CHAPTER III

LOVE AND NON-RELATIONSHIP

Love is a difficult, complex maintenance of individual integrity throughout incalculable processes of inter-human polarity.

(C.H. Lawrence)

The self's preoccupation with its state of non-belonging has not resulted in a total displacement or negation of love in the twentieth century described as an 'age of lovelessness.' As John Bailey points out:

It has been difficult to imagine literature without love... Their interrelation is as complex as civilisation itself. The best as well as the worst imaginative writing is still largely about love, for everyone recognises that - whatever you call it - sexual love is for most people the most interesting and memorable aspect of life. It is this kind of love, eros rather than agape, with which literature is most concerned. 1

The Indian poet's vision of love, like his western counterpart's has suffered a sea-change in recent years. It is no longer the pulsating, inspiring, and idealistic force of romantic poetry in the Shelleyan vein echoed by Sarojini Naidu. The tradition of love as a many-splendoured thing, with its aura of wonder and beauty, its amazing therapeutic

powers has been overshadowed by the realistic attitude to it.

This shift in focus can be explained as the direct result of the changing times where "rising divorce rates and the banalisation of love in life and literature have become the order of the day." The failure to love or the break-up of love-relationship rather than love itself has become a frequent theme of the fragmented miscellany of contemporary poetry. In the journey of the self through life, in its quest for roots, love is only a phase and at times an unsatisfactory one and does not encompass the whole of the self's being.

When love is invested with problematic qualities, its poetry naturally veers towards the cerebral and intellectual. The splendour of love as sentiment or heightened emotion is dimmed by the mist of the meddling intellect. Love becomes more a matter of the mind than of the heart or of the body. Ironically, this results in conflict more than communion, non-relationship more than relationship. What pre-occupies these three poets is the paradox of love that Bailey singles out as its unique feature:

Art has chosen the theme of love both to indicate human separation and to unite humanity again. Parthasarathy, Ramanujan and Ezekiel are to a very large extent pre-occupied with sexual love. They are concerned

with the immediate and concrete experience of love and do not see it as a spiritual force or a means to see beyond this world. Even though this love is the "lowest common denominator in the ladder of salvation giving a facsimile of love," it has inspired these poets to a vision that includes its varied opposites of pain and pleasure, of union and separation and strangely enough of love and hate. 1

R.Parthasarathy, in the second section of Rough Passage called 'Trial', celebrates this union of man and woman as a 'rainbow of touch'. In the Indian tradition this has found beautiful expression in Hindu temple carvings and Sanskrit love poetry. 2 The theme of almost every poem is the satisfaction of carnal love, the coming together of man and woman insistently and uninhibitedly to effect a 'complete self-forgetfulness'. 3 The divinity of love celebrated by Jayadeva and the Vaishnava poets whose influence is marked in Tagore's Gitanjali or the ever-greeness of the lovers of the Grecian Urn do not form the burthen of 'Trial'. 4 Love is

1 May, p. 15.
2 Max-Pol Fouchet in his photographic study of the erotic sculpture of India cites the Lakshmana temple carvings depicting the figures of men and woman experiencing bliss on the divine and not merely on the human plane. The Erotic Sculpture of India, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1959.
3 Parthasarathy's Introduction to Rough Passage, MS.
4 John Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss, / Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve; / She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, / For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.' The Romantic Poets, Viking Portable, Penguin, 1978, p. 386.
a reality to be savoured 'here and now' holding forth the promise of belonging against the turmoil of non-relationship', the theme of 'Exile'. Parthasarathy's poetry exemplifies the tradition of erotic love without spirituality to raise it to divine heights.

In the self's quest for moorings, for stability in the process of self-realisation, the place of love is of far-reaching significance. To Parthasarathy, love is a period of trial, the testing ground of the progress of the self in its ability to recognise and accept relationships. Love also symbolises a refuge and haven even if momentary from the painful buffets of 'Exile' and is an anodyne to overcome the sense of restlessness and the concurrent mood of disenchantment; verging on to despair, as a result of 'Whoing after English gods'. This, to a certain extent, ensures the progress of the self towards a maturity leading to a tolerant acceptance of its own self and life in the community without the blind fatalism traditionally attributed to the Indian.

Even as love with a wave of its magic wand chases away the oppressive sense of non-belonging experienced by the self; it also effects, with the same magic, a return to life. The efficacy of the godmother's magic wand, however, as in Cinderella's case, is time-bound: love is no escape from life, it is a part of it and is a paradoxical blend of romance and reality. The perishableness of love impinges upon the self the imminent need of a higher consciousness, a self-realisation which leads to the philosophic accommodation of 'Home-Coming', the third section of Rough Passage. This
philosophy finds expression in the last poems of 'Trial', especially 'Trial 15' where the self after its ecstatic enjoyment of love to satiation feels a sense of unease at the thought of death, its own 'octopus past' and the need to perfect itself. This awareness makes R. Parthasarathy a serious poet with a sense of commitment to love and life. The narcissistic involvement in love has not obliterated his awareness of his own inadequacies and of the existence of the world outside. That relationships have to be sought elsewhere is implicit in the temporary farewell to love that is effected at the end of this section and the hesitant entry into the vortex of city life which begins even as his love becomes a memory.

'Trial' consists of fifteen poems written and refined between 1961 and 1974. Love as portrayed in this section is a continuous and sustained exploration of its sensuous treasures on the physical plane. 'Touch' is the keynote of the love-sequence and forms the verbal and emotional link connecting one poem with another. It is this which gives the sequence its architectonic value and reveals Parthasarathy to be a perfect craftsman. From 'Trial 1' to 'Trial 12' these romantic cross-references serve to give the impression of continuity.

... I grasp your hand in a rainbow of touch...

... Hands and lips have marked the spot we touched...

... I am all fingers when it comes to touching them...
... You are love. Touchable...

... Touch brings the body to focus...

... the touch
of your breasts is rip
in my arms...

... your hand was a galaxy
I could reach, even touch...

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

This insistant focussing on touch as the pivot of the
love-experience raises the question of the tradition of love
that has influenced and inspired the poet. In the Elizabethan
tradition of love poetry as immortalised in the sonnet,
physical encounter is only vaguely suggested. The 'physical'
potential of love is only rarely expressed as a kiss or a
caress. In fact, the adoration of the woman is almost a
religious act: it is her beauty and chastity that inspired
the artists who have been quite content to pay their homage
from a distance. This Protestant tradition can be taken as
a refinement upon the medieval celebration of love out of
wedlock. The woman addressed is invariably married and
therefore had to be chaste and unyielding, a cruel beauty.
Also, the expression of passion for a woman is not fraught
with guilt as in the medieval tradition which looked upon
woman as a means of temptation to evil.

1 From 'Trial' 1,3,5,6,7,9,10 and 12 respectively.
'Touch' is the common link, Rough Passage, pp.31-42.

2 This is vividly treated in John Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.
tradition celebrated married love embodying both sexuality and chastity.

The Indian tradition of love as expressed in the poetry and sculpture has usually celebrated the sexual delight of love.\(^1\) Sanskrit lyrics are noted for their splendour of erotic suggestion.\(^2\) Sexual love is also symbolic of divine love and in the yearnings of Andal for Lord Krishna what is sought is a total merger with the Supreme Being with a loss of self-identity.

The motif of sexual love with its violent passion and tremendous power of absorption invests Donne's love sonnets with robust energy. Again this symbol is used by Seamus Heaney to vividly express the seduction of Ireland by England.\(^3\)

R. Parthasarathy's love-poems have assimilated these traditions imperceptibly. First, as in the Protestant tradition, 'Trial' is a celebration of married love, sanctioned by religion and society. In these poems there is no inhibition about sex in love; only poems 13 and 15 in 'Trial' do not mention the ecstatic enjoyment of love on the physical plane. He writes more in the tradition of Sanskrit erotic poetry which celebrates sexual love in hauntingly evocative fashion. However, the neutral tone which manifests itself in the unerring precision of diction, the language verging on to 'clinicalness' that destroys all

---

1 The Konarak temples and 'Kamasutra' are classic examples
suggestion makes him belong equally to the tradition of
intellection that has inspired twentieth century poets.
Further, in perfecting his art, Parthasarathy has been
constantly revising his poems which to a certain extent, has
removed the 'emotive' power inherent in such a richly
suggestive experience. Parthasarathy's own words are relevant
in this context:

I should like to think the tone is throughout
neutral without any postures of high rhetoric, and
even in terms of the diction that is used, it is the
sort of diction that is, shall I say, free from any
sort of overtones or reverberations.  

Sexual love in 'Trial' cannot be interpreted as a symbol
of divine love as depicted by the Bhakthi poets. While it is
true that the association of the erotic and the religious is
not uncommon in Indian literature, Sivaramakrishna's claim,
that 'the pervasive emotive motif in 'Trial' becomes a mode
of ordering experience which in its quality is akin to the
religious', needs to be modified.

'Trial' is definitely not cast on the lines of John
Donne's poems where carnal union symbolises union with the
divine or Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven' which is a love-
chase. The love that is celebrated here is not all-sufficing
and all-encompassing. When the point of satiation is reached,
it is given up and is characterised as something 'so

1 'Parthasarathy Passage', Tenor, p.8. The post adds
that it is a sort of zero-degree language.

2 'The Last Refinement of Speech', The Literary Criterion,
perishable, trite.' It is a 'here and now' experience, and there is a deliberate refusal to look beyond this world. Again, the perishableness of love makes the poet think of death but not death as a release from the world and a means of union with the divine. It is death in the existential context. As he himself states in his unpublished notes to Rough Passage:

The one universal fear is death. And I wonder if perfect love will cast out this fear. 

Hence religious associations are absent. Parthasarathy is a secular and rational poet rooted to life experience and hence his poetry does not 'tend achingly towards the absolute.'

That Parthasarathy is more concerned with the self than the soul makes him a poet writing in the tradition of Auden and Spender. What Louis MacNeice said of Spender is applicable to this Indian Poet. He cherishes the same belief that Spender had in 'touchability' on the emotional or physical plane.

While in 'Trial', Parthasarathy recognises the 'utility' value of love in salvaging the self from the trauma of exile, nowhere is the beloved reduced to the level of 'a piece of furniture, a hearthrug pet or a harem favourite.'

1 R. Parthasarathy, Introduction to Rough Passage, MS.
2 M. Sivaramakrishna, p. 171.
3 'Subject in Modern Poetry', Essays and Studies, 1937, pp. 144-158.
4 MacNeice, p. 157.
Throughout, she remains a vague romantic figure invested with grace and dignity, worth knowing and 'touching'. However her identity is clear in so far as she can effect a selfless surrender to the overpowering passion of love. She suffers a loss of identity in order that he may experience a sense of belonging, discover himself even if partially through this complete union with her.

The lover plunges into the experience with gusto, and savours its sensuous delights almost in the manner of Keats tasting Cayenne pepper. Here is no prurient or depraved sexuality: it is clean, passionate yet subdued and is an uninhibited enjoyment of pleasure that is 'elliptic, wholesome. 'Trial 8' vividly suggests all that is there in the love experience through allusion:

... Our bodies scrape home for passions older than the stones of Konarak.

What is underscored in these poems is that love is sharing, a relationship. This is symbolically expressed in the grasping of the hand in 'a rainbow of touch' in 'Trial 1'. Poem 2 amplifies this beauty of sharing in life, of participating in another's childhood: 'Over the family album, the other night, / I shared your childhood.' The poem is remarkable for its brilliant simplicity in delineating shared moments through the photograph. The mood is one of quiet happiness without any exuberance. Participation in life,

1 The stance is a striking contrast to A.K.Ramanujan's 'Love Poem for a Wife' where he unequivocally begins the poem: 'Really, what keeps us apart is unshared childhood'. 
even if it is a moment from the dead past of someone else, enables the lonely self to forget itself and discover a stabilising force outside to recover from the disenchantment of exile. The beloved's situation is a contrast to his own in terms of language and culture:

.... School was a pretty kettle of fish, the spoonfuls of English brew never quite slaked your thirst. Hand on chin, you grew up, all agog, on the cook's succulent folk lore. ....

The recollection is part of the Indian experience intrinsic to the poet's development as man and artist and which he had ignored due to the love-affair with English. The poem captures the beauty of childhood experience in lines noted for their synaesthetic effect as 'a ripple of arms round Suneeti's neck' or 'Time unfurled you like a peal of bells'. But he does not see non-relationship in love as Ramanujan does. A love-relationship is broken by some external force like death or the self's own inadequacy, not by its own nature. Love to him, still holds the fascination of romantic idealism.

Eight of the fifteen poems celebrate love as sharing. Only these are poems of adulthood and the relationship in love is born of intense physical passion. Flesh is the bed - all and end - all of this consuming passion at the end of which the self suffers a katharsis, purified of its yearnings for flesh experience. The senses have been regaled to the point of intoxication:

1 They are poems 2, 3 and poems 5 to 10. From 10 onwards the sequence enters a note of sadness as subjects like death, language, and the imperfect self are contemplated and not love
. . . I go
weak in the knees, thinking of you,
Anupama Devi of Belur. . . .

. . . It's you I commemorate tonight
the sweat water / of your flesh I draw
with my arms as from a well,
it tastes as ever
as on the night of Capricorn. . . .

The lines exemplify the 'rainbow of touch' that love is.
However 'touch' can after a time raise no thrills, no
pulsating responses and the 'volta face' is in the corpus of
the poem itself:

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

The aftermath of the experience of love is only the skeletal
unfeeling remains of the 'bones of touch.' This and to the
passionate man-woman sexual relationship is not suddenly
brought about, poem 11 prepares the ground for the separation:
'We live our lives for ever. taking leave.' From this, the
contemplation of the self begins once again after the
surrender of its identity to the love - experience. The
introspection includes the futility of words for expression,
'And words, surely are no more than ripples / in the deep well
of the throat,' the fear of death, 'These days I often think
of death, / and the thought skates on the thin ice of sweat
on my forehead,' and above all the imperfection of the self:
'My past is an unperfect stone: the flaws show, I polish /
the stone, sharpen the lustre to a point.' The self is once
again in the vice of a sense of unease poignantly expressed
in poem 14.
Only the heart isn't hospitable
Anywhere.

And the promise of home does not have the 'grace' that
Ezekiel's poem 'Enterprise' so warmly anticipates. It is
'always with the chill promise of a home' that Parthasarathy
has been guided.

The end of 'Trial' is not forced or sudden. That love
is a transient experience impinges on the reader's
consciousness with force through the intermittent reference
to death: in 'Trial 1', 'of the dead'/ I speak nothing but
good,' in 'Trial 2', 'You rolled yourself / into a ball the
afternoon father died.' In 'Trial 9' is the bleak image of
the 'bones of your touch.' From 'Trial 10' there is a
continuous reference to the end of the experience either
directly or indirectly.

In 'Trial 10' love is the celebration of something 'so
perishable, trite', 'Trial 11' speaks of 'taking leave' which
may be interpreted as a farewell to life and therefore love,
one significant aspect of life. In 'Trial 12' love is
reduced to a cold, death-like experience for the fingers are
nothing but 'an open grave / with only the bones of your
touch.' 'Trial 13' is a direct reference to the fear of death
and it may seem a 'faux pas' to place it in a love-sequence.
But the end of love heralds the bleakness and coldness of
death. Once again, the sense of rootlessness oppresses the
self and the fear is not merely of death but a life without
the anchor of love. Thus the 'bob-nobbing with death' becomes
inevitable. As Sauri Deshpande perceptively points out:
'Trial' underscores the imminent need for love in the self's journey through life. It is the love-experience that makes the self accept itself for what it is, the communion with the beloved gives it a sense of identity. The realization of the perishability of love does not plunge it into the slough of despondency. The self decides to proceed with the journey through life with the memory of love giving it the courage and the maturity to accept life as it is.

In 'Trial', as in 'Exile' the study of technique to heighten the theme is significant especially in the use of pronouns, deictic words and the images deployed. The pronoun 'You' in this section refers obviously and definitely to the beloved and not to the reader. In fact, all the poems point to this conclusion. It is relevant to note that the first person plural 'we, us, our' is used in 'Trial' 3, 6, 8, 11 and 15. Even after the mature realization of the perishable nature of 'love' there is no 'distancing', of the beloved by a conscious use of 'she'. The use of 'us' in the§raw has come between us' suggests that there is no permanent estrangement. Their love had moved in the world of the senses; the realization is that there is also another world co-existent with this and the awareness of the other world contributes to the unease with self and with the self in love not with love or the beloved.

1 Contemporary Indian Poetry in English, ed. Saleem Peeradina, Madras, Macmillan, 1976, p.52.
The total uninhibited response to love is seen in the absence of the use of the III Person. Though 'Trial 1' and 'Trial 4' express an awareness of death and an uneasy world around, there is generally a marked religiosity to a third person. In fact, even the self is not distanced from its own self as in 'Exile' or 'Homecoming'. The protagonists of the drama of love are 'I' and 'you'. 'Trial' emphasises this even in such a seemingly minimal device as the use of pronouns.

The togetherness in love, the idea that it is a shared experience is underscored in the occurrence of 'I' and 'you' in the first six poems and in the eighth and tenth. These are replaced by 'We' in poems 11 and 15. Poems 7 and 13 stand out because in them the existence of the two lovers is not referred to in pronominal terms. In 'Trial 7', the beloved is described in the phrase 'your singular form' and the whole personal experience is invested with an air of impersonality through the use of deictics. However, there is no loss of concreteness as seen in the lines where 'the' is used instead of 'our': 'Touch brings the body into focus / restores colour to inert hands, / till the skin takes over.' In 'Trial 13', the preoccupation with death makes the 'I' more prominent than the 'you'. But the beloved is remembered, though with an air of impersonality through the use of 'the' and not 'your':

... Curled around me
are not the familiar arms,
but an octopus past.
The rationale in the shift from the 'personal' referent to an impersonal one needs to be explained. The observations of Leech and Wetherill offer the necessary insight into this use of the definite article in poetry. To Leech, deictic words play an important part in specifying the situation, in building the world within the poem. They have definite meaning. There are other words which also have definite meaning without having the 'pointing' function of the deictics. They include the definite article 'the' and the III person pronouns 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'.

Citing the example of 'Leda and the Swan', Leech demonstrates how 'he', 'she', and 'the' invest the poem with a definite character.

In contrast to 'a body' or 'a past', 'the body' and 'the past' are definite in meaning. Leech points out that in using 'the' it is assumed that there is only one of its kind in question. He states:

It is this assumed uniqueness of the object or group of objects referred to that characterises the use of 'the' and the third person pronoun. The uniqueness may arise from previous mention or from the fact that only one of the kind exists or from subjective assumption.¹

Hence in 'Trial' the uniqueness arises more from subjective assumption and substantiates Leech's inference that language mirrors the egocentric character of human experience: we treat something as unique, if from our personal

¹ Geoffrey N. Leech, pp. 191-195.
point of view it is the only one that matters. 1 So in 'Trial',
to the lover, what matters is 'the' familiar arms and 'the'
familiar poles of eye, hand, 'the flight of human speech, and
'the' heart. The uniqueness is not lost because of the use
of 'the' instead of the possessive adjective.

This kind of use of the definite article is described
as 'non-cataphoric' or 'non-demonstrative' by Wetherill who
like Leech, maintains that it transmits a sense of uniqueness
which again "invokes the mysterious potency of the thing
alluded to." 2 The poet's use of the definite article,
Hamilton points out, often suggests that he has become
absorbed and isolated in his own vision. 3 This is what
happens to the poet-narrator in 'Trial' for he is so absorbed
in the experience of love, an experience that is exclusively
his, that even the world is eclipsed and it is no matter
whether it is 'our bodies' or 'the body', as a perfect union
in touch has been achieved in the moment of love.

As is appropriate to a personal celebration of an
intensely personal (though couched in neutral terms)
experience, the present tense denoting present time is the
dominant aspect of the work. This gives the experience the
vividness of detail and colour and it is as if the love
story unfolds like a cinematic vision even as it is enacted.

1 Leech, p. 194.
2 R. N. Wetherill, p. 53.
3 G. R. Hamilton, 'The Tell-Tale Article', London,
Heinemann, 1949, p. 59.
If the present tense is the 'tense of poetry' as Wetherill states, to what use is it put by R. Parthasarathy to highlight his themes and poetic states? From the theme of exile and state of non-belonging, the poem moves to the theme of love, the state of belonging, of shared happiness. The predominant use of this tense in each section shows the stability of each state. The states are inter-connected as they form an intrinsic part of the experience of the same self.

The idea of love as 'testing-ground' is suggested forcefully in the title 'Trial'. The images in the poems themselves focus on love as pure sensory experience. The main images of love are associated with light and invest it with romantic qualities. The experience of love has the transparency of light, there is nothing to hide. Again the purity of love is suggested in the association of light images.

The brilliant image is the evocative and sensuous characterisation of love as a 'rainbow of touch'. It evokes the rich splendour of this thrilling experience. It suggests not only the colourful beauty of love but makes love a curve of experience. An exaggerated reading into the association of the rainbow will point to the recurrent reference to 'curves' in describing the beloved. Parthasarathy's skill in compression is at its best in this most comprehensive and delicate image.

---

1 Foakes asserts that 'light' is a most universal romantic image. pp. 46-47.

2 Parthasarathy Passage: Tenor, p.10.
The pervasive presence of 'light' in love is given an added dimension by comparing the beloved to objects which are associated with light. In 'Trial 12', there is the unusual comparison:

I was a disused attic, till the walls,
the colour of pain, grew
in brightness through the skylight of your face... .

The image is striking in its originality. The chaos and futility in the life of the narrator-lover is vividly captured in the image of the 'disused attic'. The agony of the tortured soul in isolation is fully realised in the vaguely suggested romantic colour of pain. In this bleak scene where the mood of blackness and chaos as in the attic prevails, brightness enters through the 'skylight' or the beloved's face. The 'light' has the power to dispel the anguish and futility in life. It brings with it the 'sense of purpose', the result of relationship in love.

The image of 'skylight' also accentuates the functional nature of love in life. Just as a skylight reveals the dust that has gathered in the attic, so also the beloved makes the lover realise his true state. Even as he receives the benevolent and reassuring advances of love, he is made aware of the need for 'stock taking' and need for self-cleansing. It is this realisation that makes love a phase in the journey of life, necessary for partial self-realization but it cannot serve all the needs of the roving self in search of its identity. 

---

¹ An idea which is also treated in Ezekiel's poems dealing with love.
The other notable image of light is the comparison in 'Trial 10' of the beloved's hand to a 'galaxy':

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

The metaphor seems most natural in the context. In the August heat, the beloved with charming simplicity asks about constellations, the visible group of stars. The beloved's query fires his imagination and her hand becomes a galaxy, the brilliant Milky Way that cannot be seen. And the lover surrounded by the mundane world has been able to reach out to the brilliant and the seemingly invisible and unattainable — his beloved's hand.

The metaphor finds extension through association. The astronomer reaches out to the galaxy through his telescope, the lover to the hand, the galaxy, with his telescopic fingers and tries to fathom the mysterious power of touch.

This is a fine example of R. Parthasarathy's epigrammatic use of image in a metaphysical manner. As in metaphysical poetry, the apparently incongruous and unrelated objects are brought together. This is not done with force or artifice as Johnson's 'yoking together' suggests. The naturalness, spontaneity and appropriateness of the image used in context invest it with sensory and emotional clarity. Here the image becomes a means of creating precise meaning and is functional. In R. Parthasarathy's poems, the image is not only decorative, inducing pleasurable sense-impressions but also forms a concrete and indispensable element in the poem.
without which the poem itself will disintegrate. As the poet himself says:

Perhaps I am one of those who believe in things I can touch and feel, and there is this sense of concreteness to the images, to the objects, as they find expression through images.¹

In Rough Passage the poetry is not a series of statements with images but as T.E. Hulme points out:

The poem is a moment of discovery of awareness created by effective metaphor which provides the sharp intuitive insight that is the essence of life.²

This metaphor again reinforces the theme of sharing through the symbolic reaching out to the hand and expresses the lover's burning desire to become one with the beloved.

The power of association that animates Parthasarthi's imagination is seen in the light and hot co-relation through image in 'Trial 3':

... Under the heavy lens of noon passion, quicker than candles,
    burns, smoking the glass of our bodies....

As in the 'rainbow' image, the curve of the experience of love is suggested even in the synonymous use of 'glass' and 'lens' and reinforced by the use of the word 'cupped'. The transparency of the love situation is clouded over by passion. The enjoyment of the experience of touch is what matters, not the sight of bodies. However, this passion

¹ 'Parthasarthi Passage', Ionor, p.13.
consumes itself as quickly as candles burning out. The body likened to glass is a repetitive strain, a recurrent motif that links the three parts of Rough Passage. It is only here that there is such obscurity in juxtaposing the 'lens of the eye' and 'passion burning the glass of bodies'. This clouding of the sense may be the result of an over-meticulousness in craft and an over-use of the restrictive quality of the image. However, the general sense of the image with reference to the body is quite clear. The love experience has the brittleness, fragility and transparency of glass. This points to the inevitable end of love. Like glass, love is something 'so perishable, trite.'

The image of glass extends even to past experience thus reinforcing the continuity of the theme. The past is a 'mirror' which blurs and distorts 'the plate glass of his days'. The transience of the love experience even affects his vision of life which is blurred. It may be that there is a loss of purpose and uneasy awareness of one's own inadequacy as reflected in the past experience of 'exile' and the transient 'love'. What remains is the fear of life and living, the uncertainties that beset the individual in his journey through life. A cold fear grips him at the thought of death especially in the context of an insufficient, inadequate and strangulating 'octopus past'.

The glass image with its vibrant suggestion of transparency and fragility is related to the next recurrent image of stone. 'Stone' suggests hardness of an unyielding and static nature as opposed to glass. It is relevant to
note that 'the glass of bodies hardens to stone' in the love experience. Again the past is an 'imperfect stone' without the brilliance and lustre of glass and needs to be polished. Tears are likened to 'pabbles' and the verbal continuity is maintained. By bringing together objects which are basically of the same component — glass, stone, crockery and bones R. Barthasarathy shows his power over the image. The movement of the quality of the image is from transparency to opaqueness, from fragility to solidity, thus reinforcing the curve of experience.

A study of image leads to the question of its symbolic value. If 'Exile' is the 'love-affair with English', 'Trial', to Rosalyn Puthuceney, is his 'return to his beloved, Tamil', and the 'identification with sexual impulses denotes the creative aspect of language'. In the larger context of the development of the self, this seems a restrictive point of view. If the self has to affect a realisation as a cultural entity, the English experience is as 'creative' as the Tamil. Further the 'language of touch' transcends linguistic barriers and 'Trial' symbolises the human experience of love necessary for the individual to realise himself. The end of 'Trial' is a temporary farewell to love which in this interpretation would mean a farewell to Tamil as well, which is not suggested in the ensuing section 'Home-Coming'.

While to Parthasarathy, love is a period of trial and union ending in separation, A.K. Ramanujan very rarely sees love as relationship. The poems of Ramanujan revolve around the theme of man-woman relationship are few in number when compared to those of Ezekiel or Parthasarathy. The insights they offer reveal the conflicting set of value systems and tradition complexes that an expatriate poet is forced to confront in his art. He is concerned with the multi-faceted nature of love as manifested in life and literature in the Indian and Western traditions. His refusal to be brainwashed by the idealistic or idyllic nature of love is seen in the incisive realism that characterises these poems. He rips open the fairy-tale façade of love and views it as either mere carnal desire or non-relationship. Love is neither ecstasy nor agony. It is not earthly fulfillment or spiritual glory. It is a problem of human relationship and is not an answer to man's predicament.

Non-relationship is the keynote of many of these poems. This is in tune with his belief that relations bind the feet and the self should not be fatteret by the demands of love. If he concedes a relationship between man and woman, it is only on the physical plane which satisfies a biological urge and does not really last for long.

In the three poems 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing', 'Love Poem for a Wife - 1' and 'Love Poem for a Wife - 2'

1 Rollo May, p.73.
Ramanujan brings out with telling realism, the non-relationship that is an inbuilt paradox of acknowledged love relationships. Ramanujan highlights this quality of love where Ezekiel and Parthasarathy also emphasize the beauty of relationship in love while admitting to its transient nature and its 'non-love' quality. Ramanujan’s vision is thus to a certain extent fragmented as the following analysis of the poems aim to show.

"Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" when considered as a poem of childhood and nostalgia is a parallel to Wordsworth's Lucy poems or Parthasarathy's 'Cousin Sundari' ("Homecoming 6" in *Rough Passage*). This point of view is validated when the analysis juxtaposes innocence and childhood as suggested by stanza 1 where the joy and abandon of the experience of swinging is beautifully recreated:

When she was four or five  
She sat on a village swing  
And her cousin, six or seven,  
Sat himself against her;  
With every lunge of the swing  
She felt him  
in the lunting pits  
of her feeling; . . .

The second stanza explodes the myth of innocence suggested in stanza 1. Experience destroys even the innocence of childhood and this is reinforced through the verbal link 'swing'. Ramanujan verges on to cynicism when he describes such innocent childhood pastimes as 'childhood incests' in 'Love Poems for a Wife - 1'.

Distancing himself from an all-too common childhood.

1 All three are oft-anthologised poems, *Selected Poems*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1978, pp.8, 24-27, 33-35.
experience, the poet with his perfect command over language and his capacity to be coldly objective, invests this episode with Freudian overtones, however unreasonable it may seem. The non-conformist attitude is intended to shock the reader and startle him out of his complacency. His technical virtuosity helps him to achieve the desired effect through innuendo.

The sense of drama in the poem is the result of the use of different personal pronouns for the narrator. Unlike the majority of Ramanujan's poems which use 'I' for the narrator, this poem begins with a third person narrator and ends with the same. There is a dramatic interlude when the second phase of the experience recalled through the first person narration: 'And afterwards / we climbed a tree .... and we were very innocent about it.' The direct speech also invests the episode with the immediacy of dramatic appeal. Significantly, the comment given is ironically ambiguous. Brought up in a society where the segregation of the sexes is rigid, the girl's comment is an attempt to dispel suspicion and in trying to do so she only succeeds in incriminating herself as a child even though she stands guilty of looking for a cousin on every crotch of a tree only as an adult.

The mention of a fig tree also succeeds in blasting childhood innocence:

... and afterwards
we climbed a tree, she said,
not very tall, but full of leaves
like those of a figtree...
Ramanujan's forte is the exploitation of the innuendo potential in the vocabulary. 'Fig' is strongly reminiscent of the Fall - man's innocence lost in succumbing to temptation and he has to hide his sense of shame. Indirectly the reference is to sexual transgressions. Other examples to illustrate this are 'cousin' which does not always mean a blood relation and 'crotch', referring both to tree and human body.

The tension in the poem is poised on the antithesis between innocence and experience. These two states are synthesized in the use of the same words 'Swing', 'figs' 'cousin' and 'leaves' in both the stanzas thus giving the poem its superb architectonic quality.

The incomplete syntax at the end of the poem illustrates the poet's flair for mischievous suggestion. The clause which begins 'She looks for the swing in cities / with fifteen suburbs and tries to be innocent about it / not only on the crotch of a tree' is left dangling and incomplete for there is no 'but also' to complete the sense. The poet by leaving it incomplete seems to point to the conclusion that the girl seeks clandestine sex experience everywhere and tries to be innocent about it.

While 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing' is an ironic comment on seemingly innocent man-woman relationships, the failure to communa in love forms the theme of the two love poems which are included in the volume Relations. They are addressed to a wife and not to my wife or your wife. This deliberate move at impersonality precludes either the
absence of intimate personal relationship that should form the staple of any marriage or that 'wife' is an archetypal figure. The two poems realise in powerfully vivid diction the tragedy of the impossibility of sharing in love and marriage. The self's attempt to discover its identity through relationships is frustrated at every point in the recollection of the past. This is because the childhood of husband and wife cannot really be shared as each has its uniqueness and therefore remains unshared. While the wife cannot share her childhood experiences with her husband, she can share it with a cousin who grew up with her. This ironically serves to widen the chasm between husband and wife and the recollection of the past emphasises their estrangement from each other.

Irony is the keynote of the poem and is evident in the title 'Love poem for a Wife'. The poem has very little of love as togetherness or mutual communion. To the questing self, love is only non-love and the unshared childhood even though nostalgically recalled as a gesture of love only exposes their psychological distance from each other. 'The criss-cross of memory' of the individual past excludes the husband and others like the sister-in-law who have not participated in it. They watch as the wife and brother James indulge in one of their 'old drag-out fights' about trivia:

---

1 C. Kulesz, 'The Self in Ramanujan's Poetry,' p. 183.
Sister-in-law and I were blank cut-outs
fitted to our respective
slots in a room
really nowhere ...

The reduction of husband and sister-in-law to mere cardboard
cutouts shows how there is only a failure of relationship
seen in the exclusion of these two in the conversation
between the wife and her brother. Ironically even the
conversation of brother and sister is only a quarrel, an
act of non-relationship.

The poem maintains a consistent stance of non-
relationship in love from the very first line which is a
strong assertion:

Really what keeps us apart
at the end of years is unshared
childhood....

The irony is that even the effort to share with the view
to establishing and strengthening relations becomes abortive
for it becomes instrumental in the total and almost
irreconcilable exclusion of the husband from the wife's past.
His loneliness is thus tragically highlighted because he is
the persona of the poem and his wife for whom the poem is
written is totally oblivious of his living presence in the
quarrel with James her brother, about a dead past. She even
ventures to stake his earnings 'on what / the Uncle in
Kuwait would say about the Bathroom / and the Wall, and the
dying / by now dead / tree next to it'. Ramanujan seems to
succinctly point out that in reliving a lost past, man
tends to forget the vital present. This action prevents any
easy, guilt-free relationships made almost impossible in
the light of a supposedly 'innocent date' with 'a nice Muslim friend'. The past thus becomes the shaky foundation of a crumbling present and even future and even in love, alienation sets in.

This also points to the dualism that results in the rich ambiguity of Ramanujan's poetry. Here time is dualistic, the dominant presence of the past in the present situation and extends to the concept of alienation and community. Even as the father is recognizable in the son, non-love is present in love and is a painful paradox that has to be confronted.

The impact of this poem is to a certain extent minimised in spite of its brilliant logic because it does not go beyond the plane of nostalgia. The tragedy of loneliness is lost because of the almost grotesque conclusion in the recollection of the ancient tradition as an effective solution to the problem of non-relationship in marriage:

... Probably only the Egyptians had it right: their kings had sisters for queens to continue the incests of childhood into marriage. Or we should do as well-meaning hindus did,

betroth us before birth, forestalling separate horoscopes and mothers' first periods, and wed us in the oral cradle and carry marriage back into the namelessness of childhoods.

In the contemporary sex-ridden world with its insidious influences, this ancient oriental solution to the problem of marriage which can enjoy a sharing of childhood seems on
the face of it acceptable when posed in this manner. But
the horror of marriage becoming an inestimable relationship
shows Ramanujan to be a realist of the extreme kind who
decides to select his subjects from the beautiful or the
harmonious and concentrates on the sordid. This realism does
not mean the tendency to represent or accept things as they
really are but the tendency to depict things in their
ignoble and uninspiring aspect as is illustrated in the
attitude to love and marriage here. Ramanujan reveals the
cynical strain in his vision and his defiance of the status
quo in his unorthodox view. But the paradox is that this
unorthodoxy is taken from tradition itself. The poet
therefore cannot really be a rebel against tradition and its
conservatism. The word 'probably' gives the clue: the
solution for making marriage and love shared experiences
need not be taken too seriously considering the impossibility
of reviving this tradition in civilised societies. The poem
which rapidly gains in momentum as the quarrel between
James and the narrator's wife reaches its climax peters to
this tame ending. However, in the context of life-experiences
as seen in the prevalent customs of the Islamic countries,
the resolution is not so grotesque after all.

The theme of non-relationship is again repeated in
'Love Poem for a Wife'- 2' and gains in intensity because of
the powerful diction. The poem begins with the use of words
like 'rage', 'quarrel', and 'stabbing' - all connoting
murderous feelings of hate and a mood of violence in man
and nature not in keeping with the bliss and harmony usually
associated with marriage and love:

After a night of rage
that lasted days,
quarrels in a forest,
waterfalls, exchanges, marriage,
exploration of bays
and places
we had never known
we would ever know,...

The paradox of possession in love is there, though not in
the manner of the Othello story. Here the dream makes the
man lose himself in the woman:

...'I dreamed one day
that face my own yet hers
with my own nowhere to be found; lost;..."

Here too the dualism of mine and hers is momentarily lost
in the merger of 'my face with hers', Again the verbal
juxtaposition of 'found / lost' gives a comic effect to a
not so comic situation of 'losing face'. The realism of the
'ceiling light' serves to establish the separate existence
of his face as seen in half a mirror:

... I woke up and groped,
turned on the realism

of the ceiling light,
found half a mirror
in the mountain cabin
fallen behind the dresser
to look at my face now
and the face
of her sleep, still asleep
and very syriac on the bed

behind: happy for once
at such loss of face,...

While there is a half-humorous attitude to the loss of face,
the ambivalence in love is hard to reconcile with and the
poem ends on a note of insatiable envy. This serves to link
it with the first love poem for a wife in mood and tone.

As in the other poem, the memory of the past sits like a smouldering volcano on the poem. Hence present love relationships are swamped by the recollection which sparks off a chain of personal observation only too remotely connected with love. The paradox of existence is contemplated in poetic continuities through rich allusion:

whole in the ambivalence
of being halfwoman half-
man contained in a common
body,
androgynous as a god
balancing stillness in the middle
of a duel to make it dance;
soon to be myself, a man...

The ambivalence of being half-man and half-woman is best exemplified in the god, Ardhanarëeswara who represents Purusha and Prakriti, male and female energies, necessary for creation. The poet-narrator suggests that his loss of face with his wife's finds a parallel in this 'androgynous' idol and is as paradoxical as being able to balance stillness and yet dance. After this experience he is 'unhappy in the morning / to be himself again' while his 'wife's face still fast asleep'. The allusion serves to heighten the irony inherent in his marriage where wife and husband remain two separate entities.

By including these two poems in the volume titled Relations, Ramanujan's ironic vision of life becomes obvious. Living among relations even if it is one's own wife hampers individual expression. The self is lost in the tangle of relationships resulting in a loss of identity unpalatable to
a neo-Westerner. Ramanujan seems to protest against his loss of face even in love. In fact, love as it destroys individuality is not desirable. Ramanujan seems to suggest that love as an ideal is impossible; the individual is too involved in his own self to get out of it to form a meaningful relationship. Man only deceives himself in forming relationships which really do not exist and the poet makes man the object of his irony. Love is a means of satisfying the ego and not the Shelleyan going out of one's self.

In his first volume, The Stridara there are some poems dealing directly with the man-woman encounter. The tone is both tender and cynical. Associated with the tenderness is the passionate desire to really love in every sense of the term. This ideal is never reached in the corpus of the poem and hence a certain sadness coupled with a tragic sense of loneliness almost similar to alienation pervades these poems.

'Still Another View of Grace' as the title suggests throws new light on the poetic connotation of 'grace'. Ramanujan's mastery over the semantic riches of English is evident in the ambivalent use of the word. There is the obvious meaning of 'pleasing quality or gracefulness' that belongs to the girl, that is basic to the interpretation of the poem. The poem suggests much more. The persona's 'grace' is evident in favouring her, when he takes a new attitude and forcibly violates tradition in order to 'take her behind the laws of his land.'

This suggests that his action is one of divine
providence or 'grace'. It is an intellectual justification in the face of both moral and social disapprobation. 'Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns' and 'shuddering to the bone at hungers that roam the street', the poet-narrator cannot resist the look she gave 'on a nightlit april mind'. The conflict reaches the climactic point at the ends of the poem for the impulse of the moment destroys the edifice of tradition and social codes of conduct.

'Commandments crumbled in my father's past.' The poem ends on this neat volte-face, the alliterative assonance making it more effective. For even though the arguments are against the dead, it is still perpetrated. It is impossible for him to resist a woman who is bent on following him with that 'absurd determined air'.

The poem is poised delicately on the scales of orthodoxy and modernity. Even here one can trace the inroads made into an Indian sensibility by the West. The quivering awareness of the past, which is seen in his atold moral upbringing, is balanced against the temptation of the present to which he yields: but the surrender is made with full awareness of the moral implications. The radical rationalist sees this as an 'act of grace' while the conservative would view it as the blatant violation of a moral code.

The poem beautifully captures the passion of the man and his helpless intellection against succumbing to it. Ironically, the intellect has the last say for his desire to satisfy her is an act of 'grace' and not an immoral or
providence or 'grace'. It is an intellectual justification in the face of both moral and social disapprobation. 'Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns' and 'shuddering to the bone at hungers that roam the street', the poet-narrator cannot resist the look she gave 'on a nightlit april mind'. The conflict reaches the climactic point at the ends of the poem for the impulse of the moment destroys the edifice of tradition and social codes of conduct.

'Commandments crumbled in my father's past.' The poem ends on this neat volte-face, the alliterative assonance making it more effective. For even though the arguments are against the deed, it is still perpetrated. It is impossible for him to resist a woman who is bent on following him with that 'absurd determined air'.

The poem is poised delicately on the scales of orthodoxy and modernity. Even here one can trace the inroads made into an Indian sensibility by the West. The quivering awareness of the past, which is seen in his stolid moral upbringing, is balanced against the temptation of the present to which he yields: but the surrender is made with full awareness of the moral implications. The radical rationalist sees this as an 'act of grace' while the conservative would view it as the blatant violation of a moral code.

The poem beautifully captures the passion of the man and his helpless intellect against succumbing to it. Ironically, the intellect has the last say for his desire to satisfy her is an act of 'grace' and not an immoral or
pervasive act. Such collocations as the 'screams of her hair', 'hungers that roam the street' and 'nightlit April mind' show Ramanujan's felicitous use of language in balancing the stark realism and the fairly tame romanticism inherent in man-woman relationships.

In 'Still Life', a short simple piece, he nostalgically touches on the theme of separation in love. The beloved has left after lunch and the lover reads for a while. The poem begins on the casual informal meeting; there are no heartaches at her departure except that the post-narrator suddenly wanted to look again:

When she left me after lunch, I read for a while. But I suddenly wanted to look again and I saw the half-eaten sandwich, bread, lettuce and salami, all carrying the shape of her bite.

The poem baffles by its ambivalence. It can be a simple description of a left-over lunch or by extension the impact she has on him is crystallised even in such trivia as half-eaten sandwich, lettuce and salami, 'all carrying the shape of her bite'. 'Shape' has no qualifying epithet to make it a pleasant or unpleasant still life. However, idle curiosity poses many questions: why is it half eaten and why has she left? Was it in anger or haste?

The situation suggests love only rather vaguely. The poem illustrates Ramanujan's flair for listing without omitting details. The technique of placing each item of the
lunch menu in a single line with no qualifying epithet has the effect of concentrated attention on it. It is as if a single object has been flashed on the screen. The pause ensures the mental reception and the next item is flashed across the blank screen. The last line gives the much-sought cinematic effect. It is her 'hate' and she is remembered as 'life' haunting his thoughts. The poem is striking in its simplicity. There is no complex ideological stance in love.

'A Rather Foolish Sentiment' and 'I could have rested', also treat of love before marriage and illustrate in two diametrically opposite ways the nature of love. The first poem is an expression of 'romance' in 'touch' as against the romance of non-touch celebrated in the tradition of love. But in his characteristic fashion, the deflation of 'romance' is in the title for love is a rather foolish sentiment. 'Rather' in that sense is synonymous with 'truly' or even 'very' and not 'somewhat' or 'to some extent'. The poem emphasises one of the complexes of love namely the marked physical attraction between man and woman which is reckoned in terms of touch 'in the proper sense of body'. The post-narrator is grossly ignorant of the accompaniments of romantic love. He has 'no head for tunes, / no eye for colours, / no gold and silver' but he is acutely responsive to 'touch' for in touch 'he has stumbled on a pulse'. Such is its electrifying power. However, the poetry of the first stanza is lost in the tedious repetition of 'touch' and 'pass' in the second half
of the poem and the puzzle of whose touch it was, is thus lost:

but only the passing touch
of people whom I once touched
in passing when they let me pass. Perhaps it will not pass,
for in that touch I think I stumbled
on a pulse, and wondered like a fool

who has no proper sense of body
if it were yours, or mine,
and wondered if you wondered too.

Like other poems of this kind, the poem enshrines an unstated creed that what matters most in man-woman relationship is physical encounter. Beauty of voice and form and material wealth are only of secondary importance but the world sees it differently.

Unlike Parthasarathy, Ramanujan does not fight shy of the fruits of marriage in progeny. In the poem 'This Pair' which is not really a love poem in the true sense of the word, there is a direct confrontation of the problem of 'barrenness' and ironically enough 'fertility'. There are no cause and effect links between these and poverty or plenitude or even shabbiness and elegance. A poor couple may have many children and a rich may remain barren. Elegance may remain childless while shabbiness as seen in this pair may not and they become the envy of the elegant childless couple and the virgin aunt because they have a child of their own:

the envy of the elegant childless couple, and the virgin aunt, this fertile shabby pair faintly smell already of unwashed hair,...
The child of the shabby couple is characterised as 'that thing hardly kneaded into human shape' and does not really warrant envy from any quarter. It is a striking contrast to the literary idealisation of the same theme by Tagore in 'The Child'. The child in this cold objective narration is more a burden than a divine gift. The modern materialistic point of view is implicit in the tone and manner of narration. More than half of the poem is concerned with the listing of things. As many as seven items such as movies, tennis, chess, books and even walks have been sacrificed for the sake of the 'thing'. The couple's main worry is cash and they talk of these things they seem to have traded without any discount. The child is thus reduced to an economic proposition. The suggestion is that it is a liability rather than an asset. The theme of the poem is only by extension 'This Pair'. The actual theme is the child and the reader is left to decide whether the shabby, poor couple were really right in having a child.

This poem can be regarded as a caustic comment on the crass materialism that prevails in modern times. Thus the view that a child is just another trading item but got without discount is an effective hit against man's search for profit and gain even in the natural and god-ordained function of procreation. Having a child is a costly affair.

1 In Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das the acme of conjugal love is the creation of a child. Parthasarathy mentions his 'unborn' son in 'Homecoming 4' and Ramanujan has a poem on the jaundice of his unborn daughter.
and the couple is forced to have second thoughts about it. No longer is it thought of as natural. The end of the poem seems to suggest that the envy is surely misplaced. The child is not seen as a means of strengthening their relationship or as a 'child of fancy' as in Ezekiel's 'The Child'. The poem is thus shackled by mundane considerations and the true joy of parenthood is ignored as even the child has in it the power to alienate.

The folly of falling in love is exposed in 'I could have Rested'. It is accentuated by the lover's knowledge of the beloved rejecting him to accept another lover. The poem is peppered with conditional clauses indicating what the poet-narrator could have done but never did:

I could have rested,  
Had I the wrong word,  
had I the courage  
to be gawky and awkward,  
I'd have breasted  
my shotgun pulses  
and spread my patchwork sail  
between her smile  
and the counter-image  
of her twining love for someone else's  
love. Had I been a coward,  
had I been even cold  
or just old and Paracelsus  
I could have rested now...

This inaction and tardiness which prevent him from expressing his love have resulted in his mental disquiet. He could have rested if he had given vent to his passion and courageously competed for her love. But lacking the courage to be 'gawky and awkward' he did not spread his 'patchwork sail' between her smile and the counter-image of her 'twining love' for someone else's love. The self-irony at the end of the poem is touching. Youth is a time
of love but his is a 'treeless island youth'. Both epithets 'treeless' and 'island' are powerful in their impact. They suggest forcefully the barrenness and loneliness implicit in a life without love. And the self alone is to blame for this tragic isolation for it could not express its love. This is one of the rare poems of Ramanujan where love is made to appear desirable even though unattainable.

'Two Styles in Love' is a unique poem on love with its use of myth and symbol for effect. Love is apostrophized in the two sections which are intricately linked through verbal parallels. The two styles in love are 'green' and 'yellow': 'green' symbolising youth, lushness and springtime, 'yellow', the mellowness of age, of autumn. These two are interdependent as 'only green has a fall of yellow / hours. Only growing has gold to reap.' Time, represented as 'circling sickles in the wind' will bring an end to youthful love, 'will reap / your ghost from the branching gallows.' Youthful love has the aura of fairytale - 'While behind them dragon - breaths are burning / in fairytale men manage to love.' This adventurous love does not want to listen to 'talk of growth' as it fears its own end. Stanza 1 ends with the explosion of the myth of love being ever young: 'Your one fact, found in a rush of nettles, will be lost.'

However, there is no need to lament as love grows into age leaving behind the reckless spirit of youthful, fairytale love:

... Love is no hurry, love is no burning;
it is no fairytale of bitter and sweet....
Love can still be savoured and man need not be deceived by it: 'And no mouth shall have shadow for meat.' The poem ends on an ambivalent note that is characteristic of Ramanujan:

... No, no love is sudden,  
coupling hands take time to kill the frost.  
Even leaping Beast shall wait to be bidden  
by Beauty. Come lightly, love, let us wait  
to be found, to be lost.

The implication is that love takes time to take root. The initial coldness is only gradually dispelled by 'coupling hands' - the individuals who come together in love. Using the fairytale story of 'Beauty and the Beast', the poet shows that love takes a long time to manifest itself - the Beast had to wait for Beauty's love. The last line ends in starkly realistic fashion: after the long wait to discover love, it will be lost again.

The poem written in traditional stanzaic pattern, with alternate rhyme in each stanza, is uncharacteristic of Ramanujan who always uses the patterns of free verse taking the greatest liberty with this form. Where Ramanujan's forte is depiction of the real and the concrete, here love is an abstraction. Only he makes the concept a concrete reality through his power of felicitous description which appeals to the visual imagination.

This poem cannot be taken in conjunction with the other poems dealing with love as non-relationship. The only point of convergence is the sad awareness in all these poems that love is transient.
The ambivalent stance in these poems is enriched by the use of irony, paradox and powerful diction. Only there is a failure to be totally committed. His intellect seems to affect an escape from an awkward situation. The poems move to a hasty ending without any positive conclusion. They abound in descriptions which are precise, sensuous but ultimately there is no real philosophy or message. This is in keeping with the modern times where the artist prefers to adopt a non-committal and ironic point of view rather than an affirmative one. Hence Ramanujan's poems dealing with man-woman relationships are limited in range in spite of being technically perfect.

It is in Ezekiel's poetry that the wholeness of the vision of love is attained. Where Parthasarathy plays on the one-stringed instrument of touch and Ramanujan on that of non-relationship, Ezekiel explores the whole gamut of emotions. His is a many stringed instrument and the harmony of love emerges in strikingly subdued tones.

With the publication of *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), Ezekiel enjoys a growing reputation as a committed philosopher-poet and to call him a love poet may at first seem a critical fallacy. Michael Garman calls him a 'Mytho-poet'. Sathyanarain Singh maintains that in his later poetry Ezekiel displays "a distinctive slant for spiritual things and enquires into the science of being

beyond the merely economical, moral and biological man."¹ Ezekiel is a poet of human situations, human concerns and human voices: he cannot affect a total escape from the insistent demands of the world of flesh and blood into a world of the spirit, the world of philosophical and metaphysical abstractions. His philosophical commitment is to the experiences of life. And love is one such significant experience which will enable a philosophic understanding of life.

An interesting feature of Ezekiel's attitude to love is the absence of graded responses having chronological parallels. It is not as if he was a romantic idealist of love in 1950, a realist in 1960 and an ironist in 1970. He is sensitively aware of the infinite potential of love for romantic, realistic or ironic realisations all through his poetic career. The celebration of the ecstatic joy of pure sexual passion in 'Delighted by Love' is paralleled by the same mood in 'Tone Poem'.² Again, the tragic separation that is an in-built quality of love is underscored in 'Situation' and 'Poem of the Separation' written almost twenty years later. These examples show that Ezekiel's love poetry does not move from the physical or sexual to the intellectual plane. At the same point in time, his poetic

² The first is in his second volume Sixty Poems, p.46, and the second in his sixth, Hymns in Darkness, p.38.
muses explores simultaneously the dualistic nature of love —
the physical-cerebral syndrome and the unifying-
individuating paradox of love,

K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger is sensitively responsive to
the physical-cerebral dualism of Ezekiel's attitude to love:

He was painfully and poignantly aware of the
fresh, its insistent urges, its stark acetasies,
its disturbing filiations with the mind.1

S.C. Saha remarks that Ezekiel's love poetry includes "the
entire curve of love experience — early infatuation, slow
maturing, sensuousness and sensuality, lust, ironic
frustration and despair, recovery of faith in man and
children." 2 However, as the title of his book is too wide
in scope even a poet like Ezekiel has received comparatively
minimal attention.

Nissim Ezekiel, in his urbane manner, is concerned
with the experience of sex in love.3 In many of the love
poems written over a period of twenty-five years, there is
an insistent search for security for the roving self in the
momentary delights that flesh can offer. This continual
preoccupation with sex — its fulfillment and failure —
extends to his plays as well and makes him an artist

1 Indian Writing in English, Delhi, Asia, 1962, p. 657.
2 Modern Indo-Anglian Love Poetry, Calcutta, Writers
3 This preoccupation with sexual love is shared by
poets like Shiv K. Kumar, Prithish Nandy, and Kamala Das.
preoccupied with the problems of man–woman relationships.  

Love as sex uncontaminated by the meddling intellect or by the staleness of routine is celebrated in 'Description', 'Delighted by Love' and 'Tone Poem'. In these and in 'Two Nights of Love', the fascinating physical principle of love is portrayed with disarming simplicity and frankness. Here the 'crux of the matter is the sexual dream' which becomes a reality. Ezekiel's lament about himself in relation to the Sanskrit poets is disproved in such poems. These three poems can be said to form a parallel to the kind of description so common in Sanskrit love poetry of the female form but without its evocativeness. Ezekiel does not fight shy of nakedness or of the enjoyment of physical passion. It is the simplicity of these poems that saves them from vulgarity even as Parthasarathy's love poems are acquitted from the charge of cheap sensationalism in sex by the neutrality of tone and richness of images.

'Description' is the breathless adoration of the lover of his beloved. He is spellbound by the erotic beauty of

1 Song of Deprivation exposes the absurdity of sexual freedom; Marriage Poem deals with sexual infidelity.

2 The first two are from Sixty Poems.

3 'Passion Poems', Hymns in Darkness, 1976, p.50. The passion of sex is also celebrated in 'Two Nights of Love', in 'The Egoist's Prayers' and 'Nudes' (9) there is a clinical and prosaic listing of details.
hair 'remembered hair, touched, small lying silent there / upon your head, beneath your arm / and then between your thighs, a wonder of hair'. The poem virtually turns on a strand of hair and does not go beyond the purview of hair, an eternal symbol of the erotic. The language is simple but highly evocative and the poem ends with a brilliantly simple image of her 'reluctantly binding up her hair'. In frankly sensuous terms, the physical experience which Parthasarathy glorifies as the 'rainbow of touch' is evoked. The experience is not tainted by other worldly concerns. Both sensuousness and sensuality form the matrix of love and Ezekiel does not squamishly fight shy of the sensual but unquestioningly accepts it as part of the love experience.

The feeling response to love is romantically expressed in 'Delighted by Love' written in 1946, six years earlier than 'Description' and included in Sixty Poems. The ecstasy of love makes 'those stripped bodies dare the Everest' and 'all kinships here are consummated / by thrust of lust.' The hyperbole saves the poem from being a commonplace utterance.

The romantic joy of love experienced in the sharing of trivialities is the theme of 'Tune Poem'. The tone of contentment and happiness, the sheer delight in sharing trivialities links this poem with the other two poems. The juvenile ecstasy of 'Pooh's world, the long mad letters and the animal faith' all invest the relationship in love with a tenderness and innocence rare in modern poetry:

... You are gentle,
your gestures
do not disturb
the air, I feel
not in pursuit
of anything
except
animal faith
with the mysteries of love
dissolved in it.

The poem written in three-lined stanzas with the sense running on into each other is none too serious in tone and is a list of the 'trivia' that also give significance to the experience of love. It is a question of 'loving the Pooh' in each other which is also part of the mystery of love.

In dealing with sexual love, at times Ezekiel's moral sentiment scores over his poetic art as in 'The Old Abyss', 'The Female Image' and 'For Love's Record'. These poems deal with sinful man-woman relationship. Man's passion to possess a beautiful woman even if married and a mother is depicted (without any idealism) in 'The Old Abyss'. While even the desire approximates to the 'expense of spirit in a waste of shame' in 'The Female Image', the woman becomes the 'harlot of a dream'. Both poems seem to suggest that lust is no real relationship.

'For Love's Record' sees the woman as fickle but desirable. She 'gathered men as shells and put them by. / No matter how they loved she put them by.' This is the refrain of the poem, repeated as the last line of each of the four stanzas. As temptress, she is a 'laughing sorceress' from whom the poet kept his distance though charmed by the 'music of her quickened breath'. The compromise is in the attitude of

\[\text{The first two are from Sixty Poems and the third is from The Third, p.33.}\]
love abandoning her ties'. The poem is only a weak attempt to reconcile oneself to this kind of love.

In 'Two Nights of Love' there is the uninhibited assertion of the freedom to love where one can dream of love 'unconfined to threshing thighs and breasts'. Or 'turn to love, the threshing thighs, the singing breasts' even after being exhausted by the act, desiring it again 'within a freedom old as earth' and 'fresh as god's name / through all the centuries of darkened loneliness'. The repetitive patterns which mark Ezekiel's early verse give weight to the joyous principle in physical love, the uninhibited physical self-surrender of man and woman to each other and the paradox of self-surrender sans the physical principle. The poems exemplify the lines in 'Conclusion': 'The true business of living is seeing, touching, kissing / The epic of walking in the street and loving on the bed'.

These poems depicting as they do sexual passion with sensitivity disprove the observation that "nothing illustrates the sensibility blight in Indian writing more than the method of portraying passion between man and woman". The poem also reveals the desire to linger in the pastures of love 'prolonging kisses till the world of thought and deed is dim'. It is a quest for the pursuance of a 'laughing love' a

2. Raji Narasimhan, Sensibility under Stress, New Delhi, Ashajanaak, 1976, p. 36.
3. 'Question', Sixty Poems, p. 45.
pastoral joy which will be a safety valve against the ravages of time. But Ezekiel is not a romantic dreamer-poet and hence faces squarely the problem of love, lust and life. As he himself says 'a pastoral past cannot be re-established'. Even as he accepts the exuberant passion of love, there is a yearning for the 'quieter passions that flow between the acts of wedded love'. This can lead to the maturity of the self in its confrontation with love.

Sexual love in Ezekiel's poetic vision is not the mere fulfilment born out of the savouring of the physical delights of love. It can also become an intellectually and spiritually satisfying experience as illustrated in 'Tribute' and 'Love Sonnet'. There is no facile assumption on the part of Ezekiel that the physical is the only mode of expressing man-woman relationships. It includes an understanding that is delicately poised on the mutual need for permanent relationships, and shared communion.

In 'Love Sonnet', the lovers experience a serene joy in their romantic togetherness. The poem is set against a quasi-pastoral locale. The city is present only in the distance, 'in the twinkling lights and the cafes'. Even though a product of the urban set up, it is nestled on the hill, 'among the birds'. The genesis of love is quiet, unobtrusive, almost imperceptible having been formed 'like dew on summer nights': one of the rare similes in Ezekiel's

---

1 Quoted in 'The Ensphering Mind', MS.
poetry. There is no fanfare, no excessive or violent display of a flamboyant lust that gives the cloying effect to some of Kamala Das's love lyrics. The lovers recognise and accept the ambiguity of their situation. The uniqueness of their love experience is not destroyed because of their mingling with the crowd. They do not stop to rationalise or intellectualise, dissect the implication of this special state of being. The poem suggests a certain idealism in love, quietly expressed except in the last line - 'A certain happiness would be to die'. The break in the line due to the hyphen prolongs the suspense and leads to the surge of passion in 'to die' in blessed togetherness. The happiness of the present moment is so heavenly that it seems to invest it with the Kastsian mood - it seems so rich to die. The overall serenity of tone may belie the passionate conclusion. Like R.K. Narayan, in the fictional mode, Ezekiel avoids emotional peaks and prefers the poetry of subdued tones with obvious undercurrents of passion that cannot be missed. This in his skilled hands takes on an urbanity reminiscent of the Forsterian aristocracy and his own idea in 'Poet Lover, Birdwatcher' where 'patient love' relaxes on a hill and women become 'myths of light'.

The burden of 'Love Sonnet' which is technically not a sonnet as it has sixteen lines and lines 2, 3, 4 and 5 are not iambic pentameters, is harmony in silent communion: 'You and I wait for words'. The appreciation of the distant sea is done 'in consort' and not alone. The 'inarticulate' serene happiness that prevails is a continuation of the mood of
'A Morning Walk', the previous poem in the same collection where there is a shunning of the city and a longing for the garden on the cool hill. Set against this quasi-rural backdrop, the poem launches on its traditional movement from the background to the human situation. There is a simplicity and lightness of tone which contributes to the charm of the poem. A joyousness makes the lovers 'float' down the hill. There is no cynicism suggested as in the line of 'Love Song', 'you are city-crammed'. Love is a healthy innocent, natural and normal pursuit without any ratiocination. This may smack of a certain idealism but the awareness of the 'ambiguity' of their fate on the part of lovers invests the poem with the realism that is characteristic of Ezekiel's mode even in depicting romantic love. It blends the romantic and the real even as Browning's lyrics 'Meeting at Night' and 'Parting in the Morning' do.

The mood and tone of 'Love Poem' is similar to 'Love Sonnet'. It is a happy poem with no trace of bitterness or even irony and can be regarded as a celebration of love. The woman is not a cheap sex symbol; she is 'myth and dream' possessing the mystery and fascination associated with both:

Your sad and thoughtful love I heard
Above the tumult of despair.
You bent your head, I touched your hair
The sign was timed without a word.

By loving her, man can release himself from the bondage of romantic despair and find supreme solace in the silent but eloquent passion of love. She is 'myth and dream'; the

1 This finds a parallel in 'Trial 4', Rough Passage.
friendly foe, the near and far! The placidity that characterises the poem has almost a volcanic eruption in the 'storms of love' that the persona wishes for the beloved at the end. The word 'storm' with its romantic association of 'tumult' suggests the violent rush of overwhelming passion typical of an intense love. Again 'trance' suggests a state of ecstasy that is part of the hypnotic surrender to the lyricism of love. The mingling of tenses which is obvious only on close scrutiny also points to the paradox that love is both ecstasy and serenity and both states belong equally to past and present human experience.

The aura of 'Love Sonnet' is carried into 'Tribute', a short lyrical piece. Even as it maintains that love is a shared experience, as in the previous poems, the emphasis is on the mesmerising power of woman over man. Woman here is not, as in 'The Old Abyss' or 'The Female Image' an object of lust to satisfy man's carnal desire but a powerful influence to inspire man. The innocence of rapture animates this poem. Without a touch of criticism or cynicism, without flamboyant display, the power of woman to instil in man 'a sense of belonging' and make him feel at home in crowds is narrated so superbly simple diction. The only metaphorical expression is the repeated tribute to the girl as one to whom 'the lights belonged'. The overpowering and compelling (even if too obvious) suggestion of 'lights' shows the dynamic power of the woman to make the man realise himself and his

---

1 Parthasarathy's 'Tribal 3' which celebrates the power of woman to instil in man a sense of belonging is a parallel.
power and act with new-found confidence. He has been 'touched' to the very core of his being and the ecstasy of his experience in love is - to belong: The poem is written in the low-keyed manner of Ezekiel. The diction is simple, straight-forward with no word out of place. The neatness and lucidity is reminiscent of the Movement Poets. It is a blend of sophistication and sensibility to depict a fine insight into love.¹ The four-lined stanzaic pattern with lines two and four rhyming shows Ezekiel's mastery over craft - rhyme does not inhibit the flow of words and the continuity of thought is maintained. Again, there is no jingling effect as in some nursery rhymes.

While in 'Tribute' there is no mention of love as an experience of touch, in 'For Her' the theme is the oft-celebrated relationship through touch.² The beloved is similar to the 'girl to whom the lights belonged' of 'Tribute'. She is the support of the man and relieves the emptiness in his life. She is 'a knowing creature in his void'. However, he is troubled by the vague fear of her remaining 'untouched' unaffected by him and realises that he needs her more than the world. This extravagant sentiment expressed rather

¹ This counteracts C.N. Srinath's observation that Ezekiel's serious limitation is the absence of an 'Indian' sensibility. What is important is the 'human' apprehension of love. 'Contemporary Indian Poetry in English', Contemporary Indian English Verse, ed. C. Kulsrashta, p. 97. Reprinted from The Literary Criterion, 8, No. 2, 1968.

unpoetically makes the poem inferior to 'Tribute'. The
similarity lies only in the general nature of the two women
to inspire confidence in men like a mother figure and be a
moving force in his life. Here the man is complete in the
context of this unique experience.

All these love poems centre on the relationship
between man and woman which ranges from the frankly sensual
to the spiritual emphasise the insistent need for man to
love and be loved. The primordial urge cannot be killed or
even suppressed for as Karnani points out 'sex is also a
source of blessedness.' Again the idealization of the
romantic partner is of maximal importance in the romantic
concept as is evidenced in poems like 'Tribute' or
'For Her'. However, Ezekial does not portray premarital love
in the highly emotional manner characteristic of some
romantic poets. The charm and beauty of such a state is
there in the poetry but without the exaggerated sentiment
and colourful images. Hence the transition to the marriage
poems is smoothly affected. There is no rude shock as one
passes from the romantic complex of premarital love to the
realistic plane of marriage. Some of the poems seem to
suggest that in marriage, love loses its halo of romance.
While Ezekial seems to hint at a certain tragic loss of the
romantic past when a marriage is celebrated, he echoes the
sociologist's view that "it is the basic function for
marriage daily to reduce and obliterate the obstacles

1 Chatan Karneti, Nissim Ezekial, Arnold Heimann,
New Delhi, 1974, p. 60.
(which help romance to thrive) for marriage succeeds only in constant physical proximity to the monotonous present."

The poem 'Virginal' is best placed at the head of the poems revolving round the theme of marriage. It is a poignantly straightforward appeal to woman to fulfil her natural biological role - to marry and beget children. Implicit in it is the Shakespearean celebration of marriage as a personal, biological social and moral necessity, as seen in Sonnets 1-12, which are said to advocate the 'doctrine of increase'. Amalgamating Jewish, Christian and Hindu tradition, Ezekiel reiterates the age-old conviction that woman achieves the pinnacle of self-fulfilment in the married state. The oppressive loneliness of the virgin makes even the vast universe 'much too small to hold / your longing for a lover and child.' 'This is the only indulgence in hyperbole in the poem to underscore the state of isolation of the virgin. The poem stands as an example of 'the commonsense language stripped of embellishment' except for the conclusion which makes it significantly different. The banal tone is in the listing of the details of a spinster's day:

... You say you do not care, and change your dress
To read a book or write a letter, then
You wait. Perhaps you sigh....


2 The Exact Name, n.d.

This serves to heighten the intensity of the desire for relationship in love and marriage. The undercurrent of sadness that is implicit in the state of loneliness awakens the sympathy of the reader towards the virgin who, in spite of enjoying the customary comforts that would make her the envy of others, as an object of pity as she has not achieved total self-realisation that comes with marriage, the fulfilment in companionship and the bearing and rearing of children. The poem couched in modern idiom may be regarded as a quiet plea for marriage. It is striking in its simplicity and sincerity. There is no touch of Ezekiel’s irony that is a hallmark of many poems on marriage. However the poem takes on ironic hues in the context of 'Case Study' where marriage is regarded as the 'worst mistake of all'.

In poems such as 'Marriage' and 'Marriage Poem' Ezekiel's stance is a compromise between the idyllic romanticism of newly wedded love and the realism that attends any marriage with the growing responsibility of home and children. There is no single poem which breathes the tone of Spenser's 'Epithalamion' where the wedding day is 'the joyfulest day that ever sun did see' and the bride - 'the sweetest, loveliest and mildest creature adorned with beauty's grace and virtua.' The parallel in Ezekiel from 'Marriage' is rudely deflatory: 'The bride is always pretty. The groom / A lucky man'. This combines a tone of detached realism with quiet but telling irony. He contrasts what people think about marriage on the particular day and what it turns out to be in reality later on:
Lovers when they marry face
Eternity with touching grace
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated...

The onlookers including the poet who is 'a frequent wedding guest', know that 'the joy of flesh and blood' and feeling
'immortal as the breeze' will soon be reduced to the
monotonous routine of 'however many times we came / apart,
we came together. The same thing over and over again.' In
fact, the married couple even bear the horrifying 'mark of
Cain'. The urbane pretence of the poet in the decision to
play up to the illusion is a fine ironic gesture:

...why should I ruin the mystery
by harping on the suffering rest?

This finds a parallel in 'Division' where the persona is
skeptical about marital happiness:

With cold determined intellect,
I watched the heart at play
And heard it sing of blessedness
Upon a nuptial day.
I warned it of a changing time
It would not sing that way...

Only where earlier, the warning was given, here a charitable
silence is maintained while the belief that heart and
intellect when 'wedded can be a single architect', is not
developed. In the poem of five stanzas, the statements are
quietly but effectively made. The only startling image in
the sedate flow of verse is the Biblical allusion, 'mark of
Cain'. This is sharply suggestive of the horror of bringing
forth progeny that can destroy the world. The quiet movement
to this powerful image has the effect of a 'volta face'. It
rudely interrupts the joy and serenity of the previous
stanzas and heralds the mood of realism bordering on
cynicism in the next movement of the poem. But Ezekiel's
muse cannot sustain such violent flights and goes back to
the slow sedate and quiet flow almost immediately for it is
not for him to speak of marriage in such terms. He is like
the guest in 'The Ancient Mariner' who attends weddings
frequently only to affirm his faith in the age-old
institution of marriage.

The persona tries to be detached from the situation
and at the end of the poem adopts an ironic stance - let
the couple enjoy the dream, he will help by keeping quiet
and theirs will be the discovery.

The tension in 'Marriage' is between the romantic
beauty and tenderness of the coming together of lovers who
'face eternity with touching grace' and the staledness of it
later. However the self's involvement in sex is over
emphasised. Marriage here, is made out to be 'more joy of
flesh and blood'. The word 'roars' suggests the primitive
animality of surging passion in the first physical encounter
of man and woman who represents the 'great woman beast of
sex'. Ezekiel grants the self its share of enjoyment of
sex in marriage without any guilty feeling or fear of
failure. But at the same time, his experience in life is
the insistence to hide the truth. Lovers are immortal,

---

1 Kamala Das, also speaks of 'roaring nights' in
"Composition", The Old Playhouse and Other Poems, Madras,
love is soothing, gentle and all enspharing but only the immature would 'believe it all' as he himself did. Time has made him realise that it is all a myth and even sex can become a matter of routine.

What sustains the happy mood of 'Marriage Poem' is its mystery. The ideal of happy marriage lies not merely in the enjoyment of 'the nuptial passion' but also in the 'quieter passions that flow / between the acts of wedded love'. One of the rare images that occur in Ezekiel's poetry is 'the white rose'. In marriage it symbolises a calmness and serene beauty as opposed to the throbbing vitality of Burns' 'My love is like a red, red rose'. The serenity or 'quietsude of sense' is what makes secure the nuptial pattern. As elsewhere, Ezekiel prefers the compromise and strikes a happy via media of passion and sense to strengthen the nuptial bond. The significance of the equipoise between the 'acts of wedded love' and the 'quieter passion' is seen in the repetition of 'quieter' used as adjective and once as noun in 'quietsude'.

The poem 'Case Study' makes a direct reference to marriage as the 'worst mistake of all'. The verbal parallel between Parthasarathy and Ezekiel is seen in the lines from 'Homecoming 12': 'And marriage made it worse'. Ramanujan's stance is obviously more unequivocal for it is impossible for him to see tangible relationships even in marriage. Ezekiel half-humorously refers to marriage as the end of the 'foolish' love affair - 'foolish' as it has culminated in marriage.
However, it is important to note that Ezekiel never consciously or unconsciously champions celibacy — even if marriage is the worst mistake a man can make, he has to commit it in life. It is as if Ezekiel is echoing the four stages of a man's life in Hinduism where to be a 'grihasta' or 'householder' becomes a law of life. Even if a man is caught in the tentacular hold of routine, he cannot help being happy about his family, buying 'that extra doll' for his child. Though caught in the medley of life, the man is still a loving father and husband. Here again, Ezekiel shows himself to be a poet of human concerns: he is aware of the importance of marriage, the role of the biological man in the universe and his contribution to its survival. He shares the Hindu's horror of 'barrenness' and sees the need for children to ensure complete self-realisation of the individual. The enjoyment of sex for its own sake may have its rewards, but marriage without the prospect of a child becomes meaningless. Significantly enough, Parthasarathy and Ramanujan hardly touch on this aspect of marriage even though they have acquired the reputation of being overly concerned with the family. They do not speak of the inter-relatedness of sex, marriage and procreation as Ezekiel does.

His autobiographical poem 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' is a striking example of the irony and wry humour that animates Ezekiel's view of marriage.¹ What he perceives

¹ See Appendix.
is the paradox of the situation and the meaningless adherence to tradition. The hypocrisy of human behaviour is seen even at the outset in the mother's action:

Her mother shed a tear or two but wasn't really crying. It was the thing to do,...

The persona, the bridegroom is no eager starry-eyed youth but is reluctant and known for being 'modern'. The details of the wedding are remembered with clarity almost in the manner of Larkin in 'The Whitsun Weddings'. The wedding was celebrated 'in a low key, and very decently kapt in check.' The irony is that even what had to be done was not done as the bridegroom, his mother and father were 'progressive'. The poem is an understatement specifically directed against any romantic notions about weddings. And even to the bride, it was a disappointing experience. The end clinches the irrevocable nature of marriage in an ironic gesture:

During our first serious marriage quarrel she said Why did you take my virginity from me? I would gladly have returned it, but not one of the books I had read instructed me how.

The 'sense of humour' saves the poem from cynicism and also saves the marriage. As Ezekiel says:

I am not actually cynical about marriage, though I have written about the difficulties of my own. Individuals make and unmake choices, in this area as in others.1

While 'Marriage' and 'Marriage Poem' clearly indicate

through the title that the man and woman are husband and wife, in poems like 'Event' and 'The Couple' the relationship is left vague. 'On Bellasis Road' shows the reaction to man-woman relationship out of wedlock and 'Poem of Separation' is clearly a tragic piece on broken love-relationship. These poems serve to complete Ezekiel's vision of man-woman relationship not merely as the 'charade of passion and possession' but also of rejection.

The self in love in 'Event' is preoccupied with the experience of sex. It is not clear whether the man and woman are really husband and wife and it is difficult to categorically establish that they are not. The poet prefers to take the latter stance. The title itself is ironic and deflatory as what is narrated in the poem the 'event' is not really important: it is a matter of routine, at times tinged with a subtle hypocrisy. It is a game of charades 'the woman thinking that the man liked it all' and the man accepting because 'the woman wanted it so'. That there is no real 'closeness' is skilfully illustrated in the use of the III person. The woman is referred to as 'she', not as 'my beloved' or 'wife'. The man's distancing himself from the act of union or communion is seen again in stanza 2 in the attitude to sex in marriage: they came together because they 'must' and not always because both 'will'. The poem exposes the hypocrisy that often enters

\*\* His comment on MS. copy, April, 1980. \*\*
man-woman relationship. Sex becomes for many people, a matter of dull routine and 'Event' subtly touches upon the internal anxiety and guilt that are part of a hypocritical and half-hearted relationship:

... She thought that I expected this,
So, with her love, she offered it.
Naively honest as her kiss,
And hoping that I liked her wit....

The irony which comes home with striking force lies in the depersonalization of the two in what is generally accepted as the most personal of experiences between man and woman. As Ezekiel has stated in an interview the irony and the feeling in his poetry are one, so it is in this poem where the partners who are involved in the act are leading a double existence. The refusal to accept their failure to surrender to the experience is nothing more than the reflection of the cheated mind and the pretense of a relationship becomes only a camouflage for its antithesis. The subtle differentiation between her idealized version of the intellectual poet who though slow is unique, sincere, honest and undeceiving and the real picture is obvious not only to her but to the reader as well. It is here that the irony becomes sharp as a rapier thrust. The tone and tenor of the poem point to a poignant plea for understanding in love. The expectations in love are many, but a failure to

1 This is similar to 'Situation' where both the man and woman had their 'stock of lies'. The Third, p.31.

2 'Lines that Speak the Man', Indian Express, 1980.
understand the partner's strength and weakness, his or her needs and desires indicates a tragic breakdown of communication between man and woman which is not desirable. That communication is through both body and soul in a love-relationship is Ezekiel's creed, neither one nor the other, or one at the expense of the other. Sex as a matter of routine can only be a kill-joy and the failure to surrender to the experience fully makes love only a reflection of the cheated mind. Love has no place in a waning relationship filled with a sense of euphoria:

... Remote from the exploring act
I knew that both were undefined,
Who lived in day - dreams, not in fact:
Reflections of the cheated mind.

The tone of 'Event' is echoed in a poem like 'The Couple' written about fifteen years later. Here it is the ironic delineation of the existential dilemma of a couple living together in spite of the awareness of their inability to truly love each other. Love is reduced to the vulgar practical issue of 'minimum politics of survival and success.' Again, it is a question of the 'cheated mind', the man and woman knowingly indulging in 'mutual deception'. To Karnani, the poem expresses 'the state of mind of the man who does not love his mistress, and yet has to make love to her out of a necessary compulsion.'

1 However Ezekiel also expresses the view that without sex, relationship cannot exist for long as seen in 'An Affair'. The over-emphasis on sex makes 'Nudes' a poetic failure.

the 'love' partnership holds an eternal fascination for
the man in spite of her indolence, vanity and arrogance. He
seems to see 'only the legend and not the lie'. Against
her charm in making love even without feeling it, man's
defences are down. Conscious of his own hypocrisy - 'he knew
he was lying' - he acquiesces to play the game of love
charade. The greatest irony is that both partners succumb
to the act of love keenly aware of their own hypocritical
stance. The idea implicit in the poem is that even the
closest physical union of man and woman can be an example of
a diseased non-relationship synonymous with a detestable
hypocrisy.

'On Bellasis Road' even though it 'treats of a
traditionally taboo theme, does not have the 'stiffness'
of 'The Couple'. It is an incisive comment on society's
attitude to prostitution. It is not really a love poem,
Ezekiel's social conscience is awakened to poetic expression
and the 'speaking voice' here approximates to the actual
voice of the poet. It is a good example of the poet's
sincerity of purpose, his keen urge to define a personal
agonising problem not with romantic exuberance but in
terms of the paradox inherent in it. The poem begins with
the kaleidoscopic vision he has of her - a riot of purple,
yellow, green and orange set against the background of
red.

---

1 The fact that Ezekiel's home is in Bellasis Road
does not help in interpreting the poem.

2 The suggestion of 'Red Light' area is only accidental.
I see her first
as colour only,
poised against the faded
red of a post-box;
purple sari, yellow blouse,
green bangles, orange
flowers in her hair....

In striking contrast to his desire for her, she is
rudely indifferent to him while his 'maleness' is aroused
as suggested in his awareness of the 'bareness' beneath her
'shimmer'. She hurts him by her disinterestedness. The irony
lies here: the usual view is that woman of her kind beg for
clients. And here she was actually refusing to look at one:
'She doesn't glance at me'. In this paradoxical situation,
the male ego now sees only physical and moral ugliness -
'she is as low as she can go.' Ironically, this is only in
the manner of 'the fox and the grapes' fable. The ordinary
man with his weaknesses is now morally more depraved than
the woman who is faithful to her usual clientele and does
not even glance at him. The male ego is deflated to a
point of no return for she does not make the expected pass
at him and waits for 'her hawker, or mill worker, / coolie
or birdman, / fortune-teller / pavement man of medicine / or
street barber on the move.' This makes him see her 'without
a single desperate moral'.

The use of 'her' is significant: they are hers as much
as she is theirs and she respects her right of possession
over them and theirs over her by ignoring the new client.
The straight syntax without inversions and the irregular
stanzaic pattern invest the poem with the simplicity that
characterises an everyday narration of an incident. Again,
Ezekiel exposes the complex ambiguity of man-woman relationship. The poem ends with a despairing dilemma:

...I cannot even say I care or do not care, Perhaps it is a kind of despair.

The despair possibly stems from the ambiguity in the situation — was the man or the woman depraved? In this peculiar situation, it is extremely difficult to decide who is wrong. The woman can be said to be 'committed' to her vocation — typified as the oldest profession in the world. The 'sin' is not easily identifiable. Isn't man to blame for what he has made of woman? This is only a stray poem on the theme of lust but Ezekiel has tried to give a new dimension to it in making this woman, a woman of character in her steadfastness and loyalty. It is as if she has evolved her own 'Swadharma', the station in life which defines her duties and is therefore superior to the man who lusted after her. And the self in its quest is still bound by the fetters of non-relationship in relationship, communion seems an unattainable dream.

That woman has a fatal sense of fascination for man and is a 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', a femme fatale is beautifully illustrated in 'Poem of the Separation'. Included in Hymns in Darkness (1976) where the number of love poems is considerably less when compared with Sixty Poems, the poem highlights the paradox of love-in-separation and separation-in-love.1 With a flair for

1 The theme is similar to Neruda's poem 'To-night I can write...', Pablo Neruda, ed. Nathaniel Tarn, Penguin, 1975, p.31.
sentimentality or melodrama, Ezekiel sees the self in love, still very much in love after being rejected.

The key word 'Separation' in the title does not really justify its inclusion in the group of 'Love or Relationship' poems. But the paradox of separation is as much part of the inscape of love as union. The poem is a 'Love Letter' to a beloved who has exercised her freedom in love, namely the freedom to reject. The interesting situation is the conventional cruel 'she' of sonnet-fame and the lover who has been deserted but who still continues to love her. While the lover here is seen as a practical, rational character, the woman is a passionate creature. The tension in the poem is between the memory of an idyllic love-past, the laughing love that is described in 'Question' and the present non-love as seen in the ruthless rejection of the lover by the woman. She exemplifies the paradox of sharing without loving unlike in 'Tone Poem' for she continues to write letters, share the literature he likes but strangely enough finds it impossible to love him. Stanzas 1 to 3 revolve round the theme of harmony in love while stanzas 4 to 6 deal with the physical and mental separation.

The harmony of love, paradoxically enough, has its genesis in the violence and destruction of war 'when the bombs burst in Kashmir', a place conventionally associated with romantic beauty:

To judge by memory alone, our love was happy when the bombs burst in Kashmir;


my life had burst
and merged in yours...

The use of the active verb 'burst' to denote both destruction and creation is highly significant. The efflorescence of love symbolising harmony against a background of distintegration and violence is indicative of the irony and paradox of life - even as people collectively hate and fight to possess a piece of land, love is born between individuals. To them, 'The war did not matter' when it is a question of love. These two 'tried to care' - a weak, concessional gesture made by those to whom the passion and ecstasy of living was loving, expressed in a 'thousand kisses'. When the horror of war was no impediment to the blossoming of their love, it is impossible to expect them to be cowed down by the mundanities of urban life such as the buses and the noise - these did not affect the 'music of their love'.

'Music' is the keyword in stanza 3 and is delicately suggestive of the harmony and bliss in love. Wherever they went, whatever the mode of travel, there was 'music' in their love:

... In these, and in cafes,
on beaches
and on benches in the park,
our music was made...

Music is love, not the 'food of love' as Shakespeare's Orsino has remarked. However, as one musical piece is better than another, so one love is preferred to another. This fickle woman, therefore moves quickly onwards to listen to another music - the irony is that love is eternally music, only its
absence makes life discordant. The steadfast lover's pleas fall on deaf ears, as the music of her first love is drowned in that of the second:

... I ask you to pause and to hear it again, but you sweep ahead to hear another's music. It's true we cannot live on echoes... .

It is surprising that the 'whirlwind and lightning' passion could have become so cool. Here again eternal veracities stand out against romantic evanescence for 'we cannot live on echoes'. Once love is broken, there can be no real cementing. It is like broken chinaware, stuck together with artificial adhesives to present a whole but without the beauty and serviceability of unbroken wares. He shows his maturity in accepting the separation for what it is and does not go in search of another music as she does. Very rarely in Ezekiel's love-poems is the man portrayed as a drifter. As hers, he is willing to make adjustments, accept his situation even if he is callously rejected. His love does not become hate; he continues to love her and poignantly writes, 'I want you back'. She had so transformed his life like the 'girl to whom the lights belonged'. She had helped him to ignore the squalour andcrudeness of the city. It is a sad thing for him not to realise that she too shares some of the crassness of a city-crammed existence, in her act of rejection. However, there is a basic incompatibility in their nature. He is calm, mature and his love betokens a placidity that is the polar opposite of her passion which is like a torrential flood, which abates as quickly as it has risen.
As in life, the realisation in love comes too late and
the fact that he has played with 'a streamer of fire' is
significant. He has succeeded only in destroying himself.
The tragedy is in the awareness of the self-extinction in
love and the voluntary opting for such self-immolation.

The poem is one of Ezekiel's best pieces characterised by
an urbanity and delicacy of touch that seemingly minimises
the intensity of the tragedy. The deliberate attempt to
understate and play down emotions has only intensified the
agony of separation and underscored the cruelty of the
flippant woman. The unusual use of the word 'rough' to
describe their happiness is a pointer to the crudeness of
her nature even as it shows how they had no time to refine
on their experience of love which was so short-lived. The
dramatic technique of quoting the actual words of the woman
and of her letters in the manner of Browning's monologues
invests her with a true-to-life quality. Her character comes
through with great force — her petulance, childishness and
passion. Like the woman in 'Case Study', she has read what
he likes, but cannot like him any more. The poem is a stark
illustration of broken relationships and contrasts the
attitudes of those who want permanent and enduring human
relationships as exemplified in the lover's stance and those
who like this woman care very little for meaningful
relationships. Love between man and woman is both passion and
possession. It is also rejection. This poem dealing with
all three aspects make it Ezekiel's strongest and saddest
poem about man-woman relationship.
The one feature that sets him apart from the other poets of his time is his gift of humour. This animates his recent love poems in the collection 'Songs for Nandu Bhande'. In 'Names' this sense of fun reaches its height in the theme and the easy rhythm of the verse:

The name of the game
has always been prem.

Prem means love
Rhymes with skies above.

The place doesn't matter
The time doesn't matter, . . .

The theme of infidelity is treated lightly here where it received ironic or even serious treatment in the other poems. This humour serves to complete the vision of love.¹

Like A.K.Ramanujan, Ezekiel in his treatment of love, insists on its plurality. Even as it is a haven for the self in its search for identity, it also 'reinforces our most intractable solipsism.'² The dualism of love and sex as manifested in the inbuilt paradox of relationship and non-relationship is his constant preoccupation and in this Ezekiel is not the maker of a new tradition. He is only recasting and polishing extant ideas in his individual style.

The remarkable feature of Ezekiel's style which off-sets his love poems is the absence of images in the sense of simile or metaphor. While he thinks that it is his weakness

¹ Also seen in 'The Good Girl' and 'Bills' in the same collection.

as a poet, it is in fact one of his strengths. The poetry becomes an everyday reality and the poem 'speaks' to us as if there was a live person airing his views on love, sex, marriage and broken relationship.

This realism is his forte. He never chooses to leave the world even in a theme so rich in romantic possibilities. His allegiance is always to the concrete reality around him and his 'vision' of human relationships is strongly influenced by this. Hence there are no romantic excesses: even the romantic is seen with dimmed lights. There is no blare of trumpets, or riot of colours, the tone is subdued mellow and reading many of his love-poems is like dining by candle light.

The search for security in love in Ezekiel as in the other poets, however does not end in a final discovery of self. For love too can end in separation, and the self accepts this paradox. The effort to relate meaningfully to one's fellow beings is made worthwhile because of the maturing of the soul in the experience itself. Ezekiel's stance is clear. What saves the self from self-rejection so strongly felt in the confessional mode, is the participation with other people and affirming such relationship or as in Ramanujan realising its futility.

All three poets in their unique way settle for a synthesis between an existential involvement with the actualities of living and an intellectual urge for transcendence. This is seen in the movement of the self from love to community seeking participation in life outside love.