Sri Aurobindo reads and writes from boyhood. His search for form is traceable in those early days. The desire for seeking modes of expression increases with the years, and strange messages begin to take shape in impeccable literary forms. While the matter and the manner seem to belong mostly to the world of romance, the sense of design and structure speaks of a classical architect. It is not too easy to write about Sri Aurobindo's literary modes avoiding the issues of style. Keeping in mind this risk of overlapping, an effort has been made to focus on the format of his literary expressions. In this study of Sri Aurobindo's literary modes both the questions of composition and rhetoric are involved.
Sri Aurobindo's essays are of various types. His characteristic method is that of an observer, passive and detached. But there are times when his personal involvement can be detected. It happens when the essayist is deeply troubled by the political events of the country, is on the forefront to assist the reader directly, is an action-hunter. It happens in the earlier writings when his personal self tends to revolt at intervals, suffers humanly at the weeping of his motherland, and refuses to bow to the call for passivity. It is then that we get the "New Lamp" essays. Sri Aurobindo writes these essays not long after his return from England. These are sharply contrasted with his other essays of the Baroda phase. Two essays will show the contrast clearly -- On Original Thinking and the beginning article of the "New Lamp" series. Both these essays are in a way self-critical. The political essay exposes the innocuity of the Congress as a party fighting for freedom. The cultural essay points out, in a quite different tone, the problems for the Indians to think independently.
It is not easy to analyse a single essay of the "New Lamp" series without referring to the others. These articles form a bunch -- a chain of essays structuring a contemporary political theme. And yet an isolated article from the bunch is a sure proof of Sri Aurobindo's mastery of the essay-form.

The starting is catchy, an apophthegm. "If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into a ditch?" Then he applies this pithy comment to the Indian National Congress. When the first paragraph ends we have already a clear picture of the essayist, his intention and temperament. He is boldly frank, confident and persuasive. The structure of the inventio is well-knit and the manner of persuasion immediately reveals a superior intellect organising the whole passage. He is an artist of structure, and that is obvious in the last sentence where he declares his hope to bring over one or two of his countrymen to his own line of thinking. And then realising it would be asking for too much, he hopes "to induce them to think a little more deeply than they have done." In the next para, he defends his position as a critic, and prepares to expose the Congress. The argument starts in the third paragraph. It is an argument which involves a comparison between
a great man, who has served his country, and an institution. The essayist asserts that when the man is gone he should have a place in the nation's memory. But, the institution should be a thing of the present. If it has no function to play at present, it should not claim respect. Sri Aurobindo does not negative the position of the Congress altogether. "But I am not disposed to admit that all this is true of the Congress," he declares at the end of the same para. In the fourth paragraph, there is a burst of rhetoric. The essayist's early hopes and dreams about the Congress spring back to his memory. Now he realises that it was an infatuation. Then follows the long conclusive paragraph with a fine critical logic. The entire para is critical, sometimes enlightened by typical English jokes, like the ring trick, sometimes attacking the hypocrisy and the flattering attitude of the leaders, or pointing out their fear to "tell the direct truth." There is also a violent attack on General Booth, "a vulgar imposter, a convicted charlatan." The last line sounds like a grave prophetic warning.

It is interesting to note how Sri Aurobindo has gone about presenting his materials in this racy piece. The materials are part and parcel of Sri Aurobindo's own thought and experience; the
personality of the essayist is on the surface. But despite the frequent use of "I", there is no exhibitionism. There is a perfect unity of the whole structure, and the literary effect of the language is much too obvious in the pattern of rhetoric. Even a cursory glance gives us quite a few instances:

a guiding star which shall lead us through the encircling gloom to a far distant paradise, a weight of resisting winds, morning hopes, the April splendour of that wonderful enthusiasm, morning-star of our Liberty, pillar of cloud by day, pillar of fire by night, etc.

On Original Thinking looks less personal; the use of "I" is restricted to only two occasions. He uses "we" mostly. At the end of the first paragraph a direct comment comes from the "I":

'You will often hear it said that it was the forms of Hinduism which have given us so much national vitality. I think rather it was its spirit. I am inclined to give more credit for the secular miracle of our national survival to Shankara, Ramanuja, Nanak and Kabir, Guru Govind, Chaitanya, Ramdas and Tukaram than to Raghunandan
and the Pandits of Nadiya and Bhatpara.'13

In the second para Sri Aurobindo comes to the heart of the essay — the problem is too much dependence on the European culture. The problem of selection, rejection and assimilation are discussed quite rationally. The point slips into the next para where he has found the root cause of our failure to think originally. It is the lack of free intellect that has enslaved the Indians. Sri Aurobindo starts the next para with a rhetorical question — "How shall we recover our lost intellectual freedom and elasticity?"14 The answer is not like an advice; it comes rather in the form of a bold and inspired address.

'Let us break our chains, venerable as they are, but let it be in order to be free, — in the name of truth, not in the name of Europe.'15

This is the Vivekanandian tone. The tone continues in the next paragraph. It vanishes in the ending lines of the para and is replaced by a typical Sri Aurobindian prose, a combination of poetry and argument.
'It is no use clinging to the old ice-floes of the past, they will soon melt and leave their refugees struggling in perilous waters. It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good dry land, of a second-hand Europeanism. We shall only die there a miserable and unclean death. No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of ages.'

In conclusion the essayist suggests that there should be no accepting without questioning "rigorously and impartially". This, he holds, is the process of the leading European thinkers. And it is here that we see clearly the mind of the essayist -- a mind balanced and rational. He has no narrow grudge for the leading European thinkers, rather he welcomes the outlook of Carlyle and Goethe.

Both the essays are reasoned analysis, and though there is tonal and thematic dissimilarity between them, there is not much difference in their basic rhetorical pattern. The exordium of the two pieces has no obvious resemblance. The political piece begins with an exciting apophthegm, while the cultural one rejects the exterior glib of rhetoric and maintains
a graver tone from the beginning. But the thing common
to the essays is that both seek to impress a suspi-
cious reader in the proemium. It would be perfectly
relevant here to refer to the view of Edward P.J.
Corbett, an eminent scholar of rhetoric:

'All the rhetoricians emphasize the importance of
putting the audience in a receptive frame of mind,
especially if the audience is suspicious or hostile.'

Though both the essays have a coherent structure, the
structure of the cultural essay has an essence of high
seriousness. Its Sanskritism does not give us a jarring
note, rather it invites us to penetrate into the inner
structure of the words and phrases. Its peroration
is structured in a pretty long paragraph. It is a
summarizing kind of ending, and it has the classical
virtue of amplification and extenuation. The
structure of the cultural essay is less decorated
than that of the political one. By decoration we
mean figuration of words, and we have cited a few
instances of this figuration from the political piece.
But in the cultural essay Sri Aurobindo does not
forget altogether to think in terms of literature.
The passage beginning "It is no use clinging" supports us.

ii) Literary Criticism

Sri Aurobindo is a creative critic, a genius. We would like to start with this assertion and then explain why we call him a genius. We are tempted to borrow a significant passage which would clarify -- or should we say justify ? -- the assertion made above.

'.....there is a kind of criticism---sometimes, as in Matthew Arnold, of great excellence and power -- which is able to do its work with a minimum of theoretical inquiry into the nature of its subject, its controlling principles being identi-
tact of the moral, so to speak, with the moral insight and literary critic

* The thirteenth chapter of Dr.S.K.Prasad's painstaking study entitled The Art of Criticism, can be referred to in this connection.

pp.431-456, The Literary Criticism of Sri Aurobindo.

Dr.S.K.Prasad.
Bharati Bhawan, Patna.
1974.
himself. This, however, is the criticism of genius, and what holds true of it does not necessarily hold true, to the same extent at least, of the criticism which most of us attempt to practise, in which considerations of the objective subject-matter of the critic's discourse are of central concern.

This view of R.S. Crane seems to point to the nature of introspective criticism which is Sri Aurobindo's field. In fact, Sri Aurobindo shares a lot with Arnold as regards the basic principles of criticism. Arnold may be an influence, but Sri Aurobindo's plus-point is a deeper inlook which discovers a generalised but rhythmic language of argument which serves something like an objective correlative to image what happens inside the artists he writes about. Another striking thing is that he does not restrict his comments only to those who resemble his own "moral insight" or "literary tact". He seems to be interested in people like Lawrence, Baudelaire, Anatole France and a lot of others whom stand poles apart from his world. One cannot be convinced about the broadness and passivity of his temperament, unless one reads him. One may frown at our being obsessed with the outlook of the critic, because we should be talking about the
technique or plan of the format of his literary criticism. Well, there is actually no technique about his organisation of materials. There is only a manner which is rooted in the very consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Again, as he is an artist with a classical temperament, he must have a sense of the beginning, the middle and the end; must know the art of uniting the parts. It would be interesting now to analyse a particular piece to show the design of his critical work of art. We choose Hindu Drama, instead of the more visional types, for its argument is strong and easier to reckon.

Hindu Drama is a remarkable essay in literary criticism. It shows the essential difference between the Hindu and the European drama. The essay is divided into three long paragraphs. It begins with a pretty long sentence and by the end of it, we get an inking of what the argument would be like. In the next sentence it is clear -- the argument involves a comparison between the European and the Hindu drama. "To the Hindu it would have seemed a savage and inhuman spirit that could take any aesthetic pleasure in the sufferings of an Oedipus or a Duchess of Malfi or in the tragedy of a Macbeth or an Othello." Sri Aurobindo asserts confidently that the Hindu mind is steeped in a divine tenderness, and many other
soft and sweet qualities of Buddha ennoble the mind of the playwrights. He is of opinion that the Hindu drama does not give place to violence, horror, physical tragedy, the tragic in moral problems, disease, neurosis, and spiritual medicology, all of which we come across in Elizabethan, Greek and Modern drama, and also in modern fiction. Then follows an eloquent rhetoric listing the virtues of Hindu drama. The use of metaphorical mode — "the clouds are only admitted to make more beautiful the glad sunlight from which all come and into which all must melt away" — is not an interpolated poetic extravaganza; it is the exact imaging of the spirit of Hindu drama.

The second paragraph begins with an affirmation that for a really great drama the gift for dramatic characterisation is a must. The critic shows his disgust for the misinterpretations made by the European scholars in judging Hindu drama. The ironic displeasure is obvious in the statement, "A mere poet like Goethe may extend unstinted and superlative praise to a Shacountala, but the wiser critical and scholarly mind passes a far less favourable verdict". But irony vanishes soon, and there seems to be an effort at understanding the problem with the Europeans. The Europeans like strong
action and powerfully revealing speech. Only a few Europeans who have profound culture can see beyond the flashy exterior of things. The Hindu does not like violence; he likes the art of restraint. Sri Aurobindo uses two Sanskrit words to show the exact nature of the Aryan Gentleman — Mitācārah and Mitabhāsi. He then easily passes into a contrasted study of epic conception. The Europeans consider Bhima to be the only epic character, for he has something of the Achillean violence in his nature. But the Hindu poet is a man of inner province. In his play, gentleness, patience, self-sacrifice, purity and all other civilised virtues remain side by side with martial fire, brute strength, revenge, anger, hate and ungovernable self-will. Sri Aurobindo's examples are Rama and Bhima.

The last para is superb. Its forceful argument, rationality and balance bear testimony to a great mind. Sri Aurobindo begins it by accepting the many similarities that exist between the European and the Hindu drama. But, the differences, he says, are vital. The two forms resemble, but their spirits differ. The peroration is characteristic: the bold and dignified assertiveness is structured by the typical SriAurobindian balance. There is a perfect
air of coherence and harmony in the whole piece. The critic has done what he had set out to do -- that is, to show the vital difference. The difference is shown in more or less intellectual terms. There is a suppressed tone of displeasure in a few places, like the ironic structure we have referred to above. Fortunately, the tone of displeasure is nowhere allowed to overtop the argument which seems convincing although. The last sentence -- this is revelatory of Sri Aurobindo's balance and catholicity -- holds the key to the entire outlook of Sri Aurobindo the critic.

'The true spirit of criticism is to seek in a literature what we can find in it of great or beautiful, not to demand from it what it does not seek to give us.'

Sri Aurobindo has more than one mode of criticism. There is one which is visibly grand, but grander still in deeper look. We can call it visional criticism. There is more dependence on the intuitive seeing than on the analytic intellect, or perhaps the intellect itself is aided by intuitive inspiration. We can have a feel of an under-rhythm regulating the intellectual inwarding. It is not easy to define this
There are some poets who are the children of Nature, whose imagination is made of her dews, whose blood thrills to her with the perfect impulse of spiritual kinship; Wordsworth is of these and Valmiki. Their voices in speaking of her unconsciously become rich and liquid and their words are touched with a subtle significance of thought or emotion. There are others who hold her with a strong sensuous grasp by virtue of a ripe, sometimes an over-ripe delight in beauty; such are Shakespeare, Keats, Kalidasa. Others again approach her with a fine or clear intellectual sense of charm as do some of the classical poets. Hardly in the rank of poets are those who like Dryden or Pope use her, if at all, only to provide them with a smoother well-turned literary expression. Vyasa belongs to none of these, and yet often touches the first three at particular points without definitely coinciding with any. He takes the kingdom of Nature by violence. Approaching her from outside his masculine genius forces its way to her secret, insists and will take no denial. Accordingly he is impressed at first contact by the harmony in the midst of variety of external features, absorbs
these into strong retentive imagination, meditates on them and so reads his way to the closer impression, the inner sense behind that which is external, the personal temperament of a landscape. In his record of what he has seen, this impression more often than not comes first as that which abides and prevails; sometimes it is all he cares to record; but his tendency towards perfect faithfulness to the vision within leads him, when the scene is still fresh to his eye, to record the data through which the impression was reached. We have all experienced the way in which our observation of a scene, conscious or unconscious, forms itself out of various separate and often uncoordinated impressions which, if we write a description at the time or soon after and are faithful to ourselves, find their way into the picture, even at the expense of symmetry; but if we allow a long time to elapse before we recall the scene, there returns to us only a single self-consistent impression which without accurately rendering it, retains its essence and its atmosphere.'

The passage begins with fine lyricism, but it is not unique. The unique style comes later. The structure becomes complex from the line beginning "Approaching
her from outside. It is not obscure. But it demands
penetrating patience on the part of the reader. The
whole passage shows us a characteristic trend in
Sri Aurobindo's literary criticism -- clarity merging
in dense complexity.

It happens sometimes that Sri Aurobindo's
analytical intellect becomes inadequate to form a
bridge, the objective correlative, between his vision
and the reader. Generally, in such circumstances, the
writer and the critic take to the poetic method. T.S.
Eliot, as most of us know, has clarified the problem
in his famous essay on Hamlet. Let us recall the oft-referred-to portions, '....a set of objects, a situa-
tion, a chain of events which shall be the formulae
of that particular emotion; such that when the external
facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are
given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' Eliot
refers to the sleep-walking scene where Shakespeare,
he believes, has presented 'a skilful accumulation of
imagined sensory impressions' Which does the work
of bridging the inner and the outer. For Sri Aurobindo
the case is far too difficult, for he has to inter-
pret a vision, a feeling, or an excitement which are
common to the Vedic seers who live far above the
ordinary mind. The analytic intellect is too impotent
to image, or to objectify the experiences of the higher planes of the mind. One striking problem is that the soul's vision of Truth and the exact nature of the vision cannot be easily projected or described. Translating the vision -- which is done in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo -- is not difficult for a seer poet, but an attempt to explain the vision is very frustrating on most occasions. Sri Aurobindo has to discover a new prose mode to solve the problem. Often he tries to seize the vision by a flash of inspired rhetoric, or by an 'unusual bringing together of words'. Sri Aurobindo uses this phrase to denote the highly inspired style of Virgil, and we borrow it to point out the prose mode of Sri Aurobindo's visional criticism. Here is a characteristic mode:

'The word comes secretly from above the mind, but it is plunged into our intuitive depths and emerges imperfectly to be shaped by the poetic feeling and intelligence, hrđā tāstān, manisā. An intuitive self in the depth of each of our parts of being, hid in sense, life, heart, mind, is the transmitting agent, a subliminal power concealed in some secret cavern within of which the curtained and crystal doors disclose only occasional and partial transparencies.
or are sometimes half open or ajar, — nihitam
guhāvam, guhāhitam sahvareshtham.' 26

One notices here a queer effect of language. Each
word, each phrase, each turn of expression can
intoxicate the reader even in their isolated position.
Again, the whole unit has a hypnotic effect. There
are curious phrases like "secret cavern", "the cur­
tained and crystal doors", and turns of expression
like "plunged first into our intuitive depths". Sri
Aurobindo is trying perhaps to touch the reader's
deeper consciousness by creating an atmosphere of
words. He heightens his prose speech with a fluid
movement and intoxicating inner rhythm with 'high
light' 27 Sanskrit words. He writes Sanskrit equiva­
lets keeping in mind perhaps the classical rhetoric
Scesis Onomatoton, a string of synonyms used in a
 tempo of spiritual inspiration. This atmosphere of
words helps the reader to have a sense of the magic
of inside. Sri Aurobindo is always trying to explain
with the aid of intellect, but the atmosphere born
of a rhythmic efflux is more helpful to the reader.
An experience is caught in a strange rhythm, while
the intellect balances the inspirational rhythm. For
Sri Aurobindo knows that prose's function differs from that of poetry. Its function is to explain, while poetry's is to transcribe the vision directly. Let us turn to Sri Aurobindo himself for a better explanation of the point we are trying to hit:

'The degree of word-force characteristic of prose speech avails ordinarily to distinguish and state things to the conceptual intelligence; the word of the poet sees and presents in its body and image to a subtle visual perception in the mind awakened by an inner rhythmic audition truth of soul and thought experience and truth of sense and life, the spiritual and living actuality of idea and object. The prosaist may bring to his aid more or less of the seeing power, the poet dilute his vision with intellectual observation and statement, but the fundamental difference remains that ordinary speech proceeds from and appeals the conceiving intelligence while it is the seeing mind that is the master of poetic utterance.'
iii) Treatise

A treatise, commonly known as a high-serious essaying on a large scale, has a vast magnitude of appeal and is the fit medium to hold a long, sequential and organic discourse on epical topics, such as mankind's evolving march to the Supermind. It is about this evolution of mankind that Sri Aurobindo writes variably in his five great books -- *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *Essays on the Gita*, *War and Self-determination* and *The Secret of the Veda* can be regarded as companion structures. The themes of these books are related. The other two books cast in the same form -- *The Future Poetry* and *The Foundation of Indian Culture* -- are not thematically connected in an obvious way. Of course, the point of view is the same. Poetry, Art and Culture in general -- all are seen from the Yogi's point of view. Poetry and Art are seen as a means of changing the consciousness.

Among the five great expositions, *The Life Divine* is the central diamond in the five-stoned
necklace. The other gems are there as if to illuminate the chief diamond. *Assays on the Gita* is a gateway to his integral philosophy which is based on a synthesis of the tripple path, Love, Work and Knowledge. *The Synthesis of Yoga* is the practical guide-book to realize the divine life. *The Human Cycle* talks about man's social evolution, as the previous three books throw light on spiritual evolution. Finally *The Ideal of Human Unity* seeks to give us the clue to the unity of mankind in political terms. In a way, these treatises seem to be the parts of a single plan. One wonders whether it is possible for one man to start more than one such book at the same time and run them simultaneously keeping the unity of themes in varied styles. But then this has happened. All these books have grown out of life, and Sri Aurobindo builds a lot, to borrow Georg Lukács' phrase, 'his own out of himself'.

*The Life Divine* is philosophy. But it is not the philosopher's philosophy. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy owes to his experience — a wide, intense, variegated mystical realisation. What he writes here is his yogic experience. The manner he chooses for writing is the epic manner. In truth, it is the
epic prose born of a blend between intellect and inspiration, K.D. Sethna observes:

'Sri Aurobindo's intellect is an instrument used by a spiritual realisation: not any sentence anywhere is inspired by the intellect alone.'

This is perhaps the reason why one misses the essence of the book by applying mere intellect. A.B. Purani's observation on the book is also worth noticing:

'It is like a vast architecture in which you walk from room to room and forget the room which you left and even may lose your way. It is like a labyrinth through which you are led to a solution of the labyrinth. And you walk down and you ask: where was it that I was lost? And what did he prove? It is a very complex structure, -- very rich, very detailed and the logic with which it deals are so subtle, so wide and so radical that one is required to readjust, sometimes, one's mind in order to catch fully all that Life Divine wants to say. I have seen very good philosophers not able to understand
The question how Sri Aurobindo has used the form will involve another thesis. To talk about the form is to analyse the arguments. To analyse the arguments is to touch on Sri Aurobindo's world-view, which is definitely not our subject.

This book on Metaphysics -- it has 56 chapters, each of which is preceded by scriptural extracts, especially from The Rigveda and The Gita -- has been universally acclaimed as a great book on philosophy. We can remark this only -- and that is the most remarkable aspect seen from the aesthetic standpoint -- that the whole of *The Life Divine* is the objectivised projection of a seer's personal experience, experience of a journey and experience of reaching a wonderland.
Sri Aurobindo tries his hand at Dialogue, but casually, as a means of apprenticing perhaps. That is his major prose work of the English phase. Modelled upon Plato's philosophizings in dialogue form, it is written in his teens. He confesses:

'I read more than once Plato's *Republic and Symposium*, but only extracts from his other writings. It is not true that under his impress I rashly started at the age of eighteen an explanation of the Cosmos on the foundation of the principles of Beauty and Harmony, but I never got beyond the first three or four chapters.'

The Platonic pattern -- two or more persons involved in intellectual exchanges -- perfectly suits the classical temperament of young Aurobindo.

The dialogue is a dynamic system of expression. Because of its dramatic essence, the thought expostulated in the form is more easily
comprehensible than the thought expressed in the philosophical treatises. The question-answer-duel held among Keshav, Wilson; Trevor and Treneth are not pointless; they are carefully organised, step by step, to make the ideas clear. For instance, Keshav begins by asking about the aim of life. Wilson answers, "Duty, I presume." And this answer brings forth a challenging question — what is the meaning of duty? Which in turn leads to a detailed analysis of duty. In Plato's writings, or in such writings in general — the duel sometimes comes to a conclusion, or a tentative one, or it proceeds to no conclusion at all.

The difference between the treatment of Plato and that of Sri Aurobindo is obvious. Plato employs real and illustrious personages in his dialogues, with Socrates as the chief figure in many of them. Sri Aurobindo has no Socrates in his Harmony of Virtue. Keshav may be Aurobindo's spokesman, but there is no real life names like, say, Aurobindo, Manomohan or Oscar Browning.

The beginning of The Harmony of Virtue is reminiscent of the exordium of The Decay of Lying. Not only that, the way Sri Aurobindo allows the conversation to run is an instant reminder of Wilde.
It would be significant here to remember that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Critic As Artist* were published in the year 1890. *The Decay of Lying* was published in 1889. One suspects that the writer of *The Harmony of Virtue* must have been acquainted with these works of Oscar Wilde. We can see some passages from both the writers.

1) Keshav: Life is too precious to be wasted in labour, and above all this especial moment of life, the hour after dinner, when we have only just enough energy to be idle.

2) Cyril (coming in through the open window from the terrace): My dear Vivian, don't coop yourself up all day in the library. It is a perfectly lovely afternoon. The air is exquisite.

3) Treneth: To ignore facts is the beginning of thought.

Keshav: No, but to forget facts for the time being -- that is the beginning of thought.
4) "To be popular one must be a mediocrity."

"Not with women", said the Duchess shaking her head..."46

5) Keshav: Yes, I know that "original" and "fool"
are synonymous in the world's vocabulary.47

6) 'Conscience and cowardice are really the same thing.....'48

Sri Aurobindo cannot be as trivial as Wilde. His treatment of the form is more Platonic than Lucian. Wilde's is closer to the Lucian type -- the type based on satire and amusement.49
v) Letters and Conversations

Sri Aurobindo has written innumerable letters. We have at our disposal three pretty fat B.C.L. volumes of letters which instantly remind us of the myth grown up amidst the gradually expanding Sri Aurobindo world that he is an automatic writer who writes like a machine and sleeps little. Sri Aurobindo's own division -- Life, Literature, Yoga -- is worth keeping for a methodical discussion on them. It would not be improper, however, to study Life and Yoga under a single head.

A letter usually is a conversation on paper carried on at a distance and the personal flavour and contact are qualities common to them. The one remarkable thing about the Sri Aurobindian letters is their emotional coldness in general. The work of impersonation is always felt. But what looks cold impersonal advice apparently becomes purifying fire on repeated reading. A letter from Sri Aurobindo is a personal guidance, but the published letter seems to be meant for each reader.

He wrote letters -- it was one-touch writing -- in answer to the problems of his disciples.
would come in abundance, and he was prompt in answering them. He would write back incessantly, some brief, some pretty long, and some essay-sized. Obviously there was no time to compose them carefully. Yet they have turned out to be specimens of remarkable prose art.

Why Sri Aurobindo gives so much importance to writing letters is perhaps best expressed in a short letter written by himself.

'Every letter means an interchange with the person who writes it -- for something is there behind the words, something of his person or of the forces he has put out or had around him while writing. Our thoughts and feelings are also forces and can have effects upon others. One has to grow conscious of the movement of these forces and then one can control one's own mental and vital formations and cease to be affected by those of others.'

Much-in-little, it is a complete piece. It looks impersonal, though Sri Aurobindo seems to justify his own position as a letter writer.

The letters are all spontaneous. Written
in a flowing style, they stand as brief complete wholes. We give a typical example of this form below. Here he talks about the way through which the divine force descends upon a yogi.

'The descent into the body first in the head, then down to the neck and in the chest is the ordinary rule. For many there is a big stop before it gets below the navel owing to some vital resistance. Once it passes that barricade it does not usually take long to come down farther. But there is no rule as to the time taken. In some it comes down like a flood, in others it goes through with a methodical and deliberate increase. I don't think the peace descent is in the habit of waiting for companions -- more often it likes at first to be all by itself and then call down its friends with the message, "Come along, I have made the place all ready for you."' 51

This is both yogic guidance and literature. The theme is yogic, but the presentation and the effects of language are literary.
There should be a separate study of Sri Aurobindo's letters. Not many know him as one of the greatest letter writers.

"The letters carry their inimitable wisdom and vast knowledge lightly and grace fully. They are an indispensable addition to Sri Aurobindo's aesthetic pronouncements, though frequently informal in their wording, as is only to be expected. The Master plays with an idea or image, word or sound; refutes current estimates; corrects by an olympian glance critical misapprehensions; and takes us through numerous ways to the primordial source of song. He lets fall casually, in two or three letters, a whole body of aesthetics! An angelic humour flashes across the letters like gentle lightning now and then and the style is almost always limpid and crystalline, its lyric beauty contrasting sweetly with the architectural and epic grandeur of his major prose. What these letters convey is absorbed like light itself. One can read them a hundred times and feel the immortal freshness and infinite variety of their eternal wisdom. These are the most revealing body of letters in the English language after Keats's, and even more important for the future of poetry and of literary criticism."

pp.150-151,

(II. Sri Aurobindo's Aesthetics)

Sri Aurobindo
Seer & Poet.

Dr. Vinayak Krishna Gokak.

Abhinav Publications.
New Delhi.
Sri Aurobindo is a superb conversationist. He easily passes from the serious to the light, from the light to the serious. Bubbling over with wit, humour and fun, he has found a new style here. As a matter of fact, his tone in Talks is often different from that of the Letters. If Nirodharan is correct in recording the speech rhythm, Sri Aurobindo is missing here the typical yogic rhythms of his delivery; that supra-normal passivity is not to be found here. One believes it is deliberate. It appears that Sri Aurobindo stoops down here to speak face to face with the common man. The language -- the word Nonsense is used on several occasions -- is often the language of the intellect, and therefore it seems near to us. In truth, the conversations reveal a different aspect of that wonderful personality. We quote a few examples to show the other face of Sri Aurobindo. Asked whether he gave up poetry and politics embittered and disillusioned, he answers in a slightly impatient tone.
'Nonsense. I gave it up and took to the spiritual life because I wanted force for my action. People make the mistake that whatever a poet writes must be of his personal experience. I can write of universal experience. I can feel the experience in me and write about it.'

Sri Aurobindo's wit deserves mention.

M: Where can the souls of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda be? Have they taken birth again?

Sri Aurobindo: You have to enquire at the Foreign Office of the world. (Laughter)

He makes a lot of fun with the remarks that milk is "good for the blood" and "good for spirituality". He remarks, "It is no better than Nirod's brinjal."

Humour is remarkable too:
Sri Aurobindo: How do I come into a class of Botany?
S: Perhaps as an example of evolution?
Sri Aurobindo: From the red lotus known as "aurobindo"? (Laughter)

vi) Thoughts and Aphorisms

Much before the Greeks the art of compression was known to the Sanskrit poets who called it Tika. This was just the opposite of the expostulatory mode which was referred to as Sutra in the Hindu poetics. The Bible-makers found the aphoristic mode suitable for their themes of prophecy and meditation. The American transcendentalists took resort to this form quite often. Sri Aurobindo must be aware of the traditional handlings of the
But he is also conscious perhaps, when he uses the form in a distinguishable style. He puts an indelible "Sri Aurobindo stamp" on his aphorisms.

The aphoristic sayings of Sri Aurobindo are seeds of his entire mind and work. He wants to lose nothing; wants to jot down anything that wakes suddenly in his consciousness. These utterances come usually like a flash of poetic inspiration, and Sri Aurobindo is successful in differentiating the style only because he receives strange new themes in that flash of inspired vision. Sri Aurobindo's sense of the traditions makes him recognise early in his life that the form is very effective -- the Bible must have been a sure guidance -- to preach the principles of spirituality in terms of literature. In writing the aphorisms, he never considers artistic beauty as secondary. He must be aware that the effectiveness of the form depends almost wholly on the language -- the language of literature. It will be pertinent to remember here what Alcott says of Emerson regarding the effectiveness of the form.
'Its beauty consists in its suggestiveness, unexpec-
tedness, saliency; it vaults the passes, flashes 
the whole of things upon the imagination at a glance, 
sets life and things anew for the moment.'

A careful perusal will reveal that Alcott is referring 
to the literary power of Emerson's language. For only 
by the literary effects of language Emerson achieves 
the virtues which Alcott lists above.

F.W. Schlegel has remarked, "an aphorism 
ought to be entirely isolated from the surrounding 
world like a little work of art complete in itself 
like a hedgehog." One who has even a half-hearted 
knowledge about the complete body of Sri Aurobindo's 
 writings, and has a glimpse of his world-view, will 
find it hard to accept Schlegel's view happily. Sri 
Aurobindo's aphoristic art is definitely complete 
in itself, but most of the aphorisms seem to refer 
to his central vision reflected in the writings of 
the Pondicherry period. Most of them are like small 
units within a large unit made up of his master-
pieces. The great works are the Himalayas proper; 
the aphorisms are Himalayan foothills standing as
gateways to the lofty peaks. Schlegel is not altogether imperfect, but then the possibility of isolation "from the surrounding world" is limited in the case of writers who have a definite worldview, and who would never like to vary the central essence of their propagandist themes.

Here is a Sri Aurobindian stray thought cast in the aphoristic pattern.

'Revelation is direct sight, the direct hearing or inspired memory of Truth, drṣṭi, āruti, smṛti; it is the highest experience and always accessible to renewed experience. Not because God spoke it, but because the soul saw it, is the word of the Scriptures our supreme authority.'

We can also refer to that wonderful which defines Sri Aurobindo's conception of the epic and the tragedy.

'Poets make much of death and external afflictions, but the only tragedies are the soul's failures and the only epic man's triumphant ascent towards
Savitri testifies that Sri Aurobindo has followed this epic conception. And this is a fitting instance of the inter-relation that exists between Sri Aurobindo's major writings and the aphorisms. Instances of exception can be traced in the stray thoughts jotted down in England. But Sri Aurobindo is young then and has not found his integral vision of life. Here is an example:

'To govern life by fixed laws and a pocket-handbook!'

Even this, un-Aurobindian though apparently, cannot be affirmed as isolated. Sri Aurobindo seems to be aware already that life progresses, consciousness evolves, and there is a scope for variation at each step of life.
vii) Political Satire

It is hard to find a link between Sri Aurobindo the visionary and Sri Aurobindo the Political satirist. Of course he has never been a mere hitter, for he knows the art of hitting. Hitting may be an immediate need, but Sri Aurobindo does not forget that he is an artist of words. He uses the form for a short period in the heat of early *Bande Mataram* extremism, showing (not showing off) his classic sense of the form, and renounces it when his consciousness changes. There is no question of showing off or artificiality whenever there is an absolute air of spontaneity in the satirist at work. And whenever there is "minimum of convention, maximum of reality," the form bears the sign of originality. This naturalness -- Gilbert Highet confirms that it is the sign of finest satirists -- is the characteristic virtue of Sri Aurobindo's political satire. He was a spokesman of the New Nationalism which was facing strong opposition in the early nineteenth century. It was good of the New Nationalists that they got a satirist of superior
Bande Mataram editorials were written by a man extremely committed to the National Movement of India. The movement is a distant halo now, but the satire is as fresh as ever. The hour needed bold words to be used in a way that would be amusing and spiky as well. It is well to remember the list of satiric weapons given by Highet.

'Any author, therefore, who often and powerfully uses a number of the typical weapons of satire -- irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness, exaggeration -- is likely to be writing satire.'

Barring obscenity, Sri Aurobindo conforms to the pattern. He has never been a lampooner. His prose satire is remarkable or unique for one reason at least -- he is actuated by no personal spleen. Nowhere do we come across anything that proves that the writer is selfish or that his ego is wounded.

A Mouse in a Flutter -- an editorial note -- is a fine example of Sri Aurobindo's use of the
satiric mode. This is a cool but caustic exposition of an exaggerated truth. The venom of satire is attenuated by fun, irony and wit. Any minor writer would have been violent and obscene in handling such materials. Each line of the piece speaks of the artist behind it. It looks like a personal attack, but it is not so. In truth, Sri Aurobindo's "we" is the group voice of the Nationalists. In this editorial, there is no reference to the ideology of the New Nationalists. It is pure satire. The piece is divided into three paragraphs of almost equal length, and the mode is obvious in the very beginning, "Poor N.N. Ghose!"

Here is a more elaborate view of the manner:

'Such self-degradation by a cultured and respectable literary gentleman is very distressing and we apologise to the public for going the cause of this shocking spectacle. We will devote our column today to soothing down his ruffled plumes. By the way, we assure Mr. Ghose that when we talk of his ruffled plumes, we are not thinking of him in his capacity as a mouse at all. We are for a moment imagining him to be a feathered biped -- say, a pelican solitary in the wilderness or else, if he prefers it, a turtle-dove cooing to his
newly-found mate in Colootola. 67

The last portion of the editorial contains caustic irony. In the last sentence, Sri Aurobindo uses a jolter.

'A rose by another name will smell as sweet and a mouse by any other name will gnaw as hard.' 68

No student of literature will fail to enjoy the piece.

viii) Autobiography

Sri Aurobindo's later writings are profound internalizations. But he seldom touches on the self-referential literary mode called autobiography. He is
sensitive about anyone other than himself attempting to write about Sri Aurobindo's life. And yet, strangely enough, he has not written a full-fledged autobiography. Instead, he corrects some wrong facts about him, and in connection to what is written biographically he adds some fresh informations. He too writes biographically, rejecting the autobiographic "I", as does Rousseau in his Confession.

The biographer's passage runs as follows:

'Aurobindo, even before he was twenty years old, had mastered Greek and Latin and English and also acquired sufficient familiarity with continental languages like German, French and Italian.'

Sri Aurobindo remarks:

'This should be corrected as: "mastered Greek and Latin, English and French and had also acquired some familiarity with continental languages like German and Italian."'
On Himself is something like a blending of biography and autobiography.

Part of the Uttarpara Speech verges on the self-mirroring art proper. When Sri Aurobindo narrates what happened after his arrest, he is speaking autobiographically almost always.

The character of this narrative is in harmony with the view expressed by Mutlu Konuk Biasing, a recipient of Ph.D. from Brown University.

"...autobiographical writing necessarily involves a splitting or doubling of the self. In the act of writing about himself, the author becomes narrator and hero, observer and observed, subject and object, and the two selves are like mirror images of each other; they are the same yet opposites. This doubling or splitting of the self is the source of the self-consciousness that characterizes autobiographical writings." 71

Here is an isolated view of the narrative structure where Sri Aurobindo is both observer and observed!
'I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me.'

The structure is clearly experiential. It would be pertinent here to recall Nehru's use of the autobiographic mode.

'I began to feel as if I was almost a part of it. I was familiar with every bit of it; I knew every mark and dent on the whitewashed walls and on the
uneven floor and the ceiling with its moth-eaten rafters.

I had never noticed before that fresh mango leaves are reddish-brown, remarkably like the autumn tints on the Kashmir hills.

As I grew more observant I noticed all manners of insects living in my cell or in the little yard outside. I realized while I complained of loneliness that that yard, which seemed empty and deserted, was teeming with life. All these creeping or crawling or flying insects lived their life without interfering with me in any way, and I saw no reason why I should interfere with them.

Both Nehru and Sri Aurobindo are narrating autobiographically the experiences they had in jail. Religious and spiritual in essence, Sri Aurobindo’s conversational narrative has a sense of wonder and action. Nehru, who appears to be a humanist and naturalist, uses the impressionistic method of
narration which is devoid of action but which impresses us with revealing details and lyricism. The feeling that the prison cell is "teeming with life" is almost of a spiritual nature, though apparently it may seem to be a quality of humanism.

The structure of the Uttarpara Speech is curious, but it is impeccably fine. It is curious for Sri Aurobindo is handling two narratives here. The subject of the speech — it is Hindu religion — has been pre-arranged, Sri Aurobindo starts with the perfect pattern of speech, with a reference to the subject, and with the typical air of an inspired address. Then he makes an apparent digression and introduces the second narrative, the life-story, within the speech. He now becomes a narrator and a hero of an inspired life. When he ends the prison-tale, -- of course there are cases of return to the original speech-narrative like "You have all heard the name of the man" 74 -- he springs back to the speech proper, to the expository narrative, to the rhetoric of persuasion. It is impeccably fine, for the whole structure is born in the sweet heat of a splendid inspiration, and there is a perfect impression of
To Sri Aurobindo Short Story is a casual medium. He attempts to write four stories, but complete only two. Among the finished stories one is symbolic, The Golden Bird, and the other is a mystery called The Phantom Hour. Written in his early days at Pondicherry, The Phantom Hour gives us a clear idea about Sri Aurobindo's mastery of the form. It is sure proof that Sri Aurobindo, if he wished, could easily become a popular short story writer, very much like Poe.

If we analyse the plot of The Phantom Hour, we can well sense the ease that Sri Aurobindo feels with the form. The opening is effectively supplied by a catchy sentence.
'Sturge Maynard rose from the fireside and looked out on the blackish yellow blinding fog, that swathed London in the dense folds of its amplitude.'

The reader is instantly drawn to the next lines. The very opening sentence introduces the main character. The beginning is a little too long. But then it is natural. The writer has to introduce the setting of a story which is not rational. He has to reveal the conflict in the mind of his chief protagonist who has been reading a book dealing with occultism. It writes that there are common moments in the seers' life when "their whole surroundings" are "beseiged by a brilliant atmosphere coruscating with violent lightnings".

In the second para— it is short— Sri Aurobindo records the doubtful thoughts of Sturge. The thought is within quotation. In the third para, Sturge has a mixed feeling. He doubts, but he remembers his own occult experience in his childhood. This is how the beginning is formed. It is a preparation for both Sturge and the reader—
for the preparation experiencing the occult.

The middle comes in the fourth paragraph. The doubt is suddenly broken as Sturge begins to experience. The first visual is "violet flashes in the fog". A calm brain watches his excited nerves. Then comes the vision of a clock as a contrast with his real time-piece. Sri Aurobindo describes the difference between the two clocks with exciting details. The clock apparition vanishes at the end of the paragraph. The fifth para records the perplexed question in the mind of Sturge: where has he seen the clock? The sixth para startles us with another mysterious happening; the real clock strikes five followed by eight from the other. Sturge, helpless, doubts whether he is hypnotised or not. In the next para, we see that Sturge in trying to open his book at random, sees ghost pages relevant to what has just now happened. In this way, the writer runs his story convincingly and with a dramatic effectiveness. The suggestion is that -- and that is the theme -- Sturge is pre-warned by a super-human force, god or a daemon, about the imminent danger his beloved is going to face eight o'clock that night. But Sturge is guided -- and the lady too is pushed by that force --
Sri Aurobindo seems to be conscious about his structure. The action narrative is of first rate. The writer appears to be deliberate in giving words to the mouth of the characters. Most of the oral narratives are significant. One notices the grim dramatic irony in the speeches of the man who was to have harmed Renée. Sturge being happy with the dense fog, believes, 'God did things very cleverly sometimes.' The man is happy too, "No one will see, no one will hear. God with his fog blinded and deafened the world. You see it's He or it would not have been so perfectly arranged for me." One again goes back to Sturge, 'God's work, not his.' The repetition of the presence of a fog outside is obviously significant. The action takes place mostly indoor. Four of the five characters -- Imogen remains outside the central action; but she is cleverly presented to help the structure -- are involved in the late evening drama. Two of them -- the hero and the heroine -- know the dramatist, that is, the daemon within or without. They feel the hands that push them.
There is one dominant impression — the interference of an other-world force with human action. The romantic note and the happy ending are pleasing to the reader. But romance does not distract our attention from the central mood. Imogen is intended to relax the tension of Sturges. Moreover, it gives the omnipresent narrator a scope to arrange the set in Renee's room. The setting helps Sturges to come from behind the stranger. The drama sequence is fantastic, but it is not a digression. It comes when Sturges stands behind the man waiting for the phantom hour. This is something like a dramatised memory of Sturges's past life. For moments he sees a vision of his previous life. But the time past and the time present are linked up skilfully. Just a sentence does the work of harmonization —"But it was going to end very differently this time." Sturges feels or the daemon makes him feel certain that this time he will come out victorious. In the whole narrative, fantasy and reality are perfectly blended, and what makes it convincing or what produces a willing suspension of disbelief, is the dramatic presentation of the story.
In the last three paragraphs -- 19 lines -- there are plenty of questions in Sturge's mind regarding the things that have passed. In the last para Sturge tries to explain to his beloved the things. The last line is curious.

'And when he spoke of the daemon within, the woman understood better than the man.'

The line is a tremendous pressure upon the reader's mind. There is an important signification which is not easy to interpret. And yet the reader has to think and think, for much depends on that sentence. Why does she understand better? One believes that the girl felt the god-push from within more consciously than the man. One remembers the appeal in her eyes to kill. It is a frantic desire for living. How can she control herself even after seeing Sturge behind? And yet one cannot assert that this is a correct interpretation. It is a puzzle to the reader.
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3. p.7, Ibid.
4. p.8, Ibid.
5. p.8, Ibid.
6. p.5, Ibid.
7. p.7, Ibid.
8. p.7, Ibid.
10. p.7, Ibid.
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