CHAPTER - IV
R.PARTHASARATHY AND HIS POEMS

R.Parthasarathy’s Rough Passage is a composition of thirty seven sequences in three parts namely, ‘Exile, ‘Tamil’ and ‘Home Coming’. It is an intelligent and profoundly moving expression of a poet trying to come to terms with himself. It is the longest autobiographical poem in Indo-Anglian Literature. The poem conveys the poet’s poetic personality. In these poems, he makes an attempt to resolve the tension his mind, against the conflict between Indian and European culture, which is the vital force behind Parthasarathy’s poetry. R.Parthasarathy was born in Tiruchirapalli in 1934 and he was a British Council scholar at Leeds University where he did a course in Linguistics. He was awarded the Ulka poetry prize of “Poetry India” 1966. He was also a member of the Advisory board for English of the National Academy of Letters, New Delhi.

His works include Poetry from Leeds (1968), Ten Twentieth century Indian Poets(1976) and Rough Passage(1977) His poems have been published in several magazines namely, Encounter, London Magazine, Poetry India, Quest, The Times, Literary Supplement, Many People Many Voices, and The Shell and The Rain. The unique book of verse Rough Passage has come with a
three-tier structure. The first part of the verse ‘Exile’ was written between 1963 and 1967, ‘Tril’ the second part between 1961 and 1974 and ‘Home-coming’ the final part between 1971-1978. In the preface to Rough passage (1979), R.Parthasarathy says,

“Where all the poems form part of a single poem, as it were,
By revision and elimination-so that more than one text of
the poem exists- I have at last composed, but perhaps not completed it. Rough Passage is that book. It should be considered and read as one poem. In it twenty years writing has finally settled.” (1977: 9)

It is clear that the three divisions, ‘Exile’ ‘Trial’ and Home coming is to be read as one long poem. It is entitled as Rough Passage. Symbolizing the poet’s rough passage in England, and a ‘rough come back’ to India, where he faced the problem of cultural re-entry and re-adjustment. R.Parthasarathy is one among those who moulded the shape of contemporary Indo-Anglian poetry and gave it a miraculous identity and recognition.

As a poet and as a man of diametrically opposite cultures, Parthasarathy upholds the mirror of tension within him and successfully engineers a kind of poetry that is ostensibly sensitive, incorrigibly in imitative and austere, painstakingly calculative and melancholic. Rough Passage unfolds the autobiography of a poet of his growing-up with particular reference to some of
the most significant experiences. It also reveals the ingenuity of a serious
craftsman and sincerity of an Indian to reach the deepest roots of his tradition.
It justifies the need of a living tradition for individuals in general and creative
writers in particular. It makes a definition in the most original way the poet’s
understanding of his time, place, people, self and tradition. Each part of the
poem is a manifestation of the kind of tension the poet encounters while fronting
the essential facts of life. In his book, Modern Indian Poetry in English Brice
Kings says, “Parthasarathy gives more emphasis to the loss of rooted ness,
through this English language education and poetry which place a wall between
himself and the traditions of Tamil culture (1987:231). Thus, the poet feels that
he has become a stranger to the traditions of Tamil culture and thus has lost his
roots. He adds, “.........after returning to India feelings of dissatisfaction and
exile remain as India seems no different from the west, and he is exiled within
his own country” (p.239).

It is clear that the poet has conveyed the humiliating experience or racial
ignoring and the constant consciousness of being a segregated exile in the
foreign or in one’s own country. He appears to be voicing the disillusion of the
common wealth immigrants who find themselves uprooted on the Western soil
derided as “wogs”. Making a dirty mass of every things. Bruce king reflects the
idea as: “...... the British insult for foreigners, to describe the ruling Indian
elite shown his alienation, his sense of foreignness.”(p-238).
It is obvious that the poem narrates the life experience of a person torn between two somewhat antithetical worlds: on the one hand are his western education and the consequent alienation from Indian ethos, his belief in poetry as a means of self-search, his quarrel with the inexorable flow of time and his rather idealistic linger for immortality in lone; on the other hand are his desperate search for roots, desire for commitment to Indian way of life and feeling, awareness of the limitations of poetry in the face of crudities of life, wry skepticism of love and human relationship and acceptance of time, age, death.

In *Rough Passage*, the titles of the three separate sections namely “Exile”, “Trial” and “Home coming” are self-explanatory. They point to the universality of tone despite the individuality of the poet’s personal predicament. They also aim at the operation of a process of depersonalization of the psychological problem. The poet watches the development of the personality of the poem’s persona, from the distance, stand apart, thus he achieves a dramatic distance leading to his poetic art, semblance of dramatic inevitableness and invariability, peculiar type of stanzaic pattern can be seen in this poem. There are eleven stanzas of sequence. Each has three lines. The three-line unit reflects the larger pattern of the three sections. The poet tries to crystallize and categorize the different stages of his response to the problems of life, formulate his spiritual
ambivalences and psychological tensions. The poet registers the various stages of one's growing-up. Form this view, at the middle of life, at the height of youth from which the poet can survey the follies of the part and prepare to remedy them in the planning of one's future. P.K.J. Kurup says in his book *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*:

"In spite of the author's declaration that "Exile", the first part of *Rough Passage* dwells upon the question of language and identity upon the need for roots, 'Trial'

the second part 'celebrates love as a reality here and now” and that 'Home-coming', the third and final Dart explores after the tortuous labyrinths of solitude and disillusionment, critics have, time and again, refused to accept these divisions as organic than formal". (1991:243).

'Exile' is an epitaph for the Raj, felt as a historical and personal experience the event is one of the fundamental happenings to the Indian of the poet's generation. It sharpens their awareness, enlarges their areas of response of non-relationship with their environment. "Trail" is against the turmoil of non-relationship, personal love holds forth the promise of belonging. "Home-coming" derives its sustenance from grafting itself on to whatever he finds usable in the Tamil tradition.
‘Exile’ searches the impact of the West on India in terms of foreign setting and the poet’s personal development. The first eight sections of Exile recalls the mistakes he has committed in the past thirty years of his life. The errors committed in his past one pointless. The poet wants to commit the same mistakes again and remembers the lost woman. This he tells,

“Experience does not always make for knowledge
you make the same mistake
Do the something over again
The woman you may have loved
You never married.” (p-13)

‘you’ in the poem stands for Parthasarathy who attempts to do something to carry the dialogue with his Tamil past.

He feels like a cart in the hot tin roof in an alien foreign land and sense of futility and loneliness overwhelms him. The strength he gets from his Tamil language is gone. An introspective study shapes him and makes him understand the loneliness of his dreams about England and that gives disenchantment and disillusionment with his early English utopia.

“There is something to be said for exile
you learn roots are deep
that language is a tree, loses
under another sky.” (p-15)
A knowledge of disappointment overwhelms him and finally that goes to self-questioning.

"What have I care
Where for from a thousand miles?
The sky is no different
Beggars are the some everywhere the clubs
Are there, complete with bar and golf-links".(p-22-23)

Though he is interested in the foreign country called ‘England’ at the early period of his life, he changes his attitude and mind when he is in the foreign country and realizes the loses of his own motherland. Ultimately, the loss is nothing but his love, compassion and brotherhood toward his mother country called India.

It is reflected in R.Parthasarathy’s essay “Whoring after English Gods’. He states that “the affair with the English language has been prolonged and tempestuous. It’s over now, and I have, as the phrase goes, settle down with Tamil”(1970:32) After getting disillusioned with the English language and the country England, he returned home,

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

The cultural gap between the East and West, seems impossible to be bridged.

This is brought out in the following passage:

“Through the holes in a wall, as it were
lamps burned in the fog
In a basement flat, conversation
Filled the night while Ravi Sankar
Cigarette stubs, empty bottles of stout
And crisps provided the necessary pauses”.(p-15)

Ravi Sankar implies a connection of the poet with his cultural past in sharp contrast to cigarettes, stout and crisp, which provide western situation. The image ‘fog’ suggests that lamps in the fog may burn but fail to illumine. They appear like holes in a wall, which compare the poet’s futile efforts to bring down the culture-wall. The intellectual allegiance to a foreign language and the emotional apprehension of its futility becomes his predicament, which is central to the design of the poem. As the poet is conscious of the loss of half of his life,
he is determined to ‘give quality to the other half’. He thinks that his life has come full circle. He has glimpsed the truth in the following lines:

“Nothing can really
be dispensed with. The heart needs all.(p-24)

The metaphor of ‘exile’ is a pet theme for third world writer. Asadul Iqbal Latif in his essay “Expressing a new Identity”, says “There is a personal balance between the rewards and demands of the two worlds of home and exile” (1980:68) In Parthasarathy’s poem there is the rejection of the other world and return to his home land: Hence, ‘exile’ indicates a mental penalty of being ostracized from one’s freedom and living amidst strange and alien people with constant threat of humiliation. It implies the pain of separation and alienation. So, it suggests the rough ups and downs of this myriad kaleidoscopic human life. The hard bitterness of being an exile on western soil, makes one think of returning to one’s native land. The poet feels the importance of self-assessment at the age of thirty, when omissions and imperfections should be objectively apprised: “ As a man approaches thirty, / he may take a stock of himself”. (p-13).So that, “I must give quality to the other off” (p-25)

Parthasarathy was brought up from a Tamil past but got intensive education in English in cosmopolitan city called ‘Bombay’ and later at Leeds
University. As Bruce King suggests in his book *Modern Indian Poetry in English* that "the greatest cultural shock came upon him when he was in England’ (1987:232) thus, he says “The best poetry draws upon accepted cultural myths and uses language which reverberates with cultural associations from the past” (1987:234) The poet understood that he had been disconnected from his roots:

“you learn roots are deep
that language is a tree loses colour
under another sky” (p.15)

During his early life, he perceived England as a clean country but re found that England was a dirty and quite unlike from his previous ideal of it:

“lanes full of smoke and litter
with puddle of unwashed
English children” (Ibid)

Brace king says “The speaker in ‘Exile 7’ moves to madras where, despite returning Tamil Nadu he remain alienated” (1987:238) So, the poet considers himself a misfit when he finds that even Tamil Nadu is blindly aping the West and the old values seem to be dwindling. The poet is surprised as:

“What have I come
here for from thousand miles?” (p.22)

The sense of isolation and disillusion are presented in Parthasarathy is *Rough Passage*. They are considered as modern man’s predicament. Although modern
man appears to be surrounded by all sort of company, his heart remain barren and starved:

"Shiver in the alleys of mind,

hungry and alone." (p.24)

Poem 2 of ‘Exile’ establishes the external reality of England where the poet feel frustrated in his attempt at discovering anything uncommon. The poet records his impressions in the following lines:

"However, the most reassuring thing

about the past is that it happened"(p-15)

This stanza reflects and registers poet’s keep perception of the reality. Poem 5 registers that frustrating discovery:

"Birds, too,

struggle, pressing thin feathers

against the glass of air”(p-20)

The glass of air is a vivid and striking image which is suggestive. The poem reflects that the poet. Encounters the impact of the West in the hone land. The last poem of ‘Exile’ symbolizes his experience in Calcutta, the city that testifies to the decadence of the dusty appearance:

"A grey sky appresses the eyes:

porters, rickshaw-pullers, barbers, hawkers

fortune-tellers, loungers compose the scene”(p-24)

In Calcutta he discovers what he has attained during the last thirty years:
“The years have given me little wisdom”

and I’ve dislodged myself to find it”(Ibid)

The final of ‘Exile’ carries a universal truth:

“I’ve for feited the embarrassing gift,

innocence in my scramble to be man”(p-25)

This shuttling between the local and the particular and the universal in the
depiction of both geographical localities and mental progress adds dynamism to
the development of the poem.

In the second part ‘Trial’ Parthasarathy recalls the beloved and members
his association with a lady from the day of his seeing her photograph:

“Over the family album, the other night,

I shared your childhood (p-30)

Till the day, his love relationship with the beloved is revealed. In one of his
essays “The Achievement of R.Parthasarathy”, Brijraj Singh, says

“his love poetry conveys the whole range of feeling that
his remark suggest, from the ecstasy to transcendence to the
passion, to the feeling of being cleansed by sex, to the Poignant
bitter-Sweet of memory, to the anguished sense that doom cannot
be staved off” (1980:68)
There is a melancholy note throughout his poetry. The same theme is noticed by William Walsh when he observes in his essay "Two Indian poets":

"Disappointment is his principle theme, whether with edgy compositions of love, with the insoluble problems of poetic composition or as with disappointment with an irritable but unprotesting glumness, a slightly more recognition of the way things are" (1974:P.14)

The youth is passion and desire toward the beloved and their union is urgent and correspondingly brief. The poet says in his own words: Under the heavy lens of noon passion, quicker than candles, burn, smoking the glass of our bodies". (p.31).

The poet recollects his love-affairs in several different sections of 'Trail' when

"But in the dark, hands lips
have marked the spot
we touched"(p-31)

and

"our do dies scrape hone
for passions. Older
than the stones of Konark"(p-36)

The 'aching joys' are no more and all its dizzy raptures are things of the past. The poet adds:

"I have put a side the past
in a corner, an umbrella
now poor in the ribs”(p-37)

A note of melancholy and regret to poet’s life indicates his thought about the poet. It made him confess,

“I am not myself in the present
I only endure
A reflected existence in the past”(p-43)

As he proceeds towards the end of the ‘Trial’, thoughts of death become more frequent. He understands that the idea that has helped his lore-affairs has been ‘the chill promise of a hone’. He accepts his mistake with the past and tries to removed it:

“My past is an unperfect stone
the flaw show. I polish
the stone, sharpen the lusture to a point” (Ibid)

The thought included in the lines is that thought the attempt to redeem the past by love has remained unsuccessful but the attempt still continues...

Parthasarathy is softening down the harsh of the style in this section. He is in India, the poet’s hometown, and the members of the poet’s ancestral family living in the countryside. Poem 1 sets the tone of acceptance which exhibits the poet’s attempt to realize the appreciate the by gone:

“of the dead
I speak nothing but good” (p.29)
“The dead” symbolizes the poet’s traumatic past in the alien countries, on one head, the dead members of his ancestral family, on the other he recollect them before he enters their country. When he there is a fresh renewal of the youth in his mind:

“I grasp your hand
in a rainbow of touch” (Ibid)

his experience of love asserted in the poem3:

“But in the dark, hands and lips
have marked the spot
we touched” (p. 31)

“Trial’ is a section of recollection of the poet’s youth. The love-making is described in the following line: “A nipple hardens on the tongue (p-33)

The poem finds a present analysis of the experience:

“Now, only the thought of you
I blow on burns distance to a stub” (p-32)

In the poem 2 the poet turns the pages of his family album, and goes through a kind of psychic purgation:

“puged
you turned the corner in a child’s steps”(p-30)

in poem 6, the poet says,

“soon, it will reflect
nothing” (p-34)
and in poem 7, The lyric experience is celebrated:

"The four walls
Turn on a stand of hair"(p-35)

"The above lines find the poet two extremes namely sentiment euphoria of love experience and its ecstasy was not permanent. The sequent of Trial gives the past and bring meaning to the present:

"with lamp/and pen I blow the dust off my poet".(p-37)

This awareness and recognition of the opposite extremes in human experience gives Parthasarathy’s poem’s a note of genuine sincerity. His attempt is to bring out and give the truth. This is observed in poem 10, Parthasarathy says:

"Thus celebrate
Something so perishable, trite".(p-38)

It is a poetic retrial, a re-living of the "octopus poet" The hard bitterness of the past is affixed on every word of the poem. The collection called ‘Trial’ is a poem of sequence of pain. Parthasarathy accept it:

“being accustomed to pain is of no help”(p-43)

He makes use of his experience positively.

However, the last poem. Hints at a new phase in the poet’s life. It tells the entry of new being, “my five – year old son”(p-44)
The poet is to bring the harmonics of sentence and stanza together, to unite them, one animating and sustaining the other, such skill is exhibited in Parthasarathy’s poem:

“I am all fingers when it comes
to touching them. Their fullness
keeps the eyes peeled
with excitement. A nipple hardness
on the tongue. Here,

pleasure is elliptic, whole some” (p-33)

‘with excitement’ is placed in the next stanza according to the three lined pattern: a part of the sentence that goes into the first stanza, it qualifies the following sentences that goes into the second. ‘Trail’ sustains the exploration of his growth and his cultural inheritance in images of love, in identifying Tamil with a lover, the poet embodies the relationship with the characteristic accompanying passion.

‘Home coming’ completes the cycle begin with ‘Exile’ and ‘Trail’. It attempts a redefinition of the poet, himself as a Tamil. Tamil here means to be a Tamil after whored after English gods. It is the process of self-scrutiny. The protagonist confesses,

“my tongue in English chains,

I return, after a generation, to you,
I am at the end
Of my Dravidic tether
Huger for you unassuaged‟.(p-47)

It is clear that England has stopped to inhibit his sensibility. In the poet mind, there is constant inner conflict for preferring Tamil to English. When he is continually made aware of his position, this conflict becomes severe. He states,

“To live in Tamil Nadu is to be conscious every day of importance.”(p-48)

He sums up his condition accurately that he feels inadequate in the use of Tamil. In “Home Coming 1”, his attempt to relearn the classical form of his mother tongue fails as he finds that Tamil has been debased in films, he says,

“hooked on celluloid, you reel
down plush corridors”.(p-47)

“Tamil” has changed to be flea-ridden Parthasarathy attempts to evoke his Tamil past and his poem on Vaikai river as in ‘Home coming’ 8

“No one has any use for Vaikai,
river, once, of this sweet city.(p-54)

In ‘Home coming-12’ he asks the most important question:

“what’s it like to be a poet”?
while fattening(p-58), and
Parthasarathy prompted by this kind of slavish imitation on the part of poets today, makes an ironical comment:

“...himself on the flesh of dead poets” (Ibid)

Where would His Eminence be
but for the poets who splashed about
in the Hellespont or burned in the Java sea”.(p-59)

In ‘Exile’, time was bound to the diurnal drudgery of cities, with its newspapers and trains. In ‘Trail’ time was the eternal present of intimate physical love. In ‘Home coming’, time means recognition and perception. He looks for relationship through reflection and gains the ledge that the self can perceive itself only in relation to others:

“Now that all silver
at the back of faces I have loved
has worn off silent
eyes saccadic. I store at myself”.(p-52)

‘Home coming-3 is a crucial poem providing a meeting-ground for past and the present: There is a sense of reconnection with the vital past. It has been clouded over by the intervening years in countries. It appears to pervade throughout the section. The tortuous rhythm and ironical metaphor indicative of anxiety, agitation and dissatisfaction give place to quieter metaphors of safety and satisfaction:
"Three daughters floating
like safe planets near her". (p-49)

‘Home coming 4 is an important milestone in the development of poet’s mind and art. His past come to an end:

“I crashed, a glass house
hit by the stone of father’s death” (p-50)

Here “end” means that the end is only a part of the continuous cycle:

“And after me,
my unborn son…….” (Ibid)

The poet cannot brease the past, the tradition and the memory of his Father,

“Old
I smart under your absence
The long years break out in a sweat
Down the spire of pillows”. (p-51)
The section is fit to be entitled "Home coming" became it includes the poems of the poet's self-analysis in relation to his father and son to a routine in a set local milieu.

Thus in the poems of R.Parthasarathy could be seen an attempt to link the past with the present and an emphasis to keep up the old human values which will stand one in good steed. In the name of modern and new civilization things are fast changing and the men and women of the present world move even faster forgetting completely all the age-old lies, significance of the cultural setup and traditional lives and ties of relationship with each other in different circumstances. The poet voiced his feelings and aspirations by pointing out the abject reality and by indirectly stressing what is essential to make the completely and the world opens up a discussion in the role of human values in the contemporary world.