

A Postcolonial Approach to Rajagopal Parthasarathy's Rough Passage

Sri Kalyan Jyoti Khanikar

Dept. of English, Borhat B.P.B.M. College, Charaideo, Assam-785693

Abstract:

Postcolonialism encompasses a wide variety of approaches and it is not easy to set forward a common definition. It is aimed at disempowering such theories by means of which colonialists perceive, understand and know the world. Postcolonial theory, thus establishes intellectual space for subaltern to speak for themselves, in their own voices. As a general domain of intellectual inquiry, postcolonialism addresses those questions that emerge in relation to the aftermath of imperialism. More often postcolonial theory is concerned with issues of identity, diaspora, alienation, hybridity, language etc. Rajagopal Parthasarathy is one of those poets who suffered from diasporic identity, alienation, cultural conflict and a sense of being uprooted. In the present paper, a humble attempt has been made to analyse his "Rough Passage" from theoretical perspectives. The paper highlights his treatment of issues under postcolonial critical theory.

Keywords: postcolonial, diaspora, alienation.

Introduction:

Post-colonial writings can be considered as the historical marker of the period because it deals the literature which come after decolonisation as well as it is considered as an embodiment of intellectual approaches. At the intellectual level Post-colonial writers engaged themselves in opening up the possibilities of a new language and a new way of looking towards the world. Their themes are focussed on the subject matters like identity, national and cultural heritage, hybridity, diaspora, contemporary reality, human relationship and emotions etc. In other words, post-colonialism has a number of common motifs and themes like cultural dilemma and dominance, quest for identity, self-exploration along with some peculiar style of presentation which are meant the central ideas of post-colonial literature. Rajagopal Parthasarathy is one of the Indian English poets whose poetry bears postcolonial characteristics. He tries to recreate the stability and lost order of the society and culture. Parthasarathy's contribution may not be voluminous, but his compositions are worthy of critical analysis. "Poetry from Leeds", "Rough Passage" are his masterpiece and his poetic world in post-colonial era can be shown in a more vivid and clear way in "Rough Passage". Published in 1977, "Rough Passage" is divided into three parts, viz "Exile", "Trial" and "Homecoming". In "Exile", he attempts 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.

Significance of the Study:

R.Parthasarathy's poems have been included in some finest anthologies like "The Golden Treasure of Writers Workshop", "A New Book of Indian Poems in English", "Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets". Unfortunately very few research works have been done on his poetry and he is always considered a minor poet. Poetry of Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Shiv K.Kumar has always become first choice for research scholars and they have been analysed, researched widely from post-colonial perspective. But, an in-depth reading of Parthasarathy's poetry shows that he is much ahead of time. His vehement denunciation of westernisation may not be immediately appreciated by a generation dazzled by the glitter and glamour of western civilization. But his poetic sensibility, his style of expression and his presentation of reality are worthy of critical analysis. Bijay Kant Dubey has rightly said that among the modern poets whose names have been doing rounds, R.Parthasarathy is definitely one to stake claim for his inclusion on the basis of poetic verve and excellence. If Purshottam Lal is a faded romanticist, Jayanta Mahapatra an imagist, Ramanujan an ironist, Kamala Das a realist, Parthasarathy is a mixture of them. Parthasarathy is but one book PhD matter and to choose him for one's dissertation is to discuss him by poem by poem. More research works should be done on his poetry as he is yet to be unveiled.

Objectives:

The objectives of the paper may be summarized as follows:

1. To examine Parthasarathy's poetic experience in the light of post-colonial literary theory
2. To analyse thematic concerns from theoretical perspectives.

Methodology:

The present paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. Based on both primary and secondary sources, the paper is a humble attempt to rediscover Rajagopal Parthasarathy's poetic achievement. The methodology is divided into three phases viz., data collection, data analysis and data presentation.

Discussion:

The essence of R.Parthasarathy's magnum opus "Rough Passage" is definitely the influence of the different cultures on the life of the poet-speaker. The poem is painted in the clash between two cultures: English and Tamil. The first part "Exile" opposes the culture of India, more especially Tamil to the Europe and examines the consequences of British rule on an Indian, and especially an Indian's loss of his identity and therefore, his need to go back to his roots. The final part of the poem explores the phenomenon of returning of one's home. Parthasarathy is concerned with the problems arising from the use of English language and his aspiration to become an English poet. This blind inclination towards foreign language alienated him from his own culture. As a result he has sensed a loss of identity of his own in the own cultural arena. "Exile" describes this experience-the kind of life the poet had to lead among the alien people in England. Parthasarathy, having been born in a Tamil family and having inherited a glorious Tamil past, went to England for higher education. But he received a shock realising that, although he had learnt a good deal in pertaining the English language, English literature and English people, he had been delinked from the roots of the whole process. This feeling is penned in such lines:

"You learn roots are deep;

That language is a tree, loses colour

Under another sky"

He discovered his shattered dream and finds that England is quite unlike what he thought it to be-

“Lanes full of smoke and litter

With puddles of unwashed

English Children”

The British people’s imperialistic arrogance towards Indians offended his sensibility. Indians are referred as “coloureds”. On returning home’ he feels that by having achieved some command over the English language, he has lost much of his nativity. He has now become a mismatch of his own country-

“School was a pretty kettle of fish:

The spoonfuls of English

Brew never quite slaked your thirst.” (“Trial”)

He realises the best time of his life had been lost on making use foreign language and that result him social separation:

“My tongue in English chains

I return after a generation, to you

I am at the end.” (First poem in “Home Coming”)

The use of foreign language impoverished the Indians as they adopted it at the cost of their own cultural root. He points an accusing finger at the sin committed by the English in having led the Indian minds to the English poets only. The Indians are unable to understand the perfect knowledge of the English poets because of their ignorance of the English myths, customs, culture, seasons and English history. The poet forces on the futility of time and energy which the Indians consume having this learning. This deficiency has made many of the so-called urban a mock replica of the westerns with their manners and fashions. Parthasarathy considers the imperative necessity of rejuvenation by linking oneself to one’s own cultural past:

“Turn inward.

Scrape the bottom of your past.

Ransack, the cupboard

For skeleton of your Brahmin childhood.”

In “Rough Passage” Parthasarathy describes the sense of isolation and feeling of disillusion which constitutes the modern man’s predicament. The modern man’s heart remains barren and starved although he appears to be surrounded by all sorts of company. His eyes are the:

“hinges which the mind turns

Its fragile door on,

As I hob-and-nob with death.”

Edward Said’s fusion of Foucault’s discourse theory and Antonio Gramsci’s thoughts on hegemony have heavily theorised the area of thoughts related to the effects of the colonial domination over the socio-cultural structure of the people’s who were colonized and hegemonically controlled through the colonial discourse, defined as a coordinated set of practices, primarily linguistics, that aimed at the “management of colonial relationships”. Moreover, it became a presenter and representer of their non-European world to Europe. The images of Indians that Parthasarathy’s poems present are not unilaterally flattering. They also have the rampant poverty and filth in them that orientalism loved to show as a dominant traits of the colonies. Thus, Parthasarathy confirm the image of the other constructed by the Orientalists:

“A grey sky oppresses the eyes: | porters, rickshaw-pullers, barbers, hawkers, | fortune-tellers, loungers compose the scene (Exile).

“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...” Iyenger’s (Iyenger, 641-642) these words are right in case of Parthasarathy. He gives a new dimension and a new way of outlook to Indian English poetry. But in doing so, as already discussed, Parthasarathy has to suffer a lot as he dwells in cultural dilemma which results in alienation and a sense of loss of root. On one hand he dreamt of England and of becoming an English poet, on the other hand he can not forsake his own Tamil identity and and Tamil culture as he has indefinite love and respect towards his roots. As a result a sense of double alienation arises. He suffers from diasporic consciousness as he experiences a conflict between his past memories and present social reality. “Rough Passage”, thus, has dealt with the themes of alienation, cultural dilemmas, search for identity and diaspora.

To quote from Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, “Parthasarathy dwells upon the question of language and identity and upon the inner conflict that arises from being brought up in two cultures” TTCIP, 74). This conflict reminds of the fictional world of Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Namesake”. In the first part of the poem Parthasarathy contrasts the culture of Europe with that of India and a deep sense of homesickness and longing for root culture is reflected. In the final part of the poem “Homecoming” he explores the phenomenon of returning to one’s motherland. In “Exile” Parthasarathy presents the images of his India along with dirt, poverty, domination and socio-cultural; structures of his natives as they were colonized and controlled through colonial discourse. In “Trial”, the second part of “Rough Passage”, Parthasarathy tries to reveal that it is not very intelligent to move away from the roots and to write about native condition, to express one’s emotion in a foreign language. The poet is in a dilemma, some kind of moral and cultural dilemma. He senses that his Tamil culture is under tremendous pressure and about to destroy under the spell of colonial language and colonial culture. Even the Tamils have changed their attitude towards religion and gods. He attempts a harmonisation of his inner self and reality. Out of frustration and retrospection, he compares the two cultures of Indian and Western as he says:

“ While Ravi Shankar

Cigarette, stubs, empty bottles of shouts

And crisps provided the necessary pauses.” (Exile)

Parthasarathy’s problem is that he is heir to two cultures and two languages. His inner self urges him to return home, to turn back to his roots. As he realises the fact that his diasporic identity creates so much problem and conflict in him that his poems alienate from his own culture and he acknowledges it in “Exile”:

“The hourglass of Tamil mind

Is replaced by the exact chronometer

Of Europe.”

He realizes that he is completely under the spell of colonial language and culture and wants to overcome his pain for inability to adopt personal and national self. He assures himself that only home can provide him his desired love, care, joy and comfort. In “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”

“Homecoming” portrays a picture of his native state as he returns from his sojourn abroad. Now he perceives a marked change in his native language. He comprehends that it was his lack of familiarity

with the mother language that rendered the language alien to his perception. His persistent use of the foreign tongue dispossessed him of his inherently rich native language. His association with English appears to be like imprisonment as wrestles with English chain. He claims that he made mistakes of opting for the wrong gods. He asserts genuine models thrive in their own roots, and native speakers must therefore, refrain from imitating alien culture. He finds that his course of action was erroneous right from the beginning as he began with the English language. Even the second part of “Rough Passage”, in which he celebrates love, elements of exile and alienation are present. 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. The impulse to preserve 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.

Conclusion:

A post-colonial approach to Rajagopal Parthasarathy’s “Rough Passage” reveals that diasporic identity, search for root, cultural dilemma, alienation are central to the context of the poem. He is among those poets who abandoned writing in English and chose to write in native language. Parthasarathy finds that when one is alienated from his culture, his language, his tradition, he finds himself in a dilemma, in a sort of exile. His identity is at stake. In “Rough passage”, the poet attempts an assimilation of two cultures and two languages, a synthesis of the two different traditions. To conclude, R. Parthasarathy resembles Michael Madhusudan Dutt in his denunciation of foreign language, he is on the of V.S.Naipaul in his critical remarks on native social realities, but at his best he shows individuality in his treatment of the themes.

References:

1. Arora, Sudhir.K. “Voyage Within: R. Parthasarathy”. *Transcendence and Immanence in Works of Select Poets in English*,ed.Lata Mishra.New Delhi: Access, 2013.
2. Bhabha,Homi. K. *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge,1990.
3. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*.New York: Routledge, 1994.
4. Bhatnagar,O.P. “R.ParthasarathyRe-evaluation”. *Perspectives on Indian English Poetry: Criticism*,ed, Bijay Kumar Das. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1993.
5. Dubey, Vinay Kumar. “Elements of Exile and alienation inR. Parthasarathy’s Poem ‘Trial’”. *Ars Aritum*. ISSN: 2319-7889, Vol.3, January, 2015.
6. Iyenger, K.R.S. “*Indian Writing in English*”. New Delhi: Sterling Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1985.
7. Karmakar Goutam. “Divided in the root and dilemma: Re-reading Rajagopal Parthasarathy in Postcolonial Era”. *European Academic Research*. Vol. II. Issue 11/February, 2015. ISSN: 2286-4822.
8. Lal, Malashri and Paul Sukrita Kumar “*Interpreting Home in South Asian Literature*”. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley(India) Pvt. Ltd, 2007.
9. Naik, M.K. “*A History of Indian English Literature*”. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi:2006. Print.
10. Pandey Surya Nath.” *Writing in A Post Colonial Space*”. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1999.
11. Parthasarathy,R.*Poetry from Leeds*.Oxford University Press,UK,1968
12. Parthasarathy, R. “*Rough Passage*”. New Delhi: OUP, 1977

13. Parthasarathy, R. (ed). *Ten Twentieth Century Indian English Poets*. New Delhi: OUP, 1977.
14. Rajan, B.” Influence and Existentialism in Modern Indian English Poetry. *International Journal of Education and Applied Sciences Research*. ISSN: 2349-2899, Vol.I, Issue-5. 2014.
15. Rukhya, M.K. “Poetry Analysis: R. Parthasarathy’s “Homecoming”, Indian Literature, 2014.
16. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
17. Sharma, Godavari. The Poetry of R.Parthasarathy. *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, XIX,1979.
18. Sivaramakrishnan,S. “The Last Refinement on Speech:The Poetry of R.Parthasarathy”. *The Literary Criterion*,XII,1971.
19. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Basingstoke Macmillan, 1988.
20. Parthasarathy, R. *Rough Passage*. New Delhi: OUP, 1977.
21. Iyenger, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1985.
22. Parthasarathy, R. (ed). *Ten Twentieth Century Indian English Poets*. New Delhi: OUP, 1977.
23. Pandey Surya Nath. *Writing in A Post Colonial Space*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1999.
24. Lal, Malashri and Paul Sukrita Kumar *Interpreting Home in South Asian Literature*. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley(India) Pvt. Ltd, 2007.
25. Karmakar Goutam. *Divided in the root and dilemma: Re-reading Rajagopal Parthasarathy in Postcolonial era*. European Academic Research, Vol. II. Issue 11/February, 2015. ISSN: 2286-4822.
26. Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi:2006. Print.
27. Rukhya, M.K. *Poetry Analysis: R. Parthasarathy’s “Homecoming”*, Indian Literature, 2014