CHAPTER VII

The Summing Up
The present study is now coming to an end. In 1374, Chaucer wrote, 'But the laste, as everything hath ende' (Troylus Ill 615). In due course of time this saying acquired the rank of a proverb. It experienced changes and now reads, All good things must come to an end. We also recollect another proverb, All is over but the shouting. Putting these two sayings together we realize that the study cannot really be called complete unless the arguments are summed up. The same idea is echoed in a facetious statement in Washington Post, (13-6-1978), The opera isn't over till the fat lady sings. This statement has found recognition as a proverb in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs. Accordingly, I will now present a brief recapitulation of what has gone before.

The first chapter deals briefly with stylistics, and with definition and origin and sources of proverbs. The study of style has occupied the minds of critics ever since the study of literature began. Books on style have been written by Walter Raleigh, Herbert Read, F.L. Lucas and others. Buffon and Swift gave definitions of style. The application of linguistic principles brought into being the discipline of stylistics. It is a new discipline. A brief resume of the subject was necessary because the present study is interdisciplinary in character.
Various definitions given by different authorities are then taken up and discussed. It has been found that no definition is fully satisfactory. The whole world of proverbs is too subtle, too elusive, too vital to be confined within the limits of a definition. Yet everyone recognizes a proverb when he comes across one. It is a matter of common knowledge that life is a dome of many coloured glass which stains the white radiance of eternity. Life has unfathomable complexity. Proverbs catch only a very small fragment of life. I have tried to differentiate a proverb from a maxim, an aphorism, an apothegm, an adage, and so on but have found that 'thin lines do their bounds divide', and a proverb is a proverb, just as a ballad is a ballad. The secret of the proverb eludes us. As Robert Frost says,

We dance round in a ring and suppose
But the secret sits in the middle and knows.

The third section of chapter I deals with origins. The ocean of English proverbs has received tributes from different sources. Most of the proverbs are undoubtedly creations of native speakers now forgotten. Some came from English authors. The Holy Bible gave a large number of proverbs. Latin writers, Greek writers, writers in other foreign languages - all contributed to the number of proverbs. Myths, fables, folk-lore, also gave their own contribution.

The next three chapters are devoted to close linguistic study of proverbs. The subjects of the three
chapters are phonology, syntax and semantics. A very large number of proverbs have been subjected to analysis. First we have phonology. Sound has to be studied thoroughly if we want to understand how a language works. We study the sounds used in speech - how they are produced and how they are detected. This part of linguistics is called phonology. We can speak of the phonology of a language, or of a dialect or of poetry and prose of a particular period. As Hockett says, 'we also speak of phonology as a level of language which is the expression or realization of language in its spoken form'.

After examining many proverbs from the phonological point of view, we take up syntactical study. Syntax provides the basic framework of a sentence. It plays a vital role in the distribution and assembling of information. It uses various devices such as word-order variations, arrangement of words in clauses and sentences and also in phrases. Word order is very important because of the functional load it bears. The contribution of syntax to the overall meaning of a sentence is no less significant. Several proverbs have been examined from the syntax point of view.

The next chapter is entitled Semantics. Semantics is specifically the study of linguistic meaning of words and sentences. A proverb, like any other utterance has a phonemic and grammatical structure and yields a definite meaning. Some proverbs are symbolical and contain a deeper
meaning apart from their literal meaning. In the present chapter several proverbs are analysed and their meanings explored. It is however clear that a proverb being essentially a homespun creation, easy to memorize and easy to use, cannot be loaded with a deep subtle intellectual or philosophical meaning. Archibald MacLeish says about a poem that 'a poem should not mean, but be'. We certainly cannot apply these words to a proverb. A proverb must have a meaning — a meaning easily grasped by the common people. When we analyse a proverb closely we find ourselves in disagreement with William Wordsworth who protests that 'we murder to dissect'.

Linguistic studies also show the close relationship that exists between a proverb and an idiom. As Turner says, 'Proverbs and nursery rhymes are emancipated utterances, freed from specific situations and given, if not permanent life, perpetual rebirth. They are an extended version of the idiom or emancipated partial utterance.' About idioms Katie Wales says, 'in linguistics, idioms most usually denote phrases or strings of words which are idiosyncratic (idiomatic) in that they are language-specific, not easily translated into another language and their meaning is not easily determined from the meanings of their consecutive parts. In English such phrases are characteristically fixed in COLOCATION, "opaque" in meaning and of restricted grammatical mobility. So bury and hatchet collocate in
Let's bury the hatchet or They buried the hatchet. These words are applicable to proverbs with equal force. Actually, the example given To bury the hatchet is listed among the proverbs in proverb dictionaries. So if we study the origin of idioms from the linguistic point of view we can learn something about the origin of proverbs.

In every language which is living, new idioms are being frequently created. Some may have a short life, some may get a permanent place. Same is the case with proverbs. Every speaker or writer sometimes writes pithy sentences, such as each one, teach one; east is east and west is west, but never the twain shall meet; they also serve who only stand and wait. All these may be called 'proverbial' but have not yet attained the status of a proverb. On the other hand, garbage in, garbage out, a recent creation has found a place in the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs and Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs. The fundamental fact is that people want to play with words occasionally and arrange and rearrange them in such a way as to produce new meanings. Such is the birth of idioms and proverbs. How many of such combinations survive is just a matter of chance. One factor however is, that the idiom or proverbial phrase should be memorable either because of an unusual structure or unusual set of circumstances.
As Hockett says,

As we go about the business of living, we constantly meet circumstances which are not exactly like anything in our previous experience. When we react via speech to such partially new circumstances, we may produce a phrase or an utterance which is understandable only because those who hear it are also confronted by the new circumstances. Alternatively, an individual may react to conventional circumstances with a bit of speech which is somewhat unconventional, once again being understood because of context. Given any such novelty, either of expression or of circumstances or of both, the event bestows special meaning on the linguistic form which is used, and the latter becomes idiomatic.

The above words are equally applicable to proverbs. At first someone might have used certain words in a nonce-form. In a particular context, linguistic and non-linguistic, this form might have gained wide popularity. It might have spread through space and time and in due course attained the status of a proverb. Thus, a special new meaning, just as in the case of an idiom, might have been assigned to a familiar linguistic form. The information available on this topic is, however, very much limited and a lot of research is still necessary before we can formulate a definite linguistic theory of proverb formation. Idiom formation is going on in other patterns also. Words naming people, places or things are assigned special meanings and hence become qualified to function as idioms. Abbreviations also acquire qualities of a word. When we say our QC is a pleasant man we understand that the person referred to is Officer Commanding. Nobody bothers to say International Monetary Fund - we all understand IMF. Similar is the case
with UNO, UNESCO, etc. None is sure of the origin of OK but we all understand it and use it. It has also been used to make verb Okay. The figures of speech also provide idioms. When we say, she married a lemon, lemon stands for a sour tempered woman and not for the fruit. Again, the idiomatic nature of slang is clear.

In the next chapter I have considered proverbs in relation to literature. It is shown here that the mere presence or absence of proverbs in a literary work should not be a test for determining the date of composition. It is a fact that in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proverbs were used on a large scale and thereafter the use of proverbs progressively declined. Still, proverbs cannot be used as a touchstone for deciding the date of composition, because the use or non-use of a proverb depends on the individual authors. Modern literature testifies to the decline and fall of the proverb empire. The present day writers take pride in being original and think of proverbs as trite cliches which have outlived their utility. Like Pirandello's six characters, the proverbs these days are always in search of an author. Modern authors who use proverbs at all are few and far between (See Appendix - I). The modern writer wants to be known as a proverb maker and not a proverb user.

The next chapter recounts my experiences in the use of proverbs in the class room. In addition to teach some
moral precepts through relevant proverbs, I have used them to teach grammar, paragraph and essay writing, dialogues, debates and group discussions. I have found adequate student response. I would like to recommend their use by teachers at large. Teachers of English as a second language will find them specially useful. Parallel proverbs from the mother tongue can be located and used for comparative study. Proverbs and therefore the ideas inherent in them are easy to memorize. Those who use the proverbs as starting point for literary creation will find that proverbs lead both to the 'literature of power' and to the 'literature of knowledge'. Even while I am teaching the text books, I use proverbs to clarify obscure points and also 'to point a moral and adorn a tale'.

As the study draws to a close I feel that it is 'something attempted, something done' (Longfellow). When we enter the world of proverbs we cannot but exclaim, that here is God's plenty. I have been able to deal with only some of the proverbs. Whatever be the state of paraeomiology in modern times, I have pored over many proverbs with pleasure and profit. Many proverbs have become to me, to use the words of Robert Southey, 'my never failing friends'. I have found that proverbs are useful and their present neglect is not justified. It is perhaps too much to hope that my study can win friends and influence people in favour of proverbs. Still I hope that at least some people will find them a
lifelong fountain of innocent and exalted pleasure. Proverb may not be able to open 'magic casements, opening on the fos of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn'. However, a large number of proverbs are unparalled for down to earth robust common sense. They can create a store of wisdom which can become a reservoir of strength. An anonymous writer has stated that 'Solomon made a book of proverbs, but a book of proverbs never made a Solomon'. We do not disagree. We would only say that proverbs add an everchanging seasoning to the standing dish of life.
REFERENCES

