

PREFACE

Otherness, heterogeneity, are ideas celebrated in today's cultural ethos. Each of us, as well as any social whole to which we belong, feel a passionate urge to re-examine our socio-historical identity and speak from our own centre of experience. However, to gain voice from one's *own* centre of experience, should *others* be driven to silence? Will not the silence and cultural seclusion deepen lines of division that have fractured society in every aspect of its being—social, economic, political, religious, racial, ethnic and gender? How can we remain rooted socio-historically and still not sink in abysmal loneliness and conflict?

These questions surfaced when we were planning to bring out a volume addressing issues connected with the relationship of the “self” and the “other”, and with the possibility of *trans-cultural* and *intra-cultural* understanding. A need was felt for a meeting of minds for an interpretive and interactive dialogue to evolve linkages, if possible, between diverse perceptions of social, cultural and moral realities, especially those that are our most urgent concerns today.

Some of our Euro-American friends have been wondering how we, academics, can contribute our bits to bring about the intended meeting of minds. Earlier, Indian writers as well as Western scholars had given independent presentations of views on various themes, working in isolation, though very often on the same occasion, in encyclopedic volumes, books and journals.

This volume is not intended to assemble similar isolated pieces. It deals with various themes but the focus primarily is on cultural otherness and related issues. A better understanding of the culturally other is an effective means of understanding oneself. It helps one in reviewing one's own situation, in identifying themes which are integral parts of one's own culture, and also in allowing one to speak from one's own centre in contradistinction to that of the other. The orientation native to oneself may also help in removing misconceptions which the cultural other often has while looking at one from an alien point of view.

This does not debar the *other* however from looking at one from a fresh angle and clearer perspective. On the contrary it may remove

the gap created by misconceptions and promote better understanding. It may lead to sharing, to some kind of cultural symbiosis, which, in a world that has shrunk, would be mutually fulfilling. In India, numerous periodic incursions followed by mingling of cultures have made this sharing a lived reality since antiquity. From our composite and assimilative centre then, the idea of convergence at a global level, in some matters at least, need not appear entirely problematic, despite the fissures that are seen increasingly on the surface of our society as well as on that of the European's or the American's.

Most of the themes dealt with in this book have emerged in the course of the editors' discussions with their Euro-American colleagues over the decades. Our visits to and stays in Western centres of learning convince us of the need of continuous dialogue making optimal use of *public* reason. It is quite understandable that political and economic policy makers, being placed as they are under practical necessity, have been carrying on this exercise with varying degrees of success. But in the sphere of thought and theory, which in practice is apparently less pressing but actually more lasting in effect, this dialogue is yet to assume its due intensity and dignity. Comparative philosophy or comparative literature is yet to be recognized as a mainstream academic discipline. Most of the "international" conferences on humanistic disciplines turn out to be only one-sidedly international—hardly more than national. The intended audience of the American philosopher is American; the presence of the Indian philosopher or the Chinese philosopher in the gathering, is pointless. For the former has nothing interesting to say for the latter; he is not aware of what is going on in Indian or Chinese philosophy. In contrast many of the modern Indian and Chinese philosophers are more or less aware of the living issues of European and American philosophy.

To rectify this one-sidedness of the world academic scene we think we must have more projects of this kind. If we recall the neglect of Africa's intellectual scene we have every reason to feel even more disturbed. The image of Africa to the Euro-American countries is intimately, if not invariably, linked to the issues of poverty, hunger and civil war. If the North-South dialogue has not yielded positive results, the state of South-South dialogue has not proved encouraging either. The difference between self and other persists. The gulf remains. The gap yawns.

We would like to thank many people and institutions who supported this project and contributed to the volume. In this connection

we are particularly grateful to the members of the Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, Jadavpur University, the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), New Delhi, and the Project of History of Indian Science Philosophy and Culture (PHISPC), Delhi.

Our first and foremost gratitude is to the contributors to this volume. But for their cooperation this volume could not be brought out in time. Individuals in the academic community from outside, ICPR and PHISPC who deserve special thanks are J.N. Mohanty, Hilary Putnam, P.K. Mukhopadhyay, Deen K. Chatterjee, Minakshi Roy Choudhuri and Aparna Chakraborty.

We also wish to thank Elisabeth Erdman-Visser and Julian Deahl of Brill. They have been extremely patient and helpful in putting this volume together.

We would also like to put on record our thanks to Asit Kumar Datta and Debaprasad Bhattacharya for their dedicated secretarial assistance.