

## Introduction

The poems you are reading here, with the exception of Ramanujan's, are to be found in any conventional syllabus. The selections are rather mechanical, but you can make something of them – you can get a sense of poetry, if you read them with concentration. One good point seems to be their chosen from different periods ranging from the Elizabethan to the modern times. Ramanujan is a light-minded choice in these selections; of late, the Indian mind takes up Indian writing in English with sentiment and an accommodating spirit. He deserves to be there only by our own will, and he can be studied to find out our prejudice against standards. I have taken pains to write a long introduction on poetry and its importance, on the conditions unfavourable to it in India, and on the discipline for reading and understanding it.

No doubt, the introduction is heavy fare; the best thing to do is, first, to skip it and study your ten poems with our notes, and then, come back to it. You have to work on the introduction carefully, for it deals with many complex questions on poetry and its relation to the Indian civilization and to the Indian mind. First of all, it sets forth the hostile conditions to the proper study of poetry. They are actually the conditions of the modern age, supporting the modern spirit, but they hamper the mind's growth. So, you must study them in order to realize their hold on our mind. If you so wish, you can, in the first place, read the third part of it which you will find immediately relevant. But once you see that questions about poetry are bound up with questions about the mind and civilization, you cannot escape from the first two parts, whatever you might reject therein.

It is difficult to talk on any matter in its perspective; I think it is still more difficult regarding poetry about which anything can be said irresponsibly. Very, very few can check what they say with a sense of responsibility. The word, 'perspective' is often combined with the adjective, 'right', and one habitually accuses another of not seeing the debated matter in the 'right perspective'. Here the 'right perspective' stands for one's view of references, in which there is too much of personal and commonly accepted relations. What I mean by perspective is very different. The subject under consideration has its own perspective; thought about it discloses the perspective, whereas ideas on the subject go with one's view of references, which one calls the right perspective. As far as I know, it is not a perspective, though it might, for all purposes, appear to be one. It appears to be a perspective to one who imagines it as the image of things in which one expects the debated subject to be seen. One can see a thing from different perspectives; but to see it in its own perspective is the point. Image-perspective is quite different from thought-perspective. A thing seen in both is not the same. Usually, people quarrel over a thing by seeing it from different image-perspectives. Here the difference is insignificant but the quarrel acquires its own force because people are self-important. On the other hand, between the mind accustomed to seeing a thing in the image-perspective, and the mind which can see it in its own or a thought-perspective, there is indeed too wide a gulf. The gulf exists because of the relation in which the mind stands to the industrial civilization – the relation in which it satisfies its drives. In this relation the mind is too

individualistic and self-dominated to capture a thing in the thought-perspective. The mind has two processes, one following the other, but they do not take place now in the age of commercial industrialism. One, the mind acquires knowledge through discipline, and two, it wants to know itself, purifying the knowledge it has acquired. I think, the mind is absolutely self-dominated now so that it finds no occasion to know itself and it serves only the interests we have at heart for our own sake. It is proud of knowing so many things, but it cannot even suspect that its knowledge is dissociated, lacking in a living principle, and that it is crude and ideological having superficial ideas and believing in them. What can be learnt to live well is impossible for it; to live with ability for feeling, perception and thought in the interests of life is unimaginable in its case. Industrial progress affects human life, changing and leading it in a commercial direction or into anarchy with a force that conquers the mind. Self-interests conquer the individual mind, and the industrial interests conquer the Mind of the nation, in which the individual minds are represented. More than ever, the mind is fettered by self-interests and ideological beliefs to be free and natural. It is now abstracted from living contacts and lives in its own world of self-interests and imaginings. That is what the mind comes to be in commercial industrialism.

One who sees a thing in the image-perspective demands every point to be seen with a visible referent rather than understood in thought. Such a one relies on observation as if it is the highest virtue. For such a one empirical thought – thought as inference from a visible assembly of things, when inference can also be ‘seen’ – is the highest thought guaranteed by science. ‘Inference’ kind of thought is science for him, but a different kind of thought is non-science. Even a slightly more abstract thought upsets one such and provokes its dismissal as abstract and untrue. Therefore, the common way of thinking in that manner related to one’s ideas and interests while ignoring the demands of the object of thought cannot easily be resisted. Poetry refers itself to other things by its very nature. Let us recognize them. It is they which constitute its perspective.

I tried to put down the essential points of thought on the relation between poetry and human life and to work them up into a basic discipline for not only reading poetry but also understanding those other things which are related to poetry, though they may not seem to be related to the academician. I may claim here that the introduction is a way of talking intelligently on poetry without being academic in spirit and with the interests of life at heart. I am, as well, offering it as a discipline-forming statement on poetry, having opened the topic of essential issues on it. Do not read it once only, but work on it, reading it more than once. I must, however, warn you that you will find it strange and even hurtful. Therefore, you might well be disposed to condemn it out of hand and satisfy yourself that you have better ideas than anything the introduction offers. You can, of course, choose to ignore it. But I think it sane to attack it by counter-argument without misrepresenting it. The right way to work on it is to realize that, after going through it, it doesn’t offer ideas but meaningful statements. You must make up your mind as to the status to be given to the exposure of ideas and beliefs peculiar to the modern Indian mind under the circumstances in the introduction. Two things must be done and I hope they are done in my attempt: criticism of our conditions as they have come into existence, and

the explanation and defense of the value of poetry for the sake of living a fuller life. But if you fail to see the point of it you have less than fair to me.