



Ramanujan's Vision of Consciousness

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KEYWORDS :

Self consciousness is an important concept in the system of Vedanta, since it is in the understanding of the nature of self, that the theistic and non-theistic systems of Vedanta differ from one another. The ontological status of the self (atman) in the context of its "relationship" with Brahman distinguishes these two forms of Vedanta. I will be focusing on one of the forms of theistic Vedanta, Visitadvaita and its formulations on the nature of the self and of self consciousness based on the writings of Ramanuja and post-Ramanuja theologians, particularly Vedanta Desika.

A.K. Ramanujan's poems reveal the fact that he has not severed his association with India despite his long residence in the U.S.A. he rather frequently resorts to native themes and traditions. His four Hindu poems- "The Hindoo: He Doesn't Hurt a fly or a spider either", "The Hindoo : He Reads His Gita And Risk", And " A Hindoo To His Body " are essentially Indian in background and treatment and they take us to the core of the Hindu philosophy of the Gita.

Ramanujan was highly critical of many aspects of his Hindu heritage, he was by no means blind to some of its stable virtues. He admired its strong faith in the unity of all life and contrasted this with the dichotomy between man and nature and man and the lower creation which the western tradition appears to make in his another remarkable poem " Christmas". This poem is an evocative statement underlining the essential difference between oriental and occidental cultures: Another serious limitation of the Hindu view of life is exposed in " The Hindoo: He reads His Gita and is calm at all events". It is an impossible ideal of accepting both good and evil, joy and sorrow in an equal spirit. This is one of those poems of Ramanujan in which he puts cultural heritage in an essentially western perspective.

Further, Ramanujan's " Hindu consciousness" finds room in his poem, " Snakes". It is a marvelous poem and holds us spell-bound though we are afraid of them in real life and tremble with fear even when we read about them. The inspiration to write " Snakes" seems to have come to Ramanujan from D.H. Lawrence's poem entitled , Snake. In that poem the persona , on seeing a snake, reacts in the manner in which any human being would react: he picks up a stick and hurls it at the snake in order to kill it, but he misses the aim and the snake manages to escape into its kingdom where he is the sole monarch.

At the very outset , the poet conveys the sense of superiority of " The Hindoo" who does not allow himself to mix with shameless people at a party. With rigid control over his emotions , he does not get affected, and is able to stand apart. This is , of course, a form of imposed alienation a bold attempt to keep one's cultural purity at all costs. Ramanujan, as a detached Hindu treats both evil and good equally, as the Gita teaches him to do. What we should keep in mind is that the poet's but of satire is stereotyped " Hindoo" (as envisaged by British who used to spell Hindu as " Hindoo"), and not the Hindu who has read his Gita carefully, and who knows that stoicism preached by the Gita does not mean passivity, inaction or acceptance of evil. The poet has tried to suggest in his poem that in spite of all his traditional training as a 'sthitaprajna' ("the man of tranquil wisdom") he is profoundly disturbed when he finds that in life sometimes elemental innocence becomes a sacrificial victim and realizes that this strange law of life is more ancient than the most ancient of religious systems.

The poet , thus gets ready to lead his life strictly by the codes imposed by his past (The Hindu) tradition. But his acceptance is not to be taken at its face value. The mock ironic tone points out to the opposite direction; the rejection of convention of despair. Hindu myths and legends, gods and goddesses are accommodated also in some

poems such as "one , two may be three, Argument Against Suicide " (which mentions Kamsutra, the Treatise of Love or Passion by Lord Shiva). The poem follows a three part, division, keeping in mind the three arguments being presented to the author who is contemplating suicide.

References:

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