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PREFACE

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The present dissertation is intended as an essay on the human predicaments as reviewed by Rabindranath Tagore. The title, rather the theme, of the essay is suggested by Robert Blauner's book *Alienation and Freedom*. There is a sense in which the theme looks back to Kant's polarity between *phenomena* and *neumena* or *nature* and *Freedom*. If alienation is taken to describe the human situation, then it must have been sensed earlier, long before Marx or the existentialists spoke of it. The *Isa Upanisad* (verse 3) speaks of *ātmahanojanāh*, the people who kill themselves by alienating themselves from their ontological source. The *Dhammapada* (III. 2) speaks of men in the dominion of death as languishing in pain as the fish taken out of water. The *Yoga-Sutras* suggest that freedom consists in abiding in one's true native *svarupe avasthanam*. There are a few of the instances that go to show how alienation has been a malady of the human situation, entailing loss of selfhood, anxiety, melancholy and boredom. Ever since the Renaissance the symptoms have perpetrated. *The Merchant of Venice* opens with the sentence : "I do not know why I am so sad". As Walter Pater has pointed out, the mother of love in Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" looks forlorn and sad. Such great European poets as Rilke and Holderlin have lent expression and voice to the alienated spirit of the European man.

Hegel made alienation an ontological issue, while Marx referred it to the moral failure of capitalism. The faces of alienation are many and diverse. It could be ontological, epistemic, moral, political, religious and aesthetic. We should refer to the ontological dimension of alienation in Hegel. But its earliest form could be discerned in Plato, the alienation between the world of real ideas and the world of sensible shadows. Commonsense theory of knowledge alienates the knowing subject from the object of knowledge. For Kant there is the alienation of the constitutive and regulative principles, that of inclination and reason. Colonialism illustrates the political alienation between the colonizer and the colonized. St. Paul's dualism of the carnal and the spiritual and epitomizes the alienation between God and man, and it provides the basis of Kierkegaard's religious anxiety. The work of art stands on an altogether different ontological footing from that of its creator.

The dissertation opens with an introductory note on Tagore's concept of alienation, and enters into a discussion of the concept of alienation itself. Then a synoptic view of the Indian philosophical scenario is undertaken to show that the concept of the particular or the individual is underplayed in the general tenor of Indian philosophical thinkers, be it metaphysics, or grammar or aesthetics. Even the *viseśā* is a category and it behaves as though it was a universal. This fact itself is a distinguishing feature between Indian and western thought. The latter, from Aristotle to Strawson has always looked for basic

particulars. The irreducibility of the individuals or the particulars provides the ground for alienation. The word "alienation" need not always be taken in a pejorative sense. It is a description, but also a value. The road which separates me from my destination also brings me closer to it as well. By traversing the path we realize the destination at every step. This image of the road is from Tagore.

The present study is undertaken with special reference to Tagore, who operates with the twin polarities of separation (*viraha*) and union (*milan*). In one of his songs he speaks of building a bridge across the chasm between the two separate individuals. The bridge is the aesthetic analogue of a striving. For Tagore union is the value for overcoming alienation. Or, as he puts it, alienation is the given *fact* of life while union is the *truth*. The argument is carried on within the framework of a humanistic tradition and the union as value operates ubiquitously both at personal and interpersonal levels. Hence alienation and union, interchangeably called freedom, is a dialectical challenge, and calls for creativity in order to solve it.

References have been made to such other recent Indian thinkers as Sri Aurobinda, Gandhi and Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya with a view to highlighting the issue of alienation in diverse fields of human self realization. And to close with some deliberations of epistemology have been undertaken by way of clarifying related issues.

As for the method followed, the chiefly expository,

and only partially critical. It may be noted that exposition is in itself a valuable exercise, since it requires an objective point of view, and there would hardly be an exposition without an element of interpretation. And, more importantly, Tagore's philosophical thought and ideas have not yet enjoyed public currency, and in that respect they require to be clearly stated and enunciated before they can be philosophically evaluated. Schopenhauer's remarks perceptively that the value of the original is ever more than all the critical commentaries. There is then the question of dealing at length with a poet rather than a philosopher. We should remind ourselves the thesis of the Vedantic epistemology that *Śruti* is weightier than both perception and inference. Samkara's commentaries are philosophical achievements of highest order, yet they are but illuminations of the implications of the cryptic aphorisms and high poetry of the *Upanisads*. Long before Samkara's commentaries were written, the verses of the *Upanisads* had sustained generations of aspirants in their quest of spiritual truths. Much of Tagore's writings are of that order, they bear unmistakably upon the intimations of immortality. Again, a Heidegger does not fight shy of admitting that what he tells us in *Being and Time* are but musings on the poetry of Holderlin. One should be honest in answering the question, which philosopher outstrips Rilke or Holderlin in sheer philosophical depth and probing, if of course we care for solving the riddle

of human existence. As Holderlin had his Heidegger, but Tagore waits for one, in spite of Radhakrishnan.

References are located in the body of the text of the thesis, following immediately the citations. And it is one of the reasons for my dispensing with end-notes to the sections. I have made another departure, instead of dividing the dissertation into chapters, I have made it sequenced into sections of the parts of the thesis. This manner of writing justifies my submission that my thesis is an essay on the theme of alienation with special reference to the philosophical ideas of Rabindranath Tagore.

- *Gayatri Mitra*