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EXILE IN “HOME COMING”: LOSS OF BELONGING IN PARTHASARATHY’S POEMS

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Abstract

People who search career in alien lands often lose their touch with their roots, their sense of belonging to their own motherland during their foreign stay and when they come back from the foreign land find themselves totally uprooted. They live in a state of dilemma and fail to connect to any of the two worlds, east or west. However, in case of Parthasarathy it is good to see that he creatively expresses this detachment and alienation in his creative works. One can clearly observe this loss of belonging to his native land in his famous collection of poems “Homecoming”, first published in 1977. Parthasarathy in vain tries to fly back to his native land in the evening as the birds fly back to their nests in the evening. The birds find solace and rest in their nests but it is not so with Parthasarathy. As he comes to home land he wishes to connect to his people. He finds himself at a loss to pronounce the Tamil words and explain his own work in Tamil. He laments having lost his contact with the Indian myths and lore and cannot appraise his own identity remaining ignorant to his legacy which leads to alienation.

**Key Words:** Alienation, detachment, dilemma, foreign sojourn, material advancement, motherland, mother tongue, native land, uprooted.

Only a man like Mahatma Gandhi can find himself and his identity when he comes back to his native land after a long foreign sojourn. The period that Gandhi spent during his education in England and protest in Africa was just the stepping stone in his way to Mahatma after coming back to India. Actually for Gandhi his stay in England or South Africa was not his ultimate goal, but just means to a larger goal. On the other hand, is quite astonishing to see people like Parthasarathy who lose their touch with their roots, their sense of belonging to their own motherland during their foreign stay, and

when they come back from the western world they find themselves totally uprooted. In fact they are the people who live in a state of dilemma and fail to connect to any of the two worlds, east or west. However, in case of Parthasarathy it is good to see that he creatively expresses this detachment and alienation in his creative works.

Tamil Nadu, the symbol of ancient Indian culture and literature, has been the source of inspiration and motivation for Indians and foreigners as the centre of staunch Indianness. Parthasarathy, who hails from Tamil Nadu, went away quite early to

the west in search of his career. Like Toru Dutt he always realized a link to his native land even while he was away from his motherland. When Parthasarathy established himself as a poet and gained name and fame, he came back to Tamil Nadu and remained here from 1971 to 1978. But the feelings he had, the divine happiness he felt in Tamil Nadu when he was a child, were now the things of past. He couldn't see or feel those glimpses of joy which he cherished since his childhood. They became the things of past, of yore. One can clearly observe this loss of belonging to his native land in his famous collection of poems "Homecoming", first published in 1977 with fourteen poems. Two more poems were added later on up to 1980 when the OUP published his works.

He expresses his views about his loss of touch in his "Notes on the Making of a Poem" and tells about his departure to foreign country and coming back to Tamil Nadu. Most of the Indians go to the west for education, for money and for social status. In their efforts to gain their mission they just become apes to the English. One can make an interesting comparison between Arun Joshi and R. Parthasarathy – one a novelist and other a poet. Arun Joshi, like Parthasarathy bears the influence of Kafka, Camus and Sartre. He shows his protagonists as a creation of two worlds - Indian and western, the worlds of ideology and material advancement. In short his heroes are always in dilemma to ascertain their belonging. Though in the beginning his protagonists become blind followers of the western way of life but in the end they return to their native roots. On the other hand, Parthasarathy in vain tries to fly back to his native land in the evening as the birds fly back to their nests in the evening. The birds find solace and rest in their nests but it is not so with Parthasarathy. The flying birds and even the lower density of people on the roads inform him that it is evening and he should go home but, quite contrarily, he gets only alienation and loss of his personality.

Rise from the table and shake the dust

From my eyes. Pick up

My glasses and look for my self

In every nook and corner

Of the night. (*Rough Passage* 56)

When in the evening he comes back towards home, he feels exhausted and tired not only physically but psychologically as well. This is the evening, the sense of

I am no longer myself as I watch

the evening blur the traffic.....

I return home tired

My face pressed against the window

Of expectations. (*RP*, 61)

One of the most important aspects of his poems is the language. Parthasarathy expresses his inability to grasp, speak and write his own mother tongue Tamil. This factor creates greater isolation for him. Tamil language as we know is one of the richest languages in India in relation to myth and linguistics. But while imitating the English linguistics and mannerism, Parthasarathy lost his own mother tongue. Now he has come back to his home land and he wishes to connect to his people. He finds himself at a loss to pronounce the Tamil words and explain his own work in Tamil. He laments that he fails to understand the great work of Tamil *Kural*, composed quite early in the third or fourth century. The work still inspires Tamilians to be proud of their culture, myth and language. In addition, today the Tamil Cinema has become a great voice to popularize Tamil Language among the people. As we know, the great Tamil stars of Cinema in the times of Parthasarathy was M.G. Ramchandran along with Jai Lalita and they later on turned to politics because they had become famous with the help of Tamil Cinema. Quite contrarily, Parthasarathy is not able to appreciate his own language and tries to express in linguistic failure that he has lost the knowledge of phonetic structure and sound pattern of Tamil and so Tamil seems to him a tired language. No doubt, he expresses his great desire and hunger to speak Tamil but it becomes a tether for him. He stammers and makes mistakes in using his own mother tongue:

My tongue in English chains

I return after a generation to you

I am at the end

Of my Dravidic tether....

Speak a tired language

Wrenched from its sleep in the Kural

Teeth, palate, lips still new. ( *RP*, 47)

The way Parthasarathy expresses his frustration and problems about bilingualism cannot be understood particularly without realizing the agony one feels when failing to communicate through one's mother tongue lisped during childhood. No doubt this can be true of any foreign language that one wishes to speak fluently and one's tongue is not habitual of the flips and flops of that but it cannot be normally in case of mother tongue. It is well accepted theory that bilingualism helps one to understand the people and language in a better way as one can easily connect to them. But for Parthasarathy Tamil had become an old language. He laments, "We have lost our contact with our Indian myths and lore and cannot appraise our own identity remaining ignorant to our legacy which leads to alienation" (Kalra 94). He comes to India with a great desire to revive Tamil language but he does not find himself able to accomplish the pious duty. Quite opposite to his ambition Tamil becomes the symbol of his depression and impotence. The great poets like Valluvar and Nammalvar, for him, are out of context. They are dead like the Tamil language. This makes him more alienated than ever.

With the split personality he is not able to connect to the people. Robert Frost writes that one is alone and he is more alone when he dies. The deaths, particularly of parents, make a person more alone. It is a psychological fact that a son remains young till his father is alive. He feels no loss but just after the death of his father, the seriousness of death surrounds him. Not only this, he feels the loss of protection after the departure of father. He also becomes ready to face greater realities of death. It is also true that after the death of father the son takes up his position in Indian society traditionally. At the same time his physical structure also resembles his father that brings the memory of his father to his mind whenever he looks in to mirror. His facial curves remind his of him father and he becomes all the more sad. In some of the poems of

"Homecoming" the author writes about his father's death and the ways he observes his like face in the mirror. Memory haunts his mind making him more alienated. He feels that part of himself died with his father:

I am my father now

The lines of my hands

Hold the fine compass of his going:

I shall follow.....

I stare myself.

Often confront a stranger

In the scratched glass older perhaps

Who resembles my father. (*RP*, 50, 52)

He tries his best to communicate to the people, relatives and family members. He observes his childhood fellows who have grown up and have children playing around them. These people do not pay attention to him and are busy in their own lives. He feels that he has become an actor who gives farewell to the people with sad face. All these activities make him alienated when he remains alone after the death of his father. Like *The Foreigner* of Arun Joshi, he feels greater depression, when he observes Indians in India blindly imitating the western culture. He tries to find his roots and identity, so he comes back to India and Tamil Nadu but he finds himself alien and alone standing at the beach of the river Vaikai. The great poets like Valluvar and Nammalvar have become "Stinking carcass" (*RP*, 48) for him. The problems are greater when one feels alien among one's own people. Like all Indians, he realizes his mistake that in order to rise higher in life and station, he loses touch with natural surroundings and his native people. The dull and mechanical routine of an educated man brought him away from his own identity. He has to pay the price, and therefore, he says:

I have exchanged the world

For a table and chair I should not complain.  
(*RP*, 56)

His poems echo the Wordsworthian lament of "The World is too much With Us" in modern

language. His education and his worldly progress have become obstacle in his relation to people. He is so much hopeless that he is unable to give lesson to his readers. He realizes his mistake when he feels that he chased the wrong ambition, false dreams and materialistic progress at the price of inner peace, identity and solace. He has lost them and for him it is too late to mend the fault and sin he has committed. Certainly there are reasons behind his loneliness as he failed in having a good marital life. He could not get peace. He thinks and remembers the lesson of Greek poets. Failure in family life gives him greater frustration. He thinks that it is "Better to bury a woman than marry her." (RP 58)

In his *Notes on Making a poem* Parthasarathy accepts the situation and he feels that he cannot help it. It is better to accept the fate and adjust with uncertainties of life, "Back on Indian soil, under the hot sky, I felt strangely at home. England had been a trial by fire." (*Notes on Making a Poem*, 1981, 70)

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