

## **A. K. Ramanujan's Posthumous Third Volume- *Second Sight***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The third and last volume of A.K. Ramanujan's poetry published in his lifetime is *Second Sight* (1986). The title apparently is a pun on the romantic idea of Indians being spiritually alive, gifted with a second sight which can transcend the illusions of first sight. The Central themes of his poetry-family, relations, mythology, rituals and vedantic philosophy persist in this volume as well, but the experience of life has taken away the stings of first love and the wonder of India that was. Hindus, he laments, are famous the world over for having a second sight, an intuitive inner vision that looks beyond the Maya and Leela of this transitory world. In the contemporary world India has become An Area of Darkness where even the first sight of materialism is blurred.

**Keywords:** A.K. Ramanujan's poetry, first sight.

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Second Sight* contains numerous poems with allusions to India myths and legends, but mostly he presents these heroic tales in a mock-epic tone, effectively using devices like irony, contrast and bathos. Poems like "No Amnesiac King", "Pleasure", "A Minor Sacrifice", "Zoo Gardens Revisited", "The Difference" and "Moulting" demonstrate Ramanujan's skeptical involvement with Hindu myths and legends, gods and goddesses. The volume *Second Sight* opens with the poem "No Amnesiac King", regarding the well-known legend of Raja Dushyanta and forest beauty Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of Kanva Rishi, marvellously narrated by the celebrated Sanskrit poet-cum dramatist, Kalidasa in his famous work *Abhijnan-Shakuntalam*. The story narrates an act of crime on the part of the king Dushyanta for not remembering all about his beloved Shakuntala whom he met and fell in love in the ashram of the sage Kanva and with whom he entered into a fruitful union after Gandharava marriage in the thick part of a forest, The cause of the King's absent-mindedness was the curse given by

Durvasa rishi to Shakuntala who ignored his presence at her door. Consequently the King could not recognize Shakuntala in his court. Her ruffled condition could not move the amnesiac King as she had lost the wedding ring gifted to her by the King while she was bathing in a river.

A fish had engulfed that ring. That was later caught by a fisherman and sent to the royal cook who cut it open and amazingly found the ring. The ring was restored to the King that caused the recovery of the king of all his lost memory at the same time causing repentance. This ancient tale retold by Ramanujan is worth noting:

One cannot wait any 'more' in the back  
of one's mind for that conspiracy  
of three fishermen and a palace cook  
to bring, dressed in cardamom and dove,  
the one well-timed memorable fish  
so one can cut stright with the royal knife  
to the ring waiting in the belly,  
and recover at one stroke all lost memory

In Second Sight, the opems, which have a direct bearing on various Hindu gods and goddesses, are "Zoo Gardens Revisited", "The Difference" and "Moulting". These poems are remarkable for the sketches of the Hindu deities. In this thoughtful poem, there is a fine depiction of the degradation of humanity that inflicts cruelties on innocent birds and animals to be found in the zoo like flamingoes, monkeys, orangutans, giraffes, ostriches, tigers, tigresses and chimps. Making a mournful commentary on the lack of warmth and sympathy in humanity at large towards these innocent creatures, the poet invokes various Hindu gods to protect them and alludes to various inclinations of Lord Vishnu. The paragraph of this prose poem deserves to be quoted in this connection:

Lord of lion face, boar snout, and fish eyes, killer of killer  
cranes, shepherd of rampant elephants, devour my lambs,  
devour them whole, save them in the zoo garden ask of your belly

Second sight is replete with numerous Indian experiences. Ramanujan's response to the memories of places, people and incidents in India is evidently present in this volume. Moreover, incidents in India still occupy a significant space in the mind. At the same time, what George Steiner calls unhousedness seems to be setting in, subtly and surely, with the result that the American experience as well as the American idiom, so far conspicuously absent in the Striders and Relations begins to loom large. Incidents and images typical of the American reality and ethos begin to proliferate and a confluence of sensibilities is achieved." But this does not mean that Ramanujan connives at the Indian social reality, Like Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, too, is aware, though much more infrequently, of certain characteristic Indian social realities which are perceptible to him by his keen observation. We can witness much awareness in the poem "At Forty" and "Looking and Finding".

“At Forty” tells the story of Jatti, the fierce Indian pahalwan in Mysore who teaches wrestling to his disciples at the gymkhana. The poet, quite arrestingly, describes the nature and character of Jatti in the following lines:

our Jatti, palace wrestler of Mysore  
teacher at the gym, has the grey  
eyes of a cat, a yellow moustache,  
and a whorl of tabby hair  
on the chest.

The poet verbalises a similar experience in another poem ‘Wasterfalls in a Bank’. In fact, while pondering over peculiarities of the Indian cultural syndrome, the poet is also struck by several oddities involved in it. Such processing of it catches hold the attention of the poet. Therefore, the poet inclines to define this poem as a poem of stocktaking, a personal balance sheet.

As I transact with the past as with another  
country with its own customs, currency,  
stock exchange, always  
at a loss when I count my change.

Here is the typical diasporic sensibility at work, reworking foreign currency in terms of Indian rupees. The metaphor is relevant in ethical and cultural exchange as well as the diasporic mind keeps evaluating the West in terms of Indian value systems.

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