinging grandmother, . . .

His refusal to kill even a poisonous spider makes him 'different' from others and in that sense he does not belong to the kind of people who do.

Even as the spider may be the grandmother, he carries the spirit of his grandfather:
... And who can say I do not bear, as I do his name, the spirit 
of Great grandfather, that still man, untimely witness, timeless eye, perpetual outsider, watching as only husbands will
a suspense of nets vibrate under wife and enemy ...

The poem is an example of grotesque humour and the doctrine of rebirth is only a pretext for exposing the infidelity of grandmother. The lack of seriousness is seen even in the use of 'Who's Who', reminiscent of popular books listing famous personalities. The poet moves to the 'scandal' of grandmother's illicit love affair and grandfather being 'a perpetual outsider.' He cannot interfere and break the love affair; he can only view it from the outside. The irony is that his life is drastically affected by grandmother's action and yet he is reduced to the helpless position of an observer - almost like the scientist watching, without visibly being affected, 'Borneo specimens mate in murder.' Grandfather, grandmother and the fisherman lover 'who waylaid her / on the ropes in the Madras harbour,' are remembered vividly at the end of the poem and not really the question of 'Who's Who', the doctrine of rebirth and the problem of identity is almost reduced to a travesty.

This objective stance is repeated in the title 'THE HINDOO: he reads his GITA and is calm at all events.' As in the previous poem, the title has 'he' and the poem is narrated by the poet-narrator in the I Person. The emphasis is on the Hindu's ability to remain isolated and aloof:
At this party heads have no noses, teeth close
upon my heart: Yet I come unstuck
and stand apart...

The Hindu's calmness has an eerie, other-world quality about
it and he is alone even in a convivial party. No event affects
him:

... I just walk

Over the iridescence
of horses piss after rain, Knives, bombs, scandal,
and coudung fall on woman in wedding lace:
I say nothing, I take care not to gloat.

I've learned to watch lovers without envy
as I'd watch in a bazaar lens
houseflies rub legs or kiss. I look at wounds
calmly...

There is an undercurrent of irony in depicting the Hindu as
being calm under any circumstances. The poet is skeptical of
such an attitude as it smacks of the unnatural. Further, the
'calmness' is broken in the last lines:

Yet when I meet on a little boy's face
the prehistoric yellow eyes of a goat
I choke, for ancient hands are at my throat.

The 'calmness' is only a façade and the Hindu does not remain
detached at all times. The poet can be said to be ironic at
the traditional image projected by the Hindu who unsuccessfullly
attempts to isolate himself.

'THE HINDOO: the Only Risk' revolves round the same theme
of detachment - the Hindu should keep his 'simple given heart
beat / through a neighbour's striptease or a friend's suicide'.
This idea includes following a monotonous routine whatever the
provocation, 'to keep it cool when strangers' children hiss /
as if they knew what none could know or guess.' This refusal
to get perturbed is also a kind of alienation, a lack of sympathy with the human world resulting in 'heartlessness'. The poet's criticism of this kind of 'detachment' which is in no way like the supreme detachment advocated in the Scriptures is implicit in these "Hindoo poems" and suggests that this state is not really desirable though Ramanujan does not give a concrete alternative.

To Ramanujan, 'alienation' is expressed in the vital conflict between the traditional and the contemporary in scathing irony. The keynote of his second volume Relations is non-relationship, the stark human failing to make and keep relationships. Estrangement, the failure to connect, to unify, to harmonise is his poetic preoccupation and his relations including the wife bind the feet almost in the manner of Sartre's philosophy where love is to be eschewed because it fetters freedom. Hence it is irrelevant to question Ramanujan's domicile in the U.S.A. in the context of the lines prefaced to the volume:

Like a hunted deer
on the wide white
salt land,

a flayed hide
turned inside out,

one may run,
escape.

But living
among relations
binds the feet.

It may seem as if Ramanujan fled India to break the fetters of Indian relations who bind him and curb his freedom of action. In a country with a culture which is strongly rooted to the
family and society to which the individual is invariably subordinated, Ramanujan has chosen to settle in a land which believes in the individual. But the fact remains that even in such countries the worst inequalities are practised in the name of equality and repressive measures carried out in the name of freedom. Ramanujan can thus be said to have escaped only from his blood relations and can safely expose them from such a distance for their hypocrisy and inhumanity which belie the very name of relations. Far away from the 'perennial feuds and seasonal alliance of Hindu, Christian and Muslim', the tantrum of father and son over a wobbly top, the memory of mother, of the peanut seller's 'raucous cry' or even the great house which admits as many things as it allows to go out of it, Ramanujan manages to depict the Indian scene with brilliant concreteness. The recollection with its meticulous attention to minutiae shows how much of an insider he is. The descriptive nature of the poetry with its vivid diction makes him an objective artist viewing the landscape from a distance almost in the manner of Ezekiel but without Ezekiel's gentleness and simplicity of style.

If the desire to escape from the Indian scene is so strong, it is reasonable to expect that the artist should not insistently come back to it. In this constant pre-occupation with anything Indian, be it the 'virginites of Tirupati dolls' or ex-Maharajas or family relationships, Ramanujan shows himself to be both 'Indian' and 'alien'.

In Raghavendra Rao's essay, he attempts to show that Ramanujan's multi-dimensional alienation has led to reverse
Romanticism. Ramanujan as a Brahmin in a secular Indian set-up is the victim of social ostracization in a caste-ridden South Indian society. As a Tamilian brought up in Mysore he is alienated from his home state. Being an educated Indian, he shares with others in the academic world the elitist isolationism of the critical intellectual. His alienation has come full circle in his conscious choice to settle abroad. The fact that both his books were published abroad shows that he is reaching out to a wider audience than merely Indian and justifies Rao's observation 'that a work of poetry so hopelessly entangled in foreign connections cannot but betray the impact and ethos generated by those connections.'

One criticism levelled against Ramanujan is his frequent references to Indian allusions and everyday Indian practices which can mystify the reader. Kulsreshta cites the example of 'Obituary' and remarks whether the strangeness is due to "an imperfect handling of idiom or due to the poet's desire to convey a vivid sense of the unaccustomed to the foreign reader." The lines referring to the obituary notice in the paper which was 'sold by the kilo to grocery shops' is imbued with comic possibilities for reasons which remain somewhat

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2 Raghavendra Rao, p.120.
3 Kulsreshta, p.15.
mysterious to an average reader." However there are not many such instances though the reference to the feeding of ritual cobras, patchwork pouches for betel nut and tobacco or ricegrain line seam esoteric in their reference and will puzzle (and therefore alienate) the foreign reader so much so the poems may require a glossary as in the Indian novel.

The most important point made by Rao is that 'reverse romanticism' is the result of "a certain desperate need to sustain an integrated personality against a chaos of alienation." Granting the chaos of alienation in Ramanujan's background, the resultant reverse romanticism is only a very personal observation. The poetry of Ramanujan does not have the exotica of nineteenth century romantic poetry, the type of poetry in which 'strangeness is added to beauty' or the type which abounds in beautiful or wordy descriptions of nature. In most of his poems, he pierces through the veil of decorum that covers Indian life and ruthlessly exposes the secrets of man's subterranean actions. The poetry thus belongs to the realm of realism in keeping with the major trend of this century. His alienated expatriate state is responsible to a large extent for this constant focus on Indian life as it is and in 'reverse romanticism' there can be no exclusion of the real.

Rao also points out that memory is the source of this poetry of reverse romanticism. Memory as past, present and future, he avers, invests Ramanujan's poetry with a single

1 Raghavendra Rao, p.121.
unified structure. His poetry can be called romantic in the evocation of the past but the manner of the recollection is essentially real as also the contents. In dealing with the feeling of alienation and isolation, it is Ramanujan's criticalness and intellection that come to the fore and invest the poetry with energy and vitality. Only his stance is ambivalent: he neither protests against it nor accepts it fully.

Unlike Ramanujan's, Ezekiel's poems dealing with the theme of 'alienation' clearly show the progressive movement from a feeling of non-belonging to an insistent reiteration of the need to belong. His alienation includes 'accommodation' as well. This feeling that animates the poems has two possible sources: one is his Jewish background in India and the other is his sense of dissatisfaction with his self, his search for perfection. The estrangement from one's own self is in terms of an ideal or authentic self, and the quest of the self is to bridge the gap between what it is and what it would like to be or what it thinks it should be. This self-alienation is inevitable as an ever-present feeling or condition in an intellectual like Ezekiel and becomes an example of fruitful tensions in life generating great art. As Terry Eagleton perceptively observes:

Great art is produced not from the simple availability of an alternative but from the simple and involuted tensions between the remembered and the actual, integration and dispossesssion, exile and involvement.¹

There are at least three alternatives for Ezekiel as a Bene-Israel in India: one is to castigate everything Indian as Naipaul was wont to do from far-off West Indies, but with an outsider status; secondly, to sentimentalise over a lost El Dorado in the vein of Longfellow's 'The Slave's Dream' and lastly to adjust to a foreign situation and be part of the landscape without losing equanimity. Ezekiel has chosen the last which is by no means a simple choice laden as it is with the intricate questions of race, domicile, language and culture.

Ezekiel's ancestry in India can be traced back to 600 A.D. With such deep roots he cannot justifiably be regarded as a foreigner. He can be considered as much an Indian as a Muslim or Christian or Parsi with similar long-reaching familial roots in the soil of India.

Having the hoary tradition of acculturisation over centuries, in spite of the orthodoxies of the microscopic community settled in the Konkan coast, Ezekiel very rarely refers to his Jewish background in an alien land. Like

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1 Their date of arrival in India is a matter of conjecture and controversy and scholars differ widely. Dr. Wilson states that they came to India in 600 A.D. History and Culture of the Bene-Israel in India, Moses Ezekiel, n.p., 1948, pp. 1-5.

2 In 'Background Casually' he calls himself 'A mugging Jew among wolves' and later on refers to his ancestors as 'Saturday oil pressers'. This apart, there is no specific reference to his race and its problems. He is more concerned with the human predicament, with the cultivation and preservation of human values. And it is this obsessive human concern that invests his poetry with lasting value.
Joseph Conrad and W.B.Yaats, his art is inspired by a desire to resolve personal and cultural tensions and is expressive of his inner compulsion to be in harmony with his environs. He stands unique in this regard being the product of three cultures - the Indian, the Hebrew, and the English where the Irish or Polish artist in English or the African writer in English can be described as only bi-cultural.¹ As William Walsh observes:

As a permanent expatriate who has freely elected to stay, he has been able to discover a point of balance at which inwardness could combine with an essential externality to produce major art.²

As a Jew in India, Ezekiel never wanted to leave Indian shores either in life or through the escape route of his art. Even when Israel was established and there was an exodus of Jews from India, he never felt the compulsion to migrate. As he states in a letter, this has not so far been used as a theme in his poetry.³ He prefers to stay in Bombay, the 'barbaric city sick with slums' which 'burns like a passion' and nourishes his imaginative life. He accepts his loneliness as part of his Jewish inheritance and like Derek Walcott, with his West Indian and English loyalties sees no pleasures of exile. India is so much in 'his brain and bones' that he

¹ This is a convenient epithet for East-West confrontations. However no culture is pristine pure and it is a diversified unit of many cultures. Introduction, p.20-21.

² 'Two Indian Poets', William Walsh, The Literary Criterion, 2, No.3, 1974, p.4.

cannot leave it. He uses the English language to communicate in poetic terms his isolation and his desire for integration with this India. His imaginative commitment is to his place of birth as is Walcott's who expresses it in lyrically romantic style:

... So I shall voyage no more from home may I speak here.
This island is heaven-away from dust-blown blood of cities
for beauty has surrounded
Its black children and freed them of homeless ditties...

Ezekiel's affirmation of the need to belong to India is similar but is not made with the same romantic lyricism. He speaks in a more realistic vein in 'Background, Casually':

... I have made my commitments now.
This is one; to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

These lines illustrate in part Walsh’s remark:

Displaced by his own spiritual past, he is in place by an act of will and his accommodation can never be total and unwavering.

The first line 'I have made my commitments now' also shows that commitment is intrinsic to the alienated state. Ezekiel is part of the Indian landscape. Naipaul may choose to call him 'singular' for remaining in an 'area of darkness' but he will not cavil about it. Like Dom Moreau or A.K. Ramanujan

2 Walsh, p.5.
who have settled abroad, he has settled in India for good. There is no frustration or disappointment, no camouflage to hide his true identity or the nature of his choice. He will remain Bané-Israel in India and the reference to 'backward' is double-edged: It can refer not merely to the community and to the place but also to his own individual inadequacy to make it less backward than it is. The intellectual honesty of Ezekiel is commendable as also the ironic humour which makes him the target of his own criticism. It is the sense of irony that makes him alive to the ambivalence of his situation.

In considering his 'alienness', in the context of his Indian domicile, a poem like Background, Casually merits close attention. Written in 1965 and published in the volume Hymns in Darkness in 1976, the poem depicts vividly the tension between the keen urge to accept a not-too-favourable situation and the feeling of isolation. A confessional piece without the trauma and violence of language that are correlates of this mood, the poem expresses his alienness with its contradictions in simple yet forceful language.

Though 'a mugging Jew among wolves' he manages to win the Scripture prize in a Roman Catholic School where they told him he had 'killed the Christ.' The word 'wolves'

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1 Moses Ezekiel observes: 'There is no doubt that they arrived in India at a time when the country was very backward. It might be said with equal emphasis that the coast of Konkan where they arrived and settled remained very backward for centuries after their arrival.' pp.24-25,
which refers to the other students images the subjective fear and horror that the young Jewish lad, studious to a fault, cherished for them. Irony forces its way through in the sheer simplicity of syntax and diction. His is the paradoxical situation of a Jew winning a prize for knowing well the message of Christ in whom he had no faith and whom his ancestors had crucified. While this knowledge of Christianity can be construed as an unconscious gesture of the Jew towards integration in a secular country, Ezekiel is hardly ever troubled by his racial origins. His is the 'divine discontent' of the Intellectual whose quest is for perfection and who is constantly made aware of the imperfection of self: 'I knew that I had failed / In everything, a bitter thought.' 

The quest for knowledge in the manner of Ulysses only leads him to a realisation of the self's abysmal ignorance. There was 'Yoga and Zen' to learn and anyway he could still be a saint in his community if he failed in those. But he feels deeply his failure to learn anything well. He decides to go abroad to seek wisdom and it is important to stress that the decision is not motivated by his being a Jew in India. As is fitting to a metaphorical journey with the goal as intellectual and human advancement, Ezekiel's friends are naturally 'Philosophy, Poverty and Poetry' three companions who 'shared his basement room.' But nothing tangible comes out of the study of philosophy and to escape from his sense of failure and his loneliness he boards an English cargo ship bound for Indo-China:

So, in an English cargo-ship
Taking French guns and mortar shells
to Indo-China scrubbed the decks,
and learned to laugh at home...¹

The word 'laugh' may suggest a gay and unconcerned attitude
to this painful experience. The underlying agony is expressed
simply in the line that follows:

How to feel it home, was the point.

That the line between the comic and the tragic is ill-defined
is seen in the example of Ezekiel, a gold medallist in
literature and a student of philosophy in London becoming a
deckhand, which reads like a joke. But in reality it is his
restless spirit in search of truth that impels him to try
his hand at everything—whether it is scrubbing decks or
tasting LSD.² The problem is, how to root out this feeling of
insecurity as a result of not feeling at home. The
realization that feeling at home can come only through one's
own efforts and not through the influence of the others or
of the environs is implicit here.

The feeling of alienation, in Ezekiel's case, is not
because he has been discriminated against for reasons of
race, religion or education. It has its origins in his own
psyche. It is self-generated and is a 'process by which a
self (God or Man) through itself (through its own actions)

¹ This is corroborated by the facts from his life.
Ezekiel worked as a deckhand to pay his fare and also managed
to win his 'A' Seaman Certificate.

² Nissim Ezekiel, 'My idea of God', Free Press Journal,
becomes alien (strange) to itself. This condition of estrangement stems from a painful intellectual awareness of the self's own limitations and its keen desire to transcend itself. This irritability with his own limitations remains low-keyed and does not scale despairing Hamletian heights. The reason is Ezekiel's wonderful gift of humour, the Chaucerian ability to laugh at himself through the gentle use of irony. However, this laughter is not far from tears for the incongruity of being a Jew among Hindus, Christians and Muslims has its pathos too, Ezekiel does not make much of it and deflects attention to his lack of physical skills and strength. He is thus afraid of the 'strong undernourished Hindu lads' and even allows himself to be boxed by a Muslim sportsman. Surprisingly, this 'boy of maagre bone' has the courage to use a knife which illustrates the irony of life: even the seemingly weak when provoked can rise to violence.

The poem moves with an easy flow of words. The tetrameter lines fall regularly in place and the absence of inversions in the syntax makes the poem progress casually in its narration of past history. The absence of rhyme gives it the casualness suggested in the title. In contrast, the simplicity of style underscores the significance of the details so imperceptibly given that one is made to feel that the details of background cannot really be taken lightly.

The crucial question of how to feel at home is not
solved in the narration of the personal life of failure and loneliness. How could he a Jew, feel a sense of integration and oneness with his milieu? His dilemma is made worse by his father's words:

... All Hindus are like that, my father used to say, ... 

Was he too then a Hindu of this sort? If so, where is the problem of not feeling at home in Hindustan? Ezekiel constantly confronts such paradoxes as if to show that these are intrinsic to life situations and to belong and not to belong are two sides of the same coin. The individual dilemma cuts across barriers of race, caste, religion or nationality.

This rough passage through life has not resulted in a clear definite self-image, an image which projects itself favourably with oneself and with others. Marriage and change of jobs make no difference and he sees himself only as a fool:

... I prepared for the worst. Married, changed jobs, and saw myself a fool... 

The dissatisfaction with oneself gives rise to the feeling of estrangement with one's self and with one's environs. This results inevitably in an escape into the past especially an honourable past which can boost the deflated ego. Stanzas ten and eleven deal with this theme. While his ancestors 'were aliens crushing seed for bread', one among them could become a Major in the army and inspire warrior dreams in him:

... One among them fought and taught, a Major bearing British arms.
He told my father sad stories
Of the Boar War. I dreamt that
Fierce men had bound my feet and hands...

This dream of achievement in war is natural to a weak boy
who has always been sickly and who therefore never excels
in physical feats. Hence there can be no possibility of the
dream being re-enacted in life. So his intellectual prowess
and philosophical leanings make him think of himself as
rabbi saint in the future. His irrepressible humour pitches
in even here:

... I heard of Yoga and of Zen
Could I, perhaps, be rabbi-saint?...

This query is puckishly raised after the bland
statement 'My morals had declined.' He realises that he
cannot become a saint or military hero and settles to
poetry. 'The later dreams were all of words.' Poetry had
always fascinated him and even the temporary excursions to
other fields only served to bring out the poet in him. As
he himself remarks in a recent interview:

I started writing poetry at the age of twelve.
I can't imagine any other form being more
interesting than poetry. Poetry is the most
important mode of expressing myself and words
are my medium. ¹

The conscious choice of poetry as vocation normally
would mean a self-imposed isolation. An artist tends to
operate as a lone ranger either because of his Bohemian
excesses or because of his elitism. In Ezekiel's case,

¹ 'Lines that Speak the Man', Indian Express, November
15, 1980.
neither is true as his poetry is life experience, not a means of escape from the vortex of life. Poetry therefore is not the reason for his alienation but is the means of his integration with the mainstream of life. Even though he realises that words betray he let the poems come and 'lost that grip on things the worldly prize.' The honest admission is that the pursuit of poetry involves the sacrifice of things like titles that the materialistic worldly-wise people cherish. His decision is firm 'I would not suffer that again.' Like Keats, he would give all his time to poetry, the pursuit of which is its own reward.

The need to belong in Ezekiel's case also parallels the search for balance, poise and equanimity. With objectivity, he tries to 'formulate a plainer view' and exposes the paradox that life is. The whole poem bristles with opposites so deftly handled that one is left with the impression of balancing tensions and not strongly marked contrasts. Ambition and failure, dream and reality, action and contemplation are poised against each other and even as he awakens to the charm of words he realises how words betray.

This awareness of the ironic paradox of life which finds expression in many of his poems can be said to be the hallmark of Ezekiel's greatness as a poet. He comprehends reality for what it is and is also capable of transcending it without allowing the philosophy of the timeserver who 'cashes in on the inner and outer storms' overrule him. He has learnt wisdom from his song of experience and will
therefore commit himself to the Indian landscape. It can 'sear his eyes', others can call him 'singular' because of his choice (their latter overstate the case) but he knows his mind and place: 'My backward place is where I am.' His is a mature acceptance of life even if it is in an 'as-is-where-is' condition.

'Background, Casually' thus clearly shows that his racial origins have only a minimal bearing on the feeling of non-belonging that characterises some of his poems. The poem illustrates vividly the general sense of unease which is part of the pangs of growing up. However there is no despair or guilt and the concomitant schizophrenic tensions which form the matrix of confessional poetry. Ezekiel's urbanity and sense of irony are active deterrents to the neurosis of this mode.

A close study of the other poems validates the thesis that the feeling of alienation in Ezekiel's poetry is due to the awareness of the imperfections of the self. The quest is for the real self, a self that can be acknowledged and possessed, not disowned. And in this voyage of self-discovery what is underscored is the preservation of human values which will lead to integration. In his earliest piece 'A Time to Change' which has strong Eliotian echoes he upholds tradition:

... The oldest idiom may reveal
a smile never seen, limbs retain
A virginal veracity and every stone
Be as original as when the World was made ...

This championing of tradition in itself is an antidote to any
sense of frustration due to non-belonging. It invests his poetry with 'therapeutic value'. In recent times, it is the revolt against tradition and even at the extreme point the denial of tradition that has resulted in chaos in life and literature. Ezekiel returns to tradition even as his artist Jamini Ray returns to folk art being convinced that its inscape of innocence and philosophy of joy will prevent disintegration. Hence the imminent need to change; the time is ripe for the resurrection of tradition with change in order to forestall or to root out the feeling of alienation.

In keeping with the faith in tradition, his creed is:

... To own a singing voice and a talking voice,
A bit of land, a woman and a child or two
Accommodated to their needs and changing moods
And patiently to build a life with these: ...

The repetition of these lines at two different points in the same poem shows that Ezekiel does not favour an ascetic way of life involving a rejection of the life of the senses, like the Hindu, he believes implicitly in this life as one phase to be gone through in the development of self. In the enjoyment of family and possession, he breathes a tolerance that is characteristic of his search for balance.

Accommodation is thus a key-word in 'A Time to Change'. Participation too is important for withdrawal from life cannot really lead to illumination. Ezekiel does not advocate hedonism in life or art. Only he is like Forestar and does

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negate the life of the senses. Matter is to be enjoyed, not summarily rejected. Again possession is not owning the Midas touch. A bit of land is enough. It is this mental adjustment, this maturity to be content with what little one has that prevents Ezekiel from allowing his sense of non-belonging to become a sickly state.

However withdrawal from life is not totally eschewed. It is accepted as a temporary phase, which can constructively affect the growth into knowledge of the individual self. Paradoxically, this withdrawal from one way of life is only to enter into another, to participate in another kind of life:

... And walk occasionally on alien land
To know the various lives and dreams of men,...

This is reminiscent of the young student in England whose education was believed to be completed after a European tour, for which Milton stands as a classic example. Ezekiel himself is a much travelled man, having been to the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Japan and the biographical critic can read the influence of personal life on his poetry in these lines. But the universal significance is too transparent to miss: for the intercourse with people from different climes and cultures helps to unravel the mystery of man. Faith in a universal brotherhood finds affirmation in such positive cultural confrontations for no man is an island. By interacting with other selves and not by withdrawing from others can the human self be on the way to self-knowledge and integration.

Self-scrutiny is made possible by this interaction with
other selves. The poem makes use of the ambivalent stance and permits the introspection, the temporary withdrawal from the world outside in order to win redemption in the private country of my mind. Where the worse part as Socrates would say / Presides.' This self-examination is necessary for illumination, for the 'perception in April' to dawn. Where the self had been 'marking time on unknown ground with faults concealed.' the shift of knowledge makes it possible for the secret faults to come to light and enable it to move towards self-perfection. Ezekiel believes strongly in persistent hardwork if the imagination has to function fruitfully. In this, the artist is very much like the dogged farmer who works arduously and waits patiently for his labour to blossom:

... The stubborn workman breaks the stone, loosens soil, allows the seed to die in it, waits patiently for grapes or figs and even finds, on a lucky day, a metaphor leaping from the sod....

Here there is no touch of the Marxist alienation from his labour. It is well-directed labour with the patience to reap its harvest and cannot give rise to alienation. And Ezekiel is too healthy in outlook to view labour as alienated and believes that only through work can the human self belong to the human community. This sense of belonging,

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1 "He does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well being, does not develop freely his spiritual and physical powers but is physically exhausted and spiritually debased," Richard Schacht, Alienation, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1971, p.90.
he is confident can be acquired by shunning excesses as expressed in 'Simplicity':

    ... A lighter touch
    a smoother line
    Excesses cut
    simplicity... ...

The desire for simplicity can act as an anodyne to drive out any feeling of alienation for it pre-supposes an acceptance of values and not a rejection of the values of the surrounding society. Ezekiel's attitude is critical and intellectual but not repudiative and hence there is the possibility of accommodation and affirmation with no trace of the Kierkegaardian despair at the loss of self. At best, alienation remains only a feeling and not an intellectual obsession in Ezekiel. It is only an intermittent theme in the corpus of his poetry though it does run from the 1952 volume to the 1976. This is because Ezekiel, while admitting to the feeling of alienness is simultaneously convinced of the need to overcome it in the quest of the self for poise and security in life. The exorcising of this feeling of unease will eventually make possible the realization of the human dream:

    ... The pure invention or the perfect poem
    Precise communication of a thought,
    Love reciprocated to quiver,
    Flawless doctrines, certainty of God,
    These are merely dreams; but I am human
    And must testify to what they mean.

Perfection is the goal and every act of man whether it be the composition of a perfect poem or the enjoyment of love, whether it is, in the knowledge of immaculate teachings or the certain awareness of God should be directed to the
achievement of all these. Creation is a miracle, every action in it a wonder and a mystery and the faith in Ezekiel makes it impossible for him to be isolated.

In 'A Poem of Blindness' the alienness of the self is manifested as a refusal to see reality as it is. What it perceives is the opposition between itself and its environs expressed in forceful terms: 'All things are hostile to the seeing eye.' The redeeming feature of the philosophy expressed is its positive tone without any trace of despair or frustration. The poem begins with the self seeing only opposites. To its blurred vision, the shaping force becomes a distorting agent and this results in the feeling of being isolated and left out as what strikes the eye is the differentia and not the similarity. It is as if the world is viewed through a broken glass. Since the self is sufficiently mature it is able to recognize the disguise, the mask that hides the reality:

... Across the clearest landscape some disguise
With subtle fingers drawn, to melt
And mould the vision,
Twist, disturb, distort the vision,
None in what I do can recognise....

The agony and despair, seen in the use of action verbs like 'twist' and 'distort', experienced by the self in losing its focus of vision leads to a sense of non-belonging. The self feels deeply its inability to reach for the reality and is convinced only of the certitude of darkness. The amplitude of the poem is between separateness and participation which

\[Sixty Poems, p.12.\]
David Anderson sees as almost always being intentional though they are not exclusive choices.1 The momentary unease and insecurity in the breakdown of vision leads to the desire to escape — 'To feel the bounty of the open sky', which in a sense will also be a release from despair. Isolation and solitude become necessary to recover poise and balance. But the place of refuge or escape is left vague and the alienation as concept and feeling is incomplete. As Kaufmann points out, in such cases the alienation to what is not specified and only the alienation from what is some-what defined.2 But the self is intensely self-aware and therein lies the paradox of the poem which is obvious in the title itself. The blindness is a 'seeing blindness' for the self is acutely conscious of its failure to see, to connect, its painful inability to shape and perfect its distorted and fragmented vision. It is this self-knowledge that enables it to keep in bound its old despair and thus try to disalienate itself and discover its true nature in order to perfect itself.

The whole poem is in the present tense, indicative of present time. It underscores the indefiniteness of the mood of loneliness and suggests that blindness is part of man's inheritance. The desire to escape is expressed in the present tense in Parthasarathy's poems also and represents the universal present. This blindness belongs equally to past,

present and future and will remain as long as the human race endures and it cannot be exorcised. Ezekiel's realization of this truth saves him from the neurosis that alienation can bring about.

Two other poems 'Confession' and 'Song', in the same volume express a positive desire to overcome the sense of isolation. 'Confession' dwells on the theme of loneliness. In the search for the real self, the persona only pretends to be happy with the ephemeral pleasures that the materialistic world offers:

When I pretend to be happy
I let the intellect
Boisterously propel me on,
Play with women Chinese choquors,
Trade on the names of prophets,
Listen to the wireless
Consume my dreams, and turn away
Unsatisfied, to be alone...

An escape into oneself is highly desirable for calm introspection: 'And what is in this loneliness: Perfection.' Paradoxically this retreat into self only serves to make it realize that it has an identity and being only in relation to a rational crowd, 'traffic of the heart on images / miracles of love that run to rule.' The self has to go through the purgatory of both isolation and participation, of meeting and parting in order to realize its identity. At the end of the poem as in 'A Time To Change', there is the mature even if painful realization that after the intercourse with man there is bound to be isolation and even desolation, 'which any fool could have foretold.' This is part of life. Ezekiel accepts this with equanimity in his art.
In 'Song', he portrays man (easily interchangeable with self) as a fugitive far from home, a vagabond but with a zest for life. Though he enjoys the cozy comforts of the 'room's enclosed dark' with an assurance of safety, he still hears the 'clamour of human dreams'. So the darkness that envelops him has to be dispelled and he has to participate in life. Isolation suggests the incompleteness of the self. Like the man in 'First Theme and Variations' Ezekiel believes that the human self has to be 'a finished man', to be loved and understood, to be concerned about his loneliness and yet be concerned about his friends and be animated by a gleam or two of poetry even as it shambles through reality.  

As early as 1950, Ezekiel expressed his concern for men and the need for integration. In 'A Prayer' he affirms that 'Man is measure of mankind' an essentially anthropocentric view.  

The fervent prayer is that the poet's self be identified with the rest of mankind, an active and not a passive observer of the daily travails. The prayer that wells up from within him is: 'Let me not be isolated'. It is almost a cry to be saved from the horror of loneliness which in its intense manifestation is alienation. Ezekiel sees this as part of life but his faith in positive values does not allow it to kill his vitality for living. Even in a middling poem like 'Transmutation' he advises the self in almost Polonius fashion:

1 Sixty Poems, p.38.
2 Sixty Poems, p.17.
... Do not, in your vanity, the tenuous thread
Of difference flaunt, but be
 Asserted in the common dance. Participate
Entirely, make an end of separation,...

The pragmatic philosophy is to sink differences and stress
similarities which can get rid of any brooding sense of
alienation. But the effort to participate to apprehend / The
carnival of things created must come from within and cannot
be induced by external circumstances. This is Ezekiel's
philosophy to overcome the sense of non-belonging. The need
to belong is too imminent to allow one's pride to refuse to
participate in the carnival of life.

In the volume The Third (1959), alienation finds
expression as an insistent search for identity. It delineates
the human predicament of the self not knowing itself, unable
to find a way of self-knowledge in the 'myth and maze' of the
world. The sense of its identity is vague and what is
certain is what the identity is not, not what it is. The
uncertainty of not knowing who one is, not knowing what
one wants to be or one wants to do is underscored in the few
poems on the theme.

In a poem like 'Portrait', self-identity is sought with
a sadness that borders on tragedy but with a faith that
smacks of stoicism:

... No longer young but foolish still
He wakes to hear his words unspoken,
A sadness in his toughened will,
And all except his faith unbroken....

¹ Sixty Poems, p.19.
Many of the poems philosophize and moralize but always point to the obscurity and mystery of self-identity. The self performs has to be ignorant of itself and accept its 'alienness' as part of its heritage. The pragmatic outlook is seen in 'Admission':

Do not reveal the face behind the mask,  
Which almost any unguided eye sees.  

The ambivalent stance in the diffusion of identity is evident, even in the use of the relative adjective 'which'. It can stand for both the mask, the apparent face and the real face that it hides. Since the eye is 'unguided' and without any aid it cannot penetrate through the mask and see the real face. Also, as the mask is so transparent, even the unguided eye can glimpse the face that it seeks to cover. The line is an example of the ambiguity that Empson sees as intrinsic to poetry.

The mask or face semantic reference is also used in 'What Frightens Me':

I have seen the mask  
And the secret behind the mask.

The self-knowledge that the self accrues in seeing the mask and the reality that it seeks to hide is the cause of

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1 The Third, p.5. This is echoed in 'Theological': 'Even as myself, my very own / incontrovertible unexceptional / self, I feel I am disguised'. Journal of South Asian Literature, Ezekiel Number, 1975, p.9.


3 The Third, p.27.
its terror: 'Myself examined frightens me'. It knows itself
for what it is, it also sees the protean shapes that it
assumes in order to project a favourable image of itself.
Here it is the self-protective self, afraid of being hurt by
the reality of its identity, that scores over the self naked,
without any protective armour as defence:

... I have heard the endless silent dialogue
Between the self-protective self
And the self naked....

The self-image terrorises the persona who avers that it
is due to no accident:

... It is no accident I am what I am.
I saw the image being formed,
I saw it carnal in the arms of love
(Crushed, compromised and consummated)
I saw it making vows
With hidden weakness in the bone,
Unstable at nightfall and at noon....

The self is self-aware being a witness to its own
formation. What seems to be a unique characteristic of this
self is its intellectual honesty (which it shares with its
maker) for it does not gloat over its intense love experience
as seen in the verb 'crushed' which connotes the violence of
the experience. Nor does it assume a perfection not its own
for it admits to making promises which its weak nature
cannot keep, As is characteristic of Ezekiel, even such a
self is not rejected but accommodated without destructive
criticism or Spartan prescriptions. The self in the final
analysis is a fluid entity whose dimness or vagueness of
identity is paradoxically its definitive feature:

... I have felt the mystery of the image being born,
Establishing its dim but definite
Identity....
And the final lines also point to this conclusion:

... I have realised its final shape
Is probably uncertainty.--
This it is which frightens me.

This lack of stablingness and the mystery of its nature makes for a terrifying image of the self. What man would like in life is to be certain of himself, his actions and the actions of others. If he has to live in a world where everything is unpredictable and worse if this world is his own self, then life can be most difficult in spite of the halo of romance and adventure that surrounds it. However, even this terrifying uncertainty of the nature of self is no valid reason for its rejection in the humanistic outlook. He does not blame its unstable nature and does not attribute it to the external world. It is not Parthasarathy's rueful decision 'to live with the small change of uncertainties'. Ezekiel's stance reveals a mature understanding of the nature of the self which is an unpredictable entity in which change is its only permanence. What is most striking is that the self is not self-deceived and hence is able to reconcile itself to its mean nature, 'ragged in act and words'. The self in this volume is insistently and constantly aware of its imperfections and inadequacies and feels the 'inner block', the obstacle within it, which prevents it reaching to its inscape. In self-contemplation, in solitude, this is expressed in 'Song of Desolation':

Know, I went walking alone,
Record it that I sat upon a rock,
Heard the sea moan,
Felt the inner block...

The self seeks the aid of religion to give it solace
and comfort and also enable it to see its shortcomings:

... Come, religion, comfort me,
You lifeless moralists prescribe your laws,
And make me see
My secretive flaws.

The irony is that the self-knowledge that is projected
here is comprehensive. Even without the external sustenance
provided by a renewal of faith through religion, the self
knows itself. While this may proclaim the power of religion
to sustain the self and make for its self-realisation, there
is a lurking doubt about its real value as seen in the
epithet 'lifeless', used for the interpreters of religion
who have failed to make it meaningful and alive to the common
man who seeks it. Religion can teach humility to the self.
However, there is no mention of spirituality, a theme that is
skirted in much of post-Independent Indian Poetry in English.
This is a trend which it shares with much of twentieth
century literature which eschews transcendental relationships
and is preoccupied with human non-relationships rather than
man's alienation from God. This is a direct outcome of the
secularization of the concept itself in modern times.

The poems in The Third are thus more concerned with the
identity of the self with respect to its imperfections, its
'hidden flaws' which however are not singled out. The

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1 The Third, p.13.
implication is that the human self is flawed and needs 'light' to see its inadequacies. Even if the 'time to change' has come, the transformation of the self need not necessarily be for the better. So the groping for the 'inner light' continues. The self has to accept itself for what it is for it is not one entity but a fusion of many selves.

It is these tensions experienced by the individual self which Yeats avers creates poetry. To Ezekiel, 'the singing counts'. And as he points out in 'Memo for a Venture' it is in large gestures that greatness reveals itself:

You do not know
the outcome
nor should try to guess,
the secret
in the preparation of a role;
at least the general aim
should be sublime,
the idea of greatness. . . .

It is in this volume that the words 'alien' and 'exile' occur but without the usual significance attached to them. In 'Division', which takes a moralistic tone due to its awareness of the paradox of reality, he speaks of an 'anxious alien heart'. The reference is too general to make 'alien' refer to his Jewishness. It is more his outsider stance in the particular situation. Again, in 'Memo for a Venture' he recalls an acquaintance:

. . . I remember always
one who demanded
Silence and exile
for speech of true greatness. . . .

This suggests the futility of words in achieving greatness. Silence and 'withdrawal' which speaks of a certain detachment
and objectivity can contribute to some tangible achievement rather than the Hamletian 'Words, words, words'.

If alienation as a state or even feeling is only weakly delineated in *The Third*, in *The Unfinished Man* (1959) it becomes central to his poetic vision. Here, it is not merely the imperfect self that is the cause of self-estrangement but the environment as well. Ezekiel is emphatic in asserting the need to belong and the poems show the way by making clear the choice that the self has to make in order to achieve stability. The poet has accepted the self's imperfections and no longer broods about them. The self has become aware of the need for roots. It realises that it has to seek a relationship with its place of domicile and in Ezekiel's case, it is the city. Like R.Parthasarathy, A.K.Ramanujan and many others like Gieve Patil and Prithish Nandy in the '70's, Ezekiel is very much a poet of the city. He is as much a poet of Bombay as Daruwalla is a poet of rural India especially the Varanasi landscape. As Linda Hess observes:

> An important strain in Ezekiel's poetry is the developing relationship with his city Bombay. Most of the contents of *A Time to Change* and *Sixty Poems* were written abroad. *The Third* although written in India, contains no sense of place. But in *The Unfinished Man*, we find that the city has moved forward to a prominent position in the poet's consciousness.\(^1\)

This movement from a lack of sense of place to a concrete awareness of his city environs parallels the mental shift of

\(^1\) Linda Hess, p.31.
the self from a feeling of non-belonging to a sense of belonging. The self's quest for integration, for reconciling its multiple facets includes a recognition of and adjustment to its immediate milieu. Ezekiel's sensibility is not hidebound and he pretends to no immunity to the influence of the city on his imaginative life. He realizes that he is as much part of the Bombay skyline as its slums, skyscrapers, hawkers and peddlars and belongs to it. In 'A Morning Walk' he expresses his sense of belonging thus: 'The city wakes, where fame is cheap / And he belongs, an active fool.' This is reiterated in 'Island' as 'I was born here and belong' and in 'Background, Casually' as 'The Indian landscape sears my eyes / I have become a part of it.'

Ezekiel realizes his umbilical dependence on the city and that there is no escape from its 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' hold. Also, the city seems to confer an identity on the human self by its unique quality of accommodation. As Peter Smith observes:

... it facilitates belongingness. However sophisticated urban man becomes, there is a deep-rooted need within him to belong to his unique and only place, and not be just another 'Statistic, pigeon-holed in Anywhere 1977.'

The intimate kinship that Ezekiel feels with Bombay where he was born and brought up is possibly because he knows he cannot feel at home elsewhere. He has necessarily to return to its clamour to nurture his art. His roots in Bombay are so deep and his emphatic assertion in 'Poster Poems' is:

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... I've never been a refugee except of the spirit
a loved and troubled country
which is my home and enemy...

The link with the theme refrain of The Third is firmly forged here. The intermittent feeling of non-belonging that troubles him is not because of the physical displacement or racial discrimination (which he never seems to have felt) but due to the awareness of the self's inadequacies which prevent it from asserting its common humanity. The self is thus paradoxically both his 'home' and 'enemy' for it is a harbinger of comfort and peace at times and at others it becomes inhospitable territory when it is oppressed by self-conflicting issues. The image of political displacement is adequately conveyed by 'refugee' (with repatriation becoming a world problem to-day), which word underscores the theme of non-belonging. The tragic paradox of the refugee's unenviable situation of trying to make an alien land his 'home' even as he feels its 'alienness' is brought out simply but effectively. This self-awareness of the self is one reason why Ezekiel's poetry is simple and lucid. Even when it takes on a meditative strain, there is no metaphysical abstruseness.

As Linda Hess perceptively observes:

The synthesis of apparently opposite forces is that between the over-abstrating intellect and the concrete irreducible experience of the senses in which if there is not the comfort of symmetry and system, there is the substance of life itself.

The city thus becomes a life-experience for Ezekiel.

1 Linda Hess, p.29.
The self has to make compromises and accommodate itself to the city. Unlike R. Parthasarathy, who leaves the city with a cry of despair: 'I am through with the city,' Ezekiel chooses to remain an urbanite, to be committed to the city and try to effect a 'sea-change' in the self’s way of life.

With the drastic changes in the technology of living, notions about rural and urban likenesses and differences are obsolete. Louis Wirth states:

The city has spilled over into the countryside. City ways of life have in some respects taken on a rural cast, particularly in the suburbs. On the other hand, industry, which was characteristic of cities, has gone into the countryside.¹

In this context, the city becomes significant as a theme in modern literature. Does the urban poet reject the pastoral in accepting the city? Is there a possibility of a modern pastoral? Further, is the acceptance of the city, a total turning away from the idyllic pastoral? R.A. Foakes has pointed out that in romantic and Victorian poetry the city stands as an image of spiritual exhaustion "a wide waste through which the poet passas to find restoration and renewed faith in the permanent forms of nature."² Hence there has to be a rejection of the city and the artist has to be inspired by the God-created countryside. The escape from the city is in a temporary excursion into a nostalgic past expressed as

a kind of wish fulfilment in 'The Scholar Gipsy.' The city is no place to live for its pattern of life is fragmented and the scholar-gipsy is asked to flee the place which stands for the 'strange disease of modern life,' its hurry and meaningless toil. Ezekiel's lines written almost half a century later reflect a similar idea:

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

The city is no Jerusalem, the Apocalyptic vision of a Holy City descending out of Heaven. It is no past Byzantine wonder where 'singing masons build roofs of gold.' In rude and shocking contrast, it is uncivilised, littered with dirty slums and peopled by poverty stricken masses 'whose wages are in words and crumbs.' The irony is that Ezekiel does not reject the city in spite of its apparent ugliness: He accepts it unequivocally as expressed in 'After Reading a Prediction':

This is the place
Where I was born, I
Know it
Well. It is Home
Which I recognise at last
as a kind of hell
to be made tolerable. 1

The reasons for the acceptance of the city even though it is 'hell in spite of being home' is that Ezekiel is writing in

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1 Journal of South Asian Literature, Ezekiel Number, 1975, p.97.
the realistic mode with its overtones of irony. He makes the city "the most appropriate vehicle for a rejection of the romantic assertion." This also explains why there is no wilful escape into the idyllic pastoral. Again the city poet that Ezekiel is, he is not totally unaware of the pastoral as poems like 'Urban' or 'A Morning Walk' clearly illustrate.

In 'Urban' the theme is non-relationship, the failure of the self to relate itself to the pastoral. The persona is obviously charmed by the romantic setting—the faraway hills, the meandering river which it loves, the beautiful dawn and the growing shadows of night. The surrounding beauty of nature makes it go into a raverie:

He dreams of morning walks, alone
And floating on a wave of sand.

It is a pastoral Utopia which can be created by the solitary self in the midst of nature. But Ezekiel's muse is no heir to Wordsworth's, at least where the cult of nature is concerned. The morning walk is only a short-lived episode in 'Urban' and serves as a point of contrast to the city landscape. Ezekiel is too man-centred to escape into the idyllic isolation of the pastoral set-up. His avowed philosophy is that life is in participation. He can be said to have a Socrates-like attitude to the countryside for the Greek philosopher had nothing to do with nature and believed in man's power to teach.

1 Foakes, p.173.
The self in 'Urban' is no doubt aware of the beauty of nature but does not succumb to it. As if by some inner compulsion, 'its traffic turns / Away from beach and tree and stone / To kindred clamour close at hand.' Faced with the choice of solitude and silence in nature and the intoxicating beauty associated therein, the self opts for the noises of the city, the beggars' cries and the hawkers' shouts, almost feeling one with them, sharing a kinship of soul and likeness of quality. Thus the sense of belonging to the city is strongly marked here. Naturally, by belonging to one place the self does not belong to another fully. Commitment to the city which involves active dealing with it implies alienation from the rural set-up at least in part.

K.D. Verma, placing the poems in the rural-urban context, sees in them the dilemma of the modern man who is alienated from 'nature and the true self' and is ensnared in an 'urban waste land of illusion.' First, there is no real dilemma. The self juxtaposes the choices and makes the final choice without regrets. It is aware that it cannot feel at home, cannot feel secure in nature. Being a mature entity, it chooses what is more conducive to its well-being, namely life in the city. The myth of the pastoral as affording leisure and peace and beauty has to be exploded for all this is possible only if man can discover it there. If his nature can discover it elsewhere than his choice cannot be justifiably condemned as a 'waste land of illusion.' The

self does not cherish any false ideas about its urban milieu. It knows it for what it is—slums and skyscrapers senselessly crowd the landscape, beggars and hawkers crowd the pavement, raucous cries fill the air— but in spite of its ugliness it is the font of inner life and is no "fallen city that is lifeless, indifferent and inhuman". Varma’s criticism to prove the loss of identity with nature can be taken to validate the opposite view namely the self’s sense of kinship with and feeling of commitment to the urban. Alienation from one milieu or one set of values usually presupposes allegiance to another. Ezekiel’s equanimity allows for an awareness and recognition of the pastoral without an active celebration of it; his muse is inspired only in the urban set-up. Ezekiel knows his mind and realises that the human self is still being moulded— he is still an unfinished man but he will not agonise over it or allow it to become a pathological condition. He will accept the situation and try to seek perfection even if it is only of a limited kind and will not allow schizophrenic tensions to enter his art.

‘A Morning Walk’ shares with ‘Urban’ a similar awareness of the pastoral juxtaposed against the primordial urge to belong to the city in the twentieth century context. The city dweller who ‘dreams of morning walks alone’ in ‘Urban’ makes that dream a concrete reality here. What he sees in the morning is most unlike the vision of London that Wordsworth had in the early hours of the morning: ‘Earth has not anything to show more fair.’ The nature poet’s breathless admiration of the city at dawn stems possibly from its
resemblance to the quiet peaceful rural valleys. However, the
city dweller is not inspired to poetry by nature. Even as the
dawn fails to move him in 'Urban', here too the sun does not
rousing him to action, his blood remains a 'sluggish stream'.
The city is a phantasmagoria, cold and dim reminiscent of
Eliot's Unreal City. He does not appreciate the grandeur of
the silence of the city as Wordsworth does: 'And all that
mighty heart is lying still', but can see it only with its
'clamour'.

He concludes that 'only human hands sell cheap' in the
city. Even though he tries to lose himself on a hill too
high for him' symbolising his impossible escape into the
pastoral which he cannot fully comprehend, he is forced to
wake up to the reality of living in a city with its artificial
imitation of the pastoral as seen in its well-trimmed gardens.
It is obvious that for the city poet 'grace' cannot be had
outside it:

His native place he could not shun,
The marsh where things are what they seem.

The self cannot reject its roots, it cannot hate them or
persistently avoid them. The native place may have all the
trappings of the marsh and he faces the danger of being
sucked into it. Even this may be preferable to the apathy
to the sun, the morning breeze and the individual trees.
They fail to brazen him. The telling irony is that even the
sun gives him no light - 'Why had it given him no light?'
The question is rhetorical for the self, steeped in the urban
culture and addicted to the urban routine and milieu can only
be aware of the bounty of nature as a point of divergence from its daily landscape. He has no natural taste for it. But his inbuilt refinement and his desire to be tolerant prevent him from totally excluding it. He can only give it a place in the periphery of his art without fully apprehending its significance. His integrity impels him to confess frankly his inability to enter into this alien territory:

... The morning breeze
Released no secrets to his ears
The more he stared the less he saw
Among the individual trees....

It is an ironic dig at the self which has taken in so much of the panorama of city life even while walking 'with a Cezanne round its neck'.

Value judgements are inescapable in viewing such choices. Indernath Kher sees a 'constriction' in this choice of a 'narrow world' as it limits the scope of his poetic vision and indicates a certain lacuna in personality. However all art is selective and it is the artist's autonomy to choose his theme. Just as Wordsworth had nature to inspire him, or as Jane Austen carved on her 'One-inch Ivory' or R.K. Narayan has the middle class of Malgudi to write about, so the urban artist is quickened to poetry by the life around him even if it were marshy territory. He may have failed to respond to the call of nature but he has successfully answered the call of the city in keeping with the times. His redemption is thus

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1 Indernath Kher, P. 155.

2 Probably poet-laureates and 'asthana Kavis' are the exceptions as they have to write on set themes.
assured.

In experiencing the city, Ezekiel does not negate the pastoral, and is only neutral to the voices of its dream world. Presumably he is 'lost' to it. But this loss is a prelude to the self's discovery of its congenial milieu both for artistic expression and sustenance of life. As Kher perceptively points out, it is only by losing oneself does one find oneself. Life is balanced on these subtle contradictions and Ezekiel's sensibility is only too well aware of them.

While in 'A Morning Walk' and 'Urban' the self is unable to synthesise the urban and rural and is resigned to the former, in Jamini Ray, the synthesis is smoothly effected. K.D. Verma observes:

The poem delineates the stages in the process of maturity and the joyous fulfillment achieved by the urban artist.

Jamini Ray, an urban painter, began his career under the strong influence of the realistic Western tradition which resulted in a temporary estrangement from his native art treasures. However, he is fortunate to realise their intrinsic value and returns home to them like the prodigal son after his wanderings:

... He started with a different style; He travelled, so he found his roots, His rage became a quiet smile Prolific in its proper fruits....

1 Kher, p.154.

2 Journal of South Asian Literature, 1975, p.236.
The discovery of one's native roots is significant for the harvest of the 'proper fruits', what is appropriate to it. The antithetical contrast between 'rage' which connotes senseless passion and 'the quiet smile' which stands for a benign tolerance marks the journey from alienation, the different style first adopted, to accommodation, the return to one's native style which leads to plenitude in creation in the indigenous school. As Eunice D'Souza observes: "The success of the artist is through the re-integration with the people." The simplicity and innocence of this art is enough to inspire him. Other Indian artists steeped in the Western tradition can take the cue from him. Stanza 3 offers the solution to the problem of alienation of these Indian artists who have to discover their roots in the Indian tradition.

R. Parthasarathy's self-admonition to affect a return to the Brahminic past is an interesting parallel. The supple innocence of folk art triumphs over the 'Adult fantasies of sex and power-ridden lives' characteristic of popular western culture. Jamini Ray's art reflects the principle of harmony delineated in happy carefree strokes almost making its spirit 'sing and dance'. As a striking example of Ezekiel's humanistic creed, it emphasises the need to belong and to make of life a song. Alienation, in such a positive creed, is only a temporary feeling and exists only to serve as a foil to the intense need for community.

'Enterprise' marks the culminating point of expression.

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of the need to belong in poetic terms... Here there is no rural-urban or Indian-Western juxtaposition of choices as in 'A Morning Walk', 'Urban' and 'Jamini Ray'. The poem illustrates, through forceful depiction of a pilgrimage, of the abortive enterprise to belong elsewhere by uprooting oneself from home and go in search of a New Jerusalem. The all-too common and oft-repeated metaphor of journey and pilgrimage which knows no cultural barriers is deployed to project the self's search for its identity and roots. The search also parallels the quest for a 'congenial poetics' for self-expression. The enterprise is a dedicated effort to discover something and has the fervour of a spiritual mission. Hence, alienation would be unthinkable under such circumstances. Only a point of difference between the starting point and the end point can be assumed.

The very idea of going on a pilgrimage is enough 'to exalt minds and make all burdens light'. In spite of the many travails on the way, the journey continues. The persona is both participant and observer in the manner of Chaucer and does even 'put down copious notes' on the economic transactions of peasants, the behaviour patterns of such diverse fauna as serpents and goats and mentions three cities where paradoxically a sage had taught:

1 'Planning', (Journal of South Asian Literature, Ezekiel Number, 1975, p.24) describes a similar enterprise which ended in failure as the planners 'Allowed for everything, except a long / Arresting arm, the Unseen, the Unknown'. 
... We stood it very well, I thought, observed and put down curious notes on things the peasants sold and bought. The way of serpents and of goats, three cities where a sage had taught. ...

It is in the course of the journey that estrangement occurs when a friend 'whose stylish prose was quite the best of all' left the group as they could not arrive at a consensus on 'how to cross a desert patch'. The irony is that in spite of his acknowledged communicative skill, he could not convince his companions. The defection of one is followed by the defection of a whole group:

Another phase was reached when we were twice attacked, and lost our way. A section claimed its liberty to leave the group. ...

In the final lap of the journey, the few pilgrims that are left are so befuddled and disillusioned that they notice nothing as they go in contrast with their minute observations at the beginning. They are tragically reduced to a 'merely straggling crowd'. 'Straggling' forcefully illustrates their powerless, aimless pursuit. The final tragedy has no frills to it in the narration and is directly told:

... When, finally, we reached the place, we hardly knew why we were there. ...

Ezekiel, true to his style, quietly exposes the hypocrisy of their apparently noble venture by stating that they did not know why they had gone to the new place. It is a telling comment on many human undertakings which are loftily conceived but which serve no purpose. There is not that singleness of purpose that characterises the pursuit of the Holy Grail.
However, with no achievement to their credit, no father in
their cap, the mature realisation of the significance of
'home' dawns on them - 'Home is where we gather grass'.

In the search for identity and the need to belong that
the self experiences, the place of 'home' is significant.
First, it is the starting point of the enterprise, the take-
off point and hence enshrines in it the positive quality to
make its inhabitants undertake the journey.\(^1\) The singleness
of purpose and the novelty of the experience make the pilgrims
momentarily forget home. Secondly, implicit in their
departure from home is the freedom that it confers, for
without this no enterprise is possible. This quality is
important for it also allows the inmates to return home as
and when they please. The pilgrims in 'Enterprise' spread
their wings far but come home to roost after their failure.
The temporary getaway is necessary to prove the worth of home
beyond doubt. In the poetical context 'home' can refer to
the city and to the individual self. Garman maintains that
'Enterprise' depicts a 'journey from the city to the
primitive hinterland' which ends in failure as 'the place
proves unworthy of the struggle to get there and pilgrimage
can be no plan for life.\(^2\)' It is only a plunge into life in
the city that is one's home that can bring redemption. To

\(^1\) A negative point of view is that it has the power to
drive away its inmates because of its demanding nature, is
not warranted by the poem.

\(^2\) Nissim Ezekiel - Pilgrimage and Myth', Critical Essays
on Indian Writing in English, ed. M.K. Naik et al, Madras,
Ezekiel, the city is home and not a lifeless inhuman place, his travel from it is 'to bring back primal knowledge.'  
The journey involves a journey to the interior of the self as well. Kher sees no dichotomy between home as city and as self for "by travelling within the self, the artist discovers his primordial roots which are also the roots of the City" and observes:

But in so far as 'Home' is a metaphor for the self, redemption has to be won also through the private landscape of one's psyche or mind.  

Unless the 'self' is accepted as 'home' there can be no rapport with the outside world. A creative acceptance of self and city which solves Ezekiel's problem of alienation is a striking feature of these poems. To quote Kher:

Without commitment to life in the world and without the journey into the abyss of one's being, the metaphorical pilgrimage of Ezekiel's aesthetic vision remains incomplete though an everlasting possibility.  

Hence in 'home' all value systems converge and it is both the instigator of new enterprises and a haven and refuge for lost souls. The self has to accept itself with all its faults and in this it is like home where prodigal sons and truants are welcome with open arms.

'Grace' thus becomes a state of acceptance and acquires great significance used in conjunction with 'home' though

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1 Indernath Kher, p.152.
2 Indernath Kher, p.152.
3 Indernath Kher, p.152.
strangely enough without religious implications. 'Grace' is not merely the 'charm' that one associates with home, it stands for the regenerating, strengthening, inspiring and forgiving nature that one expects as characteristic of 'home'. Unless the home has the quality of grace, it cannot accept the pilgrims back, that is, if it has no grace it is no home.

In 'After Reading a Prediction', home is a place recognised as 'a kind of hall'. The lines seem to echo Sartre's existential philosophy that 'hall' is other people and relationship is in conflict and distance. 'Home' in this sense has 'provided no correlate which is adequate to the range and depth of our interior dream'. Hence, the departure from it. But the self returns to it as other places fail to offer the necessary sustenance and are no real substitutes. In spite of the suffering that one has to experience parenially in hall, 'home' is to be accepted. It is the existential dilemma and 'Enterprise' becomes both a poem of non-belonging and commitment, the self is committed to home and yet does not belong to it fully.

The journey from home results in the realisation that roots cannot be had outside home. Chetan Karnani is of the view that home in Ezekiel is 'the city' where the self has to accept itself and the kindred clamour around with the eternal possibility of grace. There is no denial of the rural-urban antithesis. However, the urban poet finds his

1 David Anderson, p.24.
2 Nissim Ezekiel, Delhi, Arnold Heinsmann, 1974, p.68.
river of life in the city. Ironically, it runs dry in the rural set-up where the 'winds lie dead' and his 'landscape has no depth or height'. In Ezekiel, as Kher affirms, 'the primordial and the urban are integral and the city poet that he is, he is aware of the grace and redemption that is intrinsic to his stance.' So he seeks his roots in the city and his psyche as well in order to continue. The Unfinished Man thus marks the apotheosis of the 'alienation-commitment' dualistic vision.

In the next volume The Exact Name he is in search of 'lucidity, the exact name of things': it seems to think that philosophy can bestow this on him when he immerses himself in its study 'away from all existence'. It is as if the self has overcome the feeling of non-belonging with the realisation that has dawned on it in The Unfinished Man. So, the quarrel is never with self or its environs, the city which makes its stay inhospitable but with ideology and its meaning. In 'Perspective' the inner voice insists:

. . . 'Find
Fulfil, diverted from the safer paths of men' . . .

The self responds to this command thus:

[He rides into a marsh to see the Grail
for hopes to earn a living with his pen
who reads the language of the world like braille.

The futility of this withdrawal from man is humorously delineated for in the marsh there can be no vision of the Holy Grail. Further if he can understand the language of the
world like 'braille' which he does not know then his quest is assured of failure even at the outset.

In *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) his last published volume there is definite affirmation to belong expressed in such poems as 'Island' and 'Background, Casually'. In 'Island' there is the marked positive assertion to ward off any vague inducement to seek an Utopia elsewhere:

... I cannot leave the Island
I was born here and belong...

It is as if the sense of belonging is part of his inheritance and therefore to leave the island is well nigh impossible. With refreshing vigour and robust will, he is determined to find his way in it. And this is in striking contrast to the brooding disenchantedm that oppresses Parthasarathy's self-exile and the harsh realization of Ramanujan's expatriate Hindu sensibility. Where they see the 'differentia', Ezekiel sees the 'oneness' between himself and his birth place:

... Unsuitable for song as well as sense
the Island flowers into slums
and skyscrapers, reflecting
precisely the growth of my mind...

Even as the landscape has its paradox of slum and skyscraper, so his mind which tries to synthesise opposite ideas and reconcile the ugly and the beautiful. The contemplation of the inner and outer paradoxes results in the 'cry for help' but ultimately the self prefers to 'keep its counsel'. The reconciliation has been effected and it is not merely to the

1 Discussed in Chapter II, pp.98-105.
ambivalence of life outside it but also to its own ambiguous voice which has 'distorted echoes'. The self observes the plethora of opposites around it. After 'the bright and tempting breezes', 'the air is still again', 'a host of miracles' exists alongside the daily business, 'dragons' claim to be 'human', and calm and clamour characterise city life. He takes all this in his stride 'as a good native should'. It is tempting to leave the island and seek salvation elsewhere. But it is at this point that he sees the miracle of life and cannot leave the island for pastures new. This unwavering decision to stay finds strong expression in 'The Egoist's Prayers':

Confiscate my passport lord,
I don't want to go abroad,
Let me find my song,
Where I belong.

Even through the ironic depiction of the egoist, Ezekiel sees the need to belong to his native place in order to achieve integration in life.

Parthasarathy, Ramanujan and Ezekiel realise that the self cannot live in a permanent state of isolation. In seeking its identity they have shown in their individual attitudes, the dynamism of the ambivalence of the self: it cannot be completely alone or totally in fellowship. This need for community makes possible the experience of love which can overcome the self's isolation at least partially.