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Elements of Exile and Alienation in R. Parthasarathy's Poem *'Trial'*

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Abstract

The self-imposed exile had left a traumatic impression on Parthasarathy's soul and psyche which compelled him to look for his real self in his Tamil milieu and Tamil language. "Trail", the second part of Rough Passage voices the efforts of the poet to celebrate, love as a reality here and now. The impulse to preserve his culture is at the bottom of "Trial", where he is continuously haunted by his inadequacy at his inability in Tamil language and feels segregated and alienated. The concluding part of first section "Exile" of 'Rough Passage' intoned the self awareness of his own vulnerability and the virtue of wisdom he acquired in the intense moments of conflict and sense of alienation. It is an effort on the part of the poet to recapitulate his youth against the background of the misery and loneliness he underwent during the period of his exile.

Parthasarathy's poems in this section thus project an experience, the dominant mood of which is a peculiar combination of regretful wryness, tone of fear and anxiety, and symptoms of an alienated person.

Keywords: Exile, Traumatic, Psyche, Segregated, Alienated, Alienation, Wryness.

The self-imposed exile had left a traumatic impression on Parthasarathy's soul and psyche which compelled him to look for his real self in his Tamil milieu and *Tamil* language. "Trail", the second part of *Rough Passage* voices the efforts of the poet to celebrate, love as a reality here and now. Against the turmoil's of non-relationship, personal love holds forth the promise of belonging and embedding in his original tradition. The impulse to preserve his culture is at the bottom of "Trial", where he is continuously haunted by his inadequacy at his inability in Tamil language and feels segregated and aliened. It is the perception and his encounter to his innate inability to recover his linguistic roots -and through them his colonial past –that leads Parthasarathy to explore, in this second section of *Rough Passage*, the seminal emotion of love between man and woman for which the language is undifferentiated experience itself. The concluding part of first section "Exile" of *Rough Passage* intoned the poetic

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self's awareness of his own vulnerability and his subsequent desire to grow by giving 'quality to the other half', by the virtue of wisdom he acquired in the intense moments of conflict and sense of alienation.

"Trial" in *Rough Passage* is his tentative attempt to know and understand love between man and woman. It was Parthasarathy's belief that a man attains his fullest measure in love, but it is not to be in "Trial", where he remains more or less, the same person he was in "Exile", lonely and detached. It is an effort on the part of the poet to recapitulate his youth against the background of the misery and loneliness he underwent during the period of his exile. It is therefore, in a bid to bring meaning to the present by reassessing the past and by giving shape to the accumulated waste of experience that he (Parthasarathy) goes back to a period of westernization, when he had been squandering his youth by 'Whoring after English Gods'. Viewed in this light the whole "Trial" sequence is a "poetic trial", a re-living of the "poetic past" in which more often than not Tamil is identified with a lover with whom the protagonist had a passionate relationship. Which the poet's turning towards Tamil for inspiration in search of a new creative self is symbolized by the protagonist's intensely personal relation with his old love, the creative aspect of language gets identified with the sexual impulses of the lover, and the consummation of the poetic self's intense passion for the cultural inheritance is converged through a description of a sexual intercourse.

The interplay of all these and many more associations in "Trial" makes the declared "celebration of love here and now" a imagistic correlative. Such a imagistic correlative voices he felt need for putting together, the disintegrated self with the purpose of rejuvenating it on the one hand and the crippling awareness about the futility of discursive language on the other. Vasant Shahane says:

> On another - may be on a rather superficial level- "Trail" detracts the self's attempt to explore. The seminal emotion of love between man and woman for which the language is undifferentiated experience itself.[1]

We also have poet's own words in support:

> 'Trial' represents my tentative attempts to know and understand love between man and woman. Images of direct perception preponderate: eyes, hand, tongue and tactile, auditory and olfactory sense vie with one another for an accurate rendering of undifferentiated experience."[2]

Thus, body in "Trial" becomes an overall apparatus to examine the connection between sexual love and individualism. It is only natural that in this process {he poet encounters fundamental challenges of life posed by transience, the tyranny of time and. above all death - pushing him in the dark -corners of alienatedpoles.

One may also perceive "Trial" any of the following perspectives; either as the poetic self's exploration of his growth by interrelating his twin inheritance or as an exploration into the everlasting spiritual joy of love with body as the apparatus, the predominant culminative effect of the effort is a sense of fatigue, a sense of waste and an ever growing fear that the self's endeavour to articulate the innate feelings will end

up 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 a revelation, to the poet's agony, that love cannot be everlasting. His effort to locate his genuine self in the native environment through the invocation of the undefiled past brings only a self-recognition of limitations.

This accounts for the melancholic tone and the sense of darkness, despair and inevitable gloom that pervades through the entire section of "Trial" in *Rough Passage.* William Walsh observes:

> Disappointment, is his principal theme, whether with the edgy complications of love, with the insoluble problems of poetic composition or with England in face of the actuality of what he expected.[3]

Nevertheless, the lesson learnt, towards the end of "Exile" is-the need of acceptance of things as they are "Nothing can really/be dispersed with/ the heart needs all" (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 144-146) stands him in good state during this phase of its evolution when the selfis painstakingly ascertaining whether love would survive in the face of life's bitterness and complexity. This is the "Trial" that the self undergoes during the second phase of his *Rough Passage.*

Parthasarathy's poems in this section thus project an experience, the dominant mood of which is a peculiar combination of regretful wryness and mockery. The very first poem of this section 'Trial' intones the sense of mortality, he feels so down and low that he even contemplates - death in a subdued tone of fear and anxiety, symptoms of alienated person:

> Mortal as I am, I face the end
> With unspeakable relief,
> Knowing how I should feel
>
> if I were stopped and cut off.
> Were I to clutch at the air,
> Straw in my extremity,
>
> how should I not scream,
> 'I haven't finished?
> Yet that too would pass unheeded.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 14-22)

The limitations of poet at the soothing .touch of love and realization, that it is circular journey arriving at the very initial point of its flight after a momentary soaring of spirits makes him melancholic and feel in isolation:

> Love, I haven't the key
> to unlock his gates.
> Night curves.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 11-13)

In "Trial", Parthasarathy in a mood of tranquil recollection, without any hint of nostalgia, attempts to recreate the childhood days, to rejuvenate the self as he glances through pages of an Album:

> Over the family album,
> the other night,
> I shared your childhood.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 4-6)

But he is reminded of the transitoriness of life and transience:

> ..... How your face
> bronzed, as flesh and bone struck
> atouchwoodday.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 31-33)

He recollects the day of his father's death, when his wife had rolled her self in a ball, in 'a shock. Parthasarathy's reminiscence of past only evokes a sense of loss and silence, he can't share feelings with past, remains cut off, with no friends or relations at present. Then, finally in "*Trial*" the experience culminatesin a visual nightmare for the poet, and 'though "passions burn' quicker than candles"[9], he is intervened by the image of death :

> Evening disfigures vision;
> stones of the day turn phantoms.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 41-42)

Parthasarathy is always aware of the corrosive influence of English on the Indian mental-makeup. The poet finds that devoid of native language and culture, the Indian (like Parthasarathy) with English becomes impotent and a misfit in his own country, exiled and alienated:

> School was a pretty kettle of fish:
> the spoonfuls of English
> Brew never quite slacked your thirst.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 44-46)

Parthasarathy's indulgence is delicate and sensitive in and through an experience of love, sometimes associated with a sense of darkness, despair and inevitable gloom, lurking around:

> Tonight I breathe on your skin:
> It clouds over. Soon it will reflect
> Nothing.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 54-56)

The poet faces the 'trial' in 'love' as he finds it (her) "touchable", "inexpugnable" and "sleeved" in a "childhood" which' he cannot surpass and his consciousness is overcome by a sense of dark gloom.

The sense of "Trial", is subtly expressed in his conflicting passions, the transitoriness of bodily fulfilment and the everlasting spiritual joy of love. The images

of body and physical pleasure are curiously juxtaposed with the approaching middle age and the shadow of death and despair:

A knock on the door:
You entered.
Undressed quietly before he mirror
Of my hands. Eyes
Drowned in the shell
As flesh hardened to store.
(*Rough Passage*, Lines: 74-79)

Parthasarathy renders the experience of love, and relegates to the background his sensitive past, like an over worked and tattered umbrella put aside in the corner 'of the room':

I have put aside the past
in a corner, an umbrella
now poor in the ribs.
(*Rough Passage*, Lines: 64-66)

However, the sense of overpowering middle age seems to grow upon him as he is continuously confronted by the predicament of the present and future.

In "Trial 11", Parthasarathy compares his beloved's hand to an image of rare beauty and passion, to a galaxy, he could reach and feel with his 'half inch telescopic fingers', and then suddenly it follows with a curious association of feelings of the opposite extreme, when he broods over the fact that the momentary relief offered by love is not a permanent solace and refuge, for the bodies are mortal and bound to perish in dust:

Overwhelm the flight
Of human speech. Thus celebrate
Something so perishable, trite.
(*Rough Passage*, Lines: 48-51)

The poem of saga of love ends on note of celebrating something so earthly, so elusive and so commonplace as the sheer bodily enchantment, yet another sign of the poet's restless and detached persona. This induces mood of introspection and questioning, whether he and his beloved should lose their way in the undergrowth of tears and stumble over the articulating of their innate feelings, and end up merely; wearing a Wreath of empty words. Incidentally, in an unpublished introduction to *Rough Passage* Parthasarathy says that "his love poetry may be seen as his stumbling footsteps through the field of love).[4] Parthasarathy at this juncture found himself chocked by the tyranny of words:

Our world, love, moves within
The familiar poles of eye, hand,
Is eclipsed by the word.
And words, surely, are no more than ripples
In the deep well of throat.
(*Rough Passage*, Lines: 84-88)

In "Trial 12" the wryness and self-mockery of the poet's mood is reflected in calling himself "a disused attic". The poet's footsteps "burned in the crypt of a page", reading and experiencing the tragic sense in the poetry of the famous Chinese poet TuFu, and well known Greek poet Sappho. Parthasarathy's alienated self is reflected in his visual image of the code as an unromantic counterpart of the moon. In 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 of soul nothing nullifies the self's degenerate state:

> The clock was my simple unromantic moon
> Icount the digits
> Ofthe years on.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 94-96)

The images of the body, of physical reality appear to reach the roots of death, another kind of reality, which, in the poet's view is inevitable. Similarly, the images of light and day are followed by those of darkness and night, a pattern which is partly symbolic of the poet's - alienated, spiritual journey.

Parthasarathy's contemplation of death is neither a mystery nor a muddle, nor an obsession; it is an articulation of the poet's tormented soul in the face of his colonial, personal and intellectual alienation, as he is engaged in a futile battle, to grapple his loss of self and aloofness:

> Sleep becomes impossible:
> The eyes shut in apology,
> hinges which the doors turns
> itsfragile door on,
> asI hob-and hob with death.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 104-108)

Thus, the expedition and his exploitation of love as a search for a new identity and belongingness in terms of bodily experience only aggravate the crisis within the self. His investment in love ends up in loss with the realization that he had only been a tenant in hisbeloved's heart and that there is no hope there of any permanent refuge; love can never materialize and get translated into a promise of a home and that the "heart isn't hospitable anywhere". Added tothis is the price of the awareness of the bitterness of the past that looms large in his consciousness oppressing him with a deep sense of remorse and guilt conscience:

> Curled around me
> are not the familiar arms
> but an octopus past, blurring
> the plate-glass of my days.
>
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 89-92)

Parthasarathy cannot escape the burns of his obtrusive past and its pains he only caresses thewounds of the past and his agony in certain expressions, which are precise to the extent of agony:

> I confess I am not myself
> in the present. I only endure
> a reflected existence of the past.
> (*Rough Passage*, Lines: 114-116)

Thus as Brijraj Singh observes:

> Parthasarathy's poetry conveys the whole range of feelings; from the ecstasy of transcendence to the drugged mindless trance of passion, to the poignant bitter, memory to the anguished sense that cannot be stayed off.[5]

Parthasarathy's poetic-self intended to recognize love as a reality here-and -now, but it got dipped in the sense of death and his disintegrated self. The protagonist endeavours to attempt a communion with his Tamil heritage to re-sensitize his sensibilities,-through his ecstasy of love, but his efforts were futile. In order to-derive pleasure he intercourses with his own inheritance (Tamil) he puts aside his British inheritance - English, which is now for him - "an umbrella/now poor in the ribs". Yet his conflict arising from his own twin inheritance is not a perishable one. Once the short excitement of renewed contact with Tamil is over the appalled awareness about his inescapability from neither of the twin inheritances intrudes upon his consciousness and he finds himself being curled around by the "octopus past".

Thus what the voyage of the self with the native culture - Tamil offers is only a temporary vent for his chaos, not an intellectual resolution as desired by the poet, because even when he is submerged in the sensuous pleasure in. his communion' with Tamil culture, the intellectual awareness about the impact of the tenacity of his own twin inheritance and dual personality is a persistent factor on his consciousness. It is this intellectual awareness that leads the self to recognize tragic irony inherent in the very effort to rehabilitate himself in his roots. Ultimately, he confesses that his effort to seek the "unity of being" through his re-entry into the native culture as a way out of the felt sense of exile has been a failure due to his dual existence: "I am not myself/in the present I only endure/a reflected, existence of the past." O.P. Bhatnagar writes:

> … Parthasarathy as a poet is full of precarious ambiguities, dilemmas and contradictions, placed between the cultures. He can't forget and the culture he doesn't feel a tease with the language through long usage becomes one's potential medium. The dilemma got aggravated by the awareness of the illusive quality of language and by "The Issue of a contemporary artist faced with the problem of expression in the present complexities of time, age and region."[6]

Thus, Parthasarathy's quest for roots remains unfulfilled and he remains alienated.

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