CHAPTER VI

HUMAN VALUES AS A COMMON THEME AS FOUND IN THE POEMS OF EZEKIEL, RAMANUJAN AND PARTHASARATHY

The modern Indo-Anglian poetry provides enormous scope for human values. The poems are related to human values. Though the Indo-Anglian poets deal with several themes, ultimately they end with humanism. Their ideas and thoughts give importance to human character, attitude, predicaments, etc. The lack of human relationship among the contemporary people as depicted in modern Indo-Anglian poetry occupies a pre-eminent place in Indian Writing in English.

In some ways India has her own cultural past and a rich tradition. Its diversity of cultures and its contrasts have greatly appealed to the Europeans. And a substantial literature testifies to the fascination of the East for Indo-Anglian writing, English becomes the medium with a touch of irony for the assertion of India’s identity and its cultures. At the same time technology accelerated the change, demanding mastery of English, which was both a ‘door’ to the new learning and a ‘bridge’ between cultures.
The First World War closed the romanticism in Indo-Anglian literature. A stringent criticism has come from poets who have consciously sought to find a new role for Indian poetry in English, and leaders in this context included Nissim Ezekiel. Likewise notable in contemporary verse are A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy. Although there are exceptions to such an oversimplification, the evolution of Indo-Anglian writing is easily seen in poetry, from the romantics to the social realists. The 20th century literature is an illustrator of the ultimate in departure from the most tenaciously held attitudes of the Indian people. This change in the concept of nature of man and experience had its concomitant impact on the concept of the nature of reality, which was conceived of as something internal. As a result of several developments in different branches of knowledge, the 20th century literature reflects a departure from, and at times indeed, a complete break with the major issues and concerns of the Indian poets. At the end of the World War II, there has been a visible stir everywhere-partly the rustle of a new hope, and partly the stutter of a new despair. A global war spread over several years is apt to liquidate the 'middle' generation. A new generation comes up with a striking individuality of its own, sharpness in its features, an angularity in its gestures, and tone of defiance in its speech, a gleam of hope in its eyes a new rhythm and nuances and acerbities of speech. The new
poetry of Indian Writing in English could be the poetry of protest. It is also really the future poetry and transient protest and escape alike and becomes rather a new affirmation, bold nectarine answer to the poison of the present.

Nissim Ezekiel is not only the first post-Independence Indian English poet of repute who taught others how to write poetry in English, but also a critic of the first rank who has definite views of poetry. To study Ezekiel in isolation seems to be a difficult task, as every poet undergoes certain influences at various stages in his life. A good poet treats these influences as necessary for his own poetic development. In the point of view from the vantage of Ezekiel's achievement, these influences look peripheral. At the center was that sincere devoted mind that wanted to discover itself. He managed to forge a unique achievement of his own. Ezekiel is a psychologist of sorts. He is fond of analyzing the devious ways in which the human mind works. Hence, he has unusual interest in depicting the portraits of individual human beings. He often treats these as a method of returning to his own self. This formula is brilliantly applied in "On Meeting a Pedant"

'Words, looks, gestures, every things before
the unquiet mind, the emptiness within
sunlight swarms around him and the summer
Evening melt in rich fatness on his tongue’ (p-8)

and

“Give me touch of men and give me smell of
Fornication, pregnancy and spices
But spare the words as cold as print, insidious
Words, dressed in evening clothes for drawing rooms”

(p-9)

He feels only disgust for the futile conversations of polite society, since he finds most of these people dull and insipid.

Ezekiel knows that the life of repression leads to neurosis. Hence the human impulses are given their due importance. He sees “The Old Abyss” in the recurrence of temptation:

“This girl, once married, with a child,
But now alone, torments
The man she knows.
With such magnificence in movement
I have died beholding it
They see the old abyss again-

Desire with object near and for” (p-48)

In the poem, ‘Scripture’ the poet attempts to show how human beings oscillate between rules of morality and the force of temptation. Man always discovers the sin of others. He reads holy books hoping that he will avoid his pitfalls. But as soon as the holy aspect of institutionalized religion is realized, he succumbs to temptation.

“ So we lose the parable again

and are accused again at home” (p-50)

It is an idea that recurs again and again in this collection that the impulses can only be given a healthy release. Ezekiel is indeed a child of flesh and fancy. He is a child of flesh because human passion is the theme of his poems. A beautiful woman stirs him into verse. He is a child of fancy in this collection because the co-ordination of parts of the poems is like the bricks of a wall. He became a child of imagination in The Unfinished man where the parts of poem combine like the cells of a living organism.

Ezekiel tried to extend the scope and subject-matter of his poetry. He sought poetry in the ordinary and the commonplace. He showed a lot of human interest that his poetry always had. At the same time, it tended to
suffer from certain inanity. The same human interest is shown in a brilliant poem, "Night of the Scorpion". The same human concern is shown in 'Poetry Reading' where the interest shifts from the poet to the poetry reading. The poet brings 'the message from another shore'. He knows that poetry is written to express the truth of the body, hence he does not care for the moral laws of hell:

"Where he, released from worldly things
was dumb before the sight he saw":
His demons wore angelic wings-
The monstrous truths of moral law.
Against those demons who can win?
He drank, he drugged himself, he went
With wives and whores galore. In six
And song he spelt out what they meant" (p-136)

Ezekiel has consciously believed that a poet should belong to his immediate environment. He has held up a faithful mirror to the characteristic attitude of the poverty-stricken master of ceremonies who carries on the show in spite
of public niggardliness. This unique relationship between literature and
environment is clearly shown in ‘In India’.

“In the sun’s eyes. 
Here among the beggars,
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and gods,
Burnt out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal
All in noisy silence
Suffering the place and time,
I ride my elephant of thought
A Cézanne sling around my neck” (p-131)

These lines have the same momentum of syntax that he showed in ‘Barbaric City Sick With Slums’. The lines present a finely juxtaposed scene of the oppressed section of Indian society. Ezekiel is keenly interested in Hindu mysticism. As a humanist, Ezekiel desires to change the world. Humanists are clear and certain that the social good, which is inclusive of all humanity,
is the supreme ethical good, they also realize that it is not goal to which they can win assent through means of logic alone. During Ezekiel's quest for identity through which he attempts the discovery of self-knowledge his experience leads him to failure, frustration and self doubt and his poetic self finds itself face to face with many a paradox, incongruities, ugliness and absurdities of life. There are moments when he finds himself not content with playing the role of a poet and is fascinated by a wider world.

The spiritual journey of a poet, self-endowed with a relentless vein of critical self-awareness tends to be a record of the weary trek waded, the frustrations encountered and the failures welcomed and so does Ezekiel's journey end after his rodent-like exploration of the various facets of life, spiritual and physical. It could also gain from this trip such inevitable revelation about life that "Home is where one will have to gather grace" and the ultimate definition of poetic perception as the gentle art of leaving things. Ezekiel's portrayal of man-woman relationship is never free from a touch of regret and a sense of sadness where time and again he presents his battlement at the vanishing trick played by lore and at its emotional regeneration. The poet is criticizing the prevailing state of relationship by
obliquely nationalizing it through a neat blending of the grave issues associated with it with plain humour.

"To a Certain Lady" builds up the conflicting emotions that husband and wife experience in their relationship and the male self's attempt to come to terms with the woman in spite of the tension inherent in the situation:

"Life can be kept alive
By contact with the unknown and the strange
A feeling for the mystery
Of man and woman joined.
At the act, desire for it again (p-28)

The poem concludes with a prayer-

"Teach us, Love, above all things, fidelity to music.
Sharpen our responses to the colours of creation.
Lead us unreceptively to what comes after passion
And let us die, Love, as though we chose to, for a reason.

(p-30)

It highlights the moral self in the male persons striving to achieve a helpless reconciliation over the failure of the marital love. The only way to
redemption from such a threatening situation created by the nagging realities of man-woman relationship is to attempt a synthesis of love and meditation at least on an imaginary level.

"The feminine caress of night before the body sleeps if perceived and experienced from a spiritual level can lead to meditation and ultimately to a sort of aesthetically-indined philosophical humanism" (1991:32) states P.K.J. Kurup in his book Contemporary Indian Poetry in English. In the opening poem "A Poem of Dedication" in Sixty Poems the poet stresses the need for a poetic culture of sympathetic bond with the humanity around.

" I do not want the yogis concentration
I do not want the perfect charity
Of saint nor the tyrant’s endless power
I want a human balance humanly
Acquired, fruitful in the common hour. (p-40)

In this poem Ezekiel tries to formulate his manifesto for the days to come. Since he has pronounced the manifesto of his poetic self in "A Poem of Dedication" to aspire for human relationships unpretentiously, he can claim
to be free from the pull of the flesh. All he must aspire for is to accept the flesh and fancy. The poet composes a poem on ‘Creation’,

“God-like make a universe

From chaos

Of fire and air and earth and water”(p-79)

The depiction of this parallelism between the acts of God and those of the poet is not to be considered as a lofty view about the vocation of a poet. As Adil Jussawalla observes in his essay ‘New Poetry’

“ It is surprising how often the word ‘prayer’ occurs in the work of a poet whose approach to life far from being religious is one of philosophical humanism” (p-77)

The occurrence of ‘God’ and prayer shows not necessarily the presence of God but the lack and so the ‘need’ of a God. The poet accepts the truth that man is a measure of mankind.

The need to express one’s self with moral servitude goes side by side with the perception in a lighter vein of the common human urge for pleasure. The most desirable approach for a poet destined to work within the range of the normal self’s limited experience is supported by the fact that whenever there is hesitation on his part to recognize the real human condition and
'ordinariness' he is tempted to jump to conclusions and maximal suggestions to explain the non-tangible and in the process fumbles without any convincing sublime tone. It is this kind of poetry in which mythology becomes a structure of human concern. Such poetic process provides the poetic self with the redemptive possibility and release from suffering so that the poetry becomes a device with which "the deaf can hear, the blind recover sight" (p-135)

A.K.Ramanujan's poetry arises from a tension between human self and history. His felt "alienation from the immediate environment thus becomes a source of continuity with an older ideal" familiar relations, with the figures of the parents, dominating the internal landscape which becomes in his poetry a device through which his poetic self attempts to contemporize history. Much of Ramanujan's poetry is shaped by the permutations and combinations of the self with the antiself guarded by a dark passion and the hard light of reason going hand in hand which gives it the strong quality of inner continuity and the appearance of life seen by an accurate poetic eye.

The poem 'Christmas' moves on to assert the oneness of all life on earth namely human, animal and vegetable:
"For a moment, I no
longer know
leaf from parrot
or branch from root
nor for that matter
that tree from you or me (p-33)

In the poem ‘Of Mothers Among Other Things’ Ramanujan is not speaking of his mother, but mothers in general, of passage of time that brings in the aging process. In this poem Ramanujan is speaking of his mother because it is by such a subjectivism that the poet gains the depth of understanding of his subject, which ultimately leads his poetic self to perceive the central fact of human condition. The poem “Entries for a Catalogue of Fears’ may be relevant in this context.

" I know
fears far more precise
than any hope (p-86)

The image of the poem ‘Small Scale Reflections on a Great House’ is evokes in one’s mind is significant. It is so natural for the sensibility, born
and brought up in the ancient house and is exposed to the pulls of modern life described in ‘Convention of Despair’.

A poet is a sensitive being watching through his mental eye, fluctuations in human values imperceptible to the common eye, resisting their regressive trend or articulating his anguish over their loss so as to show to the world some trait whereby the malady could be inferred. Growing hardships, commercialization and the increasing frequency of violent incidents over trivial matters received through various channels of communication have made man narrow, self-centered, hardened and inhuman. Being deeply concerned with this problem Ramanujan writes about the devaluation of human values among poets, mythological figures, politicians and common people. Ramanujan feels anguished that poets have forgotten their duties.

In two of his poems ‘Element of Composition and “He too was a Light’ from his Second Sight, Ramanujan writes of the hardening sensibilities of the modern poets. He like other insensate human beings, is moved by the miserable plight of the lepers of Madurai only momentarily and then becomes his normal insensitive self again
"I pass through them
as they pass through me
taking and leaving
affections, seeds, skeletons"…….

(p-122)

The lepers try to collect a lot of alms, and they can remember an alm-giver too only momentarily and then must pass on to the next one. The poet may be inspired by one such pathetic incident for some time but can not take it as an exclusive subject of his poetry, shutting all others out. Life is so complex and human miseries so intense and varied that the subsequent hours and days of the poet might yield many more such pathetic incidents, erasing the earlier impressions of similar nature. A poet's inspiration comes from tragic happenings.

In the poems 'A River' and 'Conventions of Despair' taken from his The Striders, Ramanujan satirizes modern poets. In 'A River' the poet writes ironically against the urban poets who tend to write of cities and temples, remaining insensitive to the miseries of human beings and animals of the village. R.Parathasarathy in his book Ten Twentieth Century Indian
poets feels that the poem ironically contrasts “The relative attitudes of the old and new Tamil poets, both of whom are exposed for their callousness to suffering, when it is so obvious” (1976:95) These poets sing

“Only of the floods” when the river is in the

passion of its wild youth but not in its old age

when it dries to trickle and when the ravages of its

youthful flood can be traced by the remnants

of “woman’s hair/clogging the watergates” (1995:38).

The poets sang of the beauty of flood and of the flooded river running over a number of cobbled steps but ignoring its act of destroying village houses, a pregnant woman and a couple of cows. By making use of metonymy the poet finds the flooded-river carrying on its three-fold destructive activities of material properly represented respectively by a pregnant woman and the twins-in-womb: and of the animal world represented by a couple of cows. Ramanujan feels worried that to the new poets, the glory of the river in its youthful fury is more important than all the destruction it leaves behind. The new young poet neglects to find subjects worthy of poetry among the traces of flood causes destruction one finds in summer. For such poets,
"The river has water enough

to be poetic

about only once a year"

(Ibid: 39)

and the fact that this very from the river becomes destructive means nothing to them. His antagonistic attitude against such modern poets is more pronounced in ʻConventions of Despairʼ. The poet refuses to live in the contemporary world and be considered ʻmodernʼ if it means accepting the dulled sensibilities as a way of life, disregarding feelings of other human beings in abandoning one wife for another watching striptease, drinking liquor or becoming a heartless scientist studying microscopically a spider growing plane bloodless under his scouting. He feels that accepting the life of so-called modernity and feeling a sense of pride in it is mechanical he would prefer,

ʻConventions of despair,

They have their pride.

I must seek and will find

My particular hell only

In my hindu mind.(p-34)
Ramanujan gets more pleasure in being his own individual self than in becoming modern which means the hardening of his sensibilities and dehumanization. Rejecting it he cries.

“No, no, give me back my archaic despair
it’s not obsolete yet to live
in this many-lived lair
of fears, this flesh” (Ibid)

Ramanujan exposes not only growing dehumanization of the people of his own tribe but also the hardheartedness of those people. In ‘Prayer’s to Lord Murugan’, Ramanujan seeks help from Lord Murugan, the Dravidian six faced God of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war and love to inspire the present insensate human beings:

“Lord of the sixth sense
give us back
Our five senses” (p-116)

In “No Amnesiac King” Ramanujan refers ironically to the myth of cursed Sakuntala who was abandoned to her miserable fate after the forgetful King Dushyanda failed to recognize and own her but remembered his marriage to her after accidentally finding the wedding ring in a fish’s belly. The poet here highlights the crime of King Dushyanta in forgetting
Sakuntala. The common people in modern times are more humane and considerate than ancient amnesiac kings like Dushyanta. The poet’s purpose in the poem “A Minor Sacrifice” seems to be explode the myth of king parasite and his son Janamejaya who had senselessly and callously perpetrated violence. Parileshit killed a snake in a forest with a view to garland “a sage’s neck with the cold dead things” when the angry sage cursed him of death by snakebite, Janamejaya in order to forestall the eventually of his father’s death by snakebite decided to kill all snake. The mischievousness of the father was transformed into the arrogance, pride and brutality of the son. The second part of the poem associates with the senseless killings by Janamejaya to modern times when it assumes more horrible forms. It is significant to see what Shivanna experienced at the time of death. His father tells

“he clawed and kicked the air
all that day, that new moon Tuesday
like some bug
on its bake?” (p-148)

Ramanujan suggests that as Janamejaya’s attempts at forestalling his father’s cursed death by sacrificing all snakes had turned out to be futile, shaven too could not have got ruddy scorpions.
In ‘Middle Age’ Ramanujan refers to the cruelties of the Vietnam War and of hunger in Biafra. These calamities, causing hunger and misery are man made. The poem ‘Zoo Gardens Revisited’ shows the degradation of human beings who inflict cruelties on various innocent creatures. The poem originates from the brutalized visitors who derive sadistic pleasure in inflicting pointless pain added torture on animals helplessly confined to the zoo. But at the revisit poet fails to relate them with other human being imbued with the milk of human kindness as he might be in his first visit; but recalls only, the cruel acts other ‘animals’ in human shapes.

According to an Indian myth, Lord Vishnu rescued an elephant Gajendra from the jaws of a crocodile. In the Bible, God saved two of every species of creatures in Noah’s ark when the entire creation was to be destroyed due to its criminal activities. Ramanujan does not pray for the preservation or destruction of the human race because it is already dehumanized; he wants only the animals to be saved;

Lord of lion face, boar snout, and fish eyes,
Killer of killer cranes, shepherd of rampant elephants,
Devour my lambs, devour them whole, save them
In the zoo garden ark of your belly. (p-154)

By bringing out the relationship between Gods and animals, and by showing his concern for animals, Ramanujan has transmuted what K.S.Pal terms, “the common into the unique, the local into the universal, and the familiar into the mythical”. (1981:56)

From brutalized human beings ill-treating harmless animals, Ramanujan goes to depict indifference and cruelties of members of the family which, for Ramanujan is one of the central metaphors with which he thinks. Being a poet of the urban milieu, he depicts deteriorating familial relations in the modern times, largely due to dwindling human values. In “small-scale Reflections on a Great House”, Ramanujan shows in bits and pieces with tongue-in-cheek irony the indifference of people to objects and things belonging to others:

Neighbours’ dishes brought up
With the greasy sweets they made
All night the day before yesterday
For the wedding anniversary of a god,

Never leave the house they enter,

Like the servants, the phonographs,

The epilepsies in the blood. (p 96-97)

Sundari and Ramamurthi feel that Ramanujan gives the drawback of the joint-family system in the form of catalogues presented in the poem in a deliberate and near brutal forthrightness and unadorned bareness as also with a subterranean current of wry humour running along these harsh portrayals.

In “History” the poet goes one step further in giving a horrifying portrait of greedy daughters who, devoid of any feelings for the dying mother, callously remove every piece of ornament from her body. This apathetic attitude of daughters has been well portrayed in the following lines:

her two

daughters, one dark one fair,

unknown each to the other

alternately picked their mother’s body clean

before it was cold
or the eyes were shut,
of diamond ear-rings,
bangles, anklets, the pin
in her hair,
the toe-rings from her wedding
the previous century,
all except the gold
in her teeth........
and the dark
stone-face of my little aunt
acquired some expression
at last. (p-108)

After criticizing the dehumanized poets, politicians, neighbours and
blood relations, Ramanujan does not spare the common people whose
inaction in the face of injustice, violence and cruelty is inhumanity in
embryo. “The Watchers” shows, that some religious books may consider
such indifferent watchers great and their absence of action as “their supreme
virtue” but Ramanujan calls them “mere seers” because in the absence of
human commitment and courage only their eyes are active. In contrast to
the growing dehumanization among all kinds of people, Ramanujan’s own attitude towards human beings and animals is healthy probably because of his faith in Hinduism. In “The Hindoo”: “he doesn’t Hurt a Fly, or a Spider either”, he feels gratified for his faith in Hinduism which nourished his finer sensibilities in early life. Here he talks of his inability to kill a fly or a spider, even if they are ominous and destructive. His weakness arises from the fact that these creatures could be the manifestations of God:

Why, I cannot hurt a spider

Either, not even a black widow,

For who can tell who’s who? (p-62)

It is this Hindu belief in the existence of God in every living being, big or small, that creates in Ramanujan a healthy attitude towards all creatures of God, including dogs, snakes and lizards who, in certain respects, are better than human beings. For him a dog, feeding her young ones even at the cost of her life, is quite poetic, as shown in his poem “Epitaph on a Street Dog”:

But she had in a row four pairs of breasts
Where blind mouths plucked and swilled their fill
Till mouths had eyes, and she was full of flies. (p-43)

Ramanujan is no preacher, nor does he suggest remedies and palliatives for the ills of society and for the erosion of human values. As a sensitive poet, he perceives certain things in life more clearly than do others. Disapproving of man’s senseless quest for the façade of modernity and grandiose mechanical activities, he voices his preference for a genuine Hindu hell. With these objectives in his poetry, Ramanujan cleverly works out connections between objects and creatures not even remotely related with each other. This yoking together of somewhat unrelated objects is based, as K.S. Pal in his work “Ramanujan and Ezekiel” maintains, “on the principle of producing unexpected sensations and sudden feeling”(p-32) which equip his poetry with the characteristic quality of shocking out of complacency.

As with Ramanujan, Parthasarathy’s starting point for the quest of identity is his felt sense of exile and the dynamic force behind the quest is active engagement between two cultures, Indian and Western. But in Parthasarathy’s case, he greatly associates his poetry with the necessity to regain his identity through the discovery of his language as a creative mode.
The arguments about Parthasarathy's success in developing an extreme austerity in style do not in any way disprove the language-experience dichotomy arising from the sense of gulf that divides the culture of Europe from that of India that is central to his creative tension. Unlike Ezekiel, and Ramunajan, in Parthasarathy's case the impact of the British Raj on the sensibility of an educated and cultured Indian provides the setting between his loss of identity and a sense of belonging to the Indian milieu. As Vasant A. Shahane writes in his work 'The Return of the Exile: The Poetry of R. Parthasarathy' in Indian Writing in English: A Critical Assessment, "The process of the predicament which in itself is a kind of aesthetic continuum is what constitutes Parthasarathy's poetry: The situation itself is the poetry".

(p-130)

Thus the predicament at the core of Parthasarathy's stance is the disagreement between intellect and emotion and between the intellectual allegiance to English and the emotional withdrawal of this allegiance. It is in this light that the image of city that the poet uses as the symbol of intellectual alertness and emotional passivity gains significance. All through the three parts of "Rough Passage" the artistic self of Parthasarathy is faced with the task of giving shape to the accumulated waste of the exile's experience. In "Exile", while exploring his relationship with the colonial
culture, betrayal and remorse are the chief sentiments that attend the self's reflection of the past. In “Trial” the self is a lover communicating through the language of the body. The images of direct perception, eyes, hands, tongue, skin and tactile, auditory and olfactory senses vie with one another for an accurate rendering of undifferential experience. But what he encounters on his “Homecoming” is disintegration and death.

In terms of choice of idiom and languages he realizes that if English is an alien mode to express his deep-rooted Dravidic psyche, Tamil is equally ineffective, “the bull, Nammalvar took by the horns,/ is today an unrecognizable carcass”. The tension at several stages gets much more intensified than being a mere conflict between English and Tamil sensibilities. The poet persona in “Exile I” is a man in a self-introspective mood, crossing the border of adolescent youth on the way of maturity. He feels responsive to retrospection, though his stance is detached and controlled; it is all the while infused with emotion. He recalls the thirty years of mistakes he has committed in his past life and the experience he has gained. The ambivalent fascination of Parthasarathy with two different cultures and the consequent desertion-intellectual allegiance to English and
the emotional withdrawal of his allegiance— is brought out in the images of ‘lamps’ and the ‘holes in a wall’.

through holes in a wall, as it were,
lamps burned in the fog.
in a basement flat, conversation filled: the night, while Ravi Shankar,
cigarette stubs, empty bottles of stout
and crisps provide the necessary pauses”. (p-15)

The poet persona, here attempts in vain to pull down the culture wall, and his attempts only make insignificant dents— ‘the holes’ — in the wall and hence the lamps in the fog only lurk dim. The later part of “Exile 2” is the evocation of the atmosphere of metropolitan London, where “under the shadow of poplars / the river divides the city from the night” and where Victoria “an old hag” sleeps alone “shaking her invincible locks”. If Victoria is the symbol of British imperialism, against her statue is silhouetted the statue of Boadicea, the symbol of victory of the human soul and love for freedom.
In the final section of “Exile 8” the poetic self finds itself on the banks of the Hooghly in the city of Calcutta which is another major bastion of the British Raj and culture in Eastern India. As he walks, “my tongue hunchbacked with words” through the city that testifies the decadence of the British Raj through its clusty appearance, “a grey sky” oppresses his eyes and he discovers as to what he has attained during the last thirty years:

“The years have given me little wisdom
and I’ve dislodged myself to find it”. (p-24)

Thus the poetic self’s craving to embrace freedom lost in an alien land remains unfulfilled even in his own native soil, be it Bombay, Madras, or Calcutta. The eventual pre-occupation, accordingly, is to contain both the cacophony of the city and the alienation of the culturally exiled by an affirmation of experience with love as its generic base.

“Trial” aims at it re-entry and readjustment of the exile to life during “the rough transition from England to India” by means of a process of reaffirmation of faith in the beauty of life. From such a perspective “Trial” is much more than a mere “Celebration of love”. It is an effort at
recapitulation of the poet’s youth against the background of the misery and loneliness he underwent during the period of exile.

One may view “Trial” in any of the following perspectives; either as the poetic self’s exploration of his growth by inter-relating his twin inheritance or as an exploration into the everlasting spiritual joy of love with body as the apparatus, the predominant carminative effect of the effort is a sense of fatigue, a sense of waste and an ever-growing fear that the self’s endeavor to articulate the innate feeling will end up as a mere “wreath of empty words”. Thus the poet’s effort in “Trial” to celebrate love ends up as a more intensified personal crisis with the revelation that love cannot be everlasting. This is the ‘Trial’ that the human valves undergoes during the second phase of his rough passage. The very first poem of this section intones the sense of mortality:

“Mortal as I am, I face the end
with unspeakable relief,
knowing how I should feel
if I were stopped and cut off,
where I to clutch at the air,
straw in my extremity,
how should I not scream,

'I haven't finished'?” (p-29)

Even the soothing touch of love makes the protagonist aware of his limitations and the circular movement of the “night”.

“Love, I haven’t the key
to unlock His gates.

Night curves,

I grasp your hand”. (Ibid)

It is this sense of basic disillusionment that leads to the mood of self-mockery and wryness in which he calls himself “a disused attic” whose walls were brightened by “the skylight of your face”. The predicament in which love fails and word ‘eclipses’ the body the redemption offered by physical love is only a passing phase, which cannot sustain the poet’s sense of authenticity. In such a predicament nothing nullifies the self’s degenerate state:

“ The clock was my simple unromantic moon

I counted the digits

Of the years on”. (p-40).
The confession in “Trial 13” that “These days I often think of death” has to be viewed in this light. The images of body-touch, flesh, bone, hand, arm, forehead, eyes-are ultimately led towards the images of death and decay:

“Sleep becomes impossible:
the eyes shut in apology
hinges which the mind turns
its fragile door on,
as I hob-and-nob with death”. (p-41)

and he adds

“Myopic eyes strain to catch
every straw in the wind
as touch after tomb explodes.
I feel the stone burn
Under my feet.

.......weight love
in the scales of a pool
of water my five-year-old son
erases with the drop of a ball
it is then night”. (p-44).
Thus the expeditions of love as a search for a new identity in terms of body experience only aggravate the crisis within him. Thus, as Brijraj Singh remarks, in his work, “The Achievement of R.Parthasarathy”,

“Parthasarathy’s love poetry conveys the whole range of feeling that his remark suggests, from the ecstasy of transcendence to the drugged mindless trance of passion, to the feeling of being cleansed by sex, to the poignant bitter-sweet of memory to the anguished sense that doom cannot be stayed off”. (1980:68)

Viewed in this perspective the sense of death and disintegration as a reality here-and-now is the end product of the journey of Parthasarathy’s poetic self which was intended to be the recognition of love as a reality here-and-now. On the whole “Trial” while being a phase of the self’s journey through constant progressions and regressions, has not been without its rewards.

According to him “Homecoming” derives its sustenance from grafting itself on to whatever he finds usable in the Tamil Tradition. “Homecoming” attempts a redefinition of himself-what is means to be a Tamil after having whored after English Gods. Though English has ceased to inhibit his
sensibility, he knows that in his attempts to come to terms with his Tamil heritage, English will act in spite of him to be a force that he will have to reckon with:

"My tongue in English chains,
I return, after a generation, to you,
I am at the end
Of my Dravidic tether,
Hunger for you unassuaged.
I falter, stumble". (p-47)

His reflection on relationship lands him at the burning ghat of his father where "relations stood like exclamation points". He is shocked and the shock comes from the realization that part of his self died with his father. It was the moment for him to realize that one has to make oneself "an expert in farewells".

"................. An unexpected November
shut the door in my face:
I crachsed, a glass house
Hit by the stone of Father’s death". (p-50)

The very existence of the values seems strange. This predicament accounts for the recognition of the poet about himself:
“I stare at myself
often confront a stranger
in the scratched glass, older perhaps,
who resembles my father”. (p-52)

In a wider context, the images of the ‘glass’ crashed by the death of the father and the silver-worn off-mirror suggest the predicament of the modern man who is broken into narrow isolated selves when the old world of integrated existence crashes to disaster. Critics have dwelt much on a stanza that occurs in ‘Home Coming 15’:

“It’s time I wrung the handkerchief
of words dry. Dipped it
in the perfume of silence”. (p-62)

nothing in it the poet’s aspiration for “aphasia” by cultivating the “language of silence” as a means to articulate the religious vision of the absolute. There are lines which occur in “Home Coming15” indicating that the creative urge of the poet pours forth itself in an urgency of expression.

“A poem breaks out
incandescent, on the type writer,
stripping night
to the thinness of dawn”. (Ibid)
The direction, in which such a poetic stance moves on, is towards a philosophy of positive acceptance of facts – “Now, hopefully, I clutch at straws / of unevent”.

Being conscious of the loss of half of his life, the poet is determined to ‘give quality to the other half’ and thinks that his life has come full circle. He has glimpsed the truth.

Nothing can really

Be dispensed with. The heart needs all. (p-24).

The youthful passion for the beloved makes their union urgent and correspondingly brief. Thus the poet says:

Under the heavy lens of noon

Passion, quicker than candles,

Burns, smoking the glass of our bodies. (Ibid)
He recalls his love-affairs in different sections of ‘Trial, when “in the dark, hands and lips/have marked the spot/we touched”, and “our bodies scrape home / for passions, older than the stones of Konark”.(p-36) Hence it is significant that all the three poets in their respective spheres of thought have laid well-deserved emphasis on India’s ancient culture and tradition.