

## PAPER - VI - INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

### Poetry

#### Unit - I Detailed Study :

Nissim Ezekiel *1929*

- i) A Very Indian Poem in Indian English
- ii) Enterprise

A.K. Ramanujan *1929*

- i) Small-scale Reflections on a Great House
- ii) A River

R. Parthasarathy *1989*

- i) River, Once
- ii) Under Another Sky

P. Lal *1929*

- i) The Lecturer
- ii) The Poet

Gauri Deshpande *1942*

- i) The Female of the Species
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Kamala Das

- i) The Old Playhouse
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- i) The Waiters
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- i) Dilwadi
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: *The Man Eater of Malgudi* ✓

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Arundhati Roy

*The End of Imagination*

Indo-Anglian Poetry in a recognizable form could be traced back to early 19<sup>th</sup> C to the contributions of the Dutt family. The Dutt family album consists of lyrics, ballads, translations etc and it reveals their love for the English language and their love for the romantic. Since, then it has come a long way. Poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Sree Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu wrote beautiful verses in English. Their poetry revealed their spirit of freedom, their concern for the nation, their political and social ideologies and their spiritual inclinations as well. In the language of the British, they conveyed Indian thought and sensibility. As R. Parthasarathy says, "In examining the phenomenon of Indian verse in English, it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of British from India. An important characteristic of Indian verse in English is that it is in Indian sensibility and content and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment and reflects its mores, often ironically"

However, Indo-Anglian poetry could free itself from the image of being imitative only during the post-Independent period. The publication of Ezekiel's *Five Volumes of Anthology* brought a change in the trend. He wrote in simple, free verse, without rhetoric and ornamental imagery. His tone was ironic. He had avoided emotion and sentiment. His style was refreshingly different. He did not write in the conventional rhythmic language of the past, but in the simple, direct, aphoristic style, which showed the influence of the modern western poets, like Dylan Thomas, Philip Larkin, T S Eliot and Rilke.

His style was generally accepted and most of the modern poets wrote in a similar style. For most of them were bilinguals and had the capacity to write fluently in English and in their mother tongue. For some of them like Ezekiel and Dom Moraes, English was their only language. Ezekiel's language was direct and simple. The poets who followed wrote in an aphoristic style using metaphors. Themes were also varied. Most of Ezekiel's poems were on love and sex. The poems of A. K. Ramanujan were about Hindu family situations and they revealed his search for the roots and the poems of R. Parthasarathy expressed his sense of alienation and his agony of leaving his motherland. The poetry of Kamala Das brought out the woman in her. She presented problems of man-woman

② Born - 1924 - Bombay

③ Hr. sec. school → Bombay

relationship from the feminine perspective. She wrote frankly and boldly about love and sex and about the predicament of women and male oppression.

Hr. studies



London

description  
of bombay.

Jayanta Mahapatra, Daruwalla, Adil Jusswalla, Gieve Patel are the other modern Indian-English poets and they present in their poems the changing ideologies, the problems

of love and sex, problems of language and culture, diaspora and the sense of alienation.

All these aspects and the reflection of various other shades and patterns of the life could be found in post independent Indo-Anglian poetry.

His poem  
→ typical Indian style

Nissim Ezekiel

Biographical Sketch

Nissim Ezekiel was born into a family of Bene Israeli descend in 1924 in Bombay.

After his high school education in Bombay, he went to London for higher studies. He had to struggle hard for money and he took up odd jobs in order to make both the ends meet.

After the completion of his course when he returned to Bombay, better opportunity knocked at his doors. A dynamic career then followed and he took up various activities like writing plays, doing editorial work, advertising etc.

His first book of poems A Time to Change was published in London in 1952. His other volumes are Sixty Poems (1953), Five Volumes of Anthology, The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), The Snake Skis and other poems (1974) and Hymns in Darkness (1976). He received the Sahitya Akademi award for the Latter-Day Psalms (1982).

Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

Ezekiel is a prolific writer and has carved a niche for himself in the world of Indo-Anglian Poetry. Considered as one of the major poets of Indo-Anglian poetry in the post-independent period, he has influenced many poets of the next generation. His prose like verse has become a model for many poets and is commonly used today.

Ezekiel translates all his experiences into poetry and says that his poems have a "self-therapeutic purpose". His poetic career has different stages and it brings out the evolution in him. As Srinivasa Iyengar points out, "In his first two volumes Ezekiel deals with persons, places, memories, situations, ecstasies of flesh and the concept of mind and

*"As others choose to give themselves,  
In some remote and backward place.  
My backward place is where I am"*

*"Background Casually"*

The poet's conflicts and confusions, his doubts and frustrations, have found expression in his poetry. He reveals his weaknesses and prays to God to rescue him.

*The vices, I've always had*

*I still have.*

*The virtues I've never had*

*I still do not have*

*From this human way of life*

*Who can rescue man.*

*If not his maker*

*Do thy duty Lord.*

*"Egoist's prayers"*

He believes that self-fulfillment is important. If one is satisfied with himself, then he can be at peace and communicate with the whole world even if he is alone.

*I close the door and sit alone*

*In kinship with the world*

*I am nearer everybody*

*Being near myself alone.*

---- (Happening)

Ezekiel wrote in a style that was open, simple and passionate. His aphoristic and

conversational style gave a dramatic colour to his poems. His imagery is functional.

Ezekiel has been influenced by writers like T.S.Eliot and Rilke. When asked about the influences on him Ezekiel answered, "A clear influence is no proof of a poem's merit... All

his talk about influences may be of some value when I write really good poetry during the next ten years or so, which I certainly hope to do". (Karnani, 1974) He has indeed written

many such poems and has influenced many Indo Anglian writers like P.Lal and Dom

Moraes.

A Very Indian Poem in Indian English

*I am standing for peace and non-violence*

*Why world is fighting fighting*

*Why all people of world*

*Are not following Mahatma Gandhi  
I am simply not understanding  
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct  
But modern generation is neglecting  
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing*

*Other day I'm reading in newspaper  
(everyday I'm reading Times of India  
to improve my English language)  
How one goonda fellow  
Throw stone at Indira behn  
Must be student unrest fellow, I'm thinking  
French Romans country men, I'm saying  
(to myself)  
Lend me the ears.*

---

*Everything is coming  
Regeneration, remuneration, contraception  
Be patiently, brothers and sisters.  
You want one glass lassy?  
Very good for digestion  
With little salt lovely drink  
Better than wine;  
Not that I'm ever tasting the wine  
I am the total teatotaller, completely total  
But I say wine is for the drunkards only.*

*What you think of prospects of world peace?  
Pakistan behaving like this,  
China behaving like that  
It is making me very sad, I'm telling you.  
Really most harassing me.  
All men are brothers, no?  
In India also*

Gujarathis, Maharastrians, Hindiwallas

All brothers

Though some are having funny habits.

Still, You tolerate me,

I tolerate you.

One day RamRajya is surely coming.

You are going?

But you will visit again

Any time, any day.

I'm not believing in ceremony

Always I'm enjoining your company

Supporter of peace & non-violence  
& Wonder.

Q do not follow Gandhan  
Principles.

failed → ancient wisdom.  
going too much after  
fashion & foreign goods

#### Explanation

#### Patriot

Ezekiel's "A Very Indian Poem in Indian English" is a collection where in an exaggerated Indian English, the poet comments on the <sup>2857 (a change)</sup> syntactic oddities of Indian English and the Indian political scene. The first part is titled 'The Patriot'. 'The Patriot' in his address says that he is a supporter of peace and non-violence and wonders why people do not follow Gandhiji's principles. He is frustrated that the modern generation fails to pay attention to the ancient wisdom and is going too much after fashion and foreign goods.

#### Ordinary conversation between an old man & another man

The Second part is presented as an ordinary conversation between an old man and another man. However, there is only one voice. The old man has been reading English newspaper from where he learns what happens in the country. He expresses his disapproval of the behaviour of a rebel throwing stones at Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This can be considered as a political commentary of Indira Gandhi's emergency period and 20-point programme for re-generation where <sup>artificial method</sup> contraception was encouraged. Here there is a mixture of English and Hindi words. The old man asks the listener if he would like to have a glass of Lassi. He adds that it tastes good with a little salt added to it. Then he modifies his comment and says that it tastes better than wine. He then hurries up to clarify that he should not be mistaken for a drunkard, for he is a teetotaler.

#### Neighbouring countries

The old man also expresses his frustration about the behaviour of neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China. He tells about how united Indians are, in spite of the diversity (various languages and various cultures) When the neighbour is about to leave he asks him to visit again and adds in a cordial tone that he does not stand on formalities.

He distinguishes Indian English by the frequent use of present continuous tense (I am standing for peace/ I am not understanding / fighting fighting etc), "no" after statements use of English and Hindi words, mixing the syntactic and lexical elements from both, using noun as adjectives ( Eg. Goonda fellow, Student unrest fellow etc.)

Some critics treat this poem as an alien's view of Indian English, whereas the others treat it as a mild criticism where we are made to laugh at our own follies. Ezekiel however, portrays an Indian who is cordial, worried about the country and the attitude of the people. This description makes one feel that it is not an alien's view of India. Ezekiel says, "My poems in Indian English are rightly described as very Indian poems. So, they should not be considered as 'mere lampoons'. The character and the situations projected are intended to be genuinely Indian and the humour in the English language as it is widely spoken by Indians to whom it is not funny at all." (The Hindu, 2004) These poems have succeeded in depicting the Indian friendliness and warmth in Indian English.

### Enterprise

high

*It started as a pilgrimage  
Exalting minds and making all  
The burdens light. The second stage  
Explored but did not test the call  
The sun beat down to match our rage*

*We stood it very well, I thought  
Observed and put down copious notes  
On things the peasants sold and bought  
The way of serpents and of goats  
Three cities where a sage had taught*

*But when the differences arose  
On how to cross a desert patch  
We lost a friend whose stylish prose  
Was quiet the best of all our batch  
A shadow falls on us- and grows.*

*Another phase was reached when we  
Were twice attacked, and lost our way  
A section claimed its liberty  
To leave the group. I tried to pray  
Our leader said he smelt the sea*

*We noticed nothing as we went,  
A straggling crowd of little hope,*

*Ignoring what the thunder meant,  
Deprived of common needs like soap,  
Some were broken, some nearly bent*

*When finally, we reached the place  
We hardly knew why we were there  
The trip had darken every face  
Our deeds were neither great nor rare  
Home is where we have to gather grace*

### Explanation: Beginning of the journey

"Enterprise" is a notable poem for its thought content and lyrical language.

The poem is allegorical, treating life as a pilgrimage. The first stanza describes the beginning of the journey. The pilgrims begin their journey. Curious and eager, ready for enterprise, they are prepared to face and endure all the burdens.

The mind is alert and the pilgrims are ready for all kinds of practical learning.  
~~The great stage of pilgrimage!~~  
This is brought out clearly where the poet says

*we stood it very well, I thought,  
observed and put down copious notes*

but the mind is not receptive, not ready for great moment of revelation yet. The sun is hot.

In the second stage of the pilgrimage importance is given to factual details. Facts are observed and learnt enthusiastically.

*On things the peasant bought and sold  
The way of serpent and of goat  
Three cities were sage had taught*

The practical side of life demands the attention of the pilgrims.

### Differences arise among the pilgrims:

The next stanza describes the next phase where differences arise among the pilgrims when they have to cross a desert patch. In fact, they lose a friend because of their difference. (A shadow falls on us and grows.) Gradually the pilgrims lose their interest in journey, i.e., in the pilgrimage. They stand divided among themselves. The pilgrims ignore every thing that would enlighten them (They ignored "what the thunder meant") since they were divided, and since their basic needs were not fulfilled. Thunder is symbolic of illumination. Hence it could be interpreted that the pilgrims are not so

enthusiastic now, like in the beginning of their journey and hence they miss the important details, which might promote spiritual enlightenment.

### Growth 'within' first :

And there is only utter disillusionment at the end. And by the time the journey/pilgrimage comes to an end, they are puzzled as to why they had taken so much trouble to reach that place. They understand that they could not get any enlightenment from a pilgrimage when they are not receptive. They also realize that there should be growth 'within' first. We can 'gather grace' only at home, that is, in our place, and that too should begin from 'within' us.

The title "Enterprise" symbolically denotes the ventures in the process of spiritual evolution though in the superficial level it tells about the challenges one has to face during a journey.

### Critical comments

- 1) What impresses one about Ezekiel is his remarkable sincerity. He is always himself, with in his range. His poems are generalizations of his own intimately felt experiences - Chetan Karnani
- 2) No intricate symbolism or far-fetched mythology haunts Ezekiel's work and yet the thing clicks. He believes neither in the bogus repetition of P.Lal nor in the shock tactics of A.K.Ramanujan, yet he creates an authentic effect. His poetry is simple, introspective and analytical - Chetan Karnani
- 3) The most prominent aspect of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is, the private sensibility operating in the context of social and ethical changes in post-independent India - Harish Raizada.

### A.K.Ramanujan

A.K.Ramanujan was born in Mysore in a Tamil Brahmin family in 1929. His father was a professor of Mathematics. He grew up in a multilingual environment and could speak Tamil, Kannada and English. He taught in various colleges in South India and later from 1962, he taught Linguistics in Chicago for about 30 years.

He has to his credit, four volumes of poetry. The Striders (1966) was his first publication which was followed by Relations (1971), Selected poems and (1976) Second Sight (1996). However, as A.K.Mehrotra points out, what brought him reputation was his English poems, but his translation. He has translated from Tamil, Kannada and

heart. But his later poems are more matured... the development is from a search for identification to resignation"(p657).

The comment that Ezekiel is "the poet Laureate of the ordinary" (Mehrotra, 248) brings out the essence of his poetry. Ezekiel's poems have a wide range of themes and experiences. He records every small experience like the experience of taking English tuition classes, his London experience and the morning walk in Bombay etc. in his poems. While describing a situation or a person or an incident he does not leave out even the ugly and the uninteresting aspects, thus giving a complete and a realistic picture of the subject taken. His description of Bombay for example tells about the slums, beggars and processions, bringing before our eyes the busy city with all its merits and demerits:

*Barbaric city sick with slums  
Deprived of seasons blessed with rain  
Its hawkers, beggars, iron lunged  
Processions led by frantic drums  
A million purgatorial lanes  
And child like masses many tongued  
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.*

His early poems described people, places and situations with a sense of humour. His A *Very Indian Poem in Indian English* presents typical Indian situations. He teases the oddities of Indian English like the use of present continuous tense in the place of present tense, use of statements for questions, adding "no" with statements etc. Some of these techniques could be seen in this excerpt:

*I am standing for peace and non violence  
Why world is fighting, fighting  
Why all people of world  
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi  
I am simply not understanding.*

(The Patriot)

His poems "Farewell Party to Miss Pushpa T, S", "The Patriot", "The Railway Clerk" belong to this group.

In the second stage, there are more of love poems. Love, sex, marriage, loneliness – these form the main theme of his poetry. Ezekiel is candid even to the point of bluntness in describing man-woman relationship. The passion, the desire for love and sex on one hand, the social norms and his own inhibition on the other hand lead to conflict and this could be perceived in many of his poems

His later poems of the third stage, have a philosophical strain and there is a quest for identity, a desire to unravel the mysteries of life.

*I've stripped off a hundred veils  
And still there are more  
that covers your creation.  
why are you so elusive?*

### Hymns in Darkness.

"The self" is, however, predominant in his poetry in all the three stages. His quest for identity, his sense of alienation, self-analysis and self-criticism occupy a major portion of his work. His 'Background Casually' is autobiographical and the poet tells briefly about his life - his ancestry, his childhood, school days, London experience and marriage. In 'Background casually' he talks about his Jewish origin and how he feels alienated in school.

*My ancestors among the castes  
were aliens crushing seed for bread*  
"Background Casually"

And in the same poem his struggle to overcome this sense of alienation is expressed.

"How to feel at home was the point".

He considers Bombay, his birthplace as his home and expresses his sentiment strongly.

*Confiscate my passport Lord  
I don't want to go abroad  
Let me find my song  
Where I belong*

"Egoist's prayers"

And says that he considers it as his missionary place.

Telugu. His important works of translation are the *Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Telugu*, *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981) *Poems of the Love and War* (1985) and *When Siva* (1973). He has also published a collection of proverbs in Kannada. He devoted much of his time in folk literature- Folk mythologies, puranas and traditions.

Some of his theories and techniques in translation have gained much recognition. He highlights on 'intertextuality' in his folklore studies. In his cultural essays such as "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking(1990), he explains cultural ideologies and behavioral manifestations in terms of an Indian psychology which he calls 'context sensitive' thinking.

#### Themes

"The search for the roots" is the most dominant theme in A.K.Ramanujan's poetry. He says, 'the past never passes; either the individual or historical past or cultural past. It is with us, it is what gives us the richness of understanding'.

This statement clearly brings out his attachment to the past. Childhood experiences of love and exposure to contemporary urban life are some of his recurrent theme. Most of his poems have as the subject matter Indian culture, myth and heritage. Since he was an expatriate, it was probably a natural reaction to live in the past trying to bring from his memory the Hindu life, culture and family set up. Geetha Patel calls his poetry 'exilic writing, where there is retrieval of fantasies of traditions'. (960) The following lines throw light on this aspect and his poetry abounds in such descriptions.

*Grand children who recite Sanskrit*

*To approving old men or bring*

*Betel nuts for visiting uncles* (small scale reflections)

Though it is often the Indian Landscape or environment, his allusions are not limited. 'They range over many disciplines – Literature, Philosophy, religion and folklore – and from the Taittriya Upanishad to L.P.Hartley" (Mehrotra)

His wide reading and depth of knowledge are revealed in the various subject matters that one comes across in his poems.

*Suddenly, connections severed*

*As in a lobotomy unburdened*

*of history, I lose  
my bearings, a circus zilla spun  
at the end of her rope, dizzy  
terrified,  
and happy. And my watchers  
watch, cool as fires  
in a mirror (Looking for the center)*

He writes about Transnationalism and hybridity. His poetry reveals his love for India as well as America. He has humorously described himself as the hyphen in 'indoo-American'. His Chicago Zen exemplifies the theme of transnationalism. Here is an attempt to imagine himself as another hybrid image

*Now tidy your house  
Dust especially your living room  
And do not forget to name  
All your children*

*Watch your step. Sight may strike you  
Blind in unexpected places  
The traffic light turns orange and  
On 57<sup>th</sup> and Dorchester and you stumble,  
You fall into a vision of forest fires  
Enter a frothing Himalayan river  
Rapid, silent.*

The conflict in his mind about the traditional way of life and modernity is revealed in many of his poems. The following lines bring out his struggle to change from the traditional way and his failure in doing so.

*Yes, I know that. I should be modern  
Marry again. See strippers at the tease  
Touch Africa. Go to the movies.*

*But sorry, I cannot unlearn  
Conventions of despair.  
They have their pride*

*I must seek and will find  
My particular hell only in my Hindu mind.*

*-'Convention of Despair'*

In another poem, he says how the control and traditional discipline 'crumble' in a tempting situation.

*'commandments crumbled  
in my father's past, her tumbled hair suddenly known  
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little  
and took her, behind the laws of my land.'*

*'Still Another View of Grace'*

Techniques:-

Ramanujan is a keen observer, who had the knowledge of many fields and hence his images and similes are precise and powerful. His sound application of theme and form results in a forceful meaningful utterance, as in the following poem, about his father

*Skyman in a manhole  
With astronomy for dream  
Astrology for nightmare*

*.....  
moving in Sanskrit zodiac's  
for ever troubled  
by the fractions, the kidneys*

*in his Tamil flesh  
his body the great Bear  
dipping for honey:*

Similarly in the following lines, where he describes his pain and his visit to the Doctor, one can see his wide knowledge and his sense of humour:

*Doctors x-ray the foot front face and back,  
Left profile and right as if for a police*

*File, unearth shadow fossils of Neanderthals  
Buried in this contemporary foot  
They draw three test tubes of blood as I turn  
My face away, and label my essences  
With a mis-spelled name*

('Pain')

A.K.Ramanujan uses symbols and images abundantly in his poems. In 'Still Another View of Grace', he talks of "huners that roam the street". In 'Breaded Fish', he compares memory to "coil on a heath". In his poem 'Birthdays' he writes

.... Death can be sudden  
and multiple, like pregnant deer  
shot down on the run.

Ramanujan shows variety in rhythm. He could express with the help of metaphors, precisely and accurately what he wants to convey. He could give expression strong feeling in simple language with a surprising twist at the end.

*In Chicago  
Do not walk slow  
Find no time  
To stand and stare  
Down there, blacks look black  
And whites, they look blacker.*

A River

*In Madurai  
City of Temples and poets  
Who sang of cities and temples:*

*every summer  
a river dries to a trickle  
in the sand,  
baring the sand ribs,  
straw and women's hair*

A. K. Ramanujan  
*Style is aporastic  
& witty.  
metaphysical,  
Metaphor over.*

clogging the water gates  
at the rusty bars  
under the bridges with patches  
of repair all over them,  
the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun.  
the poets sang only of the floods.

He was there for a day  
When they had the floods  
People everywhere talked  
of the inches rising  
of the precise number of cobbled steps  
run over by the water,  
rising on the bathing places  
and the way it carried off three village houses  
one pregnant woman  
and a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda, as usual.

The new poets still quoted  
the old poets, but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her  
kicking at blank walls  
even before births.

He said :  
the river has water enough  
to be poetic  
about only once a year  
and then  
it carries away

in the first half-hour  
three village houses,  
a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda  
and one pregnant woman expecting identical twins  
with no moles on their body  
with different diapers  
to tell them apart

"A River" describes the scenes that the poet saw in river Vaikai in Madurai, when it was flooded. The poet here describes some of the scenes that are generally not described by other poets.

Madurai is a city of temples. It is also a city of poets who sang about temples. Normally the river is dry and one could even see the rusted bars that had undergone repair, and straw, hair and other dust collected at the watergates under the bridges. Even the pebbles on the riverbed could be seen. The wet pebbles looked like the back of the crocodile and the dry ones looked like water buffalos.

The poet points out that the other poets had not described these scenes. They had sung only of the floods. The poet happened to be there on a day when there was flood. Water rose many inches on that day, and the flood washed off many houses, one pregnant woman and two cows named Gopi and Brinda (the poet comments on the conventional way of naming the cows Gopi and Brinda)

The new poets who wrote about the flood simply quoted the old poets and described the floods in the way the earlier poets had done but no one took care to mention the isolated incidents about the pregnant woman with twins and the cows that were washed by the flood.

He feels that the river has water enough to be poetic (That is, though it is normally dry it is flooded rarely and then the poets write only about the flood.) On the other hand this poet here writes about the tragedy associated with the flood and criticizes other poets for neglecting these facts.

The poet uses the river as a symbol to bring out the fact that conventional poets describe the customary and the regular things only. The poet criticizes the inhuman leaving out of the specific and isolated incidents.

"Small Scale Reflections

on a Great House

sometimes I think that nothing  
that ever comes into this house  
goes out. Things come in every day

to lose themselves among other things  
lost long ago among  
other things lost long ago;

Lame wandering cows from nowhere  
have been known to be tethered,  
given a name, encouraged

to get pregnant in the broad day light  
of the street under the elders'  
supervision, the girls hiding

behind windows with holes in them

Unread library books

Usually mature in two weeks  
and begin to lay a row

of little eggs in the ledgers  
for fines, as silverfish  
in the old man's office room

breed dynasties among long legal words  
in the succulence  
of Victorian parchment.

*law*  
*old paper*

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.*

*sons-in-law who quite forget  
their mothers, but stay to check  
accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces,*

*or the women who come as wives  
from houses open on one side  
to rising suns, on another*

*to the setting, accustomed  
to wait and to yield to monsoons  
in the mountains' calendar*

*beating through the hanging banana leaves.*

*And also, anything that goes out  
Will come back, processed and often  
With long bills attached,*

*Like the hoped bales of cotton  
Shipped off to invisible Manchesters  
and brought back milled and folded*

*for a price, cloth for our days'  
middle-class loins, and muslin  
for our richer nights. Letters mailed*

*have a way of finding their way back  
with many re-directions to wrong  
addresses and red ink marks*

*And though many times from everywhere,*

*Recently only twice:*

*Once in nineteen-forty-three*

*From as far away as the Sahara,*

1943

*Half-gnawed by desert foxes,*

*And lately from somewhere*

*in the north a nephew with stripes*

*on his shoulder was called*

*an incident on the border*

*and was brought back in plane*

*and train and military truck*

*even before the telegrams reached,*

*on a perfectly good*

*chatty afternoon.*

Notes:- Alexander:- Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia, He was taught by Aristotle. He showed military brilliance. His Empire, the greatest that had existed to that time extended from Thrace to Egypt and from Greece to the Indus Valley.

Plotinus: Egyptian-Roman Philosopher. At the age of 27, he traveled to Alexandria where he studied philosophy for 11 years. For Plotinus, Philosophy was not only a matter of abstract speculation but also a way of life and religion.

### *Poem :*

A.K.Ramanujan's "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House" is an absorbing poem where the poet describes the activities and events in a Hindu family in the joint family system.

It is a great house where belongings are lost but not noticed. It is a house where even things from outside also find a place but are also lost with the other articles that are already lost in the house.

Cows that come from somewhere are tethered, taken care of and are encouraged to get pregnant. The unread library books in the house get old and silver fish developed its dynasty between the Victorian papers.

The poet gives a list of other goods that come to the house but do not go back. Dishes prepared by neighbours two days earlier for some religious celebration also remain in the house. Nothing seems to go back. Though the list starts with objects, it goes on to include people and even diseases that come and settle down but do not go back. The list includes servants, phonographs, epilepsies in the blood and sons-in-law who seem to have forgotten their mothers or women who come as wives from small houses. (The houses are so small that they could see the rising sun from one side and the setting sun from the other) The clause 'sons in law who seem to have forgotten their mothers' reveals the poet's sense of humour. It criticizes the sons in law who come for a small function to the father in law's house and overstay there.

The poet then remembers how even the things that go out also come back. The raw cotton that is sent to Manchester comes back as cloth. Similarly letters get redirected with more seals and addresses. Even the rumour that goes out of the house comes back in a developed form like the prodigies who resemble but do not exactly resemble their forefathers. Even the beggar comes back with the song that is sung by the cook of this house.

The list is long. Daughters get married and come back after the husband's death, the sons come back as grand children.

The body of the nephew who fought in the border is also brought to the house even before the arrival of the telegram.

It is interesting to note how as he is listing about the things that come back, he starts with the less serious events and goes on to graver incidents. The similes – raw cotton coming back as cloth and rumour coming back in a different form like the prodigies who partly resemble their ancestors are captivating. The poetic beauty lies in the use of precise words, sharp thought provoking images and apt similes.

#### Critical comments

- 1) He is like one caught in the crossfire between the elemental pulls of his native culture and the aggressive compulsions of the Chicago milieu. On one side, the metaphor of the family with its ineluctable inner filiations, and on the other, the

- 2) "One of the recurrent concerns in Ramanujan's poetry as a whole is the nature of human body and its relation to the natural world".  
— Vinay Dharwadkar.
- 3) Full of paradoxes, with also a gift for making them; often autobiographical, but seldom transparently so; tight-lipped, but fantasizing about stripping; dead serious but never more so than when being playful; this was Ramanujan
- .K. Mehrotra.

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### R.Parthasarathy

Rajagopal Parthasarathy was born near Trichy in 1934. He was educated in Bombay and in England. He was, for several years, literary editor with Oxford University Press, Chennai and Delhi. His first book, *Rough Passage* was a runner up for the Commonwealth poetry prize in 1977. Recognition followed publication and the book received fairly good critical attention. His second book *A House Divided : Poem Of Love and War* tells about the turbulent history of the sub continent. He has also edited *Ten Twentieth Century Poets*. R.Parthasarathy, like A.K.Ramanujan, is interested in translation and has translated many Tamil works in to English. One of his major works in translation is the translation of *Silappathikaram* (The Tale of an Anklet) in to English.

R.Parthasarathy feels that more attention should be given to translation and that through translated works we can learn about the cultures of the different parts of the world. He says for a multilingual society like his native India, translation is essential. "A nation renews itself through translation. If it is indifferent to it is in danger of falling off the globe"

### His works:

*Rough Passage* is R.Parthasarathy's masterpiece, which brought him a lot of critical attention and appreciation. It is autobiographical. It has three parts – 'Exile' 'Trial' and 'Home coming.' *Rough Passage* narrates the experiences of a person who leaves his motherland and gets settled abroad for better prospects. It brings out the sens

of alienation experienced by him in the other country and also the feeling of guilt for having left his own land, people and language. The poet expresses his sense of alienation and his desire to continue the thoughts of the past to escape from this sense of alienation.

*"I confess I am not myself  
in the present. I only endure  
a reflected existence in the past." (Trial 15)*

His love for his mother tongue finds expression in many of his poems. It is this deep attachment to the mother tongue that makes him feel the loss intensely. He regrets his "whoring after English Gods". He writes in his "Home Coming",

*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.*

*"Home Coming"*

At times, he is very sensitive about his 'deculturation' and the loss of his roots. At other times he is philosophical, ready to compromise.

*I have exchanged the world  
For a table and chair. I should not complain*

*"Home coming"*

Many of his poems in *Rough Passage* and in other collections are confessional poems. The poet tells about his life, experiences, love, his achievements, his marriage and his frustrations. His disgust about his achievement is expressed beautifully in the following lines.

*At thirty, the mud will have settled  
You see yourself in a mirror  
Perhaps refuse the image as yours*     *"Trial"*

And also in the following lines