

PREFACE

The present thesis is intended as an essay on the history of an idea or a concept namely the poet. History of ideas has become by now, since Lovejoy till Isaiah Berlin, an exacting and respectable discipline which cannot be explained away in favour of analysis and deconstruction. Concepts have their reality and a life of their own. They are subsistent entities as distinguished from existent ones, *a la* C.D. Broad. In the *Republic*, in connection with developing his theory of ideas, Plato remarked that whenever we ascribe the same term to more than one object we conceive an idea or a concept to subsist. By the same token, the *poet* is a legitimate notion and is to be inevitably encountered in every culture and civilisation known to mankind. Language, be it simply spoken or scripted, has such wielders of the medium who have enlarged the expressive power and potency of language. Deliberating on the method of philosophy, A.N. Whitehead, (co-author of the *Principia Mathematica*) has remarked in *Adventures of Ideas* that the moment of breakdown of language occasions the enunciation of a profound metaphysical truth. The point for Whitehead is that the very purpose of philosophy is to delve below the apparent clarity of common speech. The creative wielder of language, whom we call the poet, does that in his own manner. Language, to Whitehead, delivers its evidence in a threefold manner – one on the meaning of words, another on the meaning enshrined in grammatical form, and the third on the meaning beyond individual words and grammatical forms, meanings miraculously revealed in poetry. It may be of special interest to note that these things have been said by no less a person than one who is one of the founders of mathematical logic and who taught mathematics to another great thinker of all times, Bertrand Russell. We may, therefore, accord further attention to yet another statement from Whitehead – ‘all men enjoy flashes of insight beyond meanings already stabilized in etymology and grammar’ (1961: 228). This explains our fascination for poetry and the *poet*. The poet is the person who in his various ways is ‘engaged in finding linguistic expressions for meanings as yet unexpressed’ (ibid) As an example, Whitehead invites us to consider a line and a half of poetry from Euripides’s the *Trojan Women* (886-7) which suggests a

philosophical problem to which Europe had no answer till today. "Zeus, whether thou art Compulsion of Nature or Intelligence of Mankind, to thee I prayed". (ibid) Whitehead comments that these lines have survived the ages with a modern appeal. The poet in Euripides carries us away from the constriction in foundation for epistemology. The importance of the concept of the poet may now be well appreciated. We may enlarge upon Whitehead's contention in respect of the poet. It is possible to say that poetry is a fragment of language with the mark on it of a finite creative effort so that it stands alone in its individuality as a 'being' detailed from the vague infinity of its background. Thus the art of poetry heightens the sense of humanity. To return to Plato, by saying that there is a concept of the poet, is to imply the thesis that the concept may be formulated as a creative spirit and instantiated with reference to the literature of the world be it Sanskrit or English. These two languages are culturally and geographically apart and yet we come across the highest common factor of designation and understanding of the role and the office of the poet. This prepares us for the 'connectedness' of the theme of the *creative self* in and through the chapters of the present dissertation.

We are not concerned with the poet as such but with the *idea of the poet* as has been spoken of or thought by various thinkers over the years. In this respect our study is a *second order* activity in the logical sense of the term. Sometimes it will be seen that the poets have themselves spoken about their office. All that I would like to bring home in the thesis is that since there is axiomatically a concept of the poet, the evidence of which is available in all known literatures of the world, it follows that the nuances and formulation of the concept deserve a study with the support of the data known to me.