SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY
WITH REFERENCE TO
A FEW SHORT POEMS

— K. S. Lalitha.

"For any considerable creation there must be background of life, a vital rich and stored or a mind and an imagination that has seen much and observed much or a soul that has striven and been conscious of its strivings".¹ This statement which is one among the vast literary, critical and evaluatory remarks of Sri Aurobindo establishes his place among Indian writers in English. With his vision and critical ability he occupies a distinguished place in the History of Indian Writing in English. Apart from his interpretations of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, the whole of his intuitive grasping of the knowledge of God and the fervour of his desire for union with the universal spirit is to be seen in his Life Divine, which offers to the world the original thinking of a practicing philosopher. His philosophy is copied from none of the established philosophical schools, but it is an individualistic approach to unravel the riddles of the world and it is a purely personal way of life. Perhaps such a genius and an original thinker naturally turns towards poetry which is the inevitable medium of expression. Poetry is the only medium which gives vent to the inner complexities and subtleties of the soul and its poised, harmonious and calm states of mind. So a mystic such as Aurobindo needs poetry inevitably. As he is a born poet and a born genius for, invariably they both go together As Aurobindo puts it himself in one of his letters: "A Born poet is usually a genius, poetry with any power or beauty in it implies genius".²

Another treasure which presents his creative and critical make of mind is found in his letters on life and literature. The collection of his letters compiled in a volume exclusively set apart for his letters (third series) is a proof of his vast knowledge of life and literature.

2. Ibid. p. 300.
Almost all his early poems imply his sensuous and romantic attitude towards life. With the exception of a few poems, such as *Uroasie, Love and Death* and *To The Sea*, the others lack enduring worth in them for many of them are experimental, as he opines himself in his early poem *Envoi*:

> Pale poems, weak and few, who vainly use your wings towards the unattainable spheres, Offspring of the divine Hellenic Muse, Poor Maimed children born of six disastrous years!

But the essence of his poetic talent and vision is to be seen perhaps in his *Last Poems*, which are mostly mystic poems. Most of the poems in this collection are autobiographical and they show his personal strivings to reach God and again the harmonious and the poised feeling of being with God. The poems are in sonnet form, for the lyrical intensity of his vision gets expressed in a realistic manner in short poems. The creative force and the urgency of the feelings in the poet seem to determine their forms in these poems. As Aurobindo says “Moreover, technique however indispensable, occupies a smaller field, perhaps in poetry than any other art........... Rather it determine itself its own form.”

Sri Aurobindo wrote once, “No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see”. We feel that the real essence of his life has been revealed to us in them, though not in any biography to this extent. The inner chord of his life, his cravings and his experiences have been strewn throughout these poems. The first poem, I would take up for analysis, is the first poem in the small collection called *Last Poems*, which bears the title *The Divine Hearing*. Here the advaitic concept of the universal spirit being one is expressed in a deeply personal way. He has felt the Universal Being flowing within him. It is not the knowledge of advaitic philosophy that he is trying to reveal here, but it is the felt experience which is clear in the title itself, that he is trying to recreate in words. It is the Divine Hearing, he hears the Divine tone in every voice of this world, a purely sensuous approach. The first line, though it looks like a statement, has a tinge of serenity, calmness and vastness about it:

> All sounds, all voices have become thy voice. He supports and

extends this view in the remaining part of the poem. He stretches the “All” into the innumerable things of the world:

Music and thunder and the cry of birds,
Life’s babble of her sorrows and her joys,
Cadence of human speech and murmured words,

The one voice is reflected in the music, in the thunder and in the cry of birds. Life’s babble, both its sorrows and joys and contrasting with it, is the “cadence of human speech and murmured words.” The word “cadence” used in the context reveals the harmony and the music of life balancing the emotion of the previous line and all these implications of sound form the One sound. The very next line suggests, the wholeness, the vastness and the magnificence of the sea and the movement of the water is also suggested:

The laughter of the sea’s enormous mirth.

In the line, “The machine’s reluctant drone, the siren’s blare”, we find the word “drone” used to suggest the monotony of the mechanical world and in the world, “blare” the emptiness of the sound.

The world itself is a wonder and all the creations in it breathe wonder-tones because they are all the features of the One Eternal Spirit:

All now are wonder-tones and themes of Thee.

The prosaic word “theme” has attained a higher and an elevated meaning here, as Sri Aurobindo says: “A phrase, a word or line may be quite simple and ordinary and yet taken with another phrase, line or word become the perfect thing”.

In the last couplet Aurobindo concentrates on the same thought with a sureness of touch:

A Secret harmony steals through the blind heart
And all grows beautiful because Thou art.

The secret harmony exists in every being whether it is aware of it or not and that is the sole cause for the beauty of the world. The poem reveals the personal experience of what we might dogmatically call the advaitic principle. He fulfils our expectations of a mystic poem. In the words of Dr. K. R. Sreenuvasa Iyengar,

"What we expect such poetry to give us is not a system of thought but the glow and the force of thought, not philosophy, but the living potency of philosophy; what mystic poetry should give us, again is not a laborious transcription of such supernormal experience, but rather, a re-enacting — a repetition — of the experience in which we may ourselves be totally and unescapably engaged. Philosophical poetry, like mystical poetry is difficult to achieve, but not impossible."\textsuperscript{5} The poem seems to illustrate the idea that, "if he has the passion, then even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light and beauty".\textsuperscript{6}

We find, Sri Aurobindo, the mystic after having striven to be with God, achieves his goal and the soul’s vision of such a union is revealed to us in the poem, The Divine Hearing. He hears the music of the Divine strings played. from every corner of this world. Another such poem is Krishna. In this poem he reveals his union with his deity "Krishna", as he says: "The concentration of Krishna is a self-offering to Ishta Deva; If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine."

The striving heart at last finding refuge in the goal he strove for, is revealed here in this poem:

\begin{quote}
At last I find a meaning of soul’s birth
Into this universe terrible and sweet,
\end{quote}

The beginning of the sonnet suggests the relief that the poet experiences at the feet of God. It is a moment of feeling of oneness with God for the poet. Even at the point of his ecstasy, his evaluatory mind comes in and he calls this universe "terrible and sweet," for he has experienced both the facets of this world and he is trying to grasp the beautiful, the true essence of life in it. In the next two lines he explicates this thought and says:

\begin{quote}
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna’s feet.
\end{quote}

It is again a sensual approach to God which is akin to the attitude of the mystic poets throughout the world. It is the "hungry heart of earth", that is craving for the union and it is the earthly passion devoted to a higher cause. The hunger, the aspiration and the

\textsuperscript{5} Sri Aurobindo — Dr. K. R. Sreenivasa Iyengar.
\textsuperscript{6} Letters of Sri Aurobindo (III Series) — p. 128.
cravings of an earthly mould are there but not for the worldly things and it is "aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet". Now in the next quatrain he explains his vision.

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,
And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.

He has transcended the sorrow and the death of this world and he sees the "beauty of immortal eyes" and hears the "passion of the Lover's flute".

In the third quatrain, the fervour of the atmosphere of the moment of his union with God is given to us by the re-creation of the experience in words:

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
Life shudders with a strange felicity:
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

Perhaps, this is one of the greatest expressions of his mystic experiences. The whole idea is conceived as a beloved's meeting of his Lover, one of the ways in which the mystic seeks his God. This subtle movement of his soul's experience is caught in a few words. These four lines are itself enough to prove the statement made by Sri Aurobindo: "There is no incompatibility between spirituality and creative activity — they can be united", as it is the inner chord of the soul that experiences and expresses the feelings and not the mere thinking mind. "...... Neither the intelligence, the imagination, nor the ear are the true recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true creators; they are only its channels and instruments; the true creator, the true hearer is the soul."  

Again in the last couplet of the poem, the poet expresses his satisfaction which presents the peace in his soul:

For this one moment lived the ages past;
The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.

The first and the last words in the poem are the same which implies the relief of the craving heart. The last line reassures the emotion.

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7. Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (II Series) — Nirodharan, p. 140.
8. The Future Poetry — Sri Aurobindo.
expressed in the first line. This poem reminds me of one of the lyrics of Purandhara Dasă, which is “Kandeno Govindana” (I saw Govinda). In both the poems, the poet pictures the “calm rapture of the divinised soul”. There is another poem from an earlier period of his creative activity, revealing his vision. The poem is, Revelation which suggests the sudden leaping up of the consciousness of Divinity in the poet:

Someone leaping from the rocks
Past me ran with wind-blown locks
Like a startled bright surmise
Visible to mortal eyes,

He personifies the consciousness which arose startlingly from the rocky texture of the human mind. The consciousness is not something which cannot be known or seen by mortal eyes, on the other hand it is in a mortal that it should shape itself and attain perfection. The phrase “wind-blown locks” suggests the fleeting nature of the vision and the suddenness and the swiftness with which it leapt and ran. In the next few lines he concretises his vision, giving it a form:

Just a cheek of frightened rose
That with sudden beauty glows,
Just a footstep like the wind
And a hurried glance behind,
And then nothing, — as a thought
Escapes the mind ere it is caught.

perhaps the sudden awareness of the presence of consciousness accounts for the “frightened rose” in the cheek. The moment of the Divine consciousness lingers and so “a hurried glance behind”

In the last two lines he identifies the “someone” as a spirit belonging to the “heavenly rout”, which unveiled the illusion of the world for a moment. The poem is very brief, thus becoming very concentrated and effective because of the intense moment expressed as though in one breath. In its form the poem bears comparison with the poem “Once by the Pacific” of Robert Frost. Sri Aurobindo captures one of the glittering moments of his vision and the awakening of the consciousness in the poem, and it makes us go back to the statement of Aurobindo in one of his letters,
speaking of form and rhythm in poetry, “Let the rhyme come, don’t begin dragging all sorts of rhythms in to see if they fit”. The tone is of narration in the poetic mould of an inner experience.

Another sonnet which commands our attention is Shiva. The theme of the poem again is the union of the Being with the Spirit. But the conception of union is here different from the one expressed in the poem Krishna. This mystic experience is conceived as the consummation of the union of the Bhakta and the Deity, viewed through the conjugal Love of Shiva and “The Mighty Mother”, Parvathi. The Divine Lila of Shiva is also presented in this poem. The beginning of the poem again brings an atmosphere of serenity and peaceful surroundings where Shiva sits alone meditating:

One the white summit of eternity
A single soul of bare infinities,
Guarded he keeps by a fire-screen of peace
His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy.

There is both the power and the pure environment around Shiva revealed in the above-quoted four lines. The pictorial presentation of Shiva’s features poses the perfect Purusha as conceived in Indian Mythology. The words “white”, “eternity”, “bare”, “Peace”, “loneliness” and “nude” evokes the image of Shiva before us, and these words command a “smiling sureness of touch and inner breath of perfect perfection born, not made in the words themselves”. But after a pause, in his mood of immense delight, Shiva stretches his sight over the depths and sees the Mighty Mother waiting to be received:

But, touched by an immense delight to be,
He looks across unending depths and sees
Musing amidst the inconscient silences
The Mighty Mother’s dumb felicity.

The “Mighty Mother” responds to the sight of Shiva and rises with felicity to unite with him. The inner throbs of the heart of the Mother while reaching the spirit is seen in the following lines.

Half now awake she rises to his glance;
Then, moved to circling by her heart-beats will,
The rhythmic worlds describe that passion-dance.

9. Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (II Series) — Nirodharan, 0. 156.
The result of this Eternal Dance of Shiva with Parvathi is the rhythmic world created by it. From the passion-dance, the Thandava Nritya, evolves this "rhythmic world". The last three lines describe the final union of Prakriti with Purusha:

Life springs in her and Mind is born; her face
She lifts to Him who is Herself, until
the spirit leaps into the spirit's embrace.

The Divine awakening comes to her and there is a mystic approach and a final reaching of the Goal. The poem satisfies the expectations of a reader, who seeks in the poet's experience, "his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm".

Sri Aurobindo's sense of humour and satire is to be seen in his poem, *A Dream of Semireal Science*. The poem is a satire against scientists. Aurobindo has spoken derogatively about satire when he writes, "satire is more often than not a kind of half poetry, because its inspiration comes primarily from the critical mind and not a very high part of it, not from the creative vision or the moved intensity of poetic feeling. Creative vision or the moved intensity can come in to lift this motive but, except rarely, it does not lift it very high". The satire here is not aimed at any particular person or institution, but it is against the whole creation of the intelligence of Man which is reaching a goal at which point Man would destroy himself. The ill-feeling against science has risen in him because of the negligent attitude of the scientists towards spirituality. But the whole poem is cast in the mould of sardonic humour. The beginning of the poem is colloquial and the tone is one of ridicule:

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink At the Mermaid, capture immortality; A committee of hormones on Aegean's brink Composed the Iliad and Odyssey.

It is not Shakespeare's vision of life and genius that produced Hamlet but a gland, according to the scientists. The poet laughs at the scientists who reduce everything to symbols and formulate

by using their intelligence. The second quatrain of the poem describes the process of the Enlightenment of Buddha viewed through a scientist's eyes:

A thyroid meditating almost nude  
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal light  
And rising from its mighty solitude  
Spoke of the wheel and eightfold path all right.

In the third quatrain he satirises the attitude of the scientists towards the activities of great men like Napolean:

A brain by a disordered stomach driven  
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell.  
From St. Helena went, perhaps to Heaven  
Thus wagged on the surreal world.

Amidst these activities of the hormones and the glands the "surreal world" was wagging on without any recognition from any quarter.

........................................ until  
A scientist played with atoms and blew out  
The universe before God had time to shout.

The progress of the scientific world was such that, a scientist blew out the world with an atom bomb before God had any time to warn and save the world. The whole poem implies the idea that there is a lack of the knowledge of the human side of things, and in the absence of this essential factor of life, the whole of the universe is heading for destruction. Even this satire has been inspired by the critical mind but there is the vision in the poem. He is not prejudiced towards scientists or scientific growth but he is ridiculing the inability of the scientists to appreciate the products of the human and spiritual attitudes to life. The vision of life the writers of Hamlet, the Iliad and the Odyssey had, the Enlightenment of Buddha under the Bo-tree, and the undaunted courage and the ambition of Napolean cannot be explained away by mere physiological reasons but there was something else in those great men. This something else, as Aurobindo says, in one of his letters referring to the criteria of creation, is, "an inner content or suggestion, soul-feeling or soul-experience, a life-feeling or life-experience, a mental emotion, vision or experience (not merely an idea) and it is only when you catch this and reproduce some vibrations of the experience — if not the experience itself in you, that you
have got, what the poem can give you, not otherwise”\textsuperscript{12} which, the factual-minded scientists are unable to understand.

What Aurobindo wants to say in the poem, perhaps is, that it is not enough if there is mere material growth or the growth of the mind but there should be evolution of the human and spiritual consciousness also. Only then a man can become a whole individual possessing both the potentialities.

Among the poems discussed above, four are sonnets, namely, \textit{The Divine Hearing}, \textit{Krishna, Shiva} and \textit{The Dream of Surreal Science}, possessing three quatrains and a couplet each. They are Shakespearean in their form. In the three sonnets other than \textit{Shiva} there is the alternate rhyme scheme. \textit{“Shiva”} is the Petrarchian sonnet. Almost all the sonnets in the \textit{Last Poems} have the Shakespearean sonnet form.

The last poem I would like to take up for analysis is the last poem in the Second Volume of the poems and plays of Sri Aurobindo edited by Nolini Kanta Gupta, \textit{The Tiger And The Deer}. It is in “Free quantitative verse, left to find out its own line by line rhythm and unity”. It is said that Aurobindo wished to choose such a meter which would help his feelings to be expressed freely:

\begin{quote}
Brilliant, crouching, slouching, what crept through the green heart of the forest, Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and soft soundless Paws of grandeur and murder?
\end{quote}

The beginning of the poem reminds me of one of lines of Hopkins, \textit{though} not the tone, but the form:

\begin{quote}
Earnest, Earthless, Equal, attundable, vaulty, voluminous stupendous evening.
\end{quote}

Both the poems begin in a very picturesque way, the former lines have a scaring tone but the latter a subdued and a peaceful one. The very words used reveal the grandeur of the Tiger: “Brilliant”, ‘crouching’, “slouching”, “gleaming eyes”, “mighty chest and soft soundless paws of grandeur and Murder?” Aurobindo almost uses the inevitable word to manifest his ideas, as Dr. K. R. Sreenivasan says: “In his poetry everything hinges on the word”.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p. 201.
The local setting of the forest and in it the tiger with its grand pose through which

The wind slipped through the leaves as if afraid lest
its voice and the
Noise of its steps perturb the pitiless splendour
Hardly daring to breathe;

is remarkable in its depiction. The moment of the final decision of the tiger to pounce on the deer is again terrific and picturesque:

But the great beast crouched and crept, and
Crept and crouched a last time, noiseless, fatal,
All suddenly death leaped on the beautiful wild deer as it drank
Unsuspecting from the great pool in the forest's coolness and shadow,
And it fell, died remembering its mate left sole in the deep woodland --
Destroyed, the mild harmless beauty by the strong cruel beauty in Nature.

Everything of the whole situation is before our eyes to imagine. The expressions are most suggestive and to the point. The most pathetic scene is brought out in the words; "died remembering its mate left sole in the deep woodland, . . . " The repetition in the words, "crouched and crept, and crept and crouched" suggests the restlessness of the tiger. The last line of the above quoted passage implies that Nature possesses both good and evil beauty and that the latter dominates at present. The last few lines of the poem come as a hopeful prophecy, as though it is an urgent and a sudden thought leaping out of the sorrowful heart of the poet:

But a day may yet come when the tiger crouches and leaps in the dangerous heart of the forest,
As the mammoth shakes no more the plains of Asia;
Still then shall the beautiful wild deer drink from the coolness of the great pools in the Leave’s shadow
The mighty perish in their might;
The slain survive the slayer.

The poet foresees a day when the good subdues the evil however mighty the power of the evil may be, as the mere physical strength
of the mammoths have been almost destroyed by the civilization of the plains of Asia. The last two lines are cryptic, terse and full of meaning like of the Upanishadic statements. The important thing that has to be noted in the development of the poem is the change of tone. The upraised voice of the description of the features of the tiger and the same voice gradually softening down while coming to the description of the situation in which the deer is found:

Till suddenly death leaped on the beautiful wild deer
as it drank

Unsuspecting from the great pool in the forests' coolness
and shadow.

The “pitiless splendour” of the tiger here reminds me of the “scarful symmetry” of the tiger in Blake’s poem. The physical descriptions in the poem add to the vision of the poet. Everything in it bears the stamp of the vision as, the “vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation, the natural genius of the scientist”.

After having discussed these poems, I think it is relevant to say why I chose only these poems among the vast creations of Aurobindo for the discussion. They are short poems of lyrical intensity and they struck me at once. These poems have a variety of expression and of thought for, generally a mystic poet tends to repeat himself in ideas, thoughts and vision very much, because the Truth and the Reality, realised by him through various means pervade him and it is very rarely that he diverts himself from his Enlightenment and Vision. Moreover, the poems represent and illustrate the poetic values to which I have alluded to, in the course of my paper. The vision of life, the passionate experiences of the soul, the subtle inner feelings, the perfect expression with inevitable and intensified words, and the movement of the feelings in the words themselves evoking the necessary images, form the features of a poem, according to Sri Aurobindo. The poems above discussed also illustrate the poet’s idea that, “poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means — the getting away from mind into the depths of life……”

14. Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (II Series) — Nirodharan, p. 197.
poems, but every poem in the collection of the *Last Poems*, indicate that mere intellect is not sufficient enough to serve the purpose of poetry but it is the inner and the deeper response to the experiences of life that is of use in giving sustenance to any poetry for it to gain endurance.
I have chosen to talk to you on Sri Aurobindo as a literary critic and a preliminary word is necessary to explain how this choice came to be made. Sri Aurobindo is known all over the world as a philosopher and yogi, and many whose literary judgement I respect consider him a great poet also. But Aurobindo’s literary criticism does not seem to be equally well-known, at least in Departments of English Studies if my own experience is any guide. I had occasion recently to supervise in the course of my official duties a doctoral dissertation on the problems of the Indian writer in English, and it was planned that one of the chapters of the dissertation should deal with modern Indian literary criticism concerning English Literature. When I began the formal and systematic reading in the subject required for the role of a conscientious supervisor of doctoral dissertations, I became more clearly aware of the uneasy feeling that I had before of the paucity of original and significant literary criticism in our country concerning English literature. I felt depressed naturally, and I began to wonder why our long study of English Literature had not produced any Indian school of literary criticism. Was it because that in spite of our proud familiarity with English, we did not really develop any inwardness, as Dr. F. R. Leavis would say, to the English language, so essential to the making of a critical judgement? Or was it because that we had somehow—it is not necessary to go into history now; Aurobindo has himself done that in his The Renaissance in India—lost our sense of values, and were therefore merely puzzled and bewildered by the new literary experience that confronted us in English, and we never quite, in our depths as it were, got over its alien culture? There may be something in these various reasons for the absence of an Indian school of literary criticism, but there had been, and still is, an Indian response, a critical response, to English Literature. Only it had not taken the form of literary criticism, but it had resulted in a great flowering of the literatures in the regional languages of the country. Any one who looks into the dreary essays of Elizabethan
literary criticism—the only exceptions that I can make are those of Sidney and Ben Jonson—for evidence of the critical reception of the Renaissance in England would come away sadly disappointed, wondering whether there had been any Renaissance at all. For the Renaissance in England, you must go to the dramatic literature of the age.

But, it may be asked, is not this desire to have an Indian school of criticism a form of provinciality which surely it is time that those who have any pretensions to any sort of intellectual awareness got away from? Matthew Arnold, you will recall, was distressed when they began to talk of an American Literature. All literature, at least all literature written in English, is one, whether trans-atlantic or cis-atlantic in origin. Is there any justification except in one’s enslavement to the idea of nation or to one’s moment in time, for an Indian school of criticism? We perceive immediately that such a school, if it should ever come into existence, must eventually seek and obtain its sanction not from the Indian nationality of its authors or its publishers, but in the uniqueness of its achievement, the uniqueness of its contribution to the world’s vision of English Literature and its values. Otherwise, it had better not be at all—another chorus of confusion at the tower of babel.

It was with thoughts and feelings of this sort that I came to read the literary criticism of Aurobindo. That criticism is to be found for the most part in The Future Poetry (first published as a series of articles in The Arya from 1917 to 1920; in book-form in Pondicherry in 1953) and in the Third Series of his Letters (Bombay 1949). Aurobindo, as I acknowledged at the outset, is pre-eminently a philosopher and yogi, though he began as a poet, and his views, not only on poetry but on other subjects as well, cannot be properly understood except in the larger context of the general philosophical system that he has expounded most notably in The Life Divine. Since he has written a considerable amount of verse and drama, including a vast epic, his literary views need to be related to his literary practice also. Obviously in a brief exploratory paper such as this, all these requirements cannot be fulfilled, and I must content myself with merely indicating the nature of the importance of Aurobindo’s work as a literary critic and with outlining the need for a detailed study.
Perhaps the best way of indicating this importance would be to look at some of his particular judgements. One could take one's examples either from *The Future Poetry* or from the Letters. Since the essays in the former were all finished in 1920, it is in the Letters, written some ten or fifteen years later, that one comes across Aurobindo's judgements on post-Victorian authors such as Lawrence, Shaw, Wells, Chesterton and Galsworthy. There are several letters which touch on Lawrence briefly. They all seem to have been written between 1933 and 1937, for the dates are not always clearly mentioned, but one has the impression that Huxley's collection of the Lawrence letters was a recent event. Aurobindo confesses that he has not read much of Lawrence, and for criticism that meets the public eye, something more ample and sufficient would be necessary. In spite of these hesitations, he feels that Lawrence's poetry (he talks specifically only of his poetry) has too much importance and significance to be passed over lightly (III, 320). During those early years, the appreciation of Lawrence was by no means, as you will recall, so general as it became later. Aurobindo, for all his slight acquaintance with Lawrence's work, shows a very acute understanding of what Lawrence was trying to do in his poetry. Let me quote:

Lawrence had the psychic push inside towards the Unknown and Beyond at the same time as a push towards the vital life which came in its way. He was trying to find his way between the two and mixed them up together till at the end he got his mental liberation from the tangle though not yet any clear knowledge of the way—for that I suppose he will have to be born nearer the East or in any case in surroundings which will enable him to get at the Light.

The phrase, vital life, which occurs in this quotation needs a word of explanation. Aurobindo holds that Reality is omnipresent Sat-Chit-Ananda. Inherent in this Reality is a force, a universal energy which we can see all round us in the world. This force or energy is a conscious energy. The Sat-Chit-Ananda is responsible for the creation of the phenomenal world. Creation
takes place with the aid of this energy according to a definite plan or Law.

The world is not a figment of conception in the universal mind, but a conscious birth of that which is beyond mind into forms of itself. A truth of conscious being supports these forms and expresses itself in them, and the knowledge corresponding to the truth thus expressed reigns as a supra-mental consciousness (rtachtit). To this supreme Truth-Consciousness Sri Aurobindo has given the name of Supermind. It is the link between Satchitananda and the finite world........ The Supermind as an infinite principle of creative will and knowledge, organizing real ideas into a perfect harmony before they are cast into the mental-vital-material mould, is the creator of the worlds. (S. Chatterjee: “Mind and Supermind in Sri Aurobindo’s Integralism” in (The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, edited by H. Chaudhuri & F. Spigelberg, Allen and Unwin, 1960, p. 40-41).

The vital or Life is a stage in evolution whose ultimate goal is the realization of Supermind. To seek the realization of the perfection of life at the level of the vital is to seek it at the wrong, because penultimate and temporary, level. Aurobindo points out in another letter that there is only one way in which one can escape from the ego-centricity which is the very nature of our present life.

It is only by finding something deep within or above ourselves and making laya (dissolution) of the ego in that that it is possible it is what Lawrence saw and his effort to do it made him ‘other’ than those who associated with him—but he could not find out the way. It was a strange mistake to seek it in sexuality; it was also a great mistake to seek it at the wrong of the nature.

(III, 322; see also The Life Divine, I, 246, 269-272)
The same acuteness of perception and the same firmness of evaluation are seen in Aurobindo's remark on Lawrence's poetry. Aurobindo had not read a great deal of it—he had his yoga after all to occupy his time with—but he perceives clearly enough what Lawrence was about. Lawrence, he writes,

wanted to get rid of the outward forms that for him hide the Invisible and arrive at something that would express with bare simplicity and directness some reality within. ... The idea is to get rid of all over-expression, of language for the sake of language, or form for the sake of form, even of indulgence of poetic emotion because all that veils the thing in itself, dresses it up, prevents it from coming out in the seizing nudity of its truth, the power of its intrinsic appeal. There is a sort of mysticism here that wants to express the inexpressible, the concealed, the invisible. ... The idea of Lawrence is akin: let us get rid of rhyme, metre, artifices which please us for their own sake and draw us away from the thing in itself, the real behind the form. So supressing these things let us have something bare, rocky, primly expressive (III. 318)

For someone who had confessedly not read much of Lawrence or given the matter very deliberate thought, I find those remarks astonishingly perceptive. Aurobindo goes on to cite an example of a few lines from Lawrence, and concludes from them that Lawrence did not succeed. Perhaps it would have been truer to say that Lawrence did not always succeed, and perhaps Aurobindo would have made the necessary discriminations if he had read more of Lawrence and had been writing of him for a public audience. (His remarks in The Future Poetry seem based firmly on wide reading in the particular author whom he happens to be examining at the moment). Aurobindo seems to attribute Lawrence's failure to Lawrence's giving up of all form, as generally understood. Those who take a more favourable view of Lawrence's poetry (for ex., Gamini Salgado reviewing The Collected Poems of Lawrence in The Critical Quarterly, VII, 4) have argued
that Lawrence’s successes and failures alike arise from the same source, his poetic theory. The theory of course is nothing novel; it has affinities with Wordsworth’s experiments in the Lyrical Ballads and his Preface, with Hazlitt’s theory of ‘gusto’ and Hopkins’s theory of ‘inscape’. Aurobindo’s view seems to be that Lawrence’s vision could have been powerfully expressed in a closer-knit language and metre. Aurobindo was not against new and free forms nor did he doubt that they could succeed. But he held that the new vision, the aim of expressing reality without the intervention of any distorting medium, would be realised better not by discarding totally the old forms of expression but by striving for an even closer integration of poetic form and poetic vision. To put the matter in the terms of the controversy between Wordsworth and Coleridge, metre is not, need not and ought not to be in fact, a super addition to a poem. The art of poetry has been in existence for a long time — long enough to have built up some resources whose flexibility and range it is at least worthwhile to try out before discarding them. What these resources can achieve when they are well employed is the minimization of whatever it is that interferes with the reception of experience in its pristine purity. A total elimination of these interferences is nor possible for poetry; for a permanent total elimination, you must go to yoga; for a temporary one, mescaline will do, we are told. In this limitation, poetry is rather like the wireless set. Even the one widely advertised as the set for a connoisseur cannot totally eliminate interference. The language of pure perception, of pure experience is silence, not speech, not poetry, so the mystics tell us. Experience cannot be transmitted; it can only be experienced; in language, however transparent we may make it, there is always some climbing down. We may make it as small as we can, but it remains, a stubborn fact. The poetry of love, it is obvious, is not love, but talk about love, hints about love. Every honest poet of course tries to reduce the distortion to a minimum. Certainly one must polish the crystal as much as one can so that the original hues of the object under examination are seen clearly, but the white of the white crystal is also a colour. Of course in speaking thus solely of the distortions of experience caused by language, we assume that the experience is itself not distorted at the very source — the perceiving mind. Aurobindo would demur that it is a large and unwarranted assumption; we assume that the
perceiving agent is free from the limitations of human egocentricity. The poet lives still on the evolutionary stage of the mind and is not yet a spiritual seer. But, concedes Aurobindo,

he represents to the human intellect the highest point of mental seership where the imagination tries to figure forth and embody in words its institutions of things, though that stands far below the vision of things that can be grasped only by spiritual experience........ Yet the Rishi or Yogi can drink of a deeper draught of Beauty and Delight that the imagination of the poet at its highest can conceive. The Divine is Delight, and it is not only the Unseen Beauty that he can see but the visible and the tangible also has for him a face of the All-Beautiful which the mind cannot discover (III, 300).

The highest poetry is the poetry in which one can experience the vision of the seer, the rishi. Aurobindo argues that such poetry is the speech of what he calls the Overmind. The Overmind is different from the Supermind. Aurobindo himself explains the difference thus in one of his letters:

By the Supermind is meant the full Truth-Consciousness of the Divine Nature in which there can be no place for the principle of division and ignorance; it is always full of light and knowledge superior to all mental substance or mental movement. Between the Supermind the human mind there are a number of ranges, planes or layers of consciousness — one can regard it in various ways — in which the element or substance of mind and consequently its movements also become more and more illumined and powerful and wide. The Overmind is the highest of these ranges; is full of lights and powers; but from the point of view of what is above it, it is the light of the soul’s turning away from the complete and indivisible knowledge and its descent towards Ignorance........ In the Supermind mental divisions and oppositions
cease; the problems created by our dividing and fragmenting mind disappear and Truth is seen as a luminous whole. In the Overmind there is not yet the actual fall into Ignorance, but the first step is taken which will make the fall inevitable. (I, 116).

When it is said that the poetry of the Overmind is the highest poetry, mantra, it does not necessarily mean that the poetry which emanates from other levels of consciousness is poetically inferior. "The poetic value of perfection of a line", clarifies Aurobindo, "does not depend on the plane from which it comes but on the purity or authenticity and power with which it transcribes an intense vision inspiration from whatever source. Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical; but there are no greater poets in any literature." (III, 95) The characteristics of the speech of the Overmind are a language that says infinitely more than the mere sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the infinite and the power to convey not purely some mental vital or physical contents or indications or values of the things it speaks of, but its value and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind the all. (III, 97). There are further elaborations of what he means by Overmind poetry in other letters also:

The Overmind is essentially a spiritual power. Mind in it surpasses its ordinary self and rises and takes its stand on a spiritual foundation. It embraces beauty and submilates it; it has an essential aethesia which is not limited by rules and canons, it sees an universal and eternal beauty while it takes up and transfers all that is limited and particular. It is besides concerned with things other than beauty or aesthetics. It is concerned especially with truth and knowledge or rather with a wisdom that exceeds what we call knowledge, its truth goes beyond truth or fact and truth of thought, even the higher thought which is the first spiritual range of the thinker. It has the truth of spiritual thought, spiritual
feeling, spiritual sense and at the highest, the truth that comes by the most intimate touch or identity. Ultimately truth and beauty come together and coincide. Overmind in all its dealings puts truth first; a limited aesthetical artistic aim is not its purpose. (III, 99-100).

To distinguish this note of the Overmind, Aurobindo confesses is not easy; no rules can be given for it. The business of the critical intellect is no doubt to appreciate and judge, but it can judge rightly only if it learns to see and sense inwardly and interpret. The mere critical intellect not touched by a rarer sight can do little here (III, 101). A rule of thumb such as that Overmind poetry takes a transcendent view of things is worse than useless; it may encourage bad, self-deceived poetry. Aurobindo does not give many examples of what he considers Overmind poetry (“In the dark backward and abysm of time”, “Those thoughts that wander through eternity” and perhaps “The winds come to me from the fields of sleep”), but at the end of a lengthy analysis and description, he admits that to detect the Overmind touch in poetry, we must have ourselves some experience, however fleeting, of that level of consciousness. Further it is easy to mistake the merely great and noble for the poetry of the Overmind. For instance, we may think that Milton often achieves the Overhead note, but “though Milton’s architecture of thought and verse,” says Aurobindo, “is high and powerful and massive there are usually no subtle echoes there, no deep chambers, the occult things in man’s being are foreign to his intelligence, for it is in the light of the poetic intelligence that he works. He does not ‘stray into the mystic cavern of the heart’. (III, 118-19) As things are with men’s evolution today overmind poetry occurs in intermittent flashes in the midst of other poetry, bringing in new tones, new colours, new elements, but as yet it does not change radically the stuff of the consciousness with which we labour. (III, 120). Whether it produces great poetry or not depends on the extent to which it manifests its power and over rides rather than serves the mentality which it is helping. At present it does not do that sufficiently to raise the work to the full greatness of the worker.

After explaining what overmind poetry consists in, Aurobindo goes on to consider how it works on us, its aesthesis.
By acsthesis is meant a reaction of the consciousness, mental and vital and even bodily, which receives a certain element in things that can be called their taste, Rasa, which passing through the mind or sense or both, awakes a vital enjoyment of the taste, Bhoga, and this again awakens us, awakens even the soul in us to something yet deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, to some form of the spirit's delight and existence, Ananda.

(III, 122)

There is a rasa of the word and sound and idea, and through the idea of the things expressed by the word and sound and thought, a mental or vital or spiritual image of their form, quality, impact upon us, or even, if the poet is strong enough, of their world-essence, their cosmic reality, the very soul of them, the spirit that resides in them as it resides in all things. "Poetry", says Aurobindo "may do more than this, but this at least it must do to however small an extent, or it is not poetry." (III, 122) Aesthesis is of the very essence of poetry therefore; its parent is universal ananda. Universal ananda is the artist and creator of the universe, witnessing, experiencing and taking joy in its creation. Its highest manifestation is ecstasy. Ecstasy is the sign of a return towards the original or supreme ananda; that art or poetry is supreme which can bring us something of the supreme tone of ecstasy. Ecstasy is the experience of intense consciousness, intense being, intense delight in existence. As aesthesis enters the overhead planes it becomes pure delight. This is the first change. There is a second change. The duties and conflicts of existence that plague us on the lower planes leave us, and there is consciousness of universality. The universal aesthesis of beauty and delight does not ignore or fail to understand the differences and oppositions that the ordinary consciousness perceives, but it draws a rasa from them and with that comes a Bhoga or enjoyment from them or the touch or the mass from them. It sees that all things have their meaning, their value, their deeper or total significance. The Overmind sees the face of the Divine everywhere. Aurobindo is perfectly aware that the real problem for the critic — and the perfect critic is a sadhaka — is to recognize the aesthesis of the Overmind. It has after all to use a language made by mind, not by itself. It
can only strain and intensify this medium and try to heighten, deepen and enlarge it (III, 152); of course for one rare line of genuine authentic Overmind poetry, there will be a hundred surrogates, it is difficult to distinguish, admits Aurobindo, unless one has lived in the light oneself.

If this admission of the rarity of critical genius is a limitation in Aurobindo's critical theory, he seems willing to accept it cheerfully. "Really, 'he says,' it is only the few that can be trusted to discern the true value of things in poetry and art". (III, 263). Or again, "It is not the opinion of the general mass of men that finally decides: the decision is really imposed by the judgement of a minority and elite which is finally accepted and settles down as the verdict of posterity; in Tagore's phrase, it is universal man, visva manava, or something universal using the general mind of man, we might say the Cosmic Self in the race, that fixes the value of its own works" (III, 273). He hopes for his part that the eventual verdict on his own epic poem, Savitri, will rule that the waste paper basket is not the fit place for it.

Finally, there is the question: what is the importance of poetry, its place in life? Poetry is not a major means of the realization of the Divine; to claim so would be, says Aurobindo, an exaggeration. He explains his position thus:

The word has power — even the ordinary written word has power. If it is an inspired word, it has still more power. What kind of power or power for what depends on the nature of the inspiration and the theme and the part of the being that it touches. If it is the word itself, as in certain utterances of the great scriptures, Veda, Upanishads, Gita, it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual and uplifting impulse, even certain kinds of realization. To say that it cannot contradicts spiritual experience.

(Aurobindo On Himself and on the Mother, p. 293)

But the illumination gained by means of poetic vision would differ from the yogic realization which is settled and permanent. Poetry is a step towards the real — which is an answer as much in harmony with Aristotle's Poetics except for a different notion
of the real as with the traditional statement of the Indian poetician that the experience of poetic rasa is akin to the experience of the Brahman itself (See also *The Life Divine*, I, 136-37). When such descriptions of the function of poetry are offered, it must not be forgotten of course that they apply to the maximum potentialities of poetry. All poetry is *mantra*, but the highest poetry is the *mantra* of the Real, says Aurobindo.

What I have been trying to do in this brief paper is to give you some idea of the quality of the particular literary judgements of Aurobindo and his general literary theory so that the nature of the importance of his work in literary criticism may be glimpsed. His literary theory, as I said at the beginning, is really part of his theory of the life divine; it was not theory for him; nor is it theory to his followers; it is a sadhna, spiritual practice pursued unremittingly with patience, dedication, faith and perseverance. To attempt an estimate of this theory of literature without some experience of the sadhana may well be seriously misleading. My own study of even the theoretical aspects of Aurobindo's metaphysic is far too sketchy at the moment to qualify me to attempt a summarising. I shall instead bring this account to a close with a few tentative observations on the estimate of this aspect of Aurobindo's genius offered by a more competent scholar and student of Aurobindo than I am. Professor V. K. Gokak in a very interesting paper on "Western Thought and Indian Aesthetics" (*Cultural Freedom in Asia*, ed. H. Passin, Tokyo and Vermont, U.S.A., 1956, 96-108) has suggested that the impact of Western thought on Indian aesthetics found its fulfilment in Aurobindo. "Coleridge's mantle," says Professor Gokak, "fell on him" (ibid., 103). A detailed investigation of this line of thought, it seems to me, should be very fruitful. Coleridge, it is well known, distinguished between the poetry of fancy and the poetry of the imagination which was clearly superior to it. "The Imagination," wrote Coleridge, "is that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the reason in images of the sense and organising (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the reason, gives birth to a system of symbols." (*The Statesman's Manual*) The Imagination is not a separate faculty of the mind, but rather a completing power that works through and by means of the entire mind. Coleridge distinguished two functions in the mind, understanding and reason. The understanding was con-
cerned with receiving and organizing sense-experience. But there were also certain forms and laws of nature (which, you will remember, Plato regarded as the only reality) that could be perceived directly by the reason. The imagination incorporated the direct insights of reason with the images of understanding, and the product was a symbol. Hence a symbol was a very different creation from an allegory. "An allegory", distinguished Coleridge," is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from the objects of the senses.......... 

On the other hand a symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general, in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative.

(The Statesman's Manual)

With this we may compare Aurobindo's explanation:

There is a considerable difference between symbolism and allegory........ Allegory comes in when a quality or other abstract thing is personalised and the allegory proper should be something carefully stylized and deliberately sterilized of the full aspect of embodied life so that the essential meaning or idea may come out with sufficient precision or force of clarity... A symbol expresses on the contrary not the play of abstract things or ideas put into imaged form, but a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images — the more these images have a living truth of their own which corresponds intimately to the living truth they symbolize, suggests the very vibration of the
experience itself, the greater becomes the art of the symbolic expression (III, 85).

There is obviously an interesting correspondence here between Aurobindo's thought and Coleridge's. But, equally, I think, there are differences which make further investigation of Professor Gokak's suggestion a promising line of inquiry. Aurobindo believes that at present Overmind poetry comes to us only in stray flashes of single lines, Coleridge does not seem to think of 'imaginative' poetry (which, incidentally, he looks for in the poem as a whole and not in a series of striking lines) as poetry that we may expect to achieve only in the future when man has evolved to a higher stage of consciousness. Secondly the idea of evolution occupies a key-place in the system of Aurobindo, and though it is present in Coleridge, how he intended to link it with his poetics, I do not know:

The highest perfection of natural philosophy (writes Coleridge) would consist in the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect. The phenomena (the material) must wholly disappear and the laws alone (the formal) must remain. Hence it comes that in nature itself the more the principle of law breaks forth, the more does the husk drop off, the phenomena themselves become more spiritual and at length cease altogether in our consciousness... The theory of natural philosophy would then be completed when all nature was demonstrated to be identical in essence with that which in its highest known power exists in man as intelligence and self-consciousness.

(Biographia Literaria, Ch. 12, Everyman's Libr. edn., p 143)

In the third place, Coleridge left his 'deduction of the imagination' incomplete, and it is worth investigation how far Aurobindo's poetics harmonizes with and completes Coleridge's pioneer efforts. Such a study, if is undertaken by a scholar of Western and Indian literature and aesthetics who is also well-grounded in logic and
metaphysics, should help us to attempt a definitive estimate of Aurobindo's achievement and assess the possibility that I touched on at the beginning of this paper of an Indian school of literary criticism.
ANANDA COOMARASWAMY'S
THE DANCE OF SHIVA

-- S. K. Mokashi Punekar.

British criticism, by and large, has operated within the limits of empirical demarcation. The critic starts his enquiry with the artefact. He usually refuses to go backwards into that state of the writer's mind which still was groping towards the exact image it sought to create; or into that equally important struggle of the artist to master the medium for receiving that image. The development of psychology has tempted some critics in recent years to attempt an enquiry into the latter, a little nervously and with no assurance about the shadowy terrain they are not used to exploring. As for the first activity, I mean, the one concerning the artist's own gropings towards the exact image, very inept and meagre effort has been put in only to prove that it forms no tradition of English criticism. As for a generalised enquiry into the artistic process, the critic exempts himself from the quest on the plea that it belongs to a subject named Aesthetics, a branch of philosophy, and thus entirely a different discipline. The aesthetician on his part cannot but be bogged down in the problems of epistemology and teleology which are an essential part of his discipline. He may conveniently pass the buck on to the pompous omniscient psychologist, whose cheerful answers, alas, are too well-known and predictable!

There are good reasons why this is so; the main reason is the deplorable state of knowledge of creativity. Fortunately, the subtle spirits of this century and the last have shown an appreciation of the predicament. It is interesting to note that even so transcendental a thinker as Coleridge decided not to dabble in the pre-artefact region, though characteristically he talks about it with awe and reverence: "They and they only, can acquire the philosophic imagination, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct which impels the crysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antannae yet to come; they know and feel the potential works within them;
even as the actual works on them!” And with Plotinus, Coleridge counsels silence. Thus even Coleridge chose to remain British.

Nevertheless, we do get some subtle spirits who were able to bring back a good deal of wisdom in their sojournings among these dark shades. Jung, Jacques Maritain, Suzanne Langer, Satre, belong to the same category as Benedetto Croce in varied measures. We cannot state that these were able to give us a definitive account of the creative process; in Herbert Read we get a psychological application ripened in personal experience of creativity, but alas, he has not continued the critical enquiry he started in “In Defence of Shelley” based on early Freudian studies.

Fortunately, even within its death, India has contributed to English literature some profound writers who by a strange charisma could convert their national impulse itself into an intuition of the artistic creation. Not is this a surprising process. It has to be the first step in explaining non-European art. It a Byzantine were to explain his art to a modern mind, or a Chinaman were to explain his dragons, an Egyptian the meaning of the Sphinx; or an Indonesian the temple architecture, he has automatically to go to the profound roots of all art before he utters his first word. Such an explanation will primarily involve the explanation of all non-mimetic art and possibly some applied art. The mimetic art of the Greeks acted as the cultural norm-setter in modern Europe for too long a time. To outstep this groove is the first challenge. As Ananda Coomaraswamy puts it, “The classic scholar starts convinced that the art of Greece has never been equalled or surpassed, and never will be; there are many who think, like Michelangelo, that because Italian painting is good, therefore good painting is Italian.” There are many who never yet felt the beauty of Egyptian sculpture or Chinese or Indian painting or music: that they have also the hardlihood to deny their beauty, however, proves nothing.” (D. of Sh. p. 45). For the same reason, Ananda Coomaraswamy takes Vincent Smith to task for talking contemptuously about the many-handed images of Indian art: he first condemns them as philologists and historians, rather than art-critics, who mainly assume “that the final aim of art is representation.” Representational art seems to have exhausted its resources even in the West during the past
century or so. The Picasso revolution was strictly speaking only an extension of the same impulse seen as *fin de siecle* in Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley could not back up his creativity with an aesthetic. Others were lucky in having been born in an age when the non-mimetic principle had already been established. Thus Picasso could be creative, not decadent. Even so, the difference between Picasso and the psychedelic art, or Tantric art is not just the difference in representational attitudes. There is a difference in kind. We have to understand the latter in terms of such widely different contexts as a frame of mind, a culture, a sub-culture, or probably a whole nation. The last is the most difficult of all, because it has to be a very inclusive and yet a pointed enquiry. Ananda Coomaraswami himself states that he, along with H. B. Havell and Professor Munsterberg, was accused of having cared more for Indian art than art. (*D. of Sh.* p. 64).

Ananda Coomaraswamy did this most difficult task of explaining Indian art in the context of a national mind within whose framework alone Indian art gains perspective. He is to be reckoned among those powerful intellects of the older generation who kept up a clear headedness and a national outlook against so much of their own training and the debasing environment, I mean the class represented by Tilak, Tagore, Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, and if I am permitted to include naturalised “Indians”, (sympathisers), Sir John Woodroffe and Anail Danielou. (I shall not concern myself with the question whether Ananda Coomaraswamy was a born or a naturalised Indian). This is an impressive type. I shall draw attention to the contrast. This group’s intellectual attainment is of an entirely different order as compared to the China-centred bunch of intellectuals such as Lin Yutang on one side and Arthur Waley and Ezra Pound on the other. I feel that Indian attitudes are more comprehensively and more competently represented, and by men of taller stature. The name of Ezra Pound need not deter us. His singular lack of understanding is seen in the strange remarks he made about Tagore’s verse and modern Bengalee art).

Yet why is there the absence of an Indian lobby in the intellectual or literary world today? Why should each or all put together not be able to start a powerful centre of a cultural or literary influx in the West, which still continues to hold the commercial monopoly of the intellect? (Everybody in India seeks a British
or American publisher; for instance Ananda Coomaraswamy caustically describes the present educational system in India as 'really a vested interest in the hands of Macmillans and Longmans' (D. of Sh. p. 156).

Strictly this would not be relevant matter but for the fact that some time or other one has to face up to the shadow of doubt cast on the work done by these talented men. Their lack of influence in the West is explained by such wide reasons as the comparative immaturity of the West, its very powerful currents of thought which do not permit the acceptance of other genres, and the Western habit of denying the validity of certain modes of enquiry, and the West's self-admitted compartmentalisation of knowledge and general insularity.

That should look after such trivial questions as to whether Ananda Coomaraswamy could influence opinion, whether he contributed anything to the central traditions of contemporary thought, and whether he is taken seriously abroad. When Indian readers themselves do not study him for establishing their own aesthetic norms, it would be presumptuous to expect the West to do so. A recent article in the Sunday Standard even complains that after Independence when India began to honour her heroes, "the very name of Ananda Coomaraswamy seemed to have been simply forgotten by the powers that be." (S. S. Nov. 9, 1967, by Trivikram Narayanan).

This brings us face to face with the predicament of the English Literature student in India; he belongs nowhere. One only hopes that he will turn to these men who have given enough to establish a centre of national intellect. Things should improve if we Indians care to go back to them, or at least have the courtesy not to call those who go to them as cranks.

It is strange that a Ceylonese who left Ceylon in his second year of birth and returned after twenty one years, as a Geologist, then became an Art Critic and Curator of Museums in America could give us the most comprehensive account of the Indian aesthetic and sociology, but it is not stranger than the fact that a Frenchman like Anail Danielou should have explained to us most comprehensively that our system of music is far more scientific and artistic than the Western; it is precisely for this reason Yeats thought that all revolutions are a miracle.
At first sight, it is possible to read in Ananda Coomaraswamy’s opus, *The Dance of Shiva* an approach more akin to archaeology than to art criticism—the attempt to explain a civilization from the meagre findings of an un. One may even read it as the work of a revivalist or a Romantic who saw in the past a perfection which did not belong to it. Ananda Coomaraswamy’s constant assertion of a national personality derived from just a few disconnected hints and artefacts might even appear idealistic to many. It is only when we are able to realize that Coomaraswamy’s aphoristic wisdom takes into a single sweep all-European experience before it posits the national approach that we feel a little humbled. Not that European experience should be the basis for all philosophic statement. But for most of us in India, European experience stands at the door with such forbidding strength that we tend to linger in the veranda rather than enter our own house. Men like Coomaraswamy ought to teach us how to enter our own house un-brow beaten. Ananda Coomaraswamy’s nationalism comprises simply a fierce independence from the Philistinism of the third-rate European “scholars” who condescended to damn with faint praise Indian art and earned places of authority for the mere fact of an accidental pioncership. As he bluntly puts it: “For those (historians who denigrate Indian art) should not air their likes and dislikes in oriental art, who when they speak of art mean mere illustration: for there they will rarely meet with what they seek, and the expression of their disappointment becomes wearisome.” To talk of Vincent Smith in such terms in India needs independence of outlook; but we should also remember that India has to be rescued constantly from Philistines like Vincent Smith, and Sir Francis Young Husband, as much as from many denigrators like Catherine Mayo, Beverley Nichols and Naipaul. The independence was possible for Ananda Coomaraswamy simply by virtue of an honest application of the finest norms of sensitive criticism evolved in the West to Indian works of art, and exposing himself to their impact. Thus could be born a national aesthetic which also is international, in the sense, it earns echoes in the most sensitive corners of the Western intellect,—Romain Rolland, Jacques Maritain, Arnold Toynbee,—in other words, the idealist reaction in the West.
Ananda Coomaraswamy begins his enquiry by viewing the national personality as a creative force in a manifold world. History becomes meaningful only in terms of national experience. A people, long before they discover their material means and the institutions which can exploit these, think of the fundamental adjustment with life. Thus is born the prophet's intuition of life's unity. Some nations fortunately are capable of receiving the impress of the right fundamentals. Ananda Coomaraswamy does not go into the why and how of it. But he positively states what makes India unique in the world. Those profound intuitions of the unity of all life Rumi and Blake could envision, Indian sages too did. But elsewhere, they had to remain isolated poetry; in India, we made these intuitions the basis of education and sociology. With all the inherent dangers, the system has held together.

In other words, Ananda Coomaraswamy offers a direct vindication of the Indian way of life in which art is considered only a bye-product of a really beautiful idealistic society. Indian art appears beautiful to Ananda Coomaraswamy as an expression of a far superior Indian scheme of values in which it has a secondary place in itself, but can aspire to the first place only when it swears loyalty to the highest value in the scheme, — viz., Self-realization.

But that is a very crude way of summing up Coomaraswamy's elaborate rationale. I have attempted this crude summation only with a view to warning my friends that they have to forego the time-hallowed idea of autonomy of arts. If anyone is repelled by this, he better not read Ananda Coomaraswamy at all. For most of us, the autonomy of arts is a fundamental tenet of belief. Further, under the influence of Romantic and post-Romantic criticism, and those subtle absolutist pseudo-religious thoughts released by Matthew Arnold in the 19th Century which have now become a part of the cultural heritage of English Literature students, we tend to give arts the highest place in the scheme of human values. We are all convinced that once it was the business of religion to give us our values; but now that religion is no longer the living force that it was arts have to bring us our "sweetness and light" etc. But if Ananda Coomaraswamy is to be asked in this matter, he might possibly have replied that the answer to
the loss of religion is a regaining of it, not replacing it by art. He certainly would have asked Indians to go back precisely to the central values of life rather than concede the autonomy of art. Just before death, Aldous Huxley too had arrived at the same conclusion: His very last public statement was that art had been overvalued in the West. Surely Aldous Huxley should count in European experience.

So should Ananda Coomaraswamy. What, when summed up, might sound a crudity is really found to be the last word (often yet-to-be-spoken word) in European experience, i.e., the logical next step. Take for instance this passage in which Ananda Coomaraswamy is analysing the Indian pattern of acquired creativity (Vidya) through the development of the art of seeing the mental images, often of deities— with a luminous perspicacity, given in the Sukranitisara, a work which deals with, among other things, sculpture. Here comes a defiant passage, since Ananda Coomaraswamy has no way but to confess that Indian sculpture was the product of a god-ridden society.

"This was indeed a return to superstition, or at any rate duality (i.e., the spirit of worship was the via media between the mystic of the Buddhist or Vedantist and the secular housekeeper; and it was worship which needed art. Thus art sponsored the mid-region of superstition); but what in this world is not a dream and a superstition,—certainly not the atoms of science. And for all those who are not yet idealists there are, as there must be, idols provided. The superstitions of Hinduism, like those of Christianity, accomplished more for the hearts of men than those of modern materialism. It may well be doubted if art and idolatry, idolatry and art, are not inseparable."

There in that little passage, Ananda Coomaraswamy has packed more exasperating iconoclastic dynamite than is needed to shatter our assumptions of materialism, dialectic or otherwise, our secularism, our scientism. Are not atoms idols too? Can there be art without idolatry and idolatry? And finally, are not the idols created by religions like Hinduism or Christianity more appealing than the idols created by Science such as the atoms?... Apparently cheeky talk, but it includes all European experience and absorbs it in his conviction.

From where does this conviction spring? This self-assurance?
This defiance? To state that it springs from a nationalist attitude to life would be crude simplification. Ananda Coomaraswamy’s nationalism is the product of a European experience seen from intimate quarters, but seen as an outsider. The eager observer of European art and culture still could have independence enough to remain true to a fundamental loyalty to life and in its assertion of a life value as above the art value, rediscovered his own nation; it was the discovery of the next step to European experience, not because of any intellectual development, but because it began with other fundamentals, — such is its prime loyalty to life, whether expressed in the unity-experience of the Upanishadic rishis or the non-violence experience of the Buddha. Did Europe lack these fundamentals? Coomaraswamy knew that the essential experience of any keen perceiver such as a mystic cannot but lead to a sense of the unity of all life; but what social credence this experience of the elect could contain in society, to what extent it influenced social behaviour and how helpful these social institutions were in promoting this experience, these mark the break between India and the West. Indian music, for instance, is the product of a heredity-ripened skill. “As in other arts and in life, so here also (i.e., in music) India presents to us the wonderful spectacle of the still surviving consciousness of the ancient world, with a range of experience rarely accessible to those who are pre-occupied with the activities of over-production and intimidated by the economic insecurity of a social order based on competition (as in the West)”.

(Ob. of Sh. p. 86).

Thus Ananda Coomaraswamy’s nationhood is strictly a matter of intellectual choice after weighing a good deal of European experience. It is more a choice of a way of life. Like the imager he is so fond of writing about in India, probably he saw in the spread-eagle image of Nataraja which forms the title and the frontis-piece of his *opus*, an Image of India and sought to express it.

It is precisely for this reason that he explains the fundamentals of his national nucleus of thought with a formal apology but with a determined conviction.

“Each race contributes something essential to the world’s civilization in the course of its own self-expression and self-realisation. The character built up in solving its own problems in the experience
of its own misfortunes, is itself a gift which each offers to the world. The essential contribution of India, then, is simply her Indianness; her great humiliation would be to substitute or to have substituted for her own character (Swabhava) a cosmopolitan veneer, for then indeed she must come before the world empty-handed.”

(D. of Sh. p. 1).

In that passage we can get the finest of European experience, — for instance the faint echo of Arnold Toynbee; but it has been carried to a level where an intellectual choice of the national is taken to a fundamentalist, but surely not a jingoistic seriousness. In Ananda Coomaraswamy, the antinomies are a philosophical nationalism and a characterless cosmopolitanism. Then it is a life choice, neither a revivalist nor an idealist one.

III

Then we have to contend with the most exasperating fact that Ananda Coomaraswamy is a non-aesthetic aesthetician. In his aesthetic scheme beauty has a secondary or incidental place. “Let us insist, however, that the concept of beauty originated with the philosopher, not with the artist, he has been ever concerned with saying clearly what had to be said. In all ages of creation the artist has been in love with his particular subject ............ he has never set out to achieve the beautiful”... ... (D. of Sh. p. 51).

Let us consider the following passage in which the very first principle of art is ravaged with an innocuous and casual strength.

“Let us observe here that the purpose of the imager was neither self-expression nor the realization of beauty. He did not choose his own problems, but like the Gothic sculptor, observed a hieratic canon. He did not regard his own or his fellows’ work from the standpoint of connoisseurship or aestheticism — not, that is to say, from the point of the philosopher, or aesthete, but from that of a pious artisan. To him the theme was all in all, and there is beauty in his work, this did not arise from aesthetic intention, but from a state which found unconscious expression”. So far so good. Then comes down the brick with a suppressed thud. “In every epoch of great and creative art we find an identical phenomenon — the artist is preoccupied with his theme. It is only in looking backward, and as philosophers rather than artists — that we perceive, that the quality of beauty in a work of art is
really quite independent of its theme. Then we are apt to forget that beauty has never been reached except through the necessity that was felt to deal with the particular subject. We sit down to paint a beautiful picture, or stand up to dance and having nothing in us that we feel must be said and said clearly at all costs, we are surprised that the result is insipid and lacks conviction. The subject may be lovely, the dance may be ravishing, but the picture and the dance are not rasavant (Indian word). The theory of beauty is a matter for philosopher, and artists strive to demonstrate it at their own risk.” (Hindu View of Art: Historical).

This straight essay on the prime rule of creativity, — that whoever may be interested in beauty the artist is not, and the artist no sooner tries to create beauty than half-defeats his purpose, — is a familiar experience. The artist has tried to express this... “there are many witnesses that the secret of all art is to be found in self-forgetfulness.” (P.50); but his voice is drowned in the noisy praise showered on him in the modern commercial world where criticism has become the most disguised soap opera ever invented by human ingenuity. Ananda Coomaraswamy is not alone, however. He is in the excellent company of that most relentless self-analysers who developed a complete aesthetic of his own by the simple process of watching himself at work, and who refused to be browbeaten by the praise or blame of contemporary critics: I mean, W. B. Yeats. Yeats carried his face-to-face inquiries to a degree where his aesthetic becomes independent of the previously developed theories till Ure has to call him “atypical”. Here is a passage from Yeats, which is but only one in which he states the same tremendous truth in a personal tone:

“I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the nonessential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and of still life. I thought of myself as something unmoving and silent living in the middle of my own mind and body...... Then one day I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always outside myself, a stone or Elixir that was always out of reach, and that I myself was the fleeting thing that held out its hand. The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful, the more did I follow the opposite of myself, for deliberate
beauty is like a woman always desiring man’s desire. Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown up by the events of life. We are only permitted to desire life, and all our complaints or our praise of that exacting mistress who can awake our lips into song with her kisses.” (Yeats: Essays: p. 219).

Beauty, then, cannot be wooed by pursuit, but by faith and love and work. Beauty exists in the clarity of vision of the artist and the ability to re-create that clarity in the critic. For that reason, Ananda Coomaraswamy plainly makes beauty a subjective (not personal) fact; he therefore prefers the words “Rasa” and “Rasavant” to “Beauty” and “the beautiful”. Beauty is a state and anything may induce that state of mind: to be able to get into that absorption is the special quality of a “Rasika” (critic-enthusiast); “Rasikata” (social culture of responsiveness) is the product of a sedate well-cultivated social life; it mainly consists of being able to complete the incompleteness of a work of art in the perceiver’s mind and recreating that state of absorption. The reward is the same in quality; therefore all good art in the past was anonymous. The artist did not take more credit than being a creator, because he was not unique. “Rasikata” was the condition in which his art could flourish.

“It may then be claimed that beauty exists everywhere and this I do not deny, though I prefer the clearer statement that it may be discovered anywhere”. But any experience to discover beauty will lead to indiscriminate enthusiasms. Again we have to return to the creative subject: “for it cannot exist apart from the artist himself, and the rasika who enters into his experience.” “All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it.”

(q. Walt Whitman.)

After thus stating the purely idealist position, he proceeds to show that he is not unaware of the structural unity of art to which Western thought has given greater value.

“In the work called beautiful we recognize a correspondence of theme and expression, content and form: ......In time and space, however, the correspondence never amounts to an identity; it is our own activity, in the presence of the work of art, which completes the ideal relation, and it is in this sense that the ideal
relation, and it is in this sense that beauty is what we "do to" a work of art rather than a quality present in the object. With reference to the object, then "more" or "less" beautiful will imply a greater or less correspondence between content and form...... art is good that is good of its kind. In the completed internal aesthetic activity, however, beauty is absolute and cannot have degree".

Well, what is that in the last sentence? It is a courageous restatement of his idealist position, which does not change, and has been obtained after a full appreciation of the structure-theory of art. Ananda Coomaraswamy admits all the cliches of the structure-theory, but insists on the subjective quality of beauty, --- which is a state. The incompletenesses of the structure-theory have been brought out thus:

1. The vision of beauty is spontaneous, a state of grace that cannot be achieved by effort.
2. Hedonist search gives only a partial reward.
3. Structural "beauty" is only a gesture or reminder.
4. "Significant form" theory (Clive Bell) applies only to linguistic arts.
5. The very idea of beauty is philosopher's creation not the creative artist's. To create beauty has been a self-destructive ideal for the artist. He creates it only when he creates a thing in a state of "self-forgetfulness," — i.e., absorption into the object of his creation.
6. I shall now quote an observation whose blunt wisdom is too lovely to be put in any other way: "It is not to the artist that one should say that the subject is immaterial: that is for the philosopher to say to the philistine......"
7. "The true critic (rasika) perceives the beauty of which the artist has exhibited the signs" "Every work of art is kamadhenu, yielding many meanings." As he succinctly puts it,"......experience can only be bought by experience; opinions must be earned."
8. A rasika is born not made. Ananda Coomaraswamy almost concedes the idea that rasikata is the result of prior birth's memory.
9. When he tries expound his responses, the critic creates another work of art, criticism.

It is after stating all those reservations, Ananda Coomaraswamy takes the final plunge. Beauty, if it is a state of self-integrity, thus cannot be judged by its external symptoms, which merely adumbrate it. "There are no degrees of beauty; the most complex and the simplest expression remind us of one and the same state."

Stunning as this statement might appear, its wisdom becomes clear from the instances he gives, as: "Civilized art is not more beautiful than savage art, .. .... " However, it certainly awakens us from the critical dogma we have been taking for granted with a glib persistence that the more complex the art, the greater its beauty. On the contrary, nervous as we always are to state our deepest convictions which seem to militate against a bullish world of accumulated knowledgemass, we have become suddenly aware that Ananda Coomaraswamy has stated what we all have felt about it. We are now prepared to listen to this conclusion which sounds half like religion, but is merely the aesthetic truth:

"It will now be seen in what sense we are justified in speaking of absolute Beauty and in identifying it with God."

On second thoughts however, we should certainly realise that for too long a time, most of us have been hanging by the apronstrings of that bloated matronly term "Beauty" whose only virtue is its multi-purpose application. Beauty is the wall from where our race begins and where it ends, unpenetrated. Ananda Coomaraswamy prefers the more exact Indian term "Rasa" (the aesthetic flavour”) but even that with reservation and infrequently. It is used in a classificatory situation for economy, not with a view to getting out of a tight corner. His essay entitled "That Beauty is a State," after pointing out that the qualities summed up by the omnibus term "Beauty" (he even suggests the word "lovely" in the sense "likeable") differ from "race to race and epoch to epoch", gives such startlingly true instances of self-defeating fanaticism. In the service of the bloated term "Beauty":........ "there are many who think like Michelangelo, that because Italian painting is good, therefore good painting is Italian. There are many who never yet felt the beauty of Egyptian sculpture or Chinese or Indian painting or music: that they have also the
hardihood to deny their beauty, however, proves nothing.” “...the eighteenth century had thus forgotten the beauty of Gothic sculpture and primitive Italian painting........ The Western aesthetic appreciation of desert and mountain scenery, for example, is no older than the nineteenth century.” .... The conclusion is, “...the more we must admit the relativity of taste.” (D. of Sh. pp. 45-6).

This relativity in the taste has further to be modified in terms of another, and a more subtle relativity, — the relativity of structure. ("the subject and the material are entangled in relativity"). While the structural relativity has been the chief idol of contemplation for practical criticism, Ananda Coomaraswamy wants constantly to stress the expressionist stage of art in the artist and the ability of the Rasika to obtain absorption in its inner harmony.

The artefact and the aesthetic experience it generates, according to Ananda Coomaraswamy, are two independent values. It is true that the European experience in art criticism does admit that there is no finality in critical judgement. But this dictum has not chastened the Western critic. On the contrary, New Criticism, almost posits a situation in which the creator is invested with the responsibility of controlling all the responses of the critic who is supposed to sit with a glum impartiality like the Princess in the Fable who would not laugh and would be given in marriage with a half-kingdom dowry to the one who could make her laugh. Ever since in a weak moment Dr. I. A. Richards evaluated the reader’s responses to various type-faces in print, critics have made it a business even to comment on the production value of a book among other things.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, on the contrary, after quoting Croce and good many Indian theoreticians like Vishvanatha bluntly states that judgment and appreciation are two categories apart. Who can deny the fact, from the instance, I have given above, that in Western criticism, judgment based on structure has been the chief value? This has made inertness a virtue for the critic. The "Rasika" on the contrary meets the artist half-way. He is thirsting to create in himself that state named Rasa.

“The spectator’s appreciation of beauty depends on the effort of his own imagination, “just as in the case of children playing with clay elephants.” The technical elaboration (realism) in art is not by itself the cause of Rasa: as remarked by Rabindranath
Tagore “in our country, those of the audience who are appreciative, are content to perfect the song in their own mind by the force of their own feeling.” This is not very different from what is said by Sukhracharyya with reference to images: “the defects of images are constantly destroyed by the power and virtue of the worshipper who has his heart always set on God.” If this attitude seems dangerously uncritical, that is to say dangerous to art, or rather to accomplishment, let us remember that it prevailed everywhere in all periods of great creativity and that the decline of art has always followed the decline of love and faith.

Not content with that, Ananda Coomaraswamy proceeds coolly to classify this process of aesthetic gap-filling into two categories: “critical” and “uncritical”. He carefully omits to say that critical appreciation is better than uncritical appreciation. Appreciation itself is good, because it belongs to the Rasika’s quality of mind. The Indian’s tradition of appreciativeness, if uncritical now and then, is far superior to the tradition of critical judgement of the West; that seems to be Ananda Coomaraswamy’s conclusion implied in that withering silence.

What he says about Indian Music is only a fact but a fact about which most of us may be a little ashamed. Ananda Coomaraswamy shows us how this is something we should be proud of “... those (of the audience) who are musical, perfect the rendering of the song by the force of their own imagination and emotion. Under these conditions the actual music is better heard than where the sensuous perfection of the voice is made the sine qua non: precisely as the best sculpture is primitive rather than suave, and we prefer conviction to prettiness”

In passing, let me comment on two popular phrases in literary criticism to-day, viz., ‘to respond’ and ‘response’. ‘Response’ is a passive word and in the context of Western ‘objective’ tradition of literary judgment, has become all important. ‘To respond’, the verb, should have been a fairly active word, but under the semantic impact of ‘response’ the noun, has become half-passive. If ‘to respond’ could get back its active dynamism, we are in a better position to know what the Indian Rasika does, and in what way he differs from the Western ‘critic’. If I seem to exaggerate, let me draw attention to the musical concerts in the North where the phrases used for this active ‘response’ are ‘Daad’, and ‘Dard’.
In India, it is not impartiality, but insight which is the first quality of a critic.

V

Once having accepted that art is not something that exists, but is something that has to be recreated and renewed in experience, Ananda Coomaraswamy is well within his bounds to describe all life itself as the dance of Shiva, and that all art is the recreation of the same divine dance of God, and that the art context is a universe of internal consistency, that the simplest art and the most civilized or complex intellectual art do not differ in their impact at their best, that criticism is a process of filling in the incompletenesses of a grand design, and in other words, art is a way of life. Wild as these statements appear, they are born as an outcome of a world experience. Nevertheless, that Coomaraswamy is no idealist crank is clear from the following sentences:

"......a work of art is great in so far as it expresses its own theme in a form at once rhythmic and impassioned: through a definite pattern it must express a motif deeply felt."

It is only when Ananda Coomaraswamy ventures to examine these commonly recognised phenomena of art that he is compelled to talk in terms of matter and spirit, and finding English vocabulary too weak to absorb the subtle elaborations of Indian aesthetics that he has to use expressions like: Leela, Prakriti, Moola Prakriti, Rasa, Rasika, Brahman, etc. Indians had a complete philosophy of concordant patterns of cosmogony, art, life, sociology, and education. For all these concentric rings of human thought, they had a common centre. Ananda Coomaraswamy found that this mental set-up had a range of experience that could hold together the highest of idealism and the most dispassionate realism; the highest freedom which yet promoted the greatest self-discipline; hence he made his choice. His first task was, if I can read it from the tone of his writings, to show the Indian what his own inheritance in art and life was. At the least, The Dance of Shiva is a book written for Indians. That is one more reason why this opus has so little impact on Western thinking.

The Western thought that Ananda Coomaraswamy inherited was in a phase of heart-searching. He was born in 1877, and went to U.K. as a child of two. During his formative years he
must have felt the impact of Tagore and become a lover of his community. Later on he must have absorbed into this patriotism the impact of the post-war prophets of doom. Critics of the very foundation of Western civilization, like Oswald Spengler, Wyndham Lewis, and later Wells had promoted a mood of self-chastisement in Europe after war. For these prophets, the doom of the European continent was not so much a prophecy as a piece of interesting speculation that could find favour with the general mood of self-flagellation, then prevalent. For Ananda Coomaraswamy, these must have confirmed his incipient intellectual nationalism. His profound cosmopolitanism voluntarily sought a locale in order to be creative, and without denying itself sought its roots in Indian thought. It is for this reason that we see in Ananda Coomaraswamy a strange mixture of great objectivity combined with a great passion that challenges the West at almost every level of culture: he criticises its traditions of romantic love; he half-justifies the caste system; apparently justifies even Sutee; condemns the West for precisely those features which are admired by the underdeveloped countries, features such as a competitive society, industrialism, and affluence.

What a great cosmopolitan he was can be known from his subtle appreciation of Nietzsche's dream of a unified Europe. Even the model of a young India he posits is towards a universal brotherhood: India only provides through her art and social organization, however, decadent, an exemplar and a starting point for a world culture. Indianness thus is the first and last act of personal integrity and freedom.


A. Wendi.

To an observer from the western world, the Seminar on Indian Writing in English held at Mysore University in January of 1968 marked an important milestone along the road to general acceptance and appreciation of an important branch of world literature. Regrettably but perhaps understandably, Indian scholars and critics have been slow to evaluate this possibly illegitimate child of their linguistic diversity; in both England and America books and doctoral dissertations have appeared on the subject, and new productions of the principal Indian writers in English are regularly reviewed in serious and scholarly publications. Further, the books have found their way into college courses, and that not merely as documents for the study of social history but for consideration as works of art. But now, with the Mysore conference, perhaps the trickle of Indian interest which began some five years ago with the publication of K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s book on the subject (a book that grew out of a course of lectures on Indian writing in English given at the University of Leeds) will become a respectable flood, as more and more Indian universities find ways to include these books in the literature syllabus, and as more and more Indian critics turn their scholarly attention in this direction.

To such ends the Mysore conference surely contributed. Yet it is difficult to provide an adequate summary of all the points of view presented at that conference, for whenever some twenty scholars gather for discussion, you will look in vain for unanimity. Because of this diversity, and because certain subjects kept recurring during the four days of the conference, often at unexpected moments of the discussion, or in papers whose titles gave no complete summary of contents, it has seemed reasonable to organize these summary remarks on a kind of subject-matter basis rather than on the purely chronological. After all, the important part
was that a subject introduced on Saturday might recur on Monday or Tuesday or — not at all.

Still, we may begin chronologically, with Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah’s introductory talk, for Professor Narasimhaiah, with almost uncanny accuracy, predicted in those early comments many of the major concerns of the meeting he had himself organized, and even gave some examples of the kind of presentations that would be offered in subsequent days. Beginning with the straightforward assertion that since Indians have in fact been writing in English for a century and a half, Indian scholars and critics have a responsibility to examine the nature of their work, he attempted to dispose in the beginning of the questions concerning the validity of this literary form. "English is no more foreign to us than Sanskrit," he stated firmly, and he made clear that he hoped to separate literary discussion from patriotic concerns. In answer to the familiar argument that English is not the language of any region in India, Professor Narasimhaiah proposed this as precisely its strength as no other "regional" language, English can become the unifying force, speaking for and to all regions.

But Professor Narasimhaiah also made clear that he was not recommending that Indian writers should use English; he asserted that they should write in whatever language they chose, or perhaps, since there is something inevitable about the choice of a literary language, in whatever language chose them. Everyone with any understanding of the creative process would understand that no one who could write a superior poem or novel in a regional language would prefer to write an inferior poem or novel in English. Nor did Professor Narasimhaiah argue that India will continue to produce eminent writers in English - that would be for the future to tell. But since the past and present have clearly produced such writers, as critics we were obligated to study them. Nor should the fact that such works were produced in English by Indians lead to the relaxation of critical standards; the same criteria that Indian critics apply to English and American writers should apply to Indians.

These were the standards that Professor Narasimhaiah attempted to apply in the body of his paper, where he dealt with a wide range of Indian writers in English, but his comments there may be presented later in this summary, for his general conclusions
about the validity of English as an Indian literary language did not go entirely unchallenged in the course of the seminar. Perhaps the strongest statement in opposition came two days later, from Professor T. V. Subba Rao, who — ostensibly dealing with the writings of B. Rajan (a person whom Professor Narasimhaiah had identified as a book-of-the-month club writer) — took an opportunity to question the fundamental theses upon which the whole seminar had been established. Speaking frankly against Indian writing in English, Professor Subba Rao asserted that the real problem was not whether Indians could write in English like the English but whether Indians could not do better in their own languages; and he went on to consider various non-literary reasons why Indians chose to write in English, and the relationships of such writing to the general interests of Indian life. It was Professor Subba Rao’s belief that the choice of English had social and self-seeking implications, for English has always been the language of the urban rich and of the educated classes, who represent a kind of life that is basically “un-Indian.”

Thus Professor Subba Rao went directly to the political issues involved, insisting, in fact, that he was not speaking as a literary critic at all. He asserted that he would value Indian literature only as an expression of Indian culture, and here he believed that Indian writing in English failed. But he did not argue against English as a useful tool; he objected only to learning English at the expense of native languages, and to the attempt to use English as a creative literary language. And he felt that Indians could never learn to write English well since they have no real spoken form of the language, and since there is insufficient mastery of written English among a large enough segment of the Indian population to make serious demands for excellence from the Indian writer in English — he asserted, though without substantiating evidence, that many of those who read Indian fiction in English are those who also read cheap American fiction.

Naturally, Professor Subba Rao’s challenge provoked lively debate. Professor Naik questioned the “un-Indian” attitudes that were fostered by writers in English; Professor Subba Rao seemed to suggest in expanding on this point that both readers and writers of English were those who for snobbish reasons tended to forget their own traditions in their eagerness to import the patterns of foreign life — the Beatles, for example, rather than
classical Indian ragas. Mrs. Mukherjee brought up the statistical question: since such a very small proportion of Indian writers have chosen English, why should their choice present a threat or a problem; she went on to suggest that those who did write in English probably did so because they had no other language in which to express themselves — to deny them this language would be to deny them their right of expression. Professor Maini seconded the argument, offering his own experience as an example; although a Punjabi-speaker by birth, he could not now imagine writing in anything except English.

Later, Professor Nagarajan questioned the argument that Indian English could never be vital as a literary language because India has, in effect, no native speakers of English. Professor Subba Rao countered that such a writer as Conrad (who had been frequently offered as an example of the writer who produces great literary works in a language not his own) at least was in contact with people who spoke the language as a native tongue, and that his own concepts were developed through his understanding of English as a living force. In addition, Professor Subba Rao flatly opposed Professor Narasimhaiah’s comparison of Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem, Savitri, with Milton’s Paradise Lost, on the grounds that the language of Savitri bore no relationship to any language spoken by common men in India; but Professor Guha was quick to ask whether Milton’s language was in fact spoken by common men in England, or whether T. S. Eliot’s language was spoken by London taxicab drivers.

Apparently few converts were made on either side as a result of the various arguments. Professor Subba Rao argued that he had not expected much agreement from the group, and Professor Narasimhaiah returned to the “pragmatic” fact that the works were there to be studied. Professor Maini was prepared to grant that Indians writing in English had, to date, produced very few truly “great” works, but he was not prepared to grant that they might not achieve such works in the future — he would obviously encourage them to continue their efforts. Further, Professor Maini brought up Dr. Johnson’s comment about the woman preacher, offering that we should not be surprised that Indian writing in English is not always well done, we should be surprised that it is done at all. But, that reference can be a two-edged sword, for Professor Iyengar, in the Introduction to his Indian
Writung in English, had used the same quotation to deplore an earlier attitude to Indian writing in English, one that had damned with faint praise.

But even though Professor Narasimhaiah introduced this paper as one that might “cut the ground from under our feet,” in the last analysis the debate probably proved healthy, for it brought important issues into the open. Professor Narasimhaiah also commended Professor Subba Rao for his obvious sincerity, and his genuine concern for the issues he raised. But Professor Narasimhaiah — among others — also indicated a strong feeling that those issues were precisely the political ones that had been mentioned, and warned against, in the opening paper. Perhaps the best evidence here was Professor Subba Rao’s own admission that his acquaintance with Indian writing in English was not as great as that of many of the people present at the seminar; hence he made clear that he spoke from principle rather than from study, and his remarks could be taken seriously without undercutting the legitimate literary criticism of the conference.

The opposite point of view had been vigorously expressed much earlier, on the first day of the seminar, in fact, by a scholar who spoke throughout as a literary critic, and who supported his arguments with generous quotations from the literary texts. Professor Damodar Thakur, in a paper entitled “The Indian Writer and His Sense of the Age,” operated on the principle that the undeniable presence of excellent creative writing in English was a sign that the English language had “come of age” in India; he was convinced that Indian writers in English had succeeded in making contact with “the sense of the age,” and that hence the problems that needed to be raised were artistic and critical, relative to specific works, rather than general ones relative to the validity of the genre.

By “the sense of the age” Professor Thakur indicated that he meant not merely timeliness, but the sense of many ages which overlay one another, especially in Indian life; and in this respect he found English more successful than regional Indian languages because English was not bound to any particular time or place. Admitting the difficulty of imagining that Indian writing in English should actually be closer to the traditional rhythms of Indian life than many of the other modern Indian literatures, he nevertheless
went on to demonstrate that he felt this to be so, using chiefly R. K. Narayan’s *The Dark Room* as an example. By careful quotation and comment, he endeavoured to illustrate that Narayan—in this novel and elsewhere—conveys genuine Indian qualities in the English language, and that even the dialogue and imagery are deeply Indian. Although there is some feeling that Indians writing in English tend to appeal to a highly Anglophile coterie taste, Professor Thakur tried to show how Narayan was able to convey the sense of middle-class Indian life. Later in his paper, he also made reference to Raja Rao particularly his novel *The Serpent and the Rope* as a further demonstration of the successful creative work by an Indian in English. And he concluded by denying the fear some people had expressed that using English would cut off the Indian writer from his world. On the contrary, Professor Thakur asserted, English provides a kind of objective platform from which the writer can better view the world, and English is after all only the mode of expression for him, not the mode of creation.

In the discussion that followed, Professor Kantuk suggested that perhaps Raja Rao had much more a "sense of his age" than R. K. Narayan. Professor Thakur said that this had been his first impression of the two writers but that further study had made him more aware of Narayan’s timelessness, his attachment to tradition. Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, the only professional fiction writer at the seminar, questioned Professor Thakur’s assertion in his paper that at the moment of creativity the writer is not conscious of his sense of purpose. Speaking for himself, Dr. Anand indicated that he had always to maintain this sense of purpose in his writing. Following this, the discussion moved generally over the areas covered by Professor Thakur, particularly emphasizing his term, "the sense of his age."

But the general subject of the legitimacy of English as a literary language for Indians came up in a variety of other guises during the four days of the conference. Dr. Krishnamurthi, for example, prefaced his paper on K. Nagaratnam’s *Chronicles of Kedaram* with some remarks about "Indian English," which he did not accept as a term because he did not believe that such a thing existed. For Dr. Krishnamurthi, the Indian writers who adopt English have a formidable task confronting them, since they are trying to operate in a kind of language limbo. These comments were
in part, of course, a kind of extension of Professor Subba Rao's argument that English has no oral tradition in India to give it vitality. The discussion that followed Dr Krishnamurthi's paper dealt much more with this question than with the questions raised regarding the particular novel he discussed, but there was again no real consensus, and the comments were wide-ranging and speculative rather than narrowly definitive. One relatively unproductive corridor that was explored concerned the relative "correctness" of the English being taught in Indian schools and colleges, but this was far from the point that Dr Krishnamurthi had raised. Professor Nagaratnam raised a potentially fruitful issue when he tried to distinguish between "language" and "style" but the distinction was not fully explored.

Nor did the seminar ever come to complete agreement about what term to employ in describing the writings that were being discussed. Miss Menaikhi Mukherjee, speaking on the first day, used the term "Indo-English" and near the end of the discussion Professor Kantak brought up the pedagogical question of terminology. Professor Narasimhaiah suggested "Indian writing in English," but a number of people noted the clumsiness of the phrase, and the difficulty of adopting it to adjectival use "Indo-English" and "Indian English" were also suggested but discarded and no solid conclusions were reached, and the seminar wisely went on to discuss the thing itself rather than hesitate longer in a futile attempt to give it a name.

In yet another way Professor Narasimhaiah's opening paper provided a keynote for a general approach that appeared at different times and different places during the conference. By both example and precept, Professor Narasimhaiah suggested the need for a continuing historical approach to the subject of Indian writing in English. Although Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's book has made an important start in this direction, much more work needs to be done. In his own paper, Professor Narasimhaiah attempted to sketch at least some outline of the development of poetry, moving from Sarojini to Sri Aurobindo to Dom Moraes, and by applying the same rigorous critical standards to all these poets, he suggested as well the need for some sort of regularized
critical principles. Both of these ideas reappeared in later papers.

Thus Mr. M. Rama Rao offered a brief survey of Indian poetry written in English during the nineteenth century, dealing with about eleven authors from Kashiprasad Ghose, whom Mr. Rama Rao identified as the first Indian to bring out a volume of poems in English, to Swami Vivekananda, better known as saint, patron, and humanist, but also a poet of some power. Nevertheless, it was clear from the samples of nineteenth-century poetry offered in the paper that its conclusions were sound: there is not much here “to inspire the zealous attention of devotees of poetry, Indian or English.” Perhaps the most significant quotation Mr. Rama Rao offered was from the Preface to *The Dutt Family Album*, a volume published in 1870 and containing the work of four members of the same family. In that Preface, the writers admitted that they were venturing on publication, “not because they think their verses good, but in the hope that their book will be regarded, in some respects, as a curiosity.” That statement might make an appropriate epigraph for a discussion of much early Indian writing in English, along with the description Mr. Iyengar offers in his volume on Indian writing in English — “Matthew Arnold in a sari.”

In spite of the derivative and imitative qualities of this poetry, Mr. Rama Rao found it possible to admire the astonishing metrical skill the poets demonstrated; he attributed this in part to the excellence of the teaching in nineteenth-century English medium schools. In the discussion that followed the paper, Dr. Anand suggested that people could not be expected to write first-rate poetry so soon after learning a language, but it may be that Dr. Johnson’s comment applies best here, and that we should not be astonished that they do not do it well, but astonished that they do it at all.

At a later time in the seminar Mr. H. H. Anniah Gowda continued this historical study with a survey of contemporary Indian verse in English, which he described as “thin in content but rich in variety.” Beginning with a study of G. K. Chettur, who has produced several volumes of poetry demonstrating a considerable capacity for traditional forms, especially the sonnet, during the 1920’s, and 1930’s Mr. Gowda then moved on to poets
who are writing today. In this category, he dealt in detail with Joseph Furtado, Dom Moraes, A. K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, and Kamala Das, and mentioned in passing the work of about ten other young writers. But Mr. Gowda's conclusions were somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand he felt that there is a kind of revolution going on in Indian creative writing; on the other hand he argued that at the moment there are no "dedicated writers of verse in English." Some of the writers he indentified as "banal," some as "interesting."

The discussion that followed Mr. Gowda's paper was lively, for the critics seated around the table were here dealing with a body of material new enough so that no standard opinions had been established. Professor Naik began asking Mr. Gowda if he was able to detect any particular trends or patterns in the writings of this group of poets; Mr. Gowda said he could not, and confessed that this was a little disturbing to him, because he felt there seemed to be no sense of community among these poets. Professor Subba Rao suggested that most of the Indians who were writing poetry in English were rootless people, lacking any genuine sense of geographical or traditional community. Dr. Anand agreed, but extended the sense of rootlessness in another direction, arguing that the difficulty the contemporary poet or writer—has in earning a living, or sometimes even in getting published, makes him "rootless" in the sense that he cannot really feel he has adopted a profession.

Later, Professor Guha led the discussion around to the question of the critical standards one should establish in connection with these poets when he asked with whom they should be compared—with other writers of English poetry, in England or America, or with other Indian writers of poetry, who worked in the various regional languages? Professor Guha made it clear that he would prefer the comparison with other Indian poets, so that even these writers could be made a part of the general Indian poetic "tradition." There was considerable discussion, however, of what constitutes an Indian "tradition," although there was general willingness to evaluate these writers within their own national framework.

Professor Kantak then brought the discussion even more explicitly into focus when he asked whether the critic's first question
here should not be, "Is this poetry at all?" From the general discussion that followed, it was clear that the doubt he was expressing was shared by many members of the group. Professor Maini read several sentences from a review he had recently written covering three small volumes of contemporary poetry. "Poetry today almost everywhere is fighting a rear-guard action against more muscular rivals," Professor Maini had written. "This is of course not to suggest either that Indo-Anglian poetry has graduated to a place of respectability or even acceptability; it is still by and large amateurish, derivative, meretricious, pastiche work when it is not dreaming, honeyed, jewelled, or exotic."

Still, as Professor Kantak, Dr. Mukherjee and others pointed out, it is the critic's job to evaluate this work and others, a job that is made all the harder by the fact that no received critical opinion is at hand to guide him. The discussion closed with an emphasis on the need for responsible criticism, and the establishment of standards for Indian poetry in English that were not different from the standards that might be applied to good poetry written at any time, in any language, and the focus was brought sharply on one of the central problems the seminar returned to again and again.

That problem — the need for responsible criticism — had in fact been dealt with squarely in an earlier paper by Professor S. Nagarajan on "The Literary Criticism of Sri Aurobindo." Professor Nagarajan began his paper with a statement about "the paucity of original and significant literary criticism in our country concerning English literature": he went on, then, to outline the importance of Aurobindo's work as a literary critic, and to define the need for further detailed study — of Aurobindo's criticism as a basis for the establishment of an Indian school of literary criticism, one that might be able to make an unique contribution to the world's vision of English literature, and perhaps — although Professor Nagarajan did not specifically say so — be better able to make judgements about English literature that happens to be written by Indians.

Pre-eminently a philosopher and yogi, Sri Aurobindo nevertheless began as a poet, Professor Nagarajan pointed out; but his critical views of poetry cannot be properly understood except in the larger context of his general system. To demonstrate what
he felt were Aurobindo’s perceptive abilities as a critic, Professor Nagarajan quoted a number of comments on D. H. Lawrence, and he moved from these comments to a demonstration of the way Aurobindo’s critical views depended upon his philosophical principles. Near the end of his paper, by further selected quotations from Aurobindo and Coleridge, he went on to suggest certain similarities and difference between the two critics, in order to make clear the areas in which he felt further study would be useful. Not all of us, Professor Nagarajan concluded, could be Aurobindo—‘it takes too many years, and requires dedication of a kind we are not all capable of’—but within Aurobindo’s writings might lie the foundation of a critical system that would serve “less exalted workers toiling at more mundane levels.”

The discussion that followed Professor Nagarajan’s paper was lengthy and lively, illustrating by its very intensity something of the feelings of those present about the need for clearly-defined literary positions. Part of the argument turned on the various schools of English criticism now operative; for Professor Narasimhaiah at least Aurobindo’s standards could operate as a healthy corrective to many current attitudes, particularly the “empirical” approach of the “New Critics.”

But the word “empirical” in that context did not go unchallenged and there were a number of people who defended the school of English criticism that has come to be associated with the name of F. R. Leavis. Even more important, perhaps, was the argument that developed concerning the relationship of “practical criticism”—the daily work of the scholar in making value judgments about particular literary works—and the philosophical theories that may lie behind those judgements. Aurobindo’s practical criticisms were praised by some members of the seminar and objected to by others; some felt that his importance lay in his specific critical judgements, others believed that his importance came from the general theories which gave shape and coherence to those judgements. In the last analysis, the seminar members were discussing ultimate questions here: the role of the literary critic, and his responsibilities in connection with the larger tasks of moral and ethical judgements. No conclusions could be expected here, but the eagerness to engage in debate suggested that Professor Nagarajan’s hope for the development of a responsible school of literary criticism in India might some day bear fruit.
In one more crucially important way Professor Narasimhaiah's opening paper had sounded a keynote for the conference, for Professor Narasimhaiah had indicated, by precept and practice, the importance of a detailed study of the works of individual writers who were producing novels and poetry in English, using the best weapons of criticism that the scholars found available, and judging them not merely as curiosities but against the highest standards the scholar could find. In his own paper, Professor Narasimhaiah attempted a detailed evaluation of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, *Savitri*, comparing it with Milton's epics. He made some general comments as well about the work of a contemporary poet, Dom Moraes, finding a lack of development in his work, and his poetry too often precious or elegant. He studied as well the literary achievement of Jawaharlal Nehru, especially in the *Autobiography*, which he compared favourably with the work of Gibbon and John Stuart Mill.

Finally, Professor Narasimhaiah made a tentative classification of some of the Indian novelists who write in English, separating the work that has merely popular appeal from that of the "serious" writers; in the latter group he identified three especially — Mulk Raj Anand, whose work he felt to be primarily concerned with human beings in the social context, R. K. Narayan, whose novels he identified as concerning themselves with human beings in their individual aspects, and Raja Rao, a novelist who concerns himself primarily with religious and spiritual matters, and a novelist who, according to Professor Narasimhaiah, represents the "supreme manifestation of Indian sensibility." Raja Rao's early novel, *Kanthapura*, Professor Narasimhaiah judged to be a genuinely Indian story but one that was perfectly rendered in English — so perfectly that efforts to translate it into Kannada have so far met with no success; for Professor Narasimhaiah, this is proof that English can be a more than adequate medium for the Indian writer.

These evaluations and others like them provided the heart of the seminar's most valuable study; many papers provided new opinions and new insights concerning the work of individual writers in prose and poetry, and the lively discussions that followed each paper helped to clarify the critical attitudes that were emerg-
ing. One thing that these discussions demonstrated was the need for further seminars, perhaps on much narrower areas: for example, there could surely be a profitable study of the three major novelists picked out by Professor Narasimhaiah, just as there could be a profitable seminar on a group of selected contemporary poets chosen from among those mentioned in Mr. Gowda's paper. Whatever else this seminar did, it surely established the possibility for much continuing work in the years to come.

And many of the papers set guide-lines for such future study. For example, Professor V. V. Kantak's essay on "The Achievement of R. K. Narayan" attempted an ambitious full-scale evaluation of that novelist's work to date. He noted the problems set for the critic by Narayan's surface simplicity, by the directness of his style, the absence of obvious symbols. He noted as well how Narayan's art is "a triumph of self-denial," the result of the novelist's willingness to till his own small field. Professor Kantak called attention also to Narayan's peculiar gusto for life, a gusto that is often child-like and appealing, and he studied Narayan's gradual improvement in range and method through his series of novels. Noting that Narayan has "no big comment on life to offer," and that his work rarely seems to make a positive social or ethical comment, Professor Kantak disposed of the western critic's desire to compare Narayan with Chekhov but had finally to admit that the essential Narayan has escaped him as well, and he closed his paper with an apt quotation from Robert Frost about the secret that sits in the middle of the ring and the comment that "Narayan's art awaits exposition."

Discussion of Professor Kantak's paper was wide-ranging and spirited, but in the final analysis it seemed to focus on two or three principal points. The first of these was established early by Professor Maini, who asked questions concerning Narayan's irony — whether it was genuinely "thematic," and whether it involved technique. The subject was returned to throughout the discussion, so that some general conclusion seemed to be reached that this was the key to the understanding of Narayan, but as Professor Subba Rao and others insisted, the seminar had difficulties in operating with the term "irony" itself, a term that is subject to so many possible interpretations and meanings.

Another subject concerned Narayan's limitations. Dr. Krishna-
murthi, for example, speaking as a young man, found Narayan's novels peculiarly "dated", and seemed to feel that the problems he exposed himself to were not the problems of the current generation. To some extent, Dr. Anand supported this view when he speculated about Narayan's "detachment" from the affairs of Indian life which had seemed most central to his generation. And Professor Kantak, in the course of the discussion, offered his own views that Narayan's surfaces — in his novels — seemed adequate and satisfying, but that when the reader tried to probe too deeply for profound meaning he might be disappointed.

From all these views and the others that emerged in the discussion it was clear that the seminar regarded R. K. Narayan as one of the major novelists writing in English, and that a further study of his works would be profitable. The same general conclusions arose from a study of Raja Rao, sparked in this case by a paper on his short novel, *The Cat and Shakespeare* presented by Professor M. K. Naik.

Professor Naik's paper is one chapter of a book he is preparing on Raja Rao; it presented a careful analysis of both plot and themes of that short novel. As the title of the paper suggested — "The Cat and Shakespeare: The Indo-Anglian Novel as Puranic Parable" — even this short and largely comic novel can be fitted into Raja Rao's philosophical system, and needs to be understood, according to Professor Naik, in terms of the Puranas and other Indian philosophical and legendary writings. Taken in this way, the novel no longer presents the obscurity and difficulty that has baffled reviewers, both in India and in the west.

In addition, Professor Naik carefully analyzed the narrative itself in his detailed paper, showing the patterns upon which it is built, and clarifying the devices that Raja Rao has employed. Professor Naik demonstrated as well how Raja Rao has carefully delineated the social scene of Kerala State in a realistic manner. But even though *The Cat and Shakespeare* can be enjoyed "simply as a comic extravaganza and a realistic tale," Professor Naik concluded that — as always in Raja Rao — a complete understanding of the book can be reached only through an understanding of its philosophical implications. Professor Naik argued convincingly that Raja Rao was making a conscious attempt to create a new genre of Indian fiction in English "deriving its sustenance from the soil of ancient Indian literary modes and techniques."
Yet the seminar was not wholly convinced about the ultimate value of the novel; the discussion went in many directions, but almost always seemed to turn on two central points: first, is *The Cat and Shakespeare* a novel at all, or should it more properly be called a philosophical disquisition; and second, even if you grant that it may be called a novel, can it be called a good novel if it requires so much prior knowledge to be understood?

Professor Nagarajan opened this discussion by asking Professor Naik how far he felt that Raja Rao’s intentions with the novel had been realized. Obviously, Professor Nagarajan had some reservations on this score: in a later comment he remarked that he had reviewed *The Serpent and the Rope*, and that people after reading his review professed to understand the novel better but could not really say that they enjoyed it more. This might be the test—to study Professor Naik’s paper and then go back to *The Cat and Shakespeare* and see if you now enjoyed it more fully.

Not all the members of the seminar felt that this much study should be necessary. Dr. Krishnamurthi, for example, felt that there was a kind of “critical snobbery” involved with the professed pleasure in understanding and enjoying so obscure a book; he felt that the writer had an obligation to his reader to communicate. Dr. Krishnamurthi added that he had already read *The Cat and Shakespeare* a number of times in an attempt to find a way of response, and that he still felt unable to do so even after Professor Naik’s paper.

To these and similar objections Professor Naik replied first that of course every writer does not write for every reader; and second, that all writers expect their readers to do some “homework” in preparation—Raja Rao merely expects more than others.

The questions concerning the novel form were first raised by Dr. Anand, who felt that philosophical speculations of this nature did not belong in a novel. He argued that the novel should properly deal with human relationships, and that in this novel the human relationships were secondary or even lower on the scale—hence the novel form had been in some sense “violated.” Professor Narasimhaiah argued that although Raja Rao may have stretched the novel form to its limits, he did not believe that the form had been violated; and Professor Maini defended the right of the novel—as the most flexible of literary forms—to
deal with any subject, in any way. None of these questions was completely answered, but as Professor Narasimhaiah noted — this close study of and debate about specific novels was the purpose of the seminar, and here the critical purpose was being adequately achieved. Certainly the critic’s task in evaluating Raja Rao’s novels will be simplified after the foundation of analysis has been so painstakingly done by Professor Naik.

The third member of the trio of principal Indian novelists now writing in English as identified by Professor Narasimhaiah’s opening paper — Mulk Raj Anand — was dealt with in a paper by Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee, where she compared Dr. Anand’s work with that of Sudhin Ghose, using in her title the double image for the two men of the tractor and the plough. To set up the contrast between the work of these two men, Mrs. Mukherjee compared Anand’s trilogy about a Punjabi peasant boy growing into manhood (*The Village, Across the Black Waters, The Sword and the Sickle*) with all four of Ghose’s novels, which constitute a tetralogy about a Bengali orphan boy’s growth to maturity. She pointed out too that in age and education and in serious concern for craft the two men are much alike.

But the two groups of novels are strikingly different. Mrs. Mukherjee identified that difference in a variety of ways. In terms of technique, Anand is the realist, while Ghose is the more poetic writer. Anand’s novels take their shape from the social conditions he is concerned to depict; Ghose’s novels develop from the ancient myths that inform them. Anand’s emphasis is upon reason and action; Ghose concerns himself with faith and contemplation. Both men are committed writers, but Anand uses his art as a means to a non-literary end, for social protest, while Ghose has no other commitment but to art itself. The modern machine becomes an effective symbol in Anand’s work of the possible social developments of the future; in Ghose, the symbol of the plow may identify his concern for the past and tradition. The two men may be compared to Shaw and Yeats in recent English literary history. But Mrs. Mukherjee offered these comparisons and distinctions without implying value judgments, and she noted that in the literature of all countries both these kinds of writers had produced work of permanent value.

Mrs. Mukherjee also noted that of the two writers, Mulk Raj Anand was by far the better known, and that Sudhin Ghose,
partly because his novels are not readily available, is little read in India. This became apparent in the discussion that followed, which was inhibited somewhat by the fact that few members of the seminar knew Ghose's work, inhibited also — at least at first — by the presence in the seminar of Dr. Anand. But Professor Narasimhaiah questioned Mrs. Mukherjee's suggestion that a writer could still be an artist even though he wrote for "extra-literary ends." Professor Subba Rao commented that there is a kind of vague idea operative among critics that writers who use "myths" are somehow greater artists than those who concern themselves with questions, for example, of social progress. Mrs. Mukherjee reiterated that she was making these distinctions for descriptive and analytical purposes, not for evaluative ones.

The discussion about the writer's use of myth went on for a long time, often in general terms, since almost no one could talk from first-hand knowledge about Sudhin Ghose. Dr. Anand tried to make his own position as novelist clear. He felt, in the first place, that he himself used ancient myths more than Mrs. Mukherjee had noted; secondly, he described some of his work as the creation of "contemporary myths." Clearly, these distinctions contributed in part to Dr. Anand's own paper, presented several days later, which was entitled, "Old Myth — New Myth: Recital vs. Novel." In addition, responding to comments about his commitment to social progress Dr. Anand identified his position as "eclectic humanism," and quoted Walt Whitman on his own behalf — "I contain multitudes." And the final conclusion of the seminar seemed to be that although quarrels could be developed about details, Mrs. Mukherjee had made a valid distinction between two discernible patterns of the Indian novel in English and indeed — as she described it — between two opposed views of art that may be found in other countries, other ages. And Professor Maini spoke for the seminar also when he said that she had done the group a service by calling attention to one novelist whose works they should all read.

In addition to these three major novelists, a number of somewhat more minor fiction writers were the subject of papers and subsequent discussion. Dr. M. G. Krishnamurthi dealt with K. Nagarajan's Chronicles of Kedaram, for example, offering it as "one of the few fascinating experiments in the form of fiction, a kind of experiment which might solve some of the problems of the Indian
novelist writing in English.” Dr. Krishnamurthi discussed the deliberately episodic structure of the novel, and Nagarajan’s symbols both of old India and new; he showed how these devices contributed to an effective novel dealing with social change. In this connection he argued, too, that an Indian novelist who chooses English as his language is likely to be choosing a theme as well as a mode of communication. Thus Nagarajan’s theme of the gradual cultural transformation of modern India is one of those themes which comes with special appropriateness to the writer in English. But the discussion that followed — largely because of Dr. Krishnamurthi’s preliminary remarks about “Indian English” — turned principally on the legitimacy of the English language for the novelist’s use, rather than on this particular novel itself.

At another time, Mr. P. Rama Mooorthy presented a paper that analyzed the two novels of G. V. Desani — All About H. Hatters and Halt. Offering “first impressions” of the work of Desani, Mr. Rama Mooorthy identified the one novel as “sheer sport”, the other as “terrifying religion.” And by the use of generous quotations, he indicated the way Desani had invented his own idiom in these novels, and indicated Desani’s debt to such western experimenters with languages as James Joyce. The following discussion almost entirely ignored Halt since very few had read it, and turned chiefly on two points — whether All About H. Hatters is a novel at all, and how seriously it needs to be taken. Professor Maini and others made the obvious comparison between Joyce’s experiments and Desani’s; Dr. Anand wanted to compare the novel with Henry Miller’s Tropic of Cancer. Professor Kantak put his finger upon the central problem the critic has in dealing with a book of this sort, one that seems to have no recognizable design or pattern — what approach should the critic take? There were no adequate answers to that question, and none to Professor Maini’s query concerning the possible seriousness of Desani’s clowning attitude. But the book clearly presents a central problem for the critic: what shall he do when he is faced with the radically new and experimental — where can he pick up the critical tools that will enable him to deal with the unconventional? No final answer could be expected to a question like this, and the seminar did not attempt one.

Again, Mr. M. Tarinayya presented a paper on two novels:
Bhabani Bhattachatya’s *So Many Hungers* and Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*. Both novels were praised for the way they took the stuff of history and transformed it into novelistic art. But in the discussion that followed most members of the seminar indicated far less satisfaction with these two novels—as literature—than Mr. Tarinayya had indicated. Generally speaking, they were taken as adequate, journalistic accounts of dramatic moments in recent Indian history, but accounts not genuinely suffused with the brilliance of imagination that could finally make them works of art. Here the seminar seemed to reach a consensus: that these are novels whose claim to serious consideration is surely second to those of Narayan, Anand, and Raja Rao.

Professor Darshan Singh Maini’s paper called “*Cry, the Peacock* as a Poetic Novel” considered the first book of a young writer, Anita Desai. Professor Maini found the book a typically “feminine” novel—that is, the fruit of a feminine sensibility, poetic in its language and use of imagery but “weak in social structuring and deficient in significant action.” Describing the work as “an extended ode in prose,” Professor Maini felt that the novel must compel admiration for “the sheer grain and pith of its poetic potential.”

Discussion following this paper principally concerned the designation of the novel as “poetic,” and Professor Maini’s criticism of it for failing to offer a background of the real world. Mrs. Mukherjee suggested that since it was primarily the story of a neurotic woman, the real world would naturally not be present. Miss Vimala Rao added that in a few instances in the novel—notably in a scene in a night club—the author does in fact write effectively about social life. Miss Vimala Rao also suggested that the novel might more accurately be called “psychological” rather than “poetic”; Professor Maini was prepared to amend his designation to include “psychological”. Professor Subba Rao also spoke appreciatively about the quality of Anita Desai’s English and Professor Narasimhaiah noted that it was especially remarkable since, as far as he knew, she has never had an opportunity to travel outside of India—hence her capacity with English was the demonstration of the possibility for an Indian writer to develop poetic skills in the language while living in India.

The novels of Anita Desai came up for discussion in another paper, one entitled, “The Achievement of the Indian Women
Novelists,” by Miss C. Vimala Rao. Paying particular attention to the works of Kamala Markandaya and Santha Rama Rau as well as Anita Desai, Miss Vimala Rao showed how the women novelists are particularly capable in dramatizing the clash of older traditions with the new cultural patterns that have come to be imported from the west. Because their own social and intellectual independence is connected with India’s political independence, the women novelists have just begun to emerge as important figures in the present generation.

Miss Vimala Rao identified *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Silence of Desire* as Kamala Markandaya’s best novels, discussing them at some length. But she placed the work of Santha Rama Rau — both her autobiographical books and her novel — on a higher level; if Markandaya is an “engaging novelist,” Santha Rama Rau is a “sensitive, self-aware, stimulating writer.” Miss Vimala Rao compared the autobiographical writings of Santha Rama Rau with those of Naipaul — to the great advantage of the first. Finally the paper identified Anita Desai as the woman novelist who has so far dared farthest and achieved most. *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* were both analyzed carefully and praised as genuinely noteworthy achievements.

The discussion dealt partly with women and partly with novelists. Professor Maini first complimented Miss Vimala Rao as being a fine woman critic, but then Mrs. Mukherjee commented that customarily we do not speak of Virginia Woolf as a “woman novelist” — we call her simply a “novelist”. But Miss Vimala Rao defended her categorizing by pointing out that Virginia Woolf has done some writing concerned with the attitudes of women writers, and that the paper’s title and subject should not be taken as implying some sort of relationship of inferiority.

Most of the balance of the discussion returned to Anita Desai. Her “poetic” style came in for more comments: Miss Vimala Rao argued that it was a style adopted simply for the purposes of characterization in the first novel, for the style of *Voices in the City* is totally different. Professor Nagarajan asked whether the comment often made about Jane Austen — that her men characters were less convincing than her women — would also apply to Anita Desai, and Professor Maini enlarged the question to ask whether there was some sort of clearly detectable “feminine
sensibility" at work in her second novel. Miss Vimala Rao answered no to both these questions, and reported that in the second novel the men were often the most effective characters; she reported as well that she had been struck in reading this novel by the fact that if she had not known it was written by a woman she would not have guessed. In general it appeared from those who had read both of Anita Desai's novels that she was the woman novelist of greatest promise presently writing in English.

Mr. H. S. Shivanna's paper on the English translation of a Malayalam novel, Chemmeen, stirred interest in the seminar first on the question of whether it should be counted as a part of "Indian literature in English" at all. Professor Naik raised the point in the first place; Professor Narasimhaiah and Dr. Anand both argued that as an Indian work, translated by an Indian, it should qualify. Professor Kantak suggested that the group might reasonably accept the work as presented — just as all of us accept the Russian novels in English translation as works of art and discuss them in those terms; but Professor Naik pointed out that we do not consider the Russian novels as a part of English literature. Here Professor Guha put in that the Russian novels could not be made part of English literature because they were written by Russians, whereas in this case, both original writer and translator were Indians. But the problem was not easily solved: Professor Kantak — only partly as a joke — wondered what the group would do with an Indian novel well translated into English by a non-Indian, and he suggested that some definition of degrees of consanguinity might be necessary. The problem was dropped rather than solved, but it will probably remain a thorny one as criticism continues to grow in connection with Indian literature in English.

Concerning the novel Chemmeen itself, the discussion chiefly centered about the source of the "tragedy", which basically involves the way people in the small Kerala fishing village are caught in an era of social change — as older traditional patterns of life gradually give way to new. The questions veered rather widely from the novel, to consider the assumptions under which a writer works: some members of the group felt that it was the writer's duty to record, others felt that he should clearly take sides. That question, too, was left unresolved, both concerning the actual
bias of Thakazhi Pillai, the author of *Chemmeen*, and the theoretical position a writer ought to take towards his material.

The question of translation was brought squarely to the attention of the seminar again with Professor Naresh Guha’s paper entitled “Translations from Tagore.” Professor Guha made several points clear in the beginning: although translation could be a difficult task, and was often frustrating, he believed that in principle it was possible. Second, the translation of factual material is relatively easy; it is literary translation that presents difficulty, especially poetry. Third, Tagore never attempted to write poems in English, and yet he was often his own best translator; still, even his luck in translation only visited him for a short while. In general, then, Professor Guha’s paper attempted to raise general problems of translation, developing those general problems out of a consideration of the various specific attempts that have been made to translate one of India’s foremost poets into languages other than his own.

Among other things, Professor Guha offered examples of literal translations of Tagore’s poetry compared with Tagore’s own English “adaptations,” indicating generally that Tagore was generally able to achieve a more poetic rendering. He discussed as well the work of Ezra Pound, who felt free to make changes in Tagore’s own translations when he felt that he could improve the chances of their reception in the west. And he concluded with Tagore’s own feelings, near the end of his career, that he might have been better advised not to attempt his translations, but to remain what he principally was, a Bengali writer.

The discussion following Professor Guha’s paper touched on most of the subjects that he had brought up. Professor Narasimhaiah commented on the continuing need for translations not only from Indian languages into English but from one Indian language to another. Professor Maini wondered whether poetry translation was possible at all, but he was answered, at least in part, by Professor Thakur, who granted the difficulty but who noted also the impossibility of the alternative—everyone would need to know all languages. And thus once again it was clear that the seminar had started the discussion of important questions, but was unable—for want of time—to bring them to their final conclusions.
In addition to these papers on novelists, several papers offered detailed analyses of writers in other forms. Miss K. S. Lalitha read an essay on the later poems of Sri Aurobindo. She analyzed six poems in considerable detail, all of them short lyrics, five of them autobiographical and mystical—qualities which she finds typical of these later poems. The sixth poem she chose for close study was “A Dream of Surreal Science”, in which she demonstrated Sri Aurobindo’s satirical abilities and sense of humour. Perhaps because of Sri Aurobindo’s special qualities as a mystic, it was difficult to focus the discussion on his poetic works; in fact, the discussion largely moved in the direction of the special problems raised for the critic in evaluating this kind of poetry. Professor Kantak raised the issue of “devotional poetry”, and asked whether the critic did not sometimes fail in his task here because he was more concerned to believe or disbelieve in the doctrines expressed than in the quality of the expression. He also argued that we normally expect good poetry to have immediacy, and to be concrete, whereas Sri Aurobindo’s poetry often appears abstract, its effect thereby diffused. Professor Nagarajan argued that on the other hand this was to subject ourselves to a kind of critical tyranny, to assume that only “concrete” poetry could be good. In general, then, the larger questions concerning “philosophical poetry” were raised, and the only general agreement seemed to be that even philosophical or devotional poetry should somehow be subjected to the same rigorous critical standards as any other kind of poetry.

The last single writer to be the subject of a paper was Ananda Coomaraswamy; The Dance of Shiva, Coomaraswamy’s work on aesthetics, was presented by Dr. S. K. Mokashi-Punekar as “a direct vindication of the Indian way of life in which art is considered only a by-product of a really beautiful idealistic society.” Pointing out that Coomaraswamy’s choice of India as a country and a way of life came only after careful intellectual consideration of the values offered by the west, Dr. Mokashi Punekar went on to argue that he deliberately chose a philosophical nationalism over a “characterless cosmopolitanism.” The Dance of Shiva is a book written for Indians, not an attempt to interpret Indian values to the rest of the world; Coomaraswamy’s first task was to show the Indian his own inheritance in both life and art. Thus Coomaraswamy appears as a curious mixture of objectivity and
passionate challenge to the west — he criticizes western traditions at various levels of culture and defends the culture and aesthetic traditions of his own country, particularly in the way art is expected to serve ethics and religion, and not expected to maintain its own autonomy.

There was little direct discussion of this paper. Dr. Anand paid a tribute to Ananda Coomaraswamy, who he said had been his “guru”, and pointed out how some of his stronger statements against western ideas and ideals had been partially modified in his later years. Some general comments about the principles of literary criticism followed, and Professor Narasimhaiah closed the discussion by suggesting that a useful book might be made consisting of a selection of Coomaraswamy’s writings, so that his work might become more generally known.

This summary account of the Mysore seminar may well conclude with some brief comments about three papers, each of which was itself a summary statement about Indian writing in English. In an entertaining as well as enlightening paper, Dr. Sujit Mukherjee discussed the plight of “The Indian Novelist in English as Best-Seller.” Disposing of the myth that novel-writing in English is the automatic key to wealth and fame for the Indian writer, Dr. Mukherjee went on to show — with specific examples — the difficulties some of the best writers have had in getting their books published at all, and he documented as well the problems of the novelist in English in finding an audience in his own country.

The paper supported as well the position taken at another time in the seminar by Dr. Krishnamurthi that the Indian novelist who chooses to write in English finds himself presented not only with a language but with a limited choice of themes. Dr. Mukherjee identified three such themes: the documentation of Indian life, a concern that often gives the impression that the novelist is writing for a foreign audience but which is not necessarily true, since the Indian writer in English cannot expect his readers in other parts of his own country to know the cultural details of the life he writes about; the theme of traditional India’s encounter with Europe and westernization; and the enlargement of certain stylized and sensational elements from Indian life in order to make
them stand for the whole, thus to fulfill for a foreign audience its expectations of what a novel about India should contain.

The last group represented the "best-selling" category, Dr. Mukherjee implied, and Manohar Malgonkar best exemplified the "best-selling" novelist. The paper ended with a brief analysis of Malgonkar's four novels, and thus performed a most useful service for the seminar by trying to establish criteria for the Indian novel in English that would enable the critic to distinguish between the worth-while and the meretricious.

In the discussion, Dr. Anand supported some of the views expressed in the paper from his own experience, especially concerning the difficulty which the serious Indian writer now has in getting his books published abroad. Dr. Anand also cited the sad state of book-reviewing in India as being responsible for some of the difficulties the serious writer has in getting a hearing; few young intellectuals have worked in the field, he said, and therefore the reviews are written by ill-qualified journalists, who do not always give credit to deserving books. Later, Professor Nagarajan commented concerning the limited number of themes dealt with by Indian novelists in English, he felt that this may be contributing to the present rather tired and worn-out appearance of the genre. But Dr. Mukherjee was not willing to go quite so far with such a value judgement; he felt that within these limited themes there was still plenty of room for creative work, and that the writer seeking newness for its own sake might very well also reach a dead end.

Another kind of summary statement was presented by Dr. Mulk Raj Anand who, in his paper, "Old Myth-New Myth: Recital Versus Novel," attempted to trace the history of the novel form in the western world and the gradual emergence of the novel form in India, which draws upon both the western and Indian traditions. Although the form varies, Dr. Anand argued, the content varies little: to support his thesis he offered three comparisons: his own war novel Across the Black Waters with the Mahabharata, Raja Rao's novel Kanthapura with Dandin's Tale of Ten Princes, and the heroine of R. K. Narayan's novel The Dark Room with any self-effacing woman of the ancient Indian world. Briefly, then, Dr. Anand summarized the history of novel-writing in India, first in the various regional languages and then in English,
and closed with a strong affirmation of the novel’s importance in the modern world as a “weapon of humanism.”

Dr. Anand’s wide-ranging paper led to broad discussion over many fields including comments about various novelists from D. H. Lawrence to Andre Malraux, including the relationship of politics (in the broadest sense) and literature, and including the possibility of tragedy in the ancient Indian epics and in modern society. But in his closing words to the seminar, Dr. Anand brought the issues of Indian writing in English squarely into the foreground again. Asserting that he had had a “tremendous feast” of discussion in Mysore, Dr. Anand added that although there was not yet a great body of Indian writing in English he was convinced that there was enough to encourage serious continuing study. He felt that many of the detailed analyses made by the seminar had shown the way such critical evaluation should go, and he hoped that the group in Mysore had perhaps set in motion the machinery of a new criticism that would be devoted to this particular branch of Indian writing. He concluded by saying that he had felt at a disadvantage during the discussions because he was the only practicing novelist present, but the seminar assured him that what may have seemed a disadvantage to him had been a great advantage to the group, for criticism needs all viewpoints, including that of the writer as well as the reader.

One other paper needs consideration and may reasonably conclude this summary account, although its writer could not be present at the conference to read his essay. But Professor K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s “Indian Story-Telling in English”, like his earlier book, Indian Writing in English, presents a clear-sighted statement of the position of the Indian writer of English today.

In this paper, Professor Iyengar concentrates on one aspect of fiction—story-telling. The tradition of story-telling in India is ancient and honourable, and by showing how the best of India’s present novelists in English adhere to this old tradition, Professor Iyengar accurately assessed their strengths and limitations. The finest Indian story-telling in English he found in C. Rajagopala-chari’s rendering of the Mahabharata, but he identified the successful story-patterns in other writers as well—in R. K. Narayan, both in the relatively simple and direct novel The English Teacher and
in the complex narrative structure of *The Guide*; in K.S. Venkataraman's *Kandan the Patriot* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, both stories of the Gandhian revolution in Indian villages, but with different story-telling patterns; and briefly in G. V. Desani and Bhabani Bhattacharya.

Professor Iyengar's conclusions are interesting both for his paper and for the seminar, for they provide in some sense not final statements but starting-points for further investigation. So far, Professor Iyengar observes, Indian fiction in English has avoided extreme forms of experimentation; the pull of both classical Indian traditions of story-telling and the tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century English novelists has kept them from the various "conundrums... fantasies...... and aberrations" of much fiction of the western world. "To put it another way," Professor Iyengar concluded, "Indian story-telling in English has been broadly content to be on the safer, saner, staider side of the great divide in modern fiction."

Like the whole seminar at Mysore, these conclusions can be both broadly satisfying and genuinely stimulating. They both mark out the general areas of critical agreement and the broad arenas for critical discussion. Whatever else the Mysore seminar may have done, it generated much interest among the participants and through them among their students and colleagues in this particular branch of literary studies, and it would seem to be a foregone conclusion that the seminar—as is the nature of lively discussions — was self-generating, and will spawn and nourish many future meetings of a similar nature. This is surely the mark of success, and the meetings closed with a well-deserved tribute to Professor Narasimhaiah and his staff at Mysore who had conceived and brought into being the provocative confrontation of the past four days. Professor Nagarajan, a former student of Professor Narasimhaiah’s at Mysore — and therefore, as he put it, both an insider and an outsider — offered the delegates' vote of thanks, and called attention to Professor Narasimhaiah's pioneer work during the last few years in making Indian writing in English gradually acceptable for serious study, in putting such writing on the map of Indian literature. Therefore, Professor Nagarajan said, it was peculiarly appropriate that this seminar should have been held here, and he spoke for the other delegates
when he not only thanked Professor Narasimhaiah for this seminar, but looked forward to more seminars on the subject, and to the continuing gradual emergence of Indian literature in English as a subject for critical, scholarly study.