

Divided in the root and dilemma: Re-reading Rajgopal Parthasarathy in Postcolonial era

GOUTAM KARMAKAR

Assistant Teacher

Department of English, Bhagilata High School (H.S)

Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal

India

Abstract:

Contemporary Indian English Literature belongs to postcolonial literature like all other literature as Canadian, Caribbean or Australian literature. In the post-independence era, almost all the poets came with their decolonized approaches and individuality in order to create a poetic tradition in a indigenous way. In that period so many poets came to contribute in Indian English Literature who tried to show in their writing cultural dislocation, linguistic displacement, personal dilemma, acute geographical dislocation, problem of writing poetry in a language which is adopted not inherited. Rajgopal Parthasarathy is one of them who shows similarity with the characteristics mentioned above. He tries to recreate the stability and lost order of the society and culture. This paper attempts to highlight the cultural dilemma ad search for roots and identity Parthasarathy through some of his poems from 'Rough Passage'.

Keywords: Root, Identity, Dilemma, Tamil Culture, Imperialism.

Introduction:

“No true poet can escape tradition, for all our yesterdays are involved in the poet’s deeper consciousness; and no true poet can escape the pressure of the present, for he is in it and for it...” (Iyengar,641-42)

R. Parthasarathy is no more exception in this case. He gives a new dimension, a new thought and a new way of outlook to Indian English Poetry. But in doing so he has to suffer a lot as he dwells in cultural dilemma which results in alienation and rootlessness. On one hand he dreamt of England as his future home and English language with English culture as his medium of expression. And on the other hand he loves his own Tamil culture very much. As a result, a double alienation from English language and Tamil culture are found in his poetry. He is suffering from the conflicts between his past memories and present social reality. Alienation and search for identity come obviously with a sense of homesickness in his poetry. So his 'Rough Passage' deals with emotional and cultural dilemma, rootlessness, urge for belongingness, impotence to acquire foreign culture and language and love for Tamil culture.

R. Parthasarathy's contribution to Indian English Poetry is quite remarkable, uncountable and unforgettable. As a poet, he does not compose too much poems but which he composes are notable and praiseworthy. Poetry from Leeds (1968), edited volume of Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (1976) and Rough Passage (1977) are his masterpieces. And his poetic world in postcolonial era can be shown in a more vivid and clear way in 'Rough Passage'. Here we find his cultural dilemma, striving for native roots and search for identity. 'Rough Passage' has divided into three sections namely 'Exile', 'Trial' and 'Homecoming'. In 'Exile', he wants to show his solitary condition in England and his fractured bond with Tamil culture. In 'Trial', he wants to find consolation through physical love as this section deals with emotion, love and human relationship. And in the last section 'Homecoming', he tries to harmonize the fusion of the English language with his Tamil culture.

Before starting the discussion I would like to quote what I came across in Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets about Parthasarathy: "Parthasarathy dwells upon the question of language and identity and upon the inner conflict that arises

from being brought up in two cultures. Exile, the first poet, opposes the culture of Europe with that of India, and examines the consequences of British rule on an Indian, especially the loss of identity with his own culture and therefore the need for roots. Again the turmoil of non-relationship personal love holds forth the promise of belonging, and the second part 'Trial' celebrates love as a reality here and now 'Homecoming', the third and final part of Rough Passage explores the phenomenon of returning to one's home. It is a sort of overture made with the aim of starting a dialogue between the poet and his Tamil past. The strength of the poem derives from his sense of responsibility towards crucial personal events in his life." (TTCIP, 74). In 'Exile', Parthasarathy wants to show the images of India along with poverty, filth, domination and socio-cultural structure of his natives as they were colonized and controlled through colonial discourse. He in these aspects wants to show orientalism and its impact and images in these lines:

"A grey sky oppresses the eyes:
Porters, rickshaw-pullers, barbers, hawkers,
Fortune-tellers, loungers compose the scene." (Exile)

In the second section 'Trial', he wants to show his realization of his inability to rediscover his Tamil past and his own roots. And in order to remove this alienation, he even engages in love. This engagement in love adds variety, seriousness, sensuousness and aesthetic dimension in his poems. But his dissatisfaction in love again brings that sense of failure, alienation and detachment into his mind. As he says:

"My past is an unperfected stone
The flaws show, I polish
The stone sharpen the luster to a point." (Trial)

In his 'Trial', he shows that it is not a very intelligent move to write about native's condition, to express one's creative faculties and to acquire knowledge in English language. Because it is not our mother tongue and therefore one face difficulties to acquire it. As he says:

“School was a petty kettle of fish
the spoonfuls of English
brew never quite slaked your thirst.” (Trial)

He is in some kind of moral and cultural dilemma. A sense of lost and waste is very much present in his poetry. He realizes that his Tamil culture is destroyed under the monstrous spell of western civilization. Even the Tamil people change their attitudes towards religion and God. And he wants to make a union between his inner self and Tamil past. Sometimes out of frustration and retrospection, he Compares Western culture with Indian culture. As he says:

“While Ravi Shankar
Cigarette, stubs, empty bottles of shout
And crisps provided the necessary pauses.” (Exile)

But in the beginning years like Michael Madhusudan Dutta, he wants to adopt English in a more vivid way. In some of his poems, British poet’s influence is seen. As in ‘False Teeth’, he says:

“For many years now he has had his teeth
In the English language- false teeth
His earliest poems were rhymed
Now rhymes are more fashionable in toothpaste ads.”
(False Teeth)

Soon after that he realizes that he has made a fault as his own Tamil culture and past are often forgotten by him. In his ‘Rough Passage’ comprises of three parts namely ‘Exile’, ‘Trial’ and ‘homecoming’, he experiments with his English language and Tamil culture to create a balance between them. In these poems we find so many conflicts and dilemmas as he is heir to two languages and two cultures. He deeply suffers from cultural anxiety because of divided allegiance. As in some poems we find his desperate longing for home. I agree totally with Lal and Kumar as what they said in the introduction of the book ‘Interpreting Homes’: “Home is one word that holds meaning for

everybody, albeit a changing one forever in search for a new vocabulary, in a Derridean sense, always already written.” (Lal and Kumar, xvii)

Actually home is a place where emotional and psychological strength and balance can be seen. In the poem ‘Stairs’, Parthasarathy wants to communicate with home as he doesn’t know about the end of the stair. As he writes:

“Other stairs and rails
have guided me,
always with the chill promise
of a home. Only
the heart isn’t hospitable anywhere.” (Stairs)

Along with home, he wants to embrace and adopt his own culture. As in ‘Under Another Sky’, he writes:

“There is something to be said for exile:
You learn, roofs are deep. That language
Is a tree, loses colour
under another sky.” (Under Another Sky)

As he realizes the fact that his diasporic identity creates so much problems and dilemma in him that his poems alienates from his own culture. As in ‘Exile’, he says:

“The hourglass of the Tamil mind
is replaced by the exact chronometer
of Europe.” (Exile)

Actually throughout ‘Exile’, he wants to show his sense of alienation with his complete knowledge of dislocation from past. As in ‘Exile 8’, his realization about existence is shown:

“The years have given me little wisdom
and I have dislodged myself to find it.
Here, on the banks of the Hoogly,
In the city Job Charnock built.
I shall carry this knowledge to another city
In the bone urn of my mind.” (Exile 8)

Actually he is under the spell of colonial language and he also wants to overcome his pain for his inability to adopt personal and national self. He realizes that only home can provide him care, love, joy and comfort. Tamil culture seems to be a lover for him and he wants to embrace it with his mind and body. In the very first poem of 'Homecoming', he shows his joy and liberation:

“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.” (Rough Passage)

A close reading from colonial and imperial point of view will show that he is deprived of natural energy, response, creative process because of imperial language. Actually language is very much needed to find one's root and identity. His despair and disillusionment are shown in the poem 'Delhi':

“Eight hundred years of blood letting
has made eunuchs of us,
once for all unsettled
our minds.” (Rough Passage)

Sense of alienation, prolonged silence and void are the result of adopting other language. And he shows this in 'Exile'. Actually in those years, he becomes a handicap person as imperial language takes away all his native voice and the energy emerging out of it. He says once:

“My fingers are stiff
I can't write even two lines
Letters come from all sides
I lay them aside, the days
Collapse on the pile.” (Rough Passage)

But suddenly his realization comes on a static point. Actually his poetry is all about the search for identity and root. He begins his struggle with colonial conditions and imperial forces

as these create debasement and deprivation in his creative faculty. His searches for the disfigured and lost identity find expression in these lines:

“The Sun has done its worst:
skimmed a language
worn it to a shadow.
The hourglass of the Tamil mind
is replaced by the exact chronometer
of Europe now.” (Rough Passage)

His acceptance of foreign culture and language only provide a sense of guilty, alienation, self-deception and the insult of national culture. He understands the need to change himself and his thought process. He is in a cultural dilemma. Despair, loss of past and present encircle him. As a result quest for self and identity start. In a poem he states that he wants to destroy his mind totally which is full of colonialism in order to regeneration. As he says:

“The years have given me little wisdom
and I have dislodged myself to find it.
Here, on the banks of the Hoogly,
The ashes are all that’s left
Of the flesh and brightness of youth
My life has come full circle: I’m thirty.” (Rough Passage)

After that he makes his return and ‘Homecoming’ deals with it. He left behind his days of alienation and rootlessness. He has gained the power of writing again from his own native Tamil culture. Through this power he starts to fulfill his dreams of creating verse with full force and ease. Actually he wants to show what Tamil culture has to show. One can’t spend too many days leaving behind his home and Parthasarathy just realizes it. As he says here:

“To live in Tamil Nadu is to be conscious
everyday of an importance
There is the language for instance.” (Rough Passage)

Decolonization of his mind takes place when he starts to search his identity, his root and his culture. Also he wants to show that by being rooted he becomes unable to interpret his present life. Actually it is very difficult to understand Parthasarathy in many times because often he raises questions as divided in the root is not so easy as sense of exile and estrangement haunt his mind too much. Once he says about this issue:

“I confess, I am not myself
in the present. I only endure
a reflected existence in the past.” (Rough Passage)

But without rooting one can't prosper as often his mind and his homesickness create a mental barrier between them. One is sure to live in a cultural dilemma in that condition and Parthasarathy is no more exception. That is why he also wants to search his root and identity both in the past and in the present. As he says:

“How long can foreign poets
provide the stape of your lines?
Turn inward. Scape the bottom of your past.”
(Rough Passage)

Like all other Indian English Poets, he also wants to reconcile his Tamil culture with his foreign language. Orientalism seems to be found here. But he creates all these keeping in mind his Indian origin, Indian ethos and sensibility. In a poem from 'Homecoming', he shows typical Indian family, atmosphere, manners with the use of images drawn from Tamil culture and words from foreign language. Here he says:

“this years, cousins arrived in Tiruchchanur
in overcrowded private buses
the dust of unlettered years
Later, each one pulled,
Sitting cross-legged on the step:
Of the choultry.” (Rough Passage)

To begin something, ending is necessary. His change motives in 'Homecoming' actually started a long time ago. And he shows his journey towards his return to Tamil culture, self renewal, free human being and redemption in a gradual way. Once he says:

"I must give quality to the other half
I've forfeited the embarrassing gift
Innocence in my scramble to be man." (Rough Passage)

Parthasarathy is a man of mixed feeling. On one hand he wants to share his childhood days, his culture, community, history, everyday life, moments, moods, nature and surroundings in his poetry. And on other hand he shows his love for foreign language. He mixes both feelings and his description of local thinking in a global context make him truly an oriental poet. By breaking the so called meaning of imperialism he wants to create a mind with creative and quality thought process. A deconstructive reading of these lines shows these:

"With paper boats boys tickle her ribs
and buffaloes have turned her to a pond
There's eaglewood in her hair
And stale flowers. Every evening,
As bells roll in the forehead of temples,
She sees a man on the steps." (Rough passage)

Conclusion:

In the concluding lines it can be said cultural dilemma, alienation, search for identity and root are found in Parthasarathy's poetry and for these he can be called a postcolonial Indian English poet to some extent. His poetic world foreshadows post colonialism. Apart from these his poetry bears his oriental attitude. He wants to establish his national identity with his verse and with his verse he is able to break his marginalized subject position. His poetry presents Tamil culture and also satirizes those de-rooted cultural representatives. Struggle between subjectivity and decentered

identity, colonial life and authentic voice, irony and self-irony, isolated consciousness and homesickness make Parthasarathy a poet of caricatured identity. And I agree what K.R.S. Iyenger said about the creative faculty of Parthasarathy: "Of the poets who cultivate an extreme austerity in style, R. Parthasarathy is probably the most successful... Parthasarathy's best poems reveal an uncommon talent and a sensibility that deliberately puts shackles on itself." (Iyengar 673)

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