

Preface and Acknowledgements

Christopher Isherwood is one of the stimulating novelists of the generation of the thirties. He came of age too late for the First World War and too early for the Second, and survived, in letters and deeds, through their terrible tests. Tossed as he was between 'two worlds at war', Isherwood along with all his contemporaries like W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, William Mac Neice etc., felt everything rocking round, the self remaining the only stable element in the fleeting world. The fact is that the thirties writers, products as they were of a bourgeois society, were preoccupied with the larger objective world around them but always with the individual at the pivot. Their chief objective was to accommodate between self and world, all the more to establish their identity while maintaining connection with the vast wave of humanity around them. Evidently, then, 'self' remained to these writers of 'The Divided Generation', as Spender labels his colleagues, a recurrent theme for all that they wrote, and autobiography a popular literary form.

My present study of Isherwood's novels is intended to chart out the whole pattern of the rebellious artist's evolution as he confronts his self at different periods of his life : his iconoclasm at home, flirtation with communism and his ultimate conversion to Vedantism. Isherwood's journey to the USA and his subsequent embrace of Vedanta provoked a plethora of critical opinions, all adverse, among his critics and scholars, even more among his friends like Stephen Spender. I have, however, tried to explore the significant political events of the day and the artist's own psychological traumas that prompted the artist to drift to Vedanta as the means of defining his authentic self. With this end in view a brief survey is made in the introductory chapter of the whole panorama of social decay and contemporary political turmoil that Isherwood lived through and of the important philosophical influences that gave shape to the themes of most of his novels and to his own intellectual

growth. In fact, a critical study of Isherwood's novels, of their themes and concerns, is a necessary step to trace the consecutive phases of Isherwood's development and growth as an artist. The entire scope of my study is devoted to that end — to chart out the complete trajectory of the artist's evolution from his early iconoclasm to his final acceptance of Vedanta in terms of all his nine novels by referring, on a couple of occasions, to his non-fictions.

My work, however, would have never been realized but for the constant advice and encouragement of Dr. G. N. Roy, Reader, Department of English, University of North Bengal. Dr. Roy, my supervisor and mentor, has not only been my source of inspiration, endowing me with a zest to carry on my work, but also has offered me ready help and loving guidance, enabling a successful completion of this study. I put on record my unmixed gratitude to him.

I pay sincere compliments to all the teachers and staff of the Department of English and also to all the members and staff of the University Library for their co-operation and help. I am also grateful to the members and staff of the National Library, Calcutta and to those of the British Council Division, Calcutta for the immense help they extended to me.

Last but not least, I am deeply obliged to my wife, Kalyani, who herself bore singlehandedly all the cares of the family and saw to it that they do disturb me the least. My daughter, Saheli and son, Reon, too deserve every bit of my affectionate thanks for being so nice and forgiving during my work.