Chapter - III

The Bridge-builders: Hiriyanna, Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy

Hiriyanna

Judging by the number and nature of his works, Hiriyanna is both a serious and a prolific writer. He stands today as the author of several translations, edited works, papers, full-length studies and reviews. Even a quick glance at them reveals the kind of scholar he was — a highly sensitive and intelligent mind sharing with his readers his vast knowledge of the various systems of Indian philosophy in which he was steeped to the core and his insights into Indian art through an inimitable style of writing. He had a singular gift of making the abstract concrete; the difficult simple by his fine perception and lucid style which defies any attempt at alteration. If ever it were true that a writer builds his sentences as carefully as a mason piling up his bricks it is so in the case of Hiriyanna who demonstrates his meticulous craftsmanship in page after page of his books. The remarkable restraint and perfect economy which he exercises over his language must be the envy of many a scholar. He might be discoursing on metaphysics — explicating the subtle nuances of the self and the soul or extolling aesthetic experience versus yogic state, but his style is concise, terse and as taut as a string of beads. Not a word is superfluous, nor can be substituted by any other. Indeed, such is the inevitability of his language
that Prof. H.H. Ingalls was persuaded to comment:

... this great scholar of whom it might be said that he never wrote a useless word.¹

His better known works like *Art Experience*, *Quest after Perfection*, *Sanskrit Studies* and *Indian Conception of Values* make one realize what deep learning in Indian philosophy, aesthetics and Sanskrit Poetics apart from his own ideal sensibilities and appetencies, wisdom and experience have gone into their making. His interpretation of Art seems to hold out to mortal men "sick with desire" visions of immortality. It could be said about his *Art Experience* that it is a work which tries to "gather" its readers "into the artifice of eternity." It is immensely valuable not merely for the author's views on Indian Aesthetics, Art Experience, Art and Morality, Art Contemplation and Sanskrit Poetics but also for the aesthetic experience it generates in us. It is also particularly welcome considering the meagre literature we have on aesthetics. Paying a tribute to this little masterpiece in art criticism, Dr. Raghavan, the noted Sanskrit scholar, remarks:

While it is generally true that whatever this mitabhashi wrote was valuable, it is

¹ Prof. H.H. Ingalls in *The Journal of American Oriental* reproduced on the blurb, *Art Experience* (Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore, 1954). All subsequent references to *Art Experience* are to this edition only and will be made in the body of the text itself.
all the more valuable in the present case, as we have so little of literature on Indian aesthetics.²

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Hiriyanna, Indian aesthetics is now gaining increasing attention and respect at home and abroad.

There is about Art Experience an engaging quality that makes us approach it with an amazing degree of surrender. The author's own involvement makes us participants in his experiences and we follow him over the twists and turns of his metaphysical quests for perfection. Able to sustain our interest at the highest possible level throughout he exemplifies at every step how even philosophy can be transmuted into art. Of course, he talks of philosophy mainly in relation to art but there was every risk of his losing himself in endless abstraction, for his subject was fraught with such temptations. But he is wary of the pitfalls he is exposed to and so constantly keeps the subject in his view, never letting it go out of his hand.

It is needless to point out how art has over the ages inspired innumerable men and women to write and speak adoringly of it, at times almost bordering on romantic adulation. Some like Tolstoy have invested it with a moral

² Dr. Raghavan in The Hindu, reproduced on the blurb, Art Experience.
function. One has in mind such remarks as: "Art must remove violence; only art can do it" and "... the highest purpose of art is to make people good by choice." Back home we have the poet Tagore attributing all art and all civilization to man's "surplus energy," (that has attracted much controversy, though). But what characterizes Hiriyanann's art criticism is its sustained effort to uphold the "transcendental character" of art without ignoring at the same time to subject it to rigorous aesthetic criteria. His Art Experience serves as sufficient proof in this regard. Provoked by Max Muller's charge that "the idea of the beautiful in Nature did not exist in the Hindu mind" (p. 1) he sets out in his opening essay on "Indian Aesthetics-1" to indicate "the nature of the advance made by the Indians in one bye-path of philosophy, viz., aesthetics or the inquiry into the character of beauty in Nature as well as in art." (p. 1) Recognizing a kinship between ethics and aesthetics he wonders whether it is "probable that a people who devoted so much attention to one of them, altogether neglected the other." (p. 2) "Is it conceivable that they who showed special power in the grasp of the good did not even stumble upon the kindred conception of the beautiful?" (p. 2) he asks. However, we need not fortunately have to end up with "vague surmises" for his own repeated references to the parallels drawn from art in Sanskrit philosophical works "imply that the close, relation of the beautiful to the good and the true was not all unknown to ancient India". (p. 2)
(Even if it were, Tagore at least seems to more than make up for this "deficiency" in his most moving and beautiful statement: "In the union of the Good and the Beautiful, of Vishnu and Lakshmi, is true perfection. This is the underlying idea of all cultural patterns.") But more "direct evidence" in the numerous works in Sanskrit on poetics furnishes "adequate data for constructing a theory of fine art in general." (p. 2) He traces the history of aesthetics and observes that the process of its evolution followed closely that of philosophy. The theory of Art itself in India was "moulded" by philosophical speculations, we gather. There was thus an intrinsic relation between the two, both aiming at influencing life in the ultimate analysis. This inter-relatedness of art and philosophy makes it obligatory on his part to first examine the earliest philosophy of India in a bid to assess its far-reaching effect on art itself. Hence he is justified in exploring the philosophical outlook of the people who gave a strong metaphysical base to art. The history of Indian philosophy beginning with the "pluralistic explanation" of the universe and culminating in "the Atman doctrine" of the Upanishads with its revolutionizing concept of "Jivanmukti" led to the rise of similar features in Indian art. Accordingly the pracina school of writers insisting on the "outward expression of poetry" namely sabda (word)

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and *artha* (sense) rarely alluded to the central essence of poetry. While on the other hand the *navina* school of critics concentrated on the implicit meaning which forms the real essence of poetry. With the appearance of Dhvanyaloka on the scene, "it is as though we are now in possession of the right key to the understanding of all poetry." (p. 6) Here we find a theory of art which exactly corresponds to the doctrine of *atman*. ("Rasa is the *atman* of poetry")

Pointing out the indispensability of *Rasa* to artistic excellence Hiriyanna explains how this was responsible for the growth of several theories of *rasa* in course of time with many systems of philosophy applying their own fundamental principles to its interpretation. He devotes a major part of the essay to an elucidation of these theories according to two of the chief systems, namely, Vedanta and Sankhya. Taking up Vedanta first he brings in the concept of *Ananda* to show how this attribute of Brahman could hold a "clue to the whole aesthetic theory of the Vedanta". (p. 8) He admits of a "bewildering number" of theories of the beautiful in any history of aesthetics. But what distinguishes the Vedantic conception as he rightly perceives is its lofty ideal that neither "symmetry" nor "novelty" nor something else constitutes "true" beauty because all this is only its outward and visible symbol perceivable by the sense while perfect beauty which is identical with the ultimate reality is disclosed only to the "inward eye" of the knower. "True beauty is neither expressible in words
nor knowable objectively: it can only be realized" (p. 9) he concludes.

The penetrating analysis he makes of the attitudes on the part of the saint and the artist in their endeavour to rise above "avidya-kama-karma" and the "ego-centric predicament" reveal his grounding in Vedanta and his knowledge of Sankara, necessary pre-requisites at least for an Indian art-critic operating in the Indian milieu. The distinctions he makes between the two are a sample of his own analytical powers at their best.

... the artistic attitude is one of disinterested contemplation but not of true enlightenment while the attitude of the saint is one of true enlightenment and disinterestedness ... (p. 10)

However, there are points of similarities as well. The one important characteristic common to both attitudes is "unselfishness". The artist's responsibility as Hiriyanna sees it is to induce in us an attitude of detachment by the "ideal creations" of his art which "cannot awaken desire" and so "the ordinary state of tension caused by selfish desires" is relaxed and joy ensues "as a matter of course". Wishing to impart a realistic touch to this apparent idealization Hiriyanna talks of the specific services art can render man in his realization of the true:
The various devices of art such as rhythm, symmetry, etc., are intended to help this concentration and successfully maintain it. They also serve another important purpose, viz., securing unity to the subject portrayed. (p. 10)

Such a concretization of the virtues of art is welcome, is even necessarily in a book which by and large devotes itself to an exaltation of its theme, namely "art experience", perhaps the reason why the reader too accepts unconditionally the author's comparison of a person appreciating art with a jivanmukta, for not merely has such a view the sanction of age-old tradition but also because Hiriyanna himself substantiates it with abundant argument and analogy. What further dispels any notion that this could be a romantic or fanciful indulgence is the fact that the author restores the balance by himself taking note of the imperfections of art. In his view what a man experiences while appreciating art is not moksha but a "foretaste" of moksha because it is "transient" not being based on perfect knowledge.

His detailed and elaborate examination of the Sankhya view of art deserves mention for the impressive way in which he formulates and crystallizes the essential differences between it and the Vedantic view. While the one is optimistic and idealistic, the other is pessimistic and realistic. Yet they are not wholly irreconcilable. The
aim of art according to both "is to induce a mood of detachment." (p. 15) In the concluding paragraph of the essay he offers an interesting and a very valid explanation of his purpose in selecting a subject "which may appear to some as rather out of the way." (p. 16) Observing the lacunae in present-day research which confines itself predominantly to "linguistic, historical and similar aspects of oriental learning" (p. 16) he emphasizes the need for the study of its other aspects "which cannot be regarded as either less instructive or less interesting". (p. 16) With the concern of a dedicated teacher and critic he makes it imperative for posterity "not only to carry research further in the departments already worked but also to widen considerably the sphere of research itself." (p. 16) Not making any tall claims for himself he submits very modestly that what he has attempted in this paper "does not profess to be more than a first and a very imperfect sketch of the subject" (p. 16) but entertains the hope that it is sufficient to indicate "what vast fields of ancient Indian learning lie unexplored." (p. 16) It is appreciable that Harlyanna not merely "indicates" their presence but offers us intimate glimpses of this vast, "unexplored" territory.

The following essay, "what to expect of poetry?" gives rare insights into the nature and function of poetry as well as the man behind it. Refering to the Indian conception of a poet as a seer or kavi, one who sees and
Hiriyanna clears up certain misconceptions relating to his function, prompted by the view that a poet's "foremost aim is not to invent anything new but to represent life as it is" (p. 17) or "to hold the mirror up to nature" (p. 17). He points out the fallacy inherent in such a naive conception and remarks that a poet ought rather to create new situations and not rest content with merely copying Nature or Life. The commonly held view of the poet as a creator or maker in Sanskrit poetics should be sufficient to warrant his conclusion. From the poet he passes on to the reader of poetry whom Sanskrit literature has immortalized as a sahrdaya — "one of similar heart" or one possessing a "poetic heart" which is described as the most important qualification in a reader of poetry. Hiriyanna informs us that this identity of temperament between the two is assumed throughout Sanskrit poetics and that the process of appreciating poetry is looked upon as essentially the same as producing it, which accounts for similar terms used to describe the poet and the reader of poetry in Sanskrit. Of course, Hiriyanna sees nothing very "novel" in this kinship, his "catholicity of scholarship" and absence of cultural arrogance ready to recognize similar trends elsewhere but is incisive enough to realize that "it receives particular emphasis in Indian works." (p.18) The humility he exhibits on several occasions is well worth emulation. But as regards poetic appreciation he seems to have entertained no democratic illusions. He affirms, at
the cost of sounding elitistic that the likemindedness
between the poet and the reader "means no doubt a certain
restriction of the circle of complete readers of poetry;
but there seems to be a good deal of truth in the restriction,
for there is no warrant for assuming that the aesthetic sense
is universal". (p. 18)

Here as elsewhere he harps on the central idea of
transcendence as the key to aesthetic delight. The highest
function of the poet as he sees it, is not simply to rise
to an impersonal mood himself but to communicate the same
to us. In so doing the poet "metamorphoses" us instantly
in the manner of an alchemist's herb. Hiriyanna pays his
tribute to the poet by acknowledging his debt to him — by
describing him as man's "supreme benefactor" in so far as
he can pass on to us not his inspiration but the poetic
experience itself — its result. This wholly unique expe-
rience is called rasa in Sanskrit and according to Hiriyanna
as to our ancients, it is for attaining this that we "almost
instinctively go to poetry." (p. 21) That is the answer he
provides to the question he poses before himself at the
beginning: "What have we to expect of poetry?" Giving a
uniquely Indian interpretation of poetry Hiriyanna claims
for it the status of being "first and foremost" a "means of
securing a spell of detachment from common life" (p. 21)
for which we turn to it "and not for any lessons or
'criticism of life' it may contain". (p. 21) Contrary to
Arnold's oft-quoted definition this approach certainly seems more spiritual and elevating. Hiriyanna does not impetuously dismiss the value of such less sonorous poetry might have for us. But in his estimation a particular attitude represented by poetry is not less important than the results which follow from it. In other words the experience itself can be more valuable than the good that results from it. That he was a practical philosopher who viewed art and philosophy constantly in relation to life is borne out by his affirmation that the time we devote to the reading of poetry is itself a part of our life—an end in itself—not a means to something else. A useful hint to those who tend to divorce literature from life. 'That is the underlying conception of rasa'. In fact, so self-satisfying is this rasanubhava that he goes so far as to prefer it "to the very writing of poetry." Very appropriately he quotes a Sanskrit verse to reinforce his statement:

If you are not conversant with the best of poets — the kings among them — how can you purpose to write poetry? and, if you are, why should you? (p. 21)

Such an apt and forceful conclusion is in itself a sample of Hiriyanna's literary art. The timing of the quotation is such that even though the words are a mere reproduction they have a touch of originality about them. His next essay, "Art Contemplation", is characteristically brief but rich in insights. He sets at nought certain misapprehensions about art contemplation, chief of them being that it is
"passive". Those who believe that "beauty is given ready-made in a work of art" (p. 22) and that they have "merely" to "yield" themselves to its influence to derive delight from it are not aware of the intellectual element involved in it. Art contemplation is a very cerebral activity, Hiriyanna seems to think but unfortunately even writers of standing in the field of art criticism, he says, seem to share the naive view of "uninstructed laymen" that pleasures from the appreciation of art or of Nature can be secured with "very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder." (p. 22) As a consequence, "what is overlooked... is the essentially creative character of art." (p. 22) If the artist needs constructive power to idealize the given theme, the spectator on his part has to reconstruct the same and "verify it by his own heart" in order to make it "actual" for himself:

... the beautiful as a value needs to be striven for and achieved (अधिष्ठात्), no matter whether one reaches it as an artist or as a spectator. (p. 23)

The passage makes it clear that the pursuit of beauty is a sadhana requiring a lot more than unquestioning submission to it as commonly believed. "Art valuation is an active process" (p. 24) he affirms and explains how the word "appreciation" itself implied activity. It is therefore natural that this view of art contemplation "entirely transforms the idea of the aesthetic end." (p. 23) More
delight is no longer the end — but the "totality of experience." That is the value of art for us. The feeling of pleasure is no doubt there but only as an aspect of that total experience. Hence it is "wrong" to think that "art exists for our delectation". (p. 24) If it did, some at all events would not attach much importance to it, believes the author. His own references to art are unmistakably free of any sensuality. His attitude is that of a devotee towards his god — profoundly religious and spiritual. To a people glibly mouthing that tortured line of Keats, "a thing of beauty is a joy forever", we have here a writer appealing to turn to art not primarily for pleasure but more importantly for "a unique attitude of mind" which signifies a "complete disinterestedness" and a "sympathetic insight into the whole situation depicted by the artist," (p. 24) justifying the comparison between artistic experience and the ideal state of the jivanmukta.

However, it is a matter of gratification that Hiriyanna nowhere gives the impression of sermonizing from any mountain top. His moral and metaphysical claims do not blind him to artistic claims. No doubt he is aware of the several uses to which art is put in "various spheres" of life. He gives the example of its being "used to further the interests of religion in all countries and in all ages" (p. 24) and assumes that it may have "other purposes" also. But it is interesting how the artist in him rebels against these
"other purposes", for however excellent such purposes may in themselves be, "they are external to art and possess no aesthetic value". (p. 24) (Italics mine) For example 'a poem that is purely didactic, we may still value it for its usefulness but not as art". (p. 24) It must be "integral" and "self-sufficing". In a word an artist must know where art begins and where morality ends. Hariyanna's own approach displays a splendid balance between art and morality. He is now with art, now with morality which does not mean that he keeps shifting his allegiance but only suggests that he understands them and represents them both in their totality. In other words it is a comprehensive view of art we get in his works. Indeed, what gives perspective to his evaluation is the fact that while he is fully aware of the joy and bliss art can bring to man he is at the same time conscious of its limitations which are not present in the ideal state but which can however be overcome with enlightenment, with the result art and morality become "alternating phases of the same ideal."
This is the theme of his subsequent essays in the Volume. What he chiefly sets out to do in these pages is to establish the impersonal nature of art. Again and Again he harps on the idea of disinterested contemplation of art which alone could result in disinterested joy. In fact, the very secret of aesthetic delight, he tells us, lies in transcending of our self-consciousness, a migrating from our narrow self. Inspite of all these possibilities, art
suffers from certain limitations such as transcendence. However, wisdom consists not in denying it but coming to terms with it, as seems to suggest. Unlike the ideal state which is permanent, art experience does not endure long, depending as it does on an "external stimulus which may pass sooner or later. The experience itself originates from the contemplation not of a real but an imaginative or a fictitious situation created by the artist. Besides, man might be so enamoured of art that he might tend to grow forgetful or negligent of his obligations to fellow-men. Pennyson's Palace of Art is an example, says Hiriyanna. Thus when we are just on the threshold of modifying our attitude toward art, he comes out with an open defence of it:

That aesthetic contemplation can lead to the same kind of exalted experience as that of the ideal state, without all the arduous discipline — moral as well as intellectual — required for the latter, may appear to be an excellence of it. (r. 28)

But even at this stage he is not dogmatic about it. A mixture of confidence and hesitation marks his attitude: "In a sense, no doubt it is." Because there is still a lurking, nagging feeling that art experience is "woefully fugitive". But these limitations do not affect his conclusion that art is "much more than a means to secure for man a temporary escape from the imperfections of common life; it is an 'intimation' to him of the possibility
Art experience is well adapted to arouse our interest in the ideal state by giving us a foretaste of it, and thus to serve as a powerful incentive to the pursuit of that state. By provisionally fulfilling the need felt by man for restful joy, art experience may impel him to do his utmost to secure such joy finally. (p. 28)

Little surprise then if in the eyes of an old Indian art critic whom Hiriyanna quotes, the bliss of moksha which the yogin has to strain himself for long to win, is no match for aesthetic bliss. There is an echo of many of these ideas in the essay 'Art Experience-2' in the sense that we find allusions to what has already been dealt with, namely, impersonality of art, disinterested contemplation leading to disinterested joy, art evaluation as very much an active process despite the use of the word 'contemplative', the attainment of an enjoyable experience as the aim of a sahrdaya and not mere pleasure, etc, etc. But what still makes the essay an illuminating experience for the reader is the author's sensitive and incisive handling of the theory of rasa. Briefly alluding to its origin and formal exposition in 9th cent. A.D. he makes a full-length study of the various aspects of poetry that came under the purview of the Rasa school — like, the poetic aim, the suitability of themes, the ideal reader of poetry, the critical process, auditya as an integral
clement of rasa, absorption in a theme, feeling, transcendence, etc. Hriyanna's powers of discrimination are more then evident in his detailed analysis of the two types or order of poetry — one dealing with "emotional situations" in life and the other dealing with the other situations in life or with objects of external nature. He sums up the latter as relatively inferior poetry. It is no value judgment, for he at once addresses himself to an objective investigation of the various causes that contribute to the superiority of the former — the chief of them being the poet's expression not to his own feeling as commonly misunderstood but his reaction to the objective scene before him; the actualization of the situation by the poet, the transfiguration of it (alaukika) involving the reader's absorption and enabling him to transcend "the tensions of ordinary life" and rise "above the duality of pain and pleasure" in order to experience "pure joy". To put it in a nutshell, we have arrived at a stage in poetry when "it takes two to make a poem". This seminal discovery "that there is an order of poetry which requires a deeper form of appreciation and yields a higher kind of aesthetic experience than is ordinarily acknowledged" (p. 42) is, Hriyanna claims, "one of the chief contributions of India to the general philosophy of art." (p. 42) And to have brought it to our attention so forcefully and effectively is Hriyanna's chief merit in this book.

His essay "Indian Aesthetics-2" is a sequel to
"Indian Aesthetics-1" in so far as it treats of art experience as identifiable with the ultimate goal of life and also in its insistence on spontaneous and complete selflessness or detachment in the spectator as the salient feature of all art experience. But the notable difference is that Hiriyanna modifies some of his earlier statements on beauty and the relationship between aesthetics and philosophy. We recall how in his first essay he had reacted to Max Mueller's charge that Indians were somewhat indifferent to beauty as rather unjustifiable and secondly that the history of aesthetics had followed the course of general philosophy. But here we have Hiriyanna himself admitting to a general neglect of beauty among ancient Indians on grounds that "its pursuit cannot directly minister to the attainment of the final goal of life" (p. 43) and for that matter 'its pursuit might even tend to lead man away from that goal." (p. 43) This runs the risk of being dubbed a contradiction. But Hiriyanna carefully makes the distinction that it is beauty in art that Indian philosophers did not trouble themselves with and not beauty in nature. As for the second point dealing with the kinship between aesthetics and philosophy, he observes that in the West aesthetics is "a regular part of philosophy" while in India even though the "intrinsic relation" between the two is not denied the study of aesthetics is carried on by a distinct class of thinkers — alamkārikas, as they are called or literary critics — who are not, generally speaking, professional philosophers.
His initial reaction to this separation of aesthetic problems from those of general philosophy is that it is not only "strange" but also "defective". However, on reflection he affirms it is not so and even believes that far from being a defect it has "many positive advantages". One of them is "it has thereby been able to get rid of the constraint which particular types of metaphysical thought may impose upon it" (p. 43). Thus what we encounter in these rejoinders ("Art Experience" -2 and "Aesthetic Experience" -2) to early essays is a sense of progression in thought, a definite movement upwards. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that this is his final opinion of art's relationship to morality. (Incidentally, the only possible objection one could raise in these pages is to the author's rather too liberal use of the word 'morality', which somehow does not seem to fit into the essentially metaphysical framework of Indian philosophy. Its specific association with Christianity and the predominant Western emphasis on it which makes it look odd in this context is the only jarring note here). His attitude in this essay is ambivalent which is evidenced by his comment that though this might not be a "defect" at all to some who maintain, art is "ethically neutral", in reality "art cannot be altogether divorced from morality", (p. 52) for if it did "it ceases to be a human value". (p. 51) No one is more aware of the possible dangers that befall art when it is consigned to the ivory-tower than Hariyanna himself. He sees the motive for establishing a close
alliance between art and religion in all countries and in all times as one of "saving art from possible degeneration by its separation from morality." (p. 52) However, true artist as he is, he is aware of the confines of art and so takes care not to let morality or anything else encroach upon its province.

The truth underlying it is that art has nothing directly to do with morality.

It should influence character indirectly;

(p. 52)

So what is "discountenanced" here is only direct instruction and not the kinship itself.

Otherwise, art not only ceases to exert any moral influence; it may turn out in the end to be a means of corrupting character and degrading ideals. (p. 54)

He rightly fears that art as it is commonly pursued has a tendency to "degenerate into mere pleasure-seeking — emphasizing, as the hedonist does, the element of joy in artistic experience to the neglect of that of impersonality.

It then becomes reduced to epicureanism and so far unsocial. (p. 57). As a result it becomes "self-centred" leading to the "vulgar view" that it is "a mere means to pleasure."

This is probably the reason why so much of art, in actual practice, is made to lean upon religion, in Hiriyanna's opinion. In fact, the genesis of both art and religion he notes in his essay on "Art and Morality" is motivated by common ideals; a sense of dissatisfaction with the
existing state of things. Both tend to rectify that state in a uniquely individualistic way. Their aim is the same — "the culture of the emotions." Both involve "a criticism of life as it is commonly led but neither advocates an abandonment of life's activities; not an "extinguishment of interests" but an "expansion" of them; not a "repression" of natural impulses but a "refinement" of them. The objective of both is to make man unselfish and raise him above all strife. "Here we see the need for art and morality having a metaphysical foundation." (p. 59) This is the most important thing in Indian Art and Poetics. The similarity between the aesthetic and the moral attitudes now impels Hiriyanna to accept art as "a mode of true spiritual experience" without the limitations referred to earlier. With enlightenment, man can substitute the actual world for the imaginary one and transform the contemplation of even a fictitious situation into a "mystical contemplation of nature" and thus experience impersonal joy even after the actual experience. Further, the "lapse" from it (alluded to before) will be into the right type of unselfish attitude and not to routine life. "In fact, it is no lapse at all." (p. 60)

Hiriyanna's achievement in Art Experience consists in his showing eloquently in a series of stimulating essays that "... the highest form of art is that which can transform nature itself into its theme." (p. 60) Reading the book is an aesthetic experience and to that extent Hiriyanna seems to
have literally demonstrated what "art experience" could mean to a sensitive and well guided reader. The entire critical process which he has himself described in an extraordinarily unforgettable manner on page 40 of the second of his essays on "Art Experience," beginning from hṛdaya-samvāda to tanmayabhāvana to rasanubhāva is in operation here. That is the measure of the success of this classic of a book.

Hiriyanna's preoccupation with art in Quest after Perfection⁴ is not as pronounced as in his other book, Art Experience. A quick glance at the table of contents indicates the nature of the work: "The Indian Conception of Values", "The Message of Indian Philosophy", "Philosophy of Values", "The Quest after Perfection", "Sankara's Conception of Ultimate Value" etc. sufficient to warrant his assertion that "Indian philosophy is essentially a philosophy of values" (p. 21) His concern is primarily with presenting the many-sidedness of Indian thought and stating the common features of the ideal of life. Recognizing self-perfection as the ultimate purpose of man he devotes the major part of his work to showing how man gathers the spiritual momentum needed for transcending the empirical plane of reality and attaining an abiding peace,

⁴ M. Hiriyanna, The Quest after Perfection (Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore, 1952). All subsequent references are to this edition only and will be made in the body of the text itself.
"a stable satisfaction". If according to the Advaita this constitutes the criterion by which it conduct is to be judged, it could be said by extension that it forms the criterion by which all art too is to be judged. In fact, that is the message of Hiriyanna's art-criticism as one understands.

Hiriyanna's chief concern in the present volume, to repeat, is of course with man's quest after perfection in philosophical terms. The concept of renunciation, service and meditation — as aids to man in his search for the fulfilment of his highest being is treated in depth with insight and inwardness. But the philosopher in Hiriyanna has not fortunately stifled the artist in him. Rather they supplement each other. He is aware, supremely aware of the function of art in helping man realize the ideal. Brief though his references to art be in this book he succeeds in winning the same pride of place for art as for yoga. What can be more encouraging than his view, "... quite apart from its theme, art by virtue of its form as art can be of use to the spiritual aspirant. (p. 33) (italics mine) He has therefore very legitimately included the beautiful in his discussion of the Values of the good and the true. He contrasts the rather "strange" neglect of the beautiful among Indian philosophers with the wide recognition accorded to it in the West. But to show that this is not the ultimate impression one ought to carry of
Indian attitude towards beauty he places side by side this "over-puritanical view of art" and the outlook of other groups of thinkers, "neither less ancient nor less influential" who explored the nature of art and pointed out its exalted character. So the conservative view of art need not give rise to the misgiving that beauty was not felt at all by Indians. In fact, Hiriyanna 'ably tackles this question on the very opening page of his Art Experience. In the Quest he draws our attention to the existence of a group of people in ancient India called alamkarikas or writers on poetics who expounded a general theory of art though they only spoke of poetry and the drama. He not merely sets down three different views of art ranging from the puritanical to the epicurean to the philosophical but also analyzes the distinguishing features of each of the three stages. If the puritan did not estimate art as one of the higher values of life, the hedonist reduced it to only kama or sensual pleasure in disguise. But understandably neither of the two in Hiriyanna's opinion is the final verdict of the Indian mind on art, for he finds it "profoundly transformed" by another and somewhat later school of thinkers who represent it as a means of experiencing rasa and at the same time "the ineffable peace of moksha". He brings in an old saying to reinforce his argument: "it is only the fortunate that can taste rasa, for it is so much like yogic experience" (p. 32)
ancient interpretations have a ring of personal conviction around them. 
He idealizes art in the same memorable manner as in Art Experience and some of the lines describing the impersonal nature of art are even haunting. One might consider for instance his graphic descriptions bracketing art with "niskama-karma" or aphoristic statements like "devotion to the beautiful is not less unselfish than devotion to the good" (p. 33) or poetic description of art not as a "mere sanctuary of escape from the troubles of life" but an "intimation" to man of the possibility of realizing the ideal. So is his allusion to the "supreme aesthetic mo\text{"}ntt when man grows completely unselfish and conscious of nothing but the work of art before him he attains the status of what the yogins term "savikalpaka-
samadhi", a passage which can compete with Wordsworth's famous 'serene and blessed mood' in its poetic intensity. Like a poet going into raptures over his vision of the beautiful and praising it variously we have Hiriyanna appreciating the different facets of art in diverse ways. If at one moment he characterizes art as the "lay man's yoga", at another he eulogizes it as the sample or pattern of moksha. But if these descriptions do not smack of sentimentality, it is because Hiriyanna analyzes the factors that elicit his admiration. Hence, art is "lay man's yoga" because "the spell which it casts on one's mind is so complete." (p. 33) It is the sample or pattern of moksha because "by the attitude of detachment which it evoke.., it
gives man a foretaste, albeit momentary, of supreme peace which, according to all the Indian systems, should be the aim of man to secure" (p. 33) A concept like rasanubhava swayed his mind powerfully but could elicit praise from him only after he had satisfied himself with its efficacy to lift man above the mundane level of existence. Besides being keenly alive to the different stages of the evolution of a concept he had the capacity to probe the different forms and different shades it assumed at different periods in the manner of a scientist. For instance he notes that the idea of rasanubhava as the aesthetic aim is no doubt very old — as is evidenced by the famous statement in the Taittiriya Upanishad (Rasovai Sah) but what follows is not a passive acceptance of the ancient ideal but a subtle distinction between the earlier view of rasanubhava as its own justification and the later view that relates it to the highest ideal of man. Thus the strength of Hiriyanna's writing emanates from his power to rationalize his response to age-old values and ideals. Even the affinity between religion and art which is an established fact in India receives a fresh interpretation at his hands. He does not imply art's subordination through its subject-matter, for that would only amount to an exploitation of art for the purpose of making religion and philosophy more attractive, but rather to uphold the claim made by Bharata and others that no subject is beyond the reach of art and all to impress that even apart from its thematic value art is useful.
to man in his spiritual concerns simply as art. But he does not develop the idea on the lines he sets down in Art Experience. For the present he is content merely to represent the old Indian view which holds all the three values of truth, beauty and goodness as subsidiary to moksha. Indeed, he finds it permissible to pursue these values for their own sake, for they are unlike the other values, free from every taint of self-interest. But steeped as he is in tradition with an unshakable faith in man's ultimate liberation as the summon bonum of life he can accord none of them the status of a supreme or absolute value — for the simple reason none of them is able to take us finally beyond the conflicts and perplexities of life. At best they can only serve as "handmaids to moksha."

While a lesser man with a lukewarm interest in metaphysics writing on art might have reduced his writing to propaganda pleading with art lovers to pursue art for art's sake here is Hiriyanna whose strong philosophical base and profoundly religious sensibility help him in maintaining a constant equilibrium between art and metaphysics. It must be reiterated that it is this balanced view that makes his art-criticism particularly relevant for us. The crux of his message seems to lie in the observation: art-experience is transient, but it might leave its wholesome influence behind.

The characteristic Indian trait of assessing the
prayojana and purucartha of anything that has a bearing on life is manifested in Hiriyanna's consistent endeavour to depict art as an aid to man in his realization of the ideal. Such an austere and lofty conception is no doubt bound to preclude all romantic and glamorous pictures of art as far as Hiriyanna is concerned. They are alien to his writing. As a matter of fact he himself rejects any "exclusive devotion" to the pursuit of beauty on grounds it "does not satisfy all the needs and aspirations of the human heart." (p. 51) But as long as art is not divorced from society there is hope yet for mankind. Being "analogous" to the ideal art might carry us to the "threshold" of this ideal as it were; offer us a "glimpse" and inspire us with a desire for attaining it. This symbolizes the eternal "quest" Hiriyanna is after in his writings.

In his Indian Conception of Values he gives us an idea of the values of life as conceived in ancient India. Noting at the outset the importance of values in life in general and the recognition accorded to them by Indian thinkers all along he permits himself to describe Indian philosophy as essentially "a philosophy of values". The most important word used in this connection by him is "pramana" derived, as he explains, from the root "ma" which means "to measure" and signifies "that by which we measure" or "the means of

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5 M. Hiriyanna, Indian Conception of Values (Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore, 1975). All subsequent references are to this edition only and will be made in the body of the text itself.
measurement." In definition of pramana, a "proximate means to right or valid knowledge" (prama) followed by a detailed analysis of its scope and function is the theme of the book. However, from the point of art-criticism, the last section dealing with Aesthetic Value is more important than others as Hiriyanna dwells on the relation of aesthetic experience to the highest value of moksha. There is of course, an echo of much of what he says in Art Experience about transcendence, disinterested contemplation, ideal awakening, essence of poetry, shradhyatva, and so on, but his perceptive comments on Dhyani add a depth to the essay, for in investigating a "formulation of a theory of meaning," (p. 339) he sheds new light on the nature of art. The truth to be apprehended here is that the ultimate content of poetry baffles direct expression and accordingly Hiriyanna values suggestion "not as a mere trick or style but as the sole means of communicating what is otherwise incommunicable" The theory itself which is characteristically Indian" and of great interest "may remind one of the Vedantic view of Brahman which words and thoughts, as it is said, alike fail to grasp."

Art as Hiriyanna conceives it can never be a 'luxury';

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
it is a "discipline", "as natural as virtuous conduct is."

It is true "the very essence of art is in raising the vision from the empirical to the ideal" (p. 343) but "a work of art should not have a moral aim, but must necessarily have a moral view pervading it ..." (p. 348) It is thus Hiriyanna provides a handle by which to judge his own writing. His works influence us without our knowing that we are being so influenced. The author himself does not knowingly aim at it. He knows his vocation.

If in Western literary criticism we admire an Eliot for bringing poetry closer to science with his allusions to the "cerebral cortex", the "nervous system", the "digestive tract" and the "alimentary canal" here is Hiriyanna who offers psychological reasons for preferring "emotional situations with all their appurtenances" (p. 327) in art with a scientific exactness:

One reason for preferring emotion to other themes in art is that it is, by its very nature, a specially complex process, involving sensory, affective and conative factors (p. 327)

If the foregoing pages emphasize Hiriyanna's predominant contribution to aesthetics, no less significant is his service to the cause of Sanskrit studies, we realize. In his book Sanskrit Studies9, he reviews not merely Sanskrit

9 M. Hiriyanna, Sanskrit Studies (Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore, 1954). All subsequent references are to this edition only and will be made in the body of the text itself.
poetry in a historical retrospect but also analyses individual works like Vasavadatta, Meghasandesa, Malati-Madhava and Uttara-Ramacarita. The last essay in the volume dealing with the study of Sanskrit is particularly relevant to the Indian student of literature as it contains many a useful tip on how to specialize in a given field of study which includes among other things a reliance on independent investigation, comparative approach and critical attitude which alone can impart a truly scientific aspect to investigation.

The book is a collection of articles published in various journals over a period of nearly three decades from 1913 to 1939. The title is most apt for a book which not merely includes highly stimulating essays on Sanskrit poetry and drama along with two short but incisive reviews of books written by A.B. Keith on Sanskrit drama and the history of Sanskrit literature, but also makes a significant contribution to the advancement of Sanskrit studies in the academic circles of the young by impressing upon them the imperative- ness of learning Sanskrit language and literature. Furthering the cause of Sanskrit is to Hariyanna an "altruistic activity" — a service to the country, for by devoting adequate attention to Sanskrit poetry, one may do to it "what is already being done by scholars for ancient Indian painting and sculpture". (p. 56) He is aware of our debt to the European Sanskritist who "opened our eyes to the possibilities of useful study outside the beaten tracks of
traditional scholarship." (p. 55) But he observes that "western scholars have hitherto neglected to deal with the artistic side of Sanskrit literature or have assumed its value to be too slight to be worth their trouble." (p. 55) While he finds some excuse for the European neglect of this phase of Sanskrit study, considering their unfamiliarity with Indian conditions and the full significance of Indian mythology which figures so prominently in Sanskrit poetry, he sees none in the case of Indians who despite their capacity for appreciating Indian sentiments and ideals, have chosen to be indifferent to it. Hiriyanna's legitimate desire to promote Sanskrit is free of fanaticism which characterizes many present-day language movements. His appeal for the spread of Sanskrit is prompted by its "artistic worth" and not by any emotional or extra-literary considerations. It is his conviction that one may derive much help from the numerous works in Sanskrit on poetics, for they sometimes give an insight into the nature and aim of poetry which "is difficult to find elsewhere in works in literary criticism". (p. 56) The fact that his enthusiasm for Sanskrit does not get the better of the critic in him is borne out by his own admission:

'No one claims perfection for Sanskrit poetry; but it has distinctive features of its own and its best specimens are well-adapted to be a source of inspiration and of joy. (p. 56)

This is Hiriyanna's mode of popularizing a language and
literature. After all, the "primary object" of a "liberal education" is not the acquisition of either scientific or literary facts but "the proper disciplining of the mind and of the soul." (p. 62)

What he says of the German poet and critic Lessing is true of him too: "If the Almighty were to offer him the truth in one hand and the search after the truth in the other, he would choose the hand that held the search after truth." (p. 57) It is this "search after truth" that prompts him to emphasize the need for "throughness", for investigation that must be "critical", "proper verification", "comparative approach" and "critical attitude that gives our investigation a truly scientific aspect." (p. 62) One might mark the words, "critical", "scientific", "verification", etc., which suggest that without these qualities present in our "investigation", our conclusions "will be worth no more than the conjectures of the man in the street." (p. 62) Indian students of English literature who have learnt the importance of comparison and contrast from Western critics like Eliot might appreciate that as far back as 1929, Hiriyanna had envisaged the modern student's duty, "to make the study of Sanskrit comparative" (p. 60)

The reasons he advanced reflect his critical calibre.

The science of language has established a close kinship among communities inhabiting various parts of the globe and unless we compare ancient Indian
thoughts and modes of expression with those of kindred communities of the past, we cannot be said to have arrived at the truth.

(p. 60)

His recourse to the form, meaning or content of words at different stages in their evolution illustrates not merely the advantages of pursuing the comparative method of study, but also his grasp over even areas like etymology and modern philology.

In his essay on Sanskrit Poetry which he modestly calls "a historical retrospect" he displays an acutely analytical mind that can penetrate the immense range of Sanskrit poetry on absolutely critical terms. While it is true no art lends itself to an easy interpretation there is as Hiriyananna mentions an additional difficulty inherent in the treatment of Sanskrit poetry since it covers "a period of several centuries especially if we include the Veda also within our purview." (p. 1) He wisely restricts himself to placing before his readers "two well-marked tendencies in Sanskrit poetry which bear to each other a relationship of historical sequence" (p. 1) and showing "that the change of ideal implied by them is in perfect harmony with the general development of mental life in ancient India." (p. 1) He knows that in matters like poetry which are the products of human feeling and thought, "advance from one stage to another is never absolute and final." (p. 1)
His view that the interest of the Rig Veda which contains the earliest Indian poetry in the form of sacred songs for a modern student is "historical" and not poetical makes us wonder how this eminent scholar could take a simplistic view of the Vedas. But his stand is somewhat contradictory as at one moment he makes a feeble concession that the work is not devoid of aesthetic merit and at another a categorical affirmation that the Rig Veda has a poetic side and the poetical quality exhibited in some of the hymns is indeed very high. His comments on the genesis of true poetry in India and elsewhere and praise for the descriptive powers of the sage-poets make the two positions more irreconcilable. It is curious that Hiriyanna himself brings out effectively some of the salient features of Vedic poetry by giving an eloquent account of the Vedic description of Usas, the goddess of Dawn, "in portraying whose glory the ancient bards have exhibited their best poetic skill." (p. 2) He explains as to how such poetry could have arisen only in a society which was in intimate communion with nature. His own words are worth quoting in full for the sheer clarity, economy and ease with which he apprehends the beauty and vitality of this ancient poetry despite his earlier denial of them.

Every thought springs naturally from the life which the poets led or beheld around them. So rich is this poetry in metaphor and allegory that it requires little effort on my part to show wherein its excellence...
lies. Nature is here presented to us suffused in a continual light of the poet's fancy whose power we feel not only in the bold personifications but also in the refreshing pictures of the physical aspects of the Down. (p. 3)

Such imaginative UNDERSTANDING of nature, I conclude, cannot fail to give us that peculiar joy for which we almost instinctively go to works of art. However, this poetry does not make emotion its subject-matter, although its appeal to emotion is undoubted, he argues. But in course of time, a far-reaching change was introduced which gradually altered the very complexion of Indian poetry." (p. 3) Hariyanna attributes this change and the birth of Indian classical poetry to the well-known story related at the beginning of the Ramayana. He believes that this change manifested itself in two important ways — content" and "process". In the first place, he tells us that Valmiki tried to raise Sanskrit to the status of a literary language and impart a dignity to it. Thus we essential as the old literary dialect of the Veda had long fallen into disuse and poetic works had ceased to appear in it. Songs and ballads of course might have been produced in the popular dialects of the day, but they could hardly take rank as literature." (p. 4) In spite of a large increase in the growth of popular dialect and the want of a common medium of communication 'no lingua franca' had as yet made its appearance." (p. 4)
Valmiki on the scene who takes stock of the existing situation and indeed finds one among the dialects distinguished for the transparency of its vocabulary, its regularity, flexibility and beauty of sound." (p. 4) The most important thing here seems to be his ability to recognize the emergence of Sanskrit as a language of poetry, for before Valmiki verse was written in dialects but it was not verse which had an enduring quality. But he is enough of a realist to note that a beautiful language in itself is not adequate. It has to be wielded by a master, by a poet of "surpassing artistic genius." "Valmiki was such a poet; and by adopting that dialect as the medium of poetic expression he rendered to it the same service which Dante did to Italian or Chaucer to English". (p. 1) Henceforward, it became the standard literary language and has retained its character even to this day. Thus "the appearance of the Ramayana marks a turning point in the history of the Indian language as well as in the history of Indian literature." (p. 4) It is in such observations as these that his claim comes home to us because his comparison of the less known with the well-known at once compels recognition.

Secondly, the advent of this epic marks an even greater break rough in the history of Sanskrit literature in the sense that the sloka at the beginning of the epic originating from the soka of the poet tells us in unequivocal
terms that for the first time "emotion was deliberately
adopted as the subject-matter of poetry" (p. 5) which
Valmiki thought was central to his poem.

... as Valmiki became the pattern for all
future time in poetic matters Sanskrit
writers turned their attention more and
more from describing nature or the outward
activities of man to the rendering of
inward feeling ....... Valmiki became less
scripture and more lyrical. In other
words, emotion replaced beauty as the
theme of poetry. (p. 5)

But Puriyanna is not satisfied with taking emotion in
poetry for granted. The cerebral element is constantly
alive in him. His inquiring mind poses the problem thus:

But what it may be asked is the meaning
of making emotion the theme of poetry?
Do not emotions in their intrinsic
character, belong to the order of the,
"deep unexahle"? (p. 5)

It is appreciate that having made a claim, he also tries
to substantiate it. He agrees that emotions cannot be
directly expressed. "Words like 'fear' or 'anger' may
name them but cannot describe them. Although emo-
ions defy direct expression, they can be suggested by por-
traying those external features which are linked with them
in our experience. That is all that the poet, who adopts
emotions as his theme, does." (p. 5) Hence it is "the
necessity for this indirect suggestion in the case of the
later poet... that gave rise to the canon of dhvani, so celebrated in the history of Sanskrit criticism. (p. 5)

Again Harivanna does not stop with merely assigning an important position to 'suggestion' but examines in depth as to why later poetry is superior to the earlier. He elaborates on the distinction between the two and pictures a 'identity in their final effect'. That is, as forms of art, both 'evolve aesthetic pleasure.' 'But while the one achieves this result by describing external facts, the other does it by depicting internal feeling.' (p. 5) He hastens to add that this does not mean the poet has merely shifted his attention from nature to man because he nows the older poet also portrayed man's thoughts and activities besides describing nature. However, what distinguishes the later poet, as the author himself puts it, is that he "delves deeper and utilizes both nature and the 'outer man' as aids in revealing to us the inmost working of the human heart." (p. 5-6) Of course, "the material to be poetised remains the same as before but it ceases to be the object of the poet's first regard." (p. 6) Consequently emotion becomes the "exclusive theme" of later poetry and nature "a mere setting for it, instead of itself occupying the focus of the picture as it did in the Veda." (p. 6)

All the same, "the Indian poet does not... grow less sensible to the beauty of nature, nor does nature, in practice, figure less in the later poetry. But it ceases
to be described for its own sake and becomes the means of attuning our mind to the emotion depicted." (p. 6) It is this close, first-hand, objective analysis of the situation on hand that makes his account authentic and worthy of critical attention. He chooses to designate the latter poetry as 'soul poetry' in contrast to the 'Nature-poetry' of the earlier stage. It is soul-poetry because it makes feeling, "the very fabric of our souls" (p. 6) its supreme consideration.

His predilection for perceiving connection between aesthetics and metaphysics is manifested in the essay also. We have seen how in his Art Experience he has devoted considerable space to establishing parallels between the two movements in India. Presently he is occupied in showing how the shifting of the poet's attention from the external to the internal world has its analogue in the identification of Brahman (initially "comprehended in the outer universe") with Atman (ultimately "known in the inner self of man").

He cites the examples of Kalmasa and Bhavabhuti as the best representatives of the new form of poetry but does not end his essay with erecting barriers between the old and the new. After stressing their differences in scope repeatedly and emphatically he takes care to recognize their point of convergence and intersection, which finally made room for a common goal to aspire for. Both came under the influence of the Indian conception of art which is to relieve
man's "inner strain" and "induce in us a mood of detachment, albeit temporarily, and enable us to escape from the bonds of interested life." (p. 8)

Hiriyanna's critical acumen, ability to remove wrong emphasis and win attention for the neglected aspects which enhance his relevance to us are impressively brought out in his essay on Kalidasa, the man and poet. While acknowledging the attention Kalidasa has received at the hands of the Orientalists he regrets that it has been rather misdirected, for the Orientalists, in his view, have been more preoccupied in assigning him a date which is "well-nigh impossible" (p. 20) than in evaluating his works for their literary merit. Of course, fixing the age in which a poet lived has its own importance in literary history but we should not forget the other aspects as well, says Hiriyanna. He is of the opinion that "a great poet has always a message for mankind and towards the elucidation of this message in Kalidasa's case, the western scholar has not hitherto contributed much." (p. 20) At the same time he has the modesty not to claim for himself the powers of making good this deficiency, which would be "presumptuous", in his own words. He however, attempts a critical sketch of Kalidasa keeping in mind the social, religious and literary times of his day. He sums up the entire achievement of Kalidasa in hardly more than four pages — a splendid exemplification of condensed writing. To isolate just one example, one might
consider in particular his introduction to the times in which Kalidasa had to operate against many add. The paragraph provides a clue to the author's own historical perspective that could assimilate the cultural ethos of a poet with amazing conciseness. The opening remark, "Kalidasa was a man of the court, though he was not a courtier in the ordinary sense of that term" (1. 20) impresses the reader with its subtle distinctions and play upon words.

The paragraph on page 21 which makes a reference to Kalidasa's "vast", "superabundant learning," his proficiency in Ílamkara, Niti, Artha, Mimamsa and Vyakaranasastras, his "remarkably correct" style, thorough acquaintance with the Puranas and appreciation of legendary lore reflected in his use of divine and heroic myths need to be studied carefully for the manner in which Hiriyanna "adds every rift with one." It is compact and informative at the same time — with each sentence throwing light on a new aspect. While a lesser critic might have dilated and digressed and taken endless pages to arrive at the same result though without the same success, Hiriyanna achieves the magic with just a couple of sentences. When he wants to stress the importance of something he can do it directly and simply by resorting to a plain, matter-of-fact sentence, eschewing pompous, dramatic declarations. In other words, the frills are justly missing. When he wants to highlight, for example
The important role of the myths in Kalidasa's writing, he can say with a disarming simplicity:

So true is this that a reader who cannot appreciate these myths will miss half the charm of Kalidasa's poetry. (p. 21)

This he said at a time when Myth criticism had not assumed its present importance in the West. Far from being banal, it can awaken a serious reader to his responsibilities of knowing tradition and mythology. Since even his personal references to Kalidasa's religious belief and art are quite in place the reader gets no impression of any violence being done to his art.

Speaking of Kalidasa's poetry he alludes to its appeal through both sentiment and diction. He has reasons to believe that Kalidasa excelled in both unlike many poets who have mastery over one or the other. As a result, his poetry impresses the scholar with the "elegance of its form" as well as with "the power of its ideas." What follows this observation is a classic example of Hiriyonna's own style. In short, cryptic sentences which number not more than five or six, he captures the quintessence of Kalidasa's work — the strength of his achievement.

Perfect artist as he is, Kalidasa avoids extravagance of all kinds. There is nothing like pomp in his manner and he nowhere succumbs to that tendency to 'over-exaggerate' (atyukti) which spoils so much of Sanskrit poetry.
His conceptions are natural, though bold; his similes are proverbially apt; and his epithets are always fully suggestive. In propriety of dialogue and sentiment he is unsurpassed. More striking than all these, is his strong love for Nature. He looks upon things in Nature with a peculiarly tender feeling, and we may regard him as another St. Francis of Assissi .......

(pp. 22-23)

On reviewing this paragraph we find reference to a variety of factors as 'conceptions', 'similes', 'epithets', 'dialogue', 'sentiment' and 'Nature'. The casting of the net is wide enough but gives no appearance of a sweeping generalization, for each sentence makes a specific contribution by pinpointing an aspect.

Another point which deserves special mention is Hariyanna's assessment of Kalidasa's treatment of love in his plays. Endorsing the remark that Kalidasa is a 'poet of love' he at once makes the distinction that "love as portrayed by Kalidasa is different from that described in much of later Sanskrit poetry." (p. 23) While the latter is "sensual" in character, the former is "pure" and has the least to do with the "love of the flesh." One might appreciate the efforts made here by the author for not merely focussing on Kalidasa's portrayal of love in the "highest sense" but in underlining "the best poetic expression" (italics mine) that this ancient poet gave to it which is after all our concern here.
In the course of the book we find that even the appearance of a conceit can be stimulating to a scholar of his seriousness and aptitude, its utility to the lexicographer apart. An alphabetical list of words found in the Meghasandesa proves useful to him in the "study of the poet's style on its formal side." (p. 25) He gives evidence of it in the shortest possible space. His remarks on Kalidasa's style are a commentary on his own style. One sentence follows another in a perfectly logical sequence revealing clarity of thought and perception. He can in the manner of a great poet catch the 'inscape' and also 'instress' it. A mere perusal of the above mentioned list brings forth rare insights into the nature of Kalidasa's style, which in turn brings out Hiriyanna's capacity for investing his scrutiny with an almost mathematical precision. Incidentally, it might not be out of place to remind ourselves that Hiriyanna was a mathematics graduate in his student days. But to have allowed it to influence his literary writing consciously or unconsciously in a positive way redounds to his credit.

Even book reviewing so often degenerating into a pedantic survey at the hands of inferior writers is transformed into an art by Hiriyanna. The reviews are certainly different from the common run — exhibiting a thorough knowledge of the texts under consideration coupled with a terrible honesty and sincerity of purpose. He is both urbane and non-compromising. At one moment he graciously acknowledges
the good things while at another he unflinchingly points out the shortcomings. His insistence on an adherence to artistic standards is well brought out in the following comment on a book by Keith.

For the first time in such books, so far as we know, has the attempt been made here to put matters of literary importance first and herein lies the chief value of the book. (p. 47)

His progressive outlook which helped him keep pace with changing times and growing knowledge often resulted in candid observations. For example:

Prof. Macdonell's work on the subject once met with want well enough, but it has remained unrevised for a quarter of a century during which period much new material has accumulated and the need for modifying many an old opinion has arisen. (p. 46)

A lesson and a warning to academics who refuse to grow after a certain stage!

In his opinion Western scholars in their study of Sanskrit Literature have a general tendency to stress its historical aspects at the expense of the literary. Questions about authorship, date, authenticity of text, etc., engross their attention but they forget that Sanskrit literature may be valuable for its own sake." (p. 50) He has the rare introspection to attribute the cause of this
European neglect of literary aspects of Sanskrit literature to its certain "peculiarities" which prevent foreign scholars from feeling quite at home with it. But then other literatures too have their peculiarities which encourages him to hold a confident view that with a certain degree of interest in the subject, it will not at all be difficult for them to appreciate it. His optimistic mood can find an ally in Prof. Macdonell who while admitting that "many beauties in classical Sanskrit poetry are lost to the generality of western Sanskritists, refers to a 'distinguished scholar' known to him who 'has entered so fully into the spirit of that poetry that he is unable to derive pleasure from any other.'" (pp. 50-51) Similarly we can take comfort from the fact that Indian sculpture and painting also were likewise "ignored" or even 'belittled' but now their worth has come to be properly appreciated, thanks to the efforts of some Indian as well as European scholars. With a sense of urgency therefore Hiriyanna reminds the readers that "what has been done in their case remains yet to do for the sister art of poetry." (p. 51) If he has praise for the book under review it is because it "pays full attention to the literary and artistic qualities of the works discussed" (p. 51) even while not neglecting the "historical" or the "antiquarian" side of the story. At the same time Hiriyanna does not want to give the impression that, his author has unqualified praise for everything he comes across in Sanskrit poetry. That
would be unfair to him. It might be unilaterally to us as Indians, but being critical readers first and then patriotic citizens next we must appreciate Hiriyanna's objectivity in noting:

This is not to imply that he is blind to the deficiencies of Sanskrit literature; on the contrary he often directs attention to them as for example to the highly tiresome manner of the descriptions in the Prose Romances. (p. 51)

His impartiality and fair mindedness not to lack of his exacting critical standards are at full play here. The only exception one could think of are his two essays — one on Svarṇaprakāśavadatta and the other on Bak ṇī Madhava which surprisingly limit themselves to a mere narration of the 'story' leaving a brief and cryptic introduction to the author and the work. Of course, the story itself is fascinatingly retold and the original sentiments of the plays are recaptured as he skillfully unfolds layer after layer of the plot all the time holding the reader's attention like the old sailor in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. But what one would have expected was the kind of analysis that Hiriyanna himself makes in relation to another play in the same volume — Uttara-Rāja-carita where he makes a detailed study of its plot, characterization and the prevailing rasa — all of which treated in a manner different from that of the original litic add a new dimension to the characters as well as the plot.
Contrary to what Aristotle said of the plot as the soul of a tragedy we have Hariyanna positively relating it to the background here. Since Rasa is the "spirit" and "soul" of a drama, the plot becomes merely its "outer vesturo" and "it serves its purpose best when it thrusts itself least on the attention of the spectator." (p. 39) In fact, Hariyanna goes so far as to assert: "In a perfect drama we should not become conscious of the plot at all." (p. 39-40) He justifies the attitude of the Sanskrit poets in looking upon "any obtrusion of the plot as a sort of materialism in poetry." (p. 40) It is refreshing to see Hariyanna refusing to defer to Aristotle's immense authority — a rare thing in Indian scholarship. This kind of insistence on choosing a "familiar" theme either historical or legendary has a particular significance in the eyes of Hariyanna which is to "avoid the distractions of a new and complex story." (p. 39) But he cautiously adds that this is not to be viewed as a "check on the exercise of inventive power by the poet," (p. 40) because the special situations which a dramatic composition requires are still the exclusive creation of the author's genius. Similarly, his remarks on characterization are very instructive as they remove "a certain misconception" that "Sanskrit drama does not represent individuals, but only conventional and generalized types." (p. 41) He proves convincingly that this "charge cannot be brought against the characters that appear in a Sanskrit drama for
they do exhibit special traits over and above that is common to their class." (p. 42) His confident assertion that "types are not of necessity generalized" (p. 42) is backed by concrete examples he provides from Sanskrit drama itself. For instance in Uttara-Ramacarita, Janaka and Lalumania are depicted quite as individuals. Yet another example would be of Rama and Dusyanta who belong to the dhirdatta type but still "possess their own individuality and are unmistakably distinct." (p. 42) The author therefore reveals the common fallacy inherent in dividing heroes and heroines into certain classes and arriving at hasty conclusions about the nature of characters in a Sanskrit drama. Finally, his analysis of the prevailing rasa in the play brings home the artistic triumph of Bhavabhuti who with his characteristic partiality for tender touches" (p. 45) departs from the original epic on certain occasions to heighten the poignancy of situation by making the hero more intensely human. Besides, certain incidents which "stand by themselves" (p. 41) in the epic "blend with the main story" (p. 41) in the play "whereby complete unity of action is secured" (p. 41) and many situations invented by the playwright are "skilfully" handled. In short, "its restrained touches and judicious selection of incidents aids at once the progress of the plot, the portraying of character, and the development of rasa." (p. 41) Hiriyanna's triumph consists in impressing upon us the "total transformation" (p. 41) that the spirit of the original has undergone
at the hands of the dramatist. Here is an example of a largely traditional Indian approach to works of art by avoiding Western critical terminology or at least keeping it to a minimum.

A striking feature of Hiriyanna's writing is the perfect mingling of past and present values making way for a meaningful future. Here is a scholar who is deeply rooted in tradition earnestly pleading on several occasions for the study of Sanskrit but is at the same time keen on keeping ahead of the times. What he says of the Hon'ble Sri Krishnaiwami Iyer in his Commemoration Address on the founder's Day of the Madras Sanskrit College published in *Popular Essays in Indian Philosophy* is so truly applicable to himself that it needs to be quoted in his own words:

He realised that, however excellent Sanskrit learning might be in itself, instruction in it needed, as a result of the changes which time and circumstance had brought about, to be supplemented by the teaching of modern subjects; (pp. 74-75)

Though himself a Sanskrit scholar, Hiriyanna feels the need for certain radical changes in the mental make-up of the "pandit". He can no longer afford to be "oblivious of

"the new knowledge". (p. 75) If he does, it will be "a serious deficiency". (p. 75) The first thing he has to grasp is that though certain fundamental truths never grow old, with regard to knowledge in general, "change is the rule." (p. 75) Of course, the old pandit can be credited with many "excellences" such as "depth" and "definiteness" of knowledge, "clearness" of thinking and "exactness" of expression. "But there was a lack of historical perspective in what he knew" (p. 75) says Hiriyanna, for the pandit was "apt to take for granted that opinions put forward as siddhantas in Sanskrit works, had all along been in precisely the same form" (p. 75) whereas the fact was "yathotharam muninam praman"yam", "The later a sage, the greater his authority" (p. 75) This maxim current among grammarians, implies in Hiriyanna's mature analysis that "languages change from generation to generation and that a system of grammar will become out of date, if it is not revised and re-written at frequent intervals". (p. 75) He exhorts the pandit therefore to acquaint himself with the "methods of modern oriental scholarship" (p. 75) and apply a "comparative method" (p. 75) to the study of Sanskrit language and literature which has, in his view, helped modern scholarship bring to light many valuable facts about them.

His love of Sanskrit as we have seen before does not make him emotional or fanatical at any time. If he appeals
on its behalf it is not even on account of "its antiquity, its originality, or its richness and variety" (p. 78) nor even its contribution to the growth of interesting branches of learning such as comparative philology and comparative mythology which are in themselves adequate reasons for pursing it. But primarily for an insight into the nature of "our ancient ideal of life" (p. 78) it enshines in the whole of its literature — the epics, the Puranas, poetry and drama:

The only permanent means for comprehending this ideal correctly, and appraising its worth properly is the literature to which Sanskrit furnishes the key. That is the chief reason why we should study it. (p. 79)

Extending the analogy, "that is the chief reason" why we should study Hiriyanna's work. Very few scholars have realized the worth of his accomplishments. We owe it to ourselves to turn to this great scholar-teacher to forestall any further artistic impoverishment in our lives.
Aurobindo

One of the most striking features of Aurobindo scholarship is the fund of light it has thrown on Aurobindo, the poet, the seer and the philosopher, ignominiously unfortunately another unique aspect of the man, namely, Aurobindo, the critic. Consequently while one comes across a plethora of books and articles on Aurobindo's integral yoga and evolution of consciousness one finds a pitiful lack of attention to his critical achievement. Even quantitatively speaking his output in this respect is certainly not so meagre as to warrant this kind of anaemic response from his readers. True, he has a Savitri to offer to the poetic world as his magnum opus but he has an equally important work to contribute to the field of criticism — that seminal and epoch-making book, The Future Poetry — which creates and shapes the attitudes of readers of poetry significantly. No less important are his interpretations of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita nor his critical views on Vyasa, Valmiki and Kalidasa and his Letters on Art, Literature and Poetry. Taken together they establish him as a major force in Indian literary criticism which must be instantly recognized, more so, because in Aurobindo's own words, uttered in a different context as comment on the general critical climate of the country:

It is not often that we see published in Indian literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive,
criticism which forces us both to see and think.

Here is Aurobindo's critical work which compels us not merely to "see and think" but wakes us up to a consciousness of "the divine movement in poetry" — the discovery of "mantra", "that rhythmic speech which ... rises at once from the heart of seer and from the distant home of the . Truth, — " (p. 8) "prompting all creation to unfold itself and to rise out of its limitations towards its Godlike possibilities". (p. 8) In his Future Poetry Aurobindo is chiefly preoccupied with showing how "poetry in the past has done that in moments of supreme elevation; in the future there seems to be some chance of its making it a more conscious aim and steadfast endeavour". (1. 8)

What Aurobindo exhibits as a critic in his Future Poetry is"... a cosmic consciousness with a global perception", (p. 348) the words he used to describe the Overmind. His range, height, breadth, depth and largeness enable him to "touch the superhuman level of creation." If Savitri revealed the poetic superman in Aurobindo, Future Poetry witnesses the genesis of the critical superman. He surveys the entire gamut of English poetry, from its dawn to its twilight making it an occasion to discuss the possible line of development for not merely its future but the future

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1 Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972), p. 1. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be made in the body of the text itself.
of poetry in general. By his opulence of thought and gigantic imagery he can set the key and command the gates of this many-mansioned city of poetic thought. Poetry is idealized or rather colossalized to such an extent that one stands before this book as a moth before a star, to use his own language.

Thumbing through the pages of this undoubtedly most important Indian work of literary criticism coming in recent times, one finds at once that this is no ordinary work re-echoing Western critical views on structure and texture (in the usual sense) in poetry like innumerable others in the field, but a remarkably new and original venture, intensely Indian and constantly trying to impart to poetry a spiritual status. By raising the status of poetry he raises the status of his own criticism. His yogic personality has indeed a big role to play in this. His chief endeavour in this book is to call upon generations of poets to evolve a new poetry in the future which will be an expression, a poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality — which is immortalized in his pages as the Mantra. Of course, he is indebted for this to his Vedic ancestors who spoke of dhyanamantra and wrote it too. But Aurobindo's distinctiveness consists in not merely reviving our interest in this spiritual heritage which is a means of hinting that the present-day Indian has a more meaningful past to fall back upon instead of constantly looking to the West for stimulus.
and inspiration but also underlining the necessity for producing mantric poetry in future with an almost missionary zeal. Precisely because of this objective the book is a unique undertaking, in so far as it has its eyes fixed on the future unlike others which are bound by the past and the present. The critic too becomes a seer in this context — one who sees and shows the way to others. It is the Yogi, the Visionary writing from end to end, manifesting at the same time a knowledge of the technical aspects of poetry, like rhythm and movement, metre and rhyme, style and substance. Starting from such lesser things as these he builds his book into a crescendo as it were, turning his gaze increasingly towards "real", "nigh poetry".

His introductory chapters talk of the technical side, the "physical means" by which the effect is produced. Rhythm is described as the "premier necessity of poetical expression" (p. 23); in fact, a perfect rhythm might even give immortality to a work which is slight in vision but the critic hastens to add that metrical rhythm which satisfies the outer ear is only a first step towards perfection despite its technical excellence, for there is a deeper and more subtle music, "a rhythmical soul-movement" which alone can "meet the deeper aims of the creative spirit" (p. 17) and correspond with the "inner hearing". It can be seen from this observation how Aurobindo is already indicating infinite meanings beyond the finite, intellectual meaning the word or the sound of what the word carries. Besides hinting
at the true nature of poetry he is also preparing the reader for the unforgettable maxim he is going to offer soon: "the true creator, hearer is the soul"; "the conductor of the orchestral movement is the soul..." (p. 21) Even so early as in his chapter on style and substance he talks of poetry which appeals to the "imaginative vision, the spiritual sense, the soul-feeling and soul-sight". (p. 24) In the light of this it could be inferred that poetry which fails to appeal to the spirit of man is strictly speaking "verse" or at best "half-poetry". His emphasis throughout on a spiritual seeing places him in the true Vedantic tradition which immortalized the poet as the "seer". His conception of the poet like the ancients' is an exalted one:

he is ... a seer and not merely a maker of rhymes, not merely a jongleur, rhapsodist or troubadour, and not merely a thinker in lines and stanzas. (p. 24)

Indeed, the poet to him is one who "sees beyond... the surface mind and finds the revealing word, not merely the adequate and effective, but the illumined and illuminating, the inspired and inevitable word, which compels us to see also." (p. 24) To arrive at that 'word' for him is the whole endeavour of poetic style. It can be seen with what supreme simplicity and clarity Aurobindo crystallizes his concept of style. The shift in emphasis from "adequate and effective" to "illuminated and illuminating" also deserves close attention, for it is a shift which can alter the very
course and complexion of poetry. However, his remark: "the essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel" might be received with a touch of scepticism by the modern reader. The sentence, when pulled out of the context and viewed in isolation from his supplementary remarks might result in a misgiving that Aurobindo was reducing all poetry to mysticism at the cost of reason and intellect. But in actuality he was only using the word 'seeing' in a larger sense which included both thought and feeling. His point was to show that "sight was the primary consequence and power of poetic speech" (p. 24); that the poet has to "first make us see by the soul" and "make us live in the soul." This is the one danger that Aurobindo critics have to guard themselves against — not to view his writing in snatches but as one complete whole.

In his classification of imagination into various kinds he gives the utmost prominence to poetic imagination which "sees the spiritual truth of things." (p. 25). The accent on the spiritual content of poetry as already mentioned is understandable in a critic for whom "all great poetic utterance is discovery ... an ecstasy of sight;" (p. 29) for whom "sight is the essential poetic gift." (p. 30) It is his conviction that though we have wandered far enough from the ancient ideal of the kavi as seer and revealer of truth to demand from him only the pleasure of the ear and
the amusement of the aesthetic faculty, still in all great poetry it is the "inner sight" which the poet awakens in us. It is this preoccupation with the deeper vision that compels him to look at the Upanishads not as philosophic thinking but as "spiritual seeing", as a "rush of spiritual intuitions" (p. 33) cast into the inevitable language of poetry. He is also happy that the vision of the Upanishads is kept in tact and not falsified by intellectual utterance. This is perhaps expected of a critic who is constantly relegating the predominance of the thought element in poetry and questioning the validity of a common enough tendency of looking to a poet for "message" or "an intellectual philosophy of life". In his opinion the poet as a seer of Truth need not possess either — but a revealing vision of life or God or gods or man or Nature. Indeed, his faith in the poet's revelation of the Spirit runs so strong that occasionally he even resorts to a language of categorical assertion while upholding it, as for instance in:

Therefore **it is well to insist** that the native power of poetry is in its sight, not in its intellectual thought-matter, and **its safety is in adhering** to this native principle of vision...

(p. 33) (Italics mine)

The tone is rather dogmatic and prescriptive and might seem unpalatable to readers brought up on Eliot's 'ifs' and 'buts' and 'perhapses'. The reason behind this is perhaps that in the case of a critic like Eliot the struggle to grapple with the poetic process is still on whereas a visionary like
Aurobindo who must have arrived after a clear 'seeing' feels no hesitation in articulating his most cherished beliefs directly. One is dealing with an order of criticism which cannot always be judged by contemporary standards of indirection, tentativeness, scepticism, etc. In fact, Aurobindo's invaluable insights often come through such direct expressions as:

... it is not sufficient for poetry to attain high intensities of word and rhythm; it must have, to fill them, an answering intensity of vision.

Even his reiterations like:

The poetic vision of life is not a critical or intellectual or philosophic view of it, but a soul view, a seizing by the inner sense; (p. 34)

do not tire the reader, for so infectious is Aurobindo's ardour in heralding a new kind of poetry, that the reader is prepared to go the whole hog with him. Such is the urgency of the situation that perhaps a bit of rubbing in at this stage is excusable, even essential. Faced as he is with the predicament of turning the poet's attention from mere technique to the "inspired ord" and "inevitable utterance" he has to elaborate why such a change is necessary. A mere statement of the case would defeat his purpose. He has to tell his readers in so many words that poetry is much more than a matter of a faultlessly correct or an exquisite technique, that technique, however indispensable,
occupies a smaller place in poetry than any other art and "the poet, least of all artists needs to create with his eye fixed anxiously on the technique of his art." (p. 11) Indeed, so persuasive is Aurobindo's style that even when the idea might be repeated he can still hold the reader's attention by the magnificent architecture of his phrasing. He can coax even an unwilling reader to agree with him that beyond technique, lie several other things worthy of the poet's attention, so much so "that even a deficient correctness of execution will not prevent an intense and gifted soul from creating great poetry which keeps its hold on the centuries." (p. 10) Such is the magic of the illumed word that we catch ourselves at the end of it all involuntarily permitting the poet to forget technique "in his best moments" altogether (p. 11) Of course, Aurobindo is enough of a realist to take note of the fact that the poet may not always or often find the inspired word, but "to seek for it is the law of his utterance, and when he can not only find it, but cast into it some deeply revealed truth of the spirit itself, he utters the mantra". (p. 14)

While reviewing the poetic process Aurobindo considers the poet in relation to his country and age. Like Eliot who placed the poet in the tradition with the whole of the history of his race in his bones, Aurobindo also believes that much depends not only on "the individual powers of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its
symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment." (p. 36) Only, Aurobindo seems to have gone much farther than Eliot in defining his views on poetic equipment, which includes not merely a sense of history but the country's thought and experience, symbols and spiritual attainment. In his Chapter on "The National Evolution of Poetry" he attributes the greatness of a poet's work partly to the "mentality of the nation", "the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic tradition and environment which it creates for him". (p. 38) But he takes care to add that a poet need not for this reason consider himself as only "a voice of the national mind" or be limited by past national tradition. Yet, the value of a sense of nationalism in countries now "returning under great difficulties to a strong self-consciousness, like the Irish or the Indians at the present moment..." (p. 38) cannot be gainsaid.

As for an intelligent poetical estimate Aurobindo sees no other method, as valid and reliable as the one of directly approaching the poet and his work for all we need essentially to know about them without referring to the milieu or all the precedents, circumstances, influences and surroundings. His disapproval of the historical method of criticism stems from the right assumption that it is "external" and therefore "unreal".

The first few chapters of The Future Poetry dealing with the essence of poetry, style and substance, rhythm and
movement, poetic vision and *mantra* form an excellent prelude to a detailed and in-depth examination of English poetry, its character and its course from dawn to recent times. His compulsion for having chosen English poetry for an intimate treatment is the fact that the English language, of all the modern European tongues "produced the most rich and naturally powerful poetry, the most lavish of energy and innate genius. The unfettered play of poetic energy and power has been here the most abundant and brought forth the most constantly brilliant fruits." (p. 44) Such full-throated praise to make any Englishman proud is followed closely on heels by a piece of cool and measured judgment that "English poetry and literature have been a far less effective force in the shaping of European culture than those of other tongues inferior actually in natural poetic and creative energy." (p. 44)

This limitation calls for an explanation and Aurobindo comes out with a most penetrating analysis of its drawbacks. Looking with "other than English-trained eyes", there is "even in this rich and vigorous poetry abundant cause for the failure". (p. 45) English poetry in his opinion is "powerful" but "imperfect", "strong in spirit" but "uncertain and tentative in form"; "extraordinarily stimulating, but not often quite satisfying. It aims high, but its success is not as great as its effort... it has not dealt fruitfully with life!" Its history has been more that of individual poetic achievements than of a constant national tradition;
in the mass it has been a series of poetical revolutions without any strong inner continuity". (p. 45)

Coming from an Indian at a time when most other fellow-Indians might have been swayed by the English performance and written in emulation and adulation of it, this piece of criticism certainly does credit to Aurobindo's courage and perception in pinpointing the nature of the English failure with an uncanny sense of precision. He also takes the example of Greek and French poetry to see the difference and this exercise only makes the contrast all the more glaring while also lending a depth to his own analysis. While he finds a strong, cultural power behind Greek and French poetry with their national spirit faithfully reflected and their form also more satisfying, he finds English poetry wanting in form expressive of a "clear self-recognizing spirit" (p. 46). He admits however, that there is an English spirit which could not fail to be reflected in its poetry, but not being clearly "self-conscious", it was reflected "obscurely and confusedly". He attributes its failure to the general cultural impoverishment existing in England. Because for him "the poetry of a nation is only one side of its self-expression, and its characteristics may be best understood if we look at it in relation to the whole mental and dynamic effort of the people". (p. 46)

What follows is a frank and merciless exposure of England's cultural backwardness pronounced in every department of life,
more so in its arts: he discovers English music to be a "Zero", sculpture an "unfilled void", architecture "hardly better", painting "illustrated by a few great names, has been neither a great artistic tradition nor a powerful cultural force and merits only a casual mention by the side of the rich achievement of Italy, Spain, France, Holland, Belgium. When we come to the field of thought... we find great individual philosophers, but no great philosophical tradition, two or three remarkable thinkers, but no high fame for thinking ..." (p. 47)

But this is not all. The worst is yet to come, for the sting is in the tail. To get the full irony and impact of his attack Aurobindo's own words have to be quoted:

... But when finally we turn to the business of practical life, there is an unqualified pre-eminence: in mechanical science and invention, in politics, in commerce and industry, in colonization, travel, exploration, in the domination of earth and the exploitation of its riches. England has been till late largely, sometimes entirely the world's leader, the shaper of its motives and the creator of its forms. (p. 47)

A close examination of this peculiar distribution of national capacities urges Aurobindo to ask pertinently:

What kind or quality of poetry should we naturally expect from a national
mind so constituted? (p. 49)

he provides the answer himself by succinctly plunging into a marathon discussion of the character of English poetry from Chaucer to the present. Reiterating his earlier opinion that English poetry suffers from a "want of conscious continuity" (p. 52) he attributes it to an "astonishing abruptness" in the revolutions of the spirit of English poetry. But unlike in the earlier chapter where he had judged the history of English poetry as "a series of poetical revolutions without any strong inner continuity" here he seems to be welcoming those very revolutions as often "good for the human soul" though "distracting", for "they bring a rapid opening of new horizons". (p. 53) He even writes in justification:

... revolutions of the spirit are not in themselves a defect or a disability; they simply mean that English poetical literature has been a series of bold experiments less shackled by the past than in countries which have a stronger sense of cultural tradition. (p. 53)

It might be recalled that he had himself earlier drawn our attention to "some remarkable lacunae" in the cultural tradition of England but here a want of continuity itself seems to be working favourably among poets by disengaging them from the past and thus enabling them to venture on bold experimentation. How is one to judge Aurobindo's stand in this matter? Further, the earlier charge that
English poetry has no significant form to here conformed.

Form is a great power, but surely or form is not everything ... it limits and strains in the way of daring individual adventure.

(p. 53)

Similarly his previous accusation that English poetry has not "dealt fruitfully with life" (p. 45) gives way to a completely opposite stand:

A strong hold upon this life, the earth-life, is the characteristic of the English mind, and it is natural that it should take possession of its poetry. (p. 54)

Perhaps by 'life' Aurobindo means external life which the English mind loves to dwell on in all its particularities and idiosyncrasies and not the "Life Divine" of his vision, in which case he is absolutely right and the reader has no quarrel with him. However, it is clear in underlining three specific characteristics of English poetry which consist in:

(1) ... a constant reference and return of the higher poetical motives to the forms of external life, as if the enriching of that life were its principal artistic aim.

(2) ... a great force of subjective individuality and personal temperament as a leading power of the poetic creation.

(3) ... a great intensity of speech and ordinarily of a certain kind of direct vision (p. 56)
Aurobindo sees these tendencies on the increase in the world's literature and finds two of them at least (obviously the first two) to be persistent. The only remedy seems to lie in an assimilation of new influences. He therefore hopes that an infusion of the pure Celtic temperament into English poetry might induce it to move towards the "impersonal" and the "universal", not through "the toning down of personality and individuality, but by their heightening to a point where they are liberated into the impersonal and universal expression". (p. 56) English poetry must henceforth employ its high intensity of speech for the expression of spiritual values which will be one of the aims of a higher intuitive utterance. He is optimistic that when this change is effected, the natural powers of the English spirit will be of the highest value to future poetry.

Even while tracing the course of English poetry after expatiating upon its characteristics he dwells on the same features that have typified it: "a more facile success in the concrete or imaginative presentation of life, a more difficult success in the intellectual or spiritual interpretation of life, while most difficult of all for it would be a direct presentation of the things beyond, of mystic realities or of the higher truths of the spirit". (p. 58) As before he is once again confident that if the last difficulty is overcome, then the very highest expression of these things would be possible. The English language in
his opinion has fortunately all the "close lights and shades, the heights and depths, the recesses of fathomless sense needed by the poet." (p. 59) To drive home the point he turns around to modern French Literature and cites the instance of Mallarmé constantly and desperately struggling to break the "mould" of the French speech in order to "force it to utter what is to its natural clear lucidity almost unutterable" (p. 58). But in contrast "no such difficulty presents itself in English poetry; the depths, the vistas of suggestion, the power to open the doors of the infinite are already there for the mind rightly gifted to evoke and use for the highest purposes." (p. 59)

It is against this background of inherent strength and weakness that English poetry unfolds itself with its large borrowings from foreign cultures: Chaucer giving English poetry a first shape with the help of French romance models and the work of Italian masters; the Elizabethans depending on Renaissance influences from France and Italy and a "side wind from Spain" (p. 60); Milton going directly to classical models, the Restoration and the eighteenth century taking "pliantly the pseudo-classical form from the contemporary French poets and critics". (p. 60) Still, this dependence according to Aurobindo is only in externals, since he finds a "native character" prevailing in the essential things.

Understandably, he starts with Chaucer who "strikes
at once an English note" (p. 60), a strong, characteristic English note in observing ordinary human life and character "without any preoccupying idea, without any ulterior design", (p. 60) for his object is "the external action of life as it passes before him" (p. 60) without seeking to "add anything to it or to see anything below it or behind its outsides" (p. 60) nor caring to "look at all into the souls or deeply into the minds of the men and women whose appearance, action and apparent traits of character he describes with so apt and observant a fidelity". (p. 60).

It is a tribute to Aurobindo that he could so accurately sum up the entire achievement of a poet in less than a paragraph. Without echoing or quoting Arnold's oft-quoted statement that Chaucer lacks a "magnificent seriousness" Aurobindo has in his own inimitable style pinpointed Chaucer's serious limitations and captured the quality of his poetry in one memorable sentence:

It is an easy, limpid and flowing movement,  
a stream rather than a well,— for it has no depths in it, (p. 61)

From the first English poet he turns to Elizabethan poetry, an expression of all that the Renaissance symbolized: "energy, passion and wonder of life" (pp. 63-64) and a drama "exultant in action and character, passion and incident and movement." (p. 64) The Elizabethan Age thus represented the two sides of the national mind — the one dominant in
pure poetry and the other in its art and "both in Shakespeare welded into a supreme phenomenon of poetic and dramatic genius." (p. 64) Aurobindo concludes that "it is on the whole the greatest age of utterance, though not of highest spirit and aim, — of the genius of English poetry." (p. 64) This comment deserves to be studied closely, as it sheds light on the kind of greatness Elizabethan Age succeeded in accomplishing. Aurobindo’s preoccupation with the "highest spirit" indicates his sphere of interest as a literary critic.

His admiration for this "greatest age of utterance" is thus tempered with a consciousness of its failings even at the very beginning: "this wealthiest age of English poetry bears a certain stamp of defect and failure." (p. 65) There might be "a coursing of richer life-blood" (p. 65) but "no settled fullness of spirit" (p. 65) or an "adequate body of forms." (p. 65) He believes of course that "the great magician" Shakespeare by his "marvellous poetic rendering of life" (p. 65) conceals this general inadequacy. He even makes a magnificent resume of the Age dominated by Shakespeare who "survives untouched all adverse criticism, not because there are not plenty of fairly large spots in this sun, but because in any complete view of him they disappear in the greatness of his light". (p. 65) The other poets either bask in Shakespeare’s glory and "appear more splendid than they are" or "owe their stature to an uplifting power in the age" rather than to any of their own intrinsic height of
genius. On the whole "the gold of this golden age of English poetry is often very beautifully and richly wrought, but it is seldom worked into a perfect artificial whole; it disappears continually in masses of alloy, and there is on the whole more of a surface gold-dust than of the deeper yield of the human spirit." (pp. 65-66)

This passage which throbs with a vital force and has the freshness of the morning dew about it is yet another specimen of Aurobindo's ability to work in concrete images as well as an ability to see beneath surface glory in his eternal quest for more glorious yields of the human spirit. As for the sheer sensuous quality of his style when occasion calls for it, it can stand comparison with the opulence of no less than either Spenser or Keats. For example: Elizabethan poetry "springs up in a chaos of power and of beauty". "It is constantly shot through with brilliant threads of intellectual energy". "...its speech sometimes liquid with sweetness... revelling in image and phrase, a tissue of sweet or violent colours, of many-hued fire, of threads of golden and silver light." (p. 64) But not all the exquisite colours nor the liquid sweetness of Elizabethan poetry could drown his senses or lull his intellect to sleep, for the same critical faculty which found Elizabethan poetry defective spars not its drama either, "vaunted" as the chief title of the Age to its greatness. In fact, he finds the defects more prominent here, powerful only in effort "rather
than sound and noble in performance (p. 66) during Shakespeare and Marlowe. To put it briefly, "all its vigorous presentation of life has not been able to keep it alive"; (p. 66) mere presentation of life however truly, vigorously and abundantly portrayed, seems to be in Aurobindo's view too slender a pedestal for drama to stand upon. Its object is something greater and its conditions of success much more onerous. It must have, to begin with, "... an interpretative vision (p. 67) which the Elizabethan dramatists with the exception of Shakespeare lacked. It fails essentially because it is "an outward presentation of manners and passions"; "tragedy and comedy are both oppressively external ... the characters are not living beings working out their mutual Karma, but external figures of humanity jostling each other on a crowded stage, mere tossing drift of the wave of life." (p. 68)

It might be seen how by bringing in the doctrine of Karma as a yardstick to judge the playwright's measure of success in his handling of the characters Aurobindo is not merely making an essentially Indian approach which ushered in a new climate in Indian Literary criticism but also infusing a depth by adopting critical weights and measures of a more serious character. Indeed, he goes so far as to define drama as the author's "vision of Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word." (p. 68)

But being an heir and insider to traditions other than the
Indian with an intimate knowledge of which drama in particular he feels compelled to bring out and it approaches elsewhere: the poetical rendering of Elizabethan dramatic pathein, 'the doer shall feel the effect of his act'" (p. 68) that to him symbolized the highest point in drama.

After enumerating several "radical dramatic defects of the Elizabethan playwrights, he comes to the conclusion that the "presentation of life with some poetic touch but without any transforming vision ... is the general character of ... their work", (p. 69) not even "atoned for by any great wealth of poetry." (p. 69) he finds it necessary to emphasize these defects because "indiscriminate praise of these poets" might result in an unjust assessment of their dramatic achievement and also the danger of their being looked up to as models by subsequent poets, as it happened in the case of Browning.

Aurobindo singles out Marlowe among the "lesser Elizabethan dramatists" not merely for his "strong and magnificent vein of poetry" (p. 69) but also for his clear grasp of dramatic idea and artistic aim. However, his observation that Marlowe's "highly coloured and strongly cut style and rhythm" are suitable for the expression of the "human soul in action" clashes with "unhappily, Marlowe had the conception, but not any real power of dramatic execution." (p. 70) But, the rest of the analysis is a lucid and convincing exposition of Marlowe's strength and limitation.
However, it is Shakespeare who stands out alone" (p. 70) in his own age as well as in all English literature as the one "great and genuine dramatic poet" (p. 70); "unique in his spirit, method and quality." (p. 70) If his contemporaries resemble him it is only in externals; they have the same outward form and the crude materials but not his "inner dramatic method" by which he transformed them and gave them a new meaning and value.

Considering the enormous bulk of Shakespearean scholarship the world has produced, it might indeed appear that any further attempt to write on Shakespeare would be only a pathetic rehash of what has already been well said. But where such a distinguished critic as Aurobindo is involved there is still something original to be said and his manner of saying it imparts a new outlook. If Shakespeare appeals to him it is not as an artist, a poetical thinker or anything else of the kind, but primarily as a great and "vital creator" and a "seer of life" (p. 71). But it is important to note that even while eulogizing Shakespeare as a "seer of life" Aurobindo takes care to qualify that it is only "within marked limits." It is not that he is reluctant to accord a writer his due praise but rather his exalted notion of life and literature makes his expectations far higher than we normally come across. This accounts for the freedom and objectivity with which he discusses Shakespeare's limitations; his "deviations into stretches of half-prosaic
verse and vagaries of tortured and bad poetic expression, sometimes atrociously bad"; (p. 73) but it redounds to Aurobindo's credit that he had the perspective to view these limitations not as "failures of power" but "wilful errors of a great poet" (p. 73) more careful of "dramatic truth" than "verbal perfection." Indeed, we accept his defects as "part of his force" which our critical sense would have hastened to condemn or reject in another poet. In fact, Aurobindo declares in a tone of finality that "even his positive defects and lapses cannot lower him, because there is an unfailing divinity of power in his touch which makes them negligible." (p. 72) Actually, his "limitations are very largely the condition of his powers." (p. 73)

Here is a criticism which neither glosses over a poet's faults nor blows them out of proportion but takes a balanced view. Another not worthy aspect of Aurobindo's analysis is the way he brings in Indian sentiments in Indian idiom. For example, Shakespeare is "the sheer creative Ananda of the life-spirit" (p. 71) who "has accomplished mentally" more than any other poet "the legendary feat of the impetuous sage Viswamitra." (p. 72) The action in his drama which "lives from within" is "not Varat, the seer and creator of gross forms, but Hiranyagarbha, the luminous mind of dreams, ..." (p. 72). True, he may not be a "universal vealer" but until the future may find for us a higher and profounder aim for the dramatic form with an equal power, fullness of
vision and intensity of speech he will keep "his sovereign station." (p. 73) Aurobindo could not have answered Shakespeare's harshest critics more convincingly.

It is most worthwhile to consider Aurobindo's analysis of the failure of poetic drama after the Elizabethan Age for the sheer insight and vitality of expression. His penetrating eye scans the whole canvas to find several poets including Dryden, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Shelly, Tennyson, Swinburne, all, all coming under the fatal hypnotic influence of the "Elizabethan formula." The principal reason for their failure is rightly attributed to their clinging not merely to the "Shakespearian form" but "to the whole crude inartistic error of that age." (p. 73) In one memorable sentence he enacts the failure of the whole lot — great poets, noble poets, delicate artists, fine thinkers and singers—all directly turning to dramatic form, externalizing fatally and failing inevitably in the process.

What Aurobindo attempts in the subsequent chapters of *Future Poetry* is a breathtaking survey of the entire field of English poetry from the poets of the dawn as he prefers to call Shakespeare and Spenser and other Elizabethan poets to Classical and Romantic and Victorian poets including recent poetry where he talks of Yeats and A.E. and Meredith and Whitman. He takes up each of these poets individually, discusses their characteristics and achievement in relation
to motive, measure, rhythm, body and spirit of poetry.

Beginning from Spenser, "the poet of second magnitude of the time" (p. 75) whose native form of genius displays a descriptive vision and a "wealthy prolixity" but often "a little too much lost in detail" (p. 75) he moves on to Milton but not before considering the minor Carolean poets who exhibit some lingering colours of the Elizabethan sunset but "much thinned and diluted, finally they die away into trivialities of the intelligence..." (p. 82) But more haunting is Aurobindo's description of the complete change that has overtaken the last days of the Elizabethan Age with a delicacy and tenderness that turns the pathos of the situation into a tangible reality:

... colour has gone, sweetns. has vanished,
song has fallen into a dead hush: for a whole long century the lyrical faculty disappears from the English tongue, to reawaken again first in the Celtic north.

(p. 83)

This is where a writer of Aurobindo's calibre can lift even ordinary language to supreme heights of poetry by endowing it with felt emotion.

If the suspension of the stir of the life-spirit in Elizabethan poetry evokes a response that has an undercurrent of melancholy in it he is not the type to stop and ruminate over it. The "grandiose epic chant of Milton" seems to
fill the void and break "the complete silence of genuine poetry." (p. 83) But alas! "it was Milton who has turned away from the richer beauty and promise of his youth, lost the Virgilian accent, put away from him all delicacies of colour and grace and sweetness..." (p. 83) The intellectual element becomes too predominant which in Aurobindo's opinion is precisely the "point of failure" and even a "fatal danger" He substantiates his argument with the observation:

To justify the ways of God intellectually is not the province of poetry; what it can do is to reveal them. (pp. 84-85)

His emphatic denial of the intellect holds the key to his conception of poetry; that is, poetry as "revelation" which is the whole burden of his son in this book.

A quick look at Gray, Collins, Thomson, Chatterton and Cowper reveals their attempts to "seek liberation by a return to Miltonic blank verse and manner, to the Spenserian form;" (p. 92) and their "pale effort" to recover something of the Shakespearean wealth of language. Then he turns to Burns whose intrinsic merit of poetry make him a "solitary voice from the north in the evolution." (p. 93) Aurobindo admits that his work has limitations but it has also things "which are most native to the poetry of our modern times;" (p. 93) though the finished possession of new motifs is to be found first only in Wordsworth. But "Wordsworth was not a wide thinker"; (p. 120) "he was
unfitted to be a critic of life" (p. 120) "... he belongs to his age rather than to the future and is limited in his view of religion, of society, of man by many walls of convention." (p. 120) Of course, when he speaks of Nature and man's kinship to Nature "he finds either his noblest or his purest and most penetrating tones." (p. 120) He writes sometimes poetry of the very greatest but "too often also he passes out from his uninspired intelligence work with no stamp of endurance, much less of the true immortality." (p. 121) Indeed, "in the end the poet in him died while the man and the writer lived on; the moralist and concentrated thinker had killed the singer, the intellect had walled up the issues of the imagination and spirited vision." (121) Aurobindo's just quarrel with Wordsworth's obvious sermonizing and "terrible stretches of flattest prose in verse..." (p. 121) reveals his integrity as well as his most discriminating quality as both critic and creative artist. His comment that Wordsworth "states too much and sings too little" (p. 121) can perhaps be neither challenged nor improved upon.

On the whole it is a masterly analysis of the "dry desert sands of the uninspired intellectual mentality" (p. 120) of a poet in whose work "lines of power, sometimes of fathomless depth" (p. 121) occurred "like a lonely and splendid accident." (p. 121)
Coleridge, more than any of his contemporaries in Aurobindo's estimate "missed his poetic crown" (p. 123); has left behind "three or four scattered jewels of a strange and singular beauty" (p. 123) and "the rest of his work is a failure." (p. 123) Intellectuality, he had in abundance, notes Aurobindo but "he squandered rather than used it ..." (p. 124).

As for Blake, "he is not only a seer, but almost an inhabitant of other planes and other worlds;" (p. 125) "But his power of expression is not equal to his power of vision." (p. 125) He is unable to translate his experience to our comprehension." (p. 125) "... produces only a half effect because he has cut away the link which would help us to reach him and share his illumination." (p. 125).

Shelley is "at once seer, poet, thinker, prophet, artist." (p. 126) But he too has his faults — lost himself in a "flood of diffuse and over-abundant expression." (p. 127) His diction is "not yet the native language of his spirit." (p. 127) "... he does not seize on the right subject matter for his genius." (p. 127) "He has to deny God in order to affirm the Divine" (p. 128).

Keats is the first entire artist in word and rhythm in English poetry, — "not grandioso, classical and derived like Milton, but direct and original in his artistry,
he begins a new era." (pp. 129-130) The youngest and in many directions the most gifted, Keat. "enters the secret temple of ideal beauty, but has not time to find his way into the deepest mystic sanctuary." (p. 94)

Nor does the Victorian Age "with all its activity and fruitfulness" (p. 133) offer Aurobindo a satisfied sense of "uplifting". Despite "a considerable energy, some largeness, occasional heights" (p. 134) in one or two poets there is still something "sickly in its luxuriance, a comparative depression and poverty in its thought, a lack in its gift, in its very accomplishment a sense of something not done." (p. 134) With just a gentle waft of his hand as it were Aurobindo can break the much-talked of Victorian complacency.

A distinguished scholar as he is, Aurobindo turns to other countries to see what is happening, so as to compare and contrast. A discussion of the Victorian period in English literature prompts him to look at France and arrive at the conclusion that the former "cannot compare in power, wing, abundance of genius and talent with the contemporary work done in France" (p. 134).

His belief in poetry as the "rhythmical expression of the soul of its age" (p. 134) seems to have influenced his observation: "Victorian poetry suffers by the dull
smoke-laden atmosphere in which it flowered;" (p. 134) nevertheless Tennyson, the unquestionable representative English poet of his time who occupied the epoch with a "great and immediate brilliance" (p. 135) receives considerable attention at Aurobindo's hands though his fame is "now a little dimmed and tarnished by the breath of Time." (p. 135).

Tennyson's "picturesqueness of presentation" and an "opulent and effective form" (p. 135) bring out Aurobindo's own exquisite powers of description. For example, Tennyson's art is "that of a master craftsman, a goldsmith, silversmith, jeweller of speech and substance with much of the decorative painter..." (p. 136). "The pictorial value of the thought" which he always finds present in Tennyson seems to be his own forte as well. What endless pages cannot do Aurobindo has done with just one superb phrase, "jeweller of speech" which captures the quintessence of Tennyson's achievement. Yet a seer as he is, he cannot be lured by the glitter of this jewellery, however captivating it might be to the "outer aesthetic mind." He finds "extraordinarily little in the end." (p. 136) "The spirit is not filled", (p. 136) for "at the heart of the original conception" there is "a void of the true sincerity of poetic vision" and "no amount of craft and skill in language or descriptive detail and picture can cure that original deficiency." (p.137)
"The poet has no meditative ... or revealing grasp on life" (p. 137) "no greater seeing" in his description of Nature; is "not a revealing poetical thinker" (p. 138); "has neither exaltations nor profundities nor subtleties nor surprises" (p. 138) but only a "richly coloured triviality" to show in the end. Not all his exceptional skill in wielding a descriptive and decorative language could save him from a "brilliant failure", for it was used to "no very great purpose." (p. 133) Hence the supreme relevance of the comment:

His art suffers from the excess of value of form over value of content; (p. 138)

Such a poetry could at best and up as "a body without soul or life-breath." (p. 137) What lends an aura of distinction to this account is as usual a stamp of originality—the hallmark of Aurobindo's greatness as a critic. It is a fact of literary history that many have written upon Tennyson, focussing attention on the obvious things like his lyrical grace and beauty and also of course his pictorial quality, but have seldom shown the kind of depth Aurobindo has displayed here.

His assessment of Browning who surpasses Tennyson in the "protean energy of his genius" (p. 139) and stands apart from his contemporaries "in his striking force and originality" (p. 140) is yet another memorable instance of close study and analysis.
describe Browning's great energy of thought and language
need to be scanned carefully for the powerful way they
bring home to us the art of a poet who 'looks into every
cranny, follows every tortuous winding, seizes on each
leap and start of the human machine.' (p. 140) He was
"robust and masculine" (p. 140) "always, original, vigorous,
inexhaustible" (p. 140), "with a great range of interests,
a buoyant hold on life" (p. 140) and an "unrivalled force
in seizing on a moment of the soul or mind." (p. 141)
Browning well may have been, says Aurobindo, "the
Shakespeare of his time." (p. 141) But like all his
predecessors discussed before, he too suffered from a
"fatal deficiency" (p. 141) which left him incomplete, a
lack of "artistic form and poetic beauty." (p. 141)

The subtle distinctions that Aurobindo makes reveal
the delicate nuances of his own critical sensibility.
For example:

This great creator was no artist; this
strength was too robust and direct to
give forth sweetness. (p. 141)

A still better example could perhaps be found in the
following passage:

Browning is a consummate technician,
one might almost say a mechanician in
verse; ... it was the language of
a prosaist and not a poet, of the
intellect and not the imagination. (p. 141)
(italics mine)
Aurobindo's sensitivity for words as well as a capacity to evaluate different levels and shades of poetry with an almost scientific accuracy are markedly present here. A fitting finale he provides to his assessment is the comment that Browning might have done strong and vigorous and robust work which won him "many victories" (p. 141) but "the supreme greatness cannot come in poetry without the supreme beauty." (p. 141) By capturing the very tone and substance of Browning's poetry Aurobindo has demonstrated what a good critic can do in barely a page and a half.

From the roughnesses and crudities and contortions of Browning's verse he passes on to the "true classic style of poetry" (p. 141) of Arnold, the "third considerable Victorian poet of the epoch." (p. 141) While Aurobindo discovers in Arnold a capacity to strike out "the more serious notes of contemporary thinking" (p. 142) he cannot fail to notice however, Arnold's inability to look beyond to the future." (p. 141) This pregnant phrase says everything and the rest is silence.

In the final analysis, "the over-wrought romantic colour of Rossetti, Swinburne's overpitch or Tennyson's too frequent overcharge and decorative preciosity of expression" (p. 142) make the Victorian epoch a "limited period of preparation for the discovery of new, more beautiful and grander fields of poetry." (p. 143) Hence
the justification of his earlier observation: "the greatest intuitive and revealing poetry has yet to come." (p. 116) But his distinction consists in making it clear that a poetry of this kind need not be at all high and remote or intangible but will make the highest things near, close and visible. Yet if it "wings to the heights", it will not leave earth unseen below it; not confining itself to earth, it will find other realities and "take all the planes of existence for its empire." (p. 208) "This at least is its possible ideal endeavour, and then the attempt itself would be a rejuvenating elixir..." (p. 208) And this is the crux of the entire book—to provide means of rejuvenation to a form of literature that has ceased to flow from the Overmind.

Not even the great Shakespeare can be assumed to have said the last word on life or human nature. Aurobindo himself is more deeply aware than anyone else that life is much larger than any individual and too complex and mysterious to be apprehended totally by any one single human being. He therefore comments:

Shakespeare is still — though need he be always? — immeasurably the largest name in English poetry;

But still, "however, preeminent his genius, there remain greater things to be seen by the poet than Shakespeare saw and greater things to be said in poetry than Shakespeare said." (p. 175)
Aurobindo's uniqueness lies in indicating the path on which these "greater things" lie and the "gates which open to their hiding - place." (p. 175) A firm believer in the evolution of poetry he states categorically that "poetry, like everything else in man, evolves." (p. 189) Of course, he is conscious of the difficulties of predicting what the poetry of the future will actually be like and moreover, "to attempt to prophesy the future turn of mind... is always a hazardous occupation." (p. 199) But the "present faint beginnings" (p. 203) of "a greater era of man's living" (p. 203) and a reflection of this trend in the field of poetry too encourages him to believe that "a new great age" of creation different from past epochs and "superior to them in its vision and motive" (p. 203) is in promise. Actually, "a glint of this change is already visible." (p. 203) Surprisingly he finds the "first signs" of such a change in the "conscious effort of Whitman, the tone of Carpenter, the significance of the poetry of A.E., the rapid immediate fame of Tagore" (p. 203) and justifiably in the reappearance of the idea of a poet as Rishi. He finds this change inevitable, for "the mind of man, a little weary now of the superficial pleasure of the life and intellect, demands... a poetry of the joy of self, of the deeper beauty and delight of existence." (p. 246)

A merely cultured poetry fair in form and word and playing on the surface strings of
mind and emotion will not serve its purpose. The human mind is opening to an unprecedented largeness of vision of the greatness of the worlds, the wonder of life, the self of man; the mystery of the spirit in him and the universe. The future poetry must seek in that vision its inspiration,... this will be the substance of the greater poetry that has yet to be written. (pp. 246–247)

This new poetry calls for a new approach understandably on the part of the poet. Aurobindo realizes that to express an "inwardly intuitive vital vision" (p. 281) an "intuitive language" has to be found first -- Paishyanti Vak or the seeing Word. The "inmost truth of the things" must be expressed in the "inmost way", "transcending the more intellectualized or externally vital and sensational expression." (p. 279) This brings us again to a major preoccupation of Aurobindo -- namely his insistence that "it is the spirit within and not the mind without that is the fount of poetry." (p. 195) His repeated assertions:

Pure intellect cannot create poetry (p. 195)

only the least inspired poetry is purely intellectual in substance (p. 275)

it is the more purely intuitive, inspired or revelatory utterance that is the most
rare and difficult for the human mind
to command, and it is these kinds that
we peculiarly value. (p. 277)

might meet with an amount of resistance from the modern
reader who has come to set much value by the intellect.
But perhaps it is about time we realized that this
intellect which Aurobindo denounces is not the Intellect
of Ananda Coomaraswamy which touches the consciousness of
God. In Coomaraswamy's interpretation of Intellect as
paroksa, it is given a metaphysical connotation: in
Intellect is the highest power of the soul; it is the
"temple of God" (alaya-vijnana) wherein He is shining in
all His glory; nowhere does He dwell more really than in
the temple of His intellect's nature. Aurobindo's
intellect, which more precisely means reason, has still
a long way to travel and hence his rejection of it. It
is true intellect might produce clever, witty and even
competent poetry but certainly not great poetic creation,
in Aurobindo's opinion.

Aurobindo's knowledge of the "godhead in the human
being which is the high fate of this race"; (p. 255) (we
might note how different this is from the "complex fate
of being an American!" the coming supermanhood of man"

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2 Ananda Coomaraswamy, "The Theory of Art in Asia" in
The Transformation of Nature in Art (Dover, New
York, 1956).
and the individual's attempt "to rise to his godlike possibility" (p. 255) drives him to visualize a poetry which will be largely concerned with the "destiny of the spirit in man", (p. 255) the spirit which is "master of the future" (p. 255) and that which in fact, "shapes his poetic utterance." (p. 255)

Accordingly the trend of recent poetry in Aurobindo's own view has been to "break open the doors of the luminous cavern" and get the "seeing" and "phrase" that could reflect the intuitive self of man. He notes that some English, Irish, and Indian poets are driving in this direction. However, "these are beginnings and beyond lies much that has to be done to effectuate the complete change; an uncertain transition has yet to pass into a great transformation." (p. 281) The first step, as he conceives, is to recast the moulds or at least the spirit and manner of poetic expression very much as Shakespeare and his contemporaries did in English, but this time it has to be done in many languages..." (p. 281).

A responsible criticism of this sort reflecting a sense of history and obligation to the present can be a valuable directive to those involved in poetic creation. Such a one alone could have possessed the authority to spell out in clear terms and with a sense of urgency the peculiar role that poetry has to play in future, that is,
the role of finding an aesthetic language and the revealing language for a vision that envisions both the divine reality in the universe and man's divine possibilities. This is imperative if a "greatening of life" has to become the substance of future poetry. The men who can make it possible are those who, irrespective of race and language see most completely with a spiritual vision, and speak with the inspiration of its utterance. They shall be the creators of the poetry of the future, a "poetry of the intuitive reason, the intuitive senses, the intuitive delight-soul in us" (p. 207) which can kindle not only the "five lamps of our being" but many countries hidden from our view and make them 'suns in the heavens of our highest mind..." (p. 207).

Aurobindo's rapid seizing of the intuitive, inevitable word and the disclosing turn of phrase admits the uninitiated reader at once to a direct vision of future poetry. The spiritual cadence of his language marks the definite beginning of a direct, spiritual intonation in literary criticism. The task that he sets before future poetry is of course immense. But in so far as he asks of it to concern itself not primarily with metre or anything of the kind but to "seize some sound, some intonation of the voice of the soul" (p. 166) which will "roll out and support all the steps of the universe" (p. 166) he is giving poetry a unique direction and also adding a
new dimension to literary criticism by changing the very language and texture of its thought. Every line goes straight as an arrow to its mark, gives iron to the mind and fills the pages with a God-like abundance.

Stupendous and self-sufficient as Future Poetry is both in conception and execution, yet no estimate of Aurobindo will be complete without a reference to his works on the Vedas, Upanishads and Indian Culture.

Moved by the greatness of the ideals of the past Aurobindo gives himself to the task of recovering a true and inward understanding of the country's ancient literature. His works on early Indian writings like the Vedas and the Upanishads which form the foundations of Indian culture emphasize more than anything else the need to free ourselves from all subjection to a foreign outlook in cultural matters. Hence his passionate affirmation:

An entire return upon ourselves is our only way of salvation.  

Apparently a warning to the Western educated Indian who looked at his country with Western eyes and appreciated neither his art nor his literature unless it came to him via the west. Hence Aurobindo's bid to restore the balance.

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The Secret of the Veda makes an objective assessment of the literary worth of these ancient hymns. Here is Aurobindo who exaggerates neither their merits nor their defects but views them both with detachment. He is equally alive to passages where language is "obscure" or "artificial", where thoughts are "unconnected" and "have to be forced and beaten by the interpreter into a whole" (p. 2) as to those which display "a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in their technique, great variations of style and poetical personality." (p. 9) Aurobindo's own poetic eloquence could be a major "discovery" to anyone reading him for the first time. Many passages can be quoted to suggest the lucidity of his description. A certain concreteness too marks his phrasing. Though occasionally guilty of cumbersomeness and longwindedness Aurobindo can throw up sentences of extreme brevity with telling effect. His writing here as elsewhere is characterized by a critical questioning so evident as in: "why suppose a symbol where there is only an image." (p. 122) Insight is not lacking either. Abundant examples reveal a subtle, sensitive mind at work. Thoughts on Vedic language and prosody and the practical, utilitarian aspects of the hymns lead him to a discussion of comparative philology which receives but scant respect at his hands.

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and justly so, for he shows us convincingly that "scientific philology is (still) non-existent"; (p. 551) that it is "nine-tenths conjecture" and that Max Muller's "fatal formula, pita, pater, pater, vater, futher" (p. 551) is wholly "illusory"; for it assumes that common terms imply a common civilization, an assumption which sins both by excess and by defect." (p. 554) As a consequence, "European philology has missed the road to the truth." (p. 551) He therefore calls upon the philologist to confine himself strictly to the history of words and illumine "this badly explored tract of knowledge." (p. 557)

Aurobindo also draws our attention to the fixity of modern language as against the fluidity of earlier tongues and warns us that the present tendency to fixity limits "severely the use of a single word in several different senses" (p. 564) and also encourages the avoidance of "the use of many different words for the expression of a single object or idea." (p. 564)

Aurobindo's book on the Upanishads is a powerful exposition of the hollowness of Western response to Indian scriptures represented notably by Max Mueller. He is provoked by European scholars who look upon the mass of heterogeneous ideas in the Upanishads as "the babblings of

a child humanity," (p. 9) and Max Mueller who thought that the Sacred Books of the East contained much that was not only "unmeaning, artificial and silly but even hideous and repellent." (p. 54) With courage and vehemence Aurobindo lashes out at European scholars for dubbing whatever they could not understand "silly." With the indignation of a stung serpent he turns back and poses to the Western reader:

What would our Hindu Pundit make of the symbol of bread and wine?
("This is my body and this is my blood") (p. 56)

The answer he himself provides must have silenced many Max Muellers! The Hindu Pundit, he explains would find a great deal that was "unmeaning, artificial and silly" and to his vegetarian imagination the symbolism might look so "hideous and repellent" that it might make him "vomit"! Certainly it needed tremendous courage not merely to differ from a white man's views at a time when "toeing the line" was the policy but also to question his credentials to talk to us about the Vedas and Vedanta just because he knew something of Sanskrit grammar. "They came in a spirit of arrogance with pre-conceived idea to teach and not to learn; and their learning was therefore not helpful towards truth, but only towards grammar" (p. 478) he concludes. In fact, he finds them "playing marbles on the doorsteps of the outer court of the temple" (p. 478) in matters of "light". It is not a mere vain rhetorical defiance, but
a positive service to the country in the sense, apart from winning self-respect to his countrymen he sets them an example to emulate. It is not that Aurobindo is prejudiced against the white man, for his catholicity of outlook goes so far as to say "Parabrahman in Shakespeare is the same as Parabrahman in ourselves." (p. 39) Yet another example, from The Foundations of Indian Culture shows his humility in observing that spirituality is not the monopoly of India. To think that whatever we have is good for us because it is Indian or even that whatever is in India is best, because it is the creation of the Rishis is "vulgar and unthinking cultural chauvinism." (p. 41) He has also the wisdom and the perspective to see that isolation from the rest of the world would be our bane. It is no longer possible even if it were desirable, he asserts. Though eager to defend his country's cultural existence, her distinct spirit, her essential principle and characteristic forms, no one is more wary of the pitfalls attending idealization of the past than Aurobindo himself. It must not lead us to inertia, he warns us.

William Archer's attack on Indian culture and his wholesale condemnation of India's greatest achievements as a "repulsive mass of unpeachable barbarism" provokes Aurobindo again to retort in his Foundations that it is their reading of the texts and not the texts themselves
that is barbarous and repulsive and describe Archer's book as "a journalistic fake, not an honest critical production." (p. 45) If a critic's greatest service to society lies in the preservation of the cultural monuments of his country from unjustified oblivion, neglect, attack and misunderstanding, here is Aurobindo doing it amply, and forcefully. It becomes his main preoccupation in the body of his writings to interpret and vindicate the value and efficacy of Indian culture and achievement amidst ill-founded charges made by irresponsible Europeans, which if not checked and arrested would have perpetuated ignorance and projected a wrong and inaccurate image of India. His mode is not simply a passionate denial or an ardent glorification but a just appraisal of various factors that have made Indian survival possible, not merely survival, but even promise of victory and conquest in the future. And to make it a reality he insists on our refusal "to remain exactly what we were before the European invasion" (p. 392) and to reject excluding "everything that comes into us from outside." (p. 391) What Aurobindo would want of us is to keep an open mind and yet maintain our centre, our svadharma. Aurobindo like Gandhi offers us a useful direction in the assimilation of outside influences.

In *The Harmony of Virtue*\(^6\), Aurobindo has by and large

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\(^6\) *Sri Aurobindo, The Harmony of Virtue: Early Cultural Writings* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972)
a literary theme to deal with as in *Future Poetry*, though he is still aware that a poet's material is "dead" and "useless" without "the breath of a vivifying culture." He starts off with Bankim, Madhusudan and Toru Dutt. While he heaps honours upon honours on Bankim and accords him the highest place for his contribution to Bengali literature and language, he however, does not seem to be happy with Toru's decision to write in English though he himself admits that she wrote English with "perfect grace and correctness and French with energy and power". (p. 79) In his personal view she "unfortunately wasted herself on a foreign language." (p. 79) Perceptive readers of *Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* in recent times have a different opinion altogether. There is, for them, not merely "promise" but even "accomplishment". But Aurobindo's bias against English seems to have sprung from his over-mastering love for the Bengali language making his argument rather arbitrary and unsound.

... in a language you have learned, ... you will never attain to the full stature of your genius. (p. 89)

To be original in an acquired tongue is hardly feasible. (p. 90)

There is certainly no logic behind these two statements and the reader is tempted to quote the case of Conrad and our own contemporary Indian writers of fiction in English
whom Aurobindo of course had not anticipated. This is perhaps because Aurobindo was operating at a time when the national sentiment ran high and it was necessary to foster things which made for national regeneration. However, Aurobindo's own style vibrates with power and gusto while describing Madhusudan's handling of the Bengali dialect largely by his recourse to elemental images. Aurobindo's audacious imagery is matched only by the audaciousness of his thought:

In Madhusudan's hands that nervous and feminine dialect became ... a tongue for the storms and whirlwinds to speak in: he caught and studied his diction from the echo and rumour of the sea (p. 95)

With his kind of background and predilections, it is not at all surprising to come across a philosophic conception of poetry even in so early a work as this. As in Future Poetry it is described here also as primarily inspiration, revelation and mantric in character. Original and Indian in mould his definition of poetry conceives of "three mental instruments of knowledge" — the heart, the reasoning intellect and the intuitive intellect depending on tāmasic, rājasic and sattwic stimuli respectively. He lays before us the characteristics of poetry resulting from each of the three states with examples from English poetry, demonstrating for the first time in Indian literary criticism the possibility and the extreme validity of making
an Indian approach to English poets.

During his discussion of Vyasa, Valmiki and Kalidasa he devotes a fair amount of space to Historical Method. His admission that "we are very fortunate not to know" the biographical details of Vyasa or Valmiki or Kalidasa is the outcome of a conviction that the historical method, though attractive and useful to an extent "does not in the end assist or improve our critical appreciation of poetry." (p. 229) Very often it is a cause of "confusion", "impressionism", "literary insincerity" (p. 233) and "anaemic catholicity." Indeed, he thinks it unfortunate that the supporters of the historical method "insist on directing that attention to the poet which should be directed to the poem." (p. 230) His critical awareness coupled with a precise use of language is reminiscent of the exponents of analytical criticism, Leavis and Richards.

He next takes up the question of milieu and says that the importance of milieu to criticism has been immensely exaggerated. "It is important as literary history; but history is not criticism," (p. 232) he argues. In fact, it litters our minds with facts and distorts our judgment, for "we proceed from the milieu to the poem instead of arguing from the poem to the milieu." (p. 233) Besides, a man may have a very wide and curious knowledge of literary history and yet be a very poor critic. In Aurobindo's judgment, an "excessive and often absurd
laudation of the numberless small names in literature, many of them "discoveries" is the curse of latter-day criticism.

His sensitive approach to translation similarly makes the reader marvel at his rare sensibility which could apprehend the subtle nuances of whatever subject he might, be dealing with.

There is a marvellous freshness in both approach and phrasing in his examination of Vyasa and Valmiki. It is Indian to the core: Vyasa who is the most "masculine" of Indian writers has a "granite" mind; is a "marble" Rishi; his art is niskama, with a "virgin coldness" about it, he is in "unmixed olympian"; in contrast with Valmiki he is not "titanic". "Vyasa has not Valmiki's movement as of the sea, the wide and unbroken surge with its infinite variety of waves..." (p. 150)" he has not the secret of the storm nor has his soul ridden upon the whirlwind," (p. 176) "he visits not Patala", "this poet could never have conceived Ravana" (p. 176) etc. This highly surcharged and animate style dominates much of his writing indicating great originality of thought and feeling.

Moving on to Kalidasa Aurobindo not merely presents a detailed analysis of Kalidasa's Seasons but exhibits a thoroughly modern temperament in placing this work side by

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(p. 176)
side with Thomson's *Seasons* for purposes of comparison and contrast and brings out many striking differences in matters of spirit and genius between the two. He also takes up Kalidasa's characters for a close study sometimes bringing in Shakespeare to disclose points of similarity and dissimilarity.

This comprehensive volume which also discusses the revival of Indian art and Hindu Drama in juxtaposition with Elizabethan Literature and European tradition is enlivened by the combined qualities of amazing perceptiveness and powerful writing by a man who lived most richly and thought most profoundly, found his heights and his depths and came to constant and many-sided fruition.

The vast body of Aurobindo's Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art covering as many as two hundred and seventy pages — sufficient to form a volume by itself, thoughtfully appended to his *Future Poetry* is undoubtedly a significant contribution to literary criticism. It is said that Aurobindo used to keep awake practically whole nights to answer queries from his friends and disciples on poetry and art. The result of such a toil is an opulent flow of riches in the form of letters written with a profound sense of commitment. A close reading reveals how Aurobindo has raised the status of letter-writing to a serious art-form. Such a mode itself is not of course
new to the literary world as it abounds in classic examples of great men expressing their professed, intimate views on life and literature through this genre. But what makes Aurobindo's *Letters* particularly relevant is his close and intelligent analysis of poems submitted to him by his poet-disciples in the course of which he also throws practical and useful tips to young and aspiring poets. He is candid and objective in his assessment expressing with a complete freedom his disapproval whenever the occasion necessitates it. His mode of operation is to pick out certain lines or even whole stanzas from the poems offered to him for scrutiny and attempt a practical analysis of them. One might at the outset consider his letter dated 19/3/1932, a remarkable evidence of his mature critical sensibility.

"Young heart", "thrilled companionship", "warm hour", "lip to lip", "passionate unease" are here poorly sensuous clichés. If he makes an outright rejection of hackneyed language here, at another place he accuses his friend of following a "pseudo-Miltonic" tradition resulting in hollowness and lack of originality. His objection to expressions like "lofty region", "vasty region" and "myriad region" on grounds

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7 Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poets And Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972), p. 312. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited in the text itself.
that they indicate nothing but a "bare intellectual fact" lacking vision and conveying mere wideness without any significance suggests an astonishing degree of sensitivity to language and a rare ability to diagnose with unerring accuracy the usually slurred over Miltonic vices. Elsewhere he finds a particular line "strong and dignified" but too "mental and Miltonic". That his disapproval does not stem from a mere prejudice against Miltonic influence is seen in the following statement which highlights the dangers of coming under such an influence:

The interference of the mental Miltonic is one of the stumbling-blocks when one tries to write from "above". (p. 347)

The reaction occasioned by the poetry of his disciple's friend on yet another occasion is likewise instructive and profitable. Analysing its defects one by one in the manner of a deeply involved literary critic he finds it "irritating" and wanting in "true technique". In the first place he traces its failure to its having unfortunately "passed strongly under the influence of poets who smell of the schoolroom" and "the bookworm's closet". (p. 458) The "schoolroom" and "the bookworm's closet" which immediately conjure up a musty atmosphere alienated from the warmth of sunlight indicate Aurobindo's dislike of any academic endeavour divorced from throbbing, pulsating life. Secondly, the poem fails, because Aurobindo believes, the author is "constantly composing out of his brain" (p. 458) which is almost similar to the first charge but different to the
extent that Aurobindo here directly expresses his reservations regarding the "brain". Not satisfied with a generalization like this he gets down to a discussion of particulars which have marred the poetic effect:

Such awful things as "unsoughten", "a-journeying", "a-knocking", "strayed gift" and the constant abuse of the auxiliary verb "to do" would be enough to damn even the best poem. (p. 458)

Such archaic expressions as "unsoughten", "a-journeying", "a-knocking", etc., apparently borrowed from English poets have had their day and any repetition of them by an Indian poet would only sound jaded and out of place. To be conscious of all this affirms Aurobindo's fine ear for poetry. But he does not stop with pinpointing the errors. More importantly he offers a piece of advice which could indeed go a long way in training the critical sensibility of the reader and the poet involved. Improving upon the author the need to modernize his language rigorously he warns him at the same time not to lapse into the other extreme of over-colloquialization resorting to "my dear" etc.

Aurobindo's firm conviction that the "best poetry comes from the Illumined Mind" and not the "brain-mind" made him suspect all poetry that originated from "mere human intelligence" or "mere intellect." Hence he repeatedly
wrote to his disciples on the value of writing directly from the "Illumined Mind". If they could find not only the "substance" but the "rhythm and language" there, then the poetry that resulted would indeed be "exquisite, original and unique." (p. 348) Only a critic who rationalized his faith in the Illumined Mind could have written to a disciple:

Certainly if you want to achieve a greater poetry, more unique, you will yourself have to change, to alter the poise of your consciousness. (p. 348)

The insistence on altering the "poise" of one's "consciousness" so as to produce greater poetry is something one can rarely think of coming across in literary criticism. Significantly the insistence is not on technique, language, style, rhythm or metre which have all been discussed threadbare by most other critics but on an aspect of the poet's equipment that seems more central to the writing of poetry here. He analyses in the manner of a scientist the factors that enhance the superiority of the Illumined Mind over the intellect lest his predilection for the former might sound arbitrary and vague. He not merely captures the difference between the two himself but crystallizes it in such a manner as to convey it even to his readers with precision and clarity. As a result, a cerebral idea is transformed into a felt experience.
Himself a daring innovator in poetry and criticism he encouraged his disciples also to be original in their literary creations. It is but natural that such a scholar could brook no imitation in their writings. Some of his letters show how he frowned upon all second-hand efforts. His replies to letters seeking his opinion on such writings reveal the stamp of a true master who passionately endeavoured to create markedly high standards in literary matters. It is not all depreciation either. At times he would come out with a word of encouragement to those who in despair contemplated abandoning writing, on grounds that with perseverance they might overcome their former defects and reach a stage at which they can hope for "greater development." There are also points which he can appreciate and which, he believes, ought to be pursued and developed. For instance, while he is critical of several things in X's poetry he admits graciously that there is a "pressure from a deeper source" (p. 458) which "might break through, if only he would let it." (p. 458) Another man with "a genuine vein of poetic inspiration" (p. 349) is advised to keep his intellect "quiet" and the "lower vital" from meddling. Unusual as the idiom and the advice might seem, it augurs well for Indian literary criticism that a distinctive Indian character is evolving.

If one of the functions of a responsible critic is to point out a true line of progress to younger writers of
promise here is Aurobindo performing it with dedication. In letter after letter he exhorts his younger contemporaries to write from a higher level of consciousness things that come from the deepest self and the highest spiritual levels; to get rid of all that is merely mental and develop what is true and fine. To those acquainted with the texture of his thought embodied in his writings, his confession that he did not "wish to produce anything except as an expression from a higher plane of consciousness" (p. 349) does not come as a vain self-boast but as a kind of signature upon all that he wrote.

The guidelines he sets down are worth a close examination for the absolute relevance they have even today. If on one occasion he finds fault with the "word effusiveness" of his disciple ("not praiseworthy in poetry anywhere", p. 307) on another he reacts in a manner that is worth quoting in full for the sheer sophistication and modernity of thought.

The line strikes at once the romantically sentimental note of more than a hundred years ago which is dead and laughed out of court nowadays. Especially in writing anything about vital love, avoid like the plague anything that descends into the sentimental or, worse, the namby-pamby. (p. 312)

Erotic poetry more than any other needs the restraint of beauty and form and
measure, otherwise it risks being no longer poetic but merely pathologic. (p. 313)

Yet another letter on page 457 which lists three important rules ought to be studied carefully by anyone who wants to write poetry "which can stand". A very brief letter on p. 460 which emphasizes the need to avoid "over-writing" might in its tone of directness well appear like a list of do's and don'ts. But a discriminating reader will realize what an invaluable piece of advice it is from so mature a poet-critic as Aurobindo. The language is kept to the barest minimum shorn of all frills and not a word is used in excess—itself serving as a model for compact and concise writing.

A serious scholar like Aurobindo has also to educate his countrymen on the kind of books they ought to read as well as avoid. Knowing full well as he does that Indians have a natural tendency to be "too coloured, sometimes flowery, sometimes rhetorical" in writing English he rejects a particular book submitted to him for perusal as in his view it encouraged the Indian tendency for ornate language. While he commends Arnold as a "very good model" for the purpose of learning to write simply and energetically he finds Emerson a less influential writer in this respect.

It is true that he advocated sincerity and straightforwardness as against rhetoric and artifice on many an occasion but on his own admission it was far from his
intention "to impose any strict rule of bare simplicity and directness as a general law of poetic style." (p. 459) His response to Lawrence's theories of bareness and directness in poetry which will be discussed later is sufficient proof in this regard.

Writing on Blank Verse, "the most difficult of all English metres" he can expatiate upon its use with mastery and inwardness. He examines in this connection the pitfalls that an Indian poet in English using blank verse is exposed to. He does not find it gratifying to see Indians trying their hands at blank verse immediately after they start writing in English and following a Victorian model, "especially a sort of pseudo-Tennysonain movement or structure which makes their work in this kind weak, flat and ineffective." (p. 456) He has the courage and insight to point out that "... Victorian blank verse at its best is not strong or great, and at a more common level it is languid or crude or characterless. Except for a few poems, ... there is nothing of a very high order." (p. 456) His analysis of Tennyson is in itself a masterpiece of literary criticism. At a time when Tennyson and the other Victorians were the rage in the Indian literary circles it must have required immense courage on Aurobindo's part to dissent from the popular opinion and also to show convincingly how Tennyson was unsuitable for emulation from the Indian point of view. To disabuse the Indian mind of its illusion
was a positive service indeed. In justice to Aurobindo his own words must be quoted.

Tennyson is a perilous model and can have a weakening and corrupting influence and the _Princess_ and _Idylls of the King_ which seem to have set the tone for Indo-English blank verse are perhaps the worst choice possible for such a role. There is plenty of clever craftsmanship but it is mostly false and artificial and without true strength or inspired movement or poetic force—the right kind of blank verse for a victorian drawing-room poetry, that is all that can be said for it. (p. 456)

For a poet whose ideal was to write poetry from a supra-physical consciousness and who looked for the soul-element in the poetry of others it is easy to conceive how, a great deal of Tennyson's work should appear as "drawing-room poetry." The expression bristles with contempt but it must be said, in fairness to him that he is equally conscious of "the higher quality" in Tennyson's best work which is not "easily assimilable." Unfortunately "the worst is catching but undesirable as a model." (p. 457)

It is with the same open mind that he appreciates the poetry of Dryden and Pope even when he has "little temperamental sympathy" for much of their work, for he is still able to see "their extraordinary perfection of force in their own field, the masterly conciseness, energy, point, metallic precision into which they cut their thought or
their verse", (p. 472) thus fulfilling his own requirement of what a critic should be, "catholic and objective" in order to find the "merit or special character of all he reads or sees in poetry and art, even when they do not evoke his strongest sympathy or deepest response." (p. 472) His admission that he has made in criticism "a practice of appreciating everything that can be appreciated as a catholic critic would" (p. 473) accounts for the interest he takes in what is happening around him. From Shakespeare and Dante to Dryden and Pope; from Wordsworth and Keats to Blake and Lawrence; from Tennyson and Browning to Yeats and A.E., from Virgil and Horace to French Symbolists, he is perfectly at home and writes with the inwardness of one born to such traditions. One might consider for instance his account of a poet like Mallarmé who "practically turned the current of French Poetry" (p. 475); whose "strange enigmatic profound style ... turned the whole structure of French upside down" (p. 475), who "helped to create Verlaine, Valery and a number of others." (p. 475) The tone of confidence and the sense of authority reveal the insider that Aurobindo was to his poetic heritage. No less valuable is his perceptive commentary on Browning and Coleridge and D.H. Lawrence. His estimate of Browning brings out his own evolution as a critic. His "calf-love" for Tennyson and Browning at seventeen gives way to a mature critical awareness which finds Browning wanting in "depth" though he has much "stuff of thought." The subtle distinction
he makes is worth noting: "he is not one of the greatest poets, but he is a great creator." (p. 542) In a word, "his expression is often not only rough and hasty but inadequate; in his later work he becomes tiresome." (p. 542) Surely the "fervent passion" of Aurobindo's adolescent years for Browning has cooled off and what we have in its place now is an adult response that savours of a sureness of touch and critical depth.

Commenting on a particular stanza in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, ("He prayeth best...") Aurobindo points out the inherent sentimentalism in the phrase "dear God" which is "obviously extra child-like and may sound childish even." (p. 541) But he answers his own charge satisfactorily by pointing out that it is not intended to be Coleridge's own contribution to thought but rather that of the Mariner, "the most simple and childlike personality possible" (p. 542) who feels with the barest ideas and the most elementary and primitive emotions. Besides, "the tone of the poem is deliberately intended to be that of an unsophisticated ballad simplicity and ballad mentality." (p. 542) What Aurobindo is directly hinting at is the fact that there is a certain amount of distance between the creator and his character and hence the general tendency of identifying the two is largely inaccurate. By treating them as two independent identities, each with a distinctive psyche of his own Aurobindo has demonstrated how he has been able to
enter into the spirit of the poem and view the stanza in question in a right perspective. On the other hand a confusion of the one with the other might have distorted his response.

His portrait of Lawrence as a "Yogi who had missed his way and come into a European body to work out his difficulties" (p. 536) at once stands out as distinctly Indian in unique contrast with Western attempts which depict him primarily as a "sexual maniac." Viewing from the Indian standpoint Aurobindo analyses the radical limitations of Lawrence in one memorable stroke: "he mistook Life for Spirit, whereas Life can only be an expression of the Spirit. That too perhaps was the reason for his preoccupation with a vain and baffled sexuality." (pp. 536-37) Again in a characteristically perceptive approach Aurobindo brings out another of Lawrence's serious failure, namely, his attempt to achieve annihilation (lāyā) of the ego—"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 end of the nature." (p. 540) What needs to be specially mentioned here is Aurobindo's ability to go to the very root of the malady and not simply the symptom. Similarly his comment on Lawrence's desire for "stark bare rocky directness" (p. 537) in modern poetry is equally enlightening. He can appreciate Lawrence's faith
that, Form hides and not expresses the reality; he can sympathize with his urge to do away with rhyme, metre, artifices, all over-expression; all language for the sake of language, form for the sake of form and even indulgence of poetic emotion for the sake of the emotion because all that "veils the thing in itself, dresses it up and prevents it from coming out in the seizing nudity of its truth ..." (p. 537) and have instead "bare, rocky, primally expressive" poetry, provided he succeeds in expressing the inner truth in things better and more vividly and directly than with rhyme and metre. But Lawrence's theory has not produced the desirable results, argues Aurobindo. He quotes some lines from Lawrence to prove his statement and points out with justification that mere "skeletonic bareness" or "dilution" will not express the fundamental quality, power and movement of poetry. In fact, Lawrence's own poem "Pansies" drives Aurobindo to exclaim:

Well, well, this is the bare, rocky, direct poetry? God help us! (p. 539)

But in actuality the modern reader might find the talking voice of the poet in the four lines Aurobindo quotes simply delightful and charming. However, in Aurobindo's opinion this is what the "evil influence of theories on a man of genius" (p. 540) does. He writes emphatically:

If he had been contented to write things of beauty instead of bare rockies and dry
deserts, he might have done splendidly
and ranked among the great poets. (p. 540)

While one has reason to agree with Aurobindo about the
"evil influence of theories" in general, one certainly
has reservations about his observation that, had Lawrence
written "things of beauty" instead of "bare rockies and
dry deserts" he might have emerged as a great poet. This
appears to be a limited view as experience has shown that
it is not the theme that lends the greatness but rather
the handling of it; the poet's apprehension of reality.
Let us remind ourselves that an Eliot could make a poem
out of a waste land hailed as the greatest poem of the
century. But one agrees with Aurobindo that Lawrence was
"a man of gifts who failed for want of vital balance"
(p. 535)

Aurobindo's collection of letters abounds in pen
pictures of famous men of letters, poets, mystics and
intellectuals. Each such portrait succeeds in bringing
out Aurobindo's sharp critical acumen. His estimate of
Bernard Shaw, for instance, reveals his analytical powers
of a superior order. Shaw, in his opinion is a "keen
and forceful intellect" but not "a great thinker." As
to assigning him a position in literature perhaps none
can rival Aurobindo's superb assessment. "... he will
take some place but not a very large place, once the
drums have ceased beating and the fighting is over. He
has given too much to the battles of the hour perhaps to claim a large share of the future... as a personality, he is not likely to be forgotten, even if his writings fade." (p. 551). Here is no value judgment but an incisive analysis with a "metallic precision" about it.

For a writer who views verse-writing as a part of one's *Sadhana*, literature as an "instrumentation for the Divine Life" (p. 511); an aid to "openings into realization", it is natural to plead for a poetry which could become a means of the poet's own realization as well as that of others in the true Vedantic tradition when poetry was viewed as *Mantra*. It is with sufficient justification therefore that he talks of "Overhead planes" and "Overmind" as the ultimate source of intuition or illumination and advises his poet-disciples to let their consciousness grow, for when the consciousness develops, he believes "a greater energy of inspiration comes," (p. 295) and inspiration is one of the basic requirements for writing poetry according to Aurobindo. Knowing full well the incertitudes of inspiration from his own experience as a poet he writes eloquently and graphically on the role of inspiration in the entire poetic process and its presence in different degrees in various poets in less than two paragraphs. He speaks of poets who command it; of those who court it and of those who sustain it by industry. A firm believer in the efficacy of "true inspiration" he advises his pupils
to wait until it comes and keep in abeyance the "half-gods of the semipoetic mind continually intervening with their false enthusiasms and misleading voices." (p. 297) Of course, this stand will not go unchallenged by the votaries of the belief: "Poetry is ninety-nine percent perspiration and only one percent inspiration". But then this is a debatable point inviting comments both for and against, depending upon the temperament and sensibility of the poet.

Rhythm in poetry is indispensable to Aurobindo, "a capital part of the value of poetry." (p. 302) But he is careful to add that it is the "inevitable rhythm" that creates the "inevitable wording." In his own vivid and memorable language it means "thisness and thereness and thatness and everythingelseness so satisfying in every way as to be unalterable." (p. 303) The aptness of his phrasing here suggests the possible means of achieving inevitability, but as though he has not said everything that needs to be said on the point he takes another little paragraph to explain what he means by "supreme inevitability" — a paragraph eminently quotable for the superb imaginativeness and delicate sensibility he displays in picking up the choicest poetic examples to demonstrate his idea of "inevitability."

Keats' "magic casements", "Wordsworth's Newton and his "fields of sleep", 
Shakespeare's "Macbeth has murdered sleep,"
Homer's descent of Apollo from Olympus, ...

(p. 303)

During his discourse on poetic inevitability Aurobindo makes at least two things clear. In the first place "highly coloured poetry" can be absolutely inevitable as some of Shakespeare's lines show. Secondly, there is a need on our part to recognize a poetry which expresses only just the necessary, the absolute truth, simply and easily without a word in excess or any laying on of colour. This, he considers to be one of the greatest achievements of poetry. In support of his argument he cites a line from Dante which reads: "In His Will is our peace" (p. 311) To respond therefore solely to that poetry which is "remotely beautiful, deeply coloured or strangely imaged with a glitter in it or a magic glimmer" (p. 310) is "surely a serious limitation of the appreciative faculty", (p. 310) in Aurobindo's opinion. There is a poetry where these qualities are absent and are yet great and beautiful to which one cannot remain "deaf and dead." (p. 310) What Aurobindo wants is a "plasticity" of one's "solar plexus" which thrills to different kinds of poetry. This is perhaps what he means by a "catholic" and "objective" critic.

If Aurobindo's ideas come alive to the readers it is largely because of his creative use of language reflected
in his felicitous phrasing and memorable imagery. To quote only one or two examples at random: Ideas "catch fire" and "burn"; Chesterton is "unequal and unreliable, violent, rocket like, ostentatious," (p. 319) and his metaphors are rather "explosive"; Wordsworth "petered out like a motor car with insufficient petrol" — the last of which in particular is exceedingly original. This is not to ignore some of his other characteristically haunting lines spread over his whole work. One has in mind such lines as those describing Agni as one who "mounts upon the back of heaven"; the syllable as the "backbone of the word"; the wall of difference between the individual self and the Supreme Self as "thin as the thinnest paper"; "rhythms ... carved like chariots of the gods" or the speech of Kalidasa "carved like a statue". But more daring than all of these is the awesome defiance aimed at him who thinks he can destroy a man with his hand:

Me wilt thou hang? When thou canst shake the sun from heaven or wrap

8 The Secret of the Veda, p. 361.
9 Ibid., p. 565.
10 The Upanishads, p. 13.
11 Foundations, p. 266.
12 Ibid., p. 294.
up the skies like a garment, then shall
power be given thee to hang me.\(^{13}\)

Such fascinating and robust descriptions, analogies and
images pervade his works as scent pervades the flower.

His views on the presence of philosophy in poetry
too make profitable reading. Despite his intense
spiritual and metaphysical grounding, he is against all
doctrinaire poetry, for the poet in him was strong enough
to keep poetry and dogma apart, was aware that a failure
to do so would do violence to the artistic life of a
poem. Hence his stand:

Why must we take the poem as an exercise
in philosophy? A poem is a poem, not a
doctrine. (p. 321)

Elaborating upon this point he writes that attempting a
metaphysical argument in verse is a "risky business",
but if philosophizing is necessary, "one has to be careful
not to be flat or heavy." (p. 320) In fact, so rigorous
are his aesthetic standards and so modern his temperament
that he does not fight shy to make a daringly unconven-
tional comment:

- Even if a poet were to extol a false
doctrine such as a malevolent God
creating a painful universe, still if

\(^{13}\) The Upanishads, pp. 488-89.
it were a fine poem I would enjoy and praise it — (p. 321)

Equally appreciable is his courage to express strong and independent opinions on literary matters under all circumstances. His letter on Chapman's poetry which records his reaction to suggestions that Chapman's poetry is "noble" or equal at its best to Homer could be studied, as a fine example of practical analysis. Setting down his reservations about such a view he qualifies his remarks lucidly and logically:

Muscular vigour, strong nervous rhythm are forceful, not noble. (p. 314)

Chapman no doubt lifts rocks and makes mountains suddenly to rise—in that sense he has elevation or rather elevations; but in doing it he gesticulates, wrestles, succeeds finally with a shout of triumph; that does not give a noble effect or a noble movement.

The words "gesticulates", "wrestles" and "shouts" used to a telling effect suggest unmistakably that Chapman who has not yet achieved a "poise" either in his consciousness or in his writing is still far from "nobility".

Aurobindo then takes two full pages to illustrate Arnold's concept of nobility. His references in this connection to lines from *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear*, a ballad of Sir Patrick Spence, Virgil, Homer, Valmiki, Johnson,
Coleridge and Scott to show the subtle quality of nobility in Epic and ballad form win immediate attention to his scholarship, insight and discrimination.

Aurobindo's generalizations, however, are not always acceptable. For instance, his remark that "a long poem is a bad poem" (p. 304) on grounds that length in a poem which means, padding, is a sin, followed by the assertion: "only brief work, intense, lyrical in spirit can be throughout pure poetry" (p. 304) and again the reiteration: "To be perfect you must be small, brief and restrained..." (pp. 304-305) naturally induce the curious reader to ask why in that case Aurobindo made his Savithri so long, granting that it is an epic. Similarly his dislike of the English ballad form for the reason it is "too flat or too loud and artificial" (p. 320) or his approval and justification of "sameness of expression" in spiritual poems on grounds that it is not "monotonous" to those who "feel" the poet's experiences are certainly disputable points. None the less his observations on farranging subjects in poetry like inspiration, technique, metre and sources make his Letters invaluable. His views on poetic technique might be taken as a sample of the wonderful balance he can strike, avoiding extremes. His admission that "technique is a means of expression" (p. 331) might, taken at its face-value sound too obvious and even banal but his caution that close attention to technique
should not be at the cost of "inattention to substance"
should put a practising poet on his guard against excessive
attention to technique for its own sake. So is his warning
against all vagueness and abstractions. Whatever value he
set by mysticism he certainly could not brook "impalpable
figures" in poetry. Hence his emphatic affirmation:

Mystic symbols are living things, not
abstractions. (p. 362)

... To get a more intimate and spiritually
cancrete presentation should be the
aim of the mystic poet. (p. 359)

It is good to remember that the fame of the opening line
of Henry Vaughan's "Retreat" rests mainly on its concrete
particulars. Indeed, a mystic poet too must constantly
endeavour to find his "objective correlative", for
imagination seems to be another name for the Holy Ghost.

It is however, strange that Aurobindo should have
looked upon the comparative method in criticism with
somewhat of a distrust. All such attempts to him are
"unprofitable, irrelevant and otiose." (p. 480) Yet
paradoxically, even while asserting the futility of
comparisons on grounds that certain poets are incomparable
he himself employs it to advantage. His comparative
assessment of Shakespeare and Dante or Shakespeare and
Blake is a profitable exercise in defining the domains
of each poet in clear, precise terms. One has heights
which the other cannot scale; one has powers that another cannot rival, one has a mystic vision which the other has not and so on. In fact, he resorts to this mode of analysis, contrary to his theory, in pairing Goethe and Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Keats, Blake and Mallarme and Yeats and A.E. His comparison of Goethe with Shakespeare indeed proves the value of such an approach. Each poet gains a perspective and a dimension only when juxtaposed with the other rather than in isolation and hence the maxim that analogies alone help create standards in criticism.

It is natural that a creative artist of Aurobindo's genius should be preoccupied with the medium of language and express himself eloquently on its usage. Describing language as an "absolute queen" he writes that one must obey "not only her laws but her caprices." (p. 461) His inwardness with language brings out certain memorable observations like:

A language becomes decadent when the race decays, when life and soul go out and only the dry intellect and tired senses remain. (p. 454)

He has a wonderful sense of time which keeps him in tune with its spirit. For example while he can justify the use of inversions in former English poetry as "natural and right" he finds the same "artificial and false" now.
This modernity of temperament is revealed in his unorthodox views on colloquialism as well. This, however, should not give room to the misconception that he can relish whatever is new or modern. On the other hand, he refers contemptuously to that "extraordinary verbal jazz which is nowadays often put forward as poetry." (p. 444) Contemporary English poetry in his view is "very carefully written and versified." (p. 441) At best the words indicate a certain skill, wit, a display of talent and even competence but not one of them is adequate to produce genuine poetry which by the way originates from "the elemental soul-power within." (p. 441) and not "the cultured striving mind" (p. 441) as contemporary poets seem to believe. In Aurobindo's opinion this "carefully written" verse which lacks both the "inspired phrase" and the "inevitable word" is neither acceptable nor worthy of imitation.

It is interesting to turn to his remarks on Indian poetry in English at this juncture. Referring to the charge that Indians cannot succeed in English poetry he declares that it is not "absolutely valid." He cites the examples of Toru and Romesh and Sarojini, but his strong critical integrity would not let him take any partisan view. He has the introspection to acknowledge their shortcomings with detachment and objectivity. But he is not prepared to accede that "one can't write first-class
things in a learned language.". (p. 454) He asks: "what about Jawaharlal's autobiography? Many English critics think it first-class in its own kind"; (p. 454) in fact, the recognition accorded by English critics themselves to the poetry of Toru Dutt, Sarojini and Harin encourage him to claim that "many Indians write better English than many educated Englishmen." (p. 455) Hence his optimism about the future of Indian poetry in English. Even while conscious that "our oriental luxury in poetry makes it unappealing to Westerners" (p. 455) he hopes it is possible that the mind of the future will be more international than it is now, in which case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance. Whatever the response, the important thing for him seems to be to "use literature as a means of spiritual expression," (p. 505) "to use it as a means of service for the Divine in the proper spirit." (p. 505) To the Indian poet he has a particular tip which enhances his relevance all the more:

... poetry must be written in the true spirit, not for fame or self-satisfaction, but as a means of contact with the Divine... it does not help if it is written only in the spirit of the Western artist or litterateur. (p. 504) (Italics mine)

At a time when Western borrowings in literary matters have assumed alarming proportions resulting in pathetic reproductions here is a critic who tries to restore the balance by advising the native genius to turn more inward
and write so as to make poetry a vaulting-board for a leap into the infinite.

No estimate of his importance as a literary critic would be complete without a reference to his valuable comments on the art of translation touching upon all the basic issues involved in the process such as literalness, language and difficulties of catching subtleties in translation.

All in all it can be seen how the Letters make an important contribution to critical theory and practice.

Singular indeed that his creative and critical work should be immortal and he himself, to borrow his own phrase to describe Shakespeare, "a mere shortlived conglomeration of protoplasmic cells."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Sri Aurobindo, \textit{The Upanishads} (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972), p. 38.
Ananda Coomaraswamy

How does one evaluate the work of a scholar who made all art and all thought his province and virtually spanned centuries and continents in his bid to awaken people to the glory and value of art? Where does one begin and how does one go about in the face of such stupendous and complex variety of his work? One feels so humble while reading Coomaraswamy it appears that any attempt to subject his work to scrutiny is an act of impertinence. To capture all that immensity and magnitude of his achievement through the medium of words is tantamount to committing "a raid on the inarticulate" or trying to confine within the walls of a temple, God's omnipresence. What one encounters at the very outset is the sheer versatility of the man, the range of his interests and the depth and sweep of his vision encompassing heaven and earth. "Svadesa bhuvana trayam", his works seem to proclaim, fulfilling in the modern idiom Malraux's grand dream, a "Museum without walls." So profound and significant is his achievement it is rightly observed that his life was several "avatars" rolled into one. His breath-taking scholarship has drawn the attention of writer after writer in the Pre-Centennial volume got up by Durai Raja Singham in his honour. But unfortunately beyond this felicitation volume, a monograph and a couple of other works very little has been done to justify our admiration for "one of those rare spirits", "one of earth's choicest spirits."
It has been largely true that we have admired Coomaraswamy without having studied him. But recent efforts to study him are an indication of some amends being made in that direction. It is hoped that a whole volume of essays on Coomaraswamy edited by Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah, published in 1982 will inaugurate a period of revival of interest in this "incomparable scholar".

Not without irony does Prof. Narasimhaiah note in his Introduction to the Centenary Essays just mentioned that "Coomaraswamy has been a forbidding terrain patrolled exclusively by art historians and occasionally watched by art critics..."; "an outlandish figure" (p. 1) who has not engaged the attention of Indian scholars in their almost exclusive preoccupation with Western writers and their concerns. Precisely because of this lacunae do we appreciate all the more any effort made to win attention to Coomaraswamy's unique contribution to traditional arts and traditional values. That he was a "phenomenon in scholarship" is revealed by the fact that "apart from reviews he was the author of some 625 essays, papers, monographs and books ranging from Mineralogy to Archaeology and philosophy, with knowledge of a dozen languages of the world and treatises on time and eternity, wisdom and power, music, painting, sculpture, furniture and dozens of less known and unknown things and concepts—almost like the sages of old except that he was more far-ranging than they
and being a 20th century man, had a keen sense of his age."

It is not proposed to deal with all of Coomaraswamy's works in this chapter both because of their inaccessibility (a sad reflection on the people of this country who have not gone all out to acquire his works) and more importantly because of the impossibility of dealing within the compass of a single chapter several hundred contributions, far-ranging in character. Though from our point of view it is his poetics that we ought to be concerned with it may be realized how difficult and even undesirable it would be to separate his poetics from his aesthetics, for it is only in the light of his aesthetics that his poetics can be understood fully. Hence the intention is to restrict the boundary to those works which contain references to Indian poetics however meagre they are and also those which have made him the supreme spokesman between East and West by virtue of his exposition of Asian and Western art; art here used in a very comprehensive sense, as much inclusive of literature as of painting or iconography.

Combining his gifts of writing with his unique scholarship, Coomaraswamy "revolutionized entire fields

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of art." His books are a monument to the role he played as an interpreter between the East and the West, the past and the present. An exponent of the Philosophia Perennis he looked upon all cultures and quests as mere "different dialects of the same language" — the language of the spirit. The amazing thing about him is that he can not merely go to the originals of whatever he is discussing as very few scholars can do in this world but also feel as much at home with St. Thomas Aquinas as with Shankara or Ramanuja. Having himself been nourished on the cultures of Europe and Asia and having "conceived the task of working for the union of Eastern and Western thought for the good of humanity" he pleaded for the need of "using one tradition to illuminate the other". His ability to traverse back and forth in space and time is reminiscent of some legendary hero doing the impossible with ease and agility.

His conviction that the prime need today is the fusion of divergent cultural traditions and values saw him emerge as an art historian, par excellence. His relevance to us is enhanced by the fact that he first takes stock of the existing situation and not merely

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3 Romain Rolland's "Foreword" to The Dance of Shiva (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1956), p. 11.
4 As quoted in S. Chandrashekar's Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, p. 15.
pinpoints the limitations but offers the wisdom of the past as a means of rectification. He notes at the outset that things have become more important than men and we are after facts, after empirical knowledge, denying intuition. Art has lost all contact with life; there is a clear break from the past with signs of a restlessness indicating absence of culture. Moderns have made art an exclusive concern of the sophisticated intellects. Hence his repeated assertion that if art has no human use it cannot have any value. This explains why he wants to revive ancient attitudes to beauty and view works of art not as museum pieces but relate, as Prof. P.S. Sastri observes, "the work to the culture of the times, to the traditional ideals of the artist and to the underlying metaphysical foundations."

What Coomaraswamy said of Eckhart is true of himself: his "whole conception of human life in operation and of attainment is aesthetic." He was not tired, reiterating that the "artist was not a special kind of man, but every man a special kind of artist." In fact, he permitted


7 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art (Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1956), p. 112. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited in the text itself.
himself to make a categorical assertion that "every man who is not an artist in some field, every man without a vocation, is an idler." (p. 24) He even went so far as to deny the right of social status to any one who was not an artist. His oft-quoted phrase "Industry without art is brutality" (p. 36) could be interpreted as his message to the brutal times we are living in when we have failed to realize that "if culture does not show itself in all we make we are not cultured." (p. 15) He denounces the modern attitude of taking for "granted that while at work we are doing what we like least, and while at play what we should wish to be doing all the time." (p. 65) Exposing the damage that the "colourless routine of wage-earning tasks" (p. 65) has done to modern man he observes with uncanny precision that "an industry without art provides a necessary apparatus lacking the essential characteristics of things made by art, the characteristics, viz., of beauty and significance." (p. 66) Eckhart's words, "the craftsman likes talking of his handicraft" (p. 66) remind him of the current times when "the factory worker likes talking of the ball game." (p. 66) It is a sad commentary on the times which makes nothing of sacrificing quality to quantity, the obvious and inevitable consequence of modern man's penchant for mass production of things. The evil resulting from such a predicament is that the "pleasures afforded by art, whether in the making or of subsequent appreciation, are not enjoyed or even supposed to be
enjoyed by the workman at work" (p. 65) which Coomaraswamy rightly regards as "one of the greatest counts against our civilization" (p. 65). Hence his scathing criticism of the "life that we call civilized" (p. 66) which is "more nearly an animal and mechanical life than a human life" (p. 66) which in all respects "contrasts unfavourably with the life of savages, of American Indians for example, to whom it had never occurred that manufacture, the activity of making things for use, could ever be made an artless activity". (p. 66) But today manufacture has become an "artless activity". and to have allowed such a thing to happen means man's reducing himself to a beast and "to become a brute" in Coomaraswamy's view "is to die as a man". (p. 101) This is the "withering touch of our civilization" (p. 16) that has reached and destroyed the cultures of "all other peoples." There is little doubt that here is Coomaraswamy's explicit reaction to the "cultural" snobbery of the white man and his domination of the coloured races. He cites instance after instance to show the superiority of the traditional craftsman in the East whose pleasure in his work ensured the perfection of his operation, over the present day workman who hankers after a state of leisure proving that "most of us are working at a task to which we could never have been called by anyone but a salesman, certainly not by God or by our own natures." (p. 15) This is indeed a pitiful indictment
of the entire modern society that has missed its God in its exclusive dealings with the "salesman". Work is no longer our religion and not merely have we gone so far as to divorce work from culture but we even tend to think of culture as something to be "acquired in hours of leisure"; (p. 15) which provokes Coomaraswamy to comment that it is only a "hothouse and unreal culture where work itself is not its means"; (p. 15) This is but an indication of his comprehensive view of culture which touched every aspect of life. For such a man art was a profoundly meaningful way of life; its purpose being always one of "effective communication." (p. 17) It was an "intellectual" and "not a physical virtue"; (p. 16) Like Prof. Hiriyanna Coomaraswamy also does not romanticize art nor invest it with any glamour, but unlike Hiriyanna he totally rejects the very concept of "disinterested aesthetic contemplation" as a "contradiction in terms and a pure nonsense." (p. 16) For him "aesthetic experience is of the skin you love to touch, or the fruit you love to taste." (p. 16) By way of explanation he offers the etymological meaning of the word "aesthetic" which meant in Greek "nothing but sensation or reaction to external stimuli"; (p. 16) "a kind of feeling rather than an understanding" (p. 25) which "proclaims our dismissal of the intellectual values of art" (p. 92) but "... sensation is an animal property, and knowledge distinctly human"; (p. 74) In fact, in his
view "no real distinction" can be drawn between aesthetic and materialistic—aisthesis being sensation, and matter, what can be sensed. (p. 46) Since in his opinion "arts were not produced for the delectation of the senses" (p. 16) he felt impelled to discard the term "aesthetic" altogether. His contention that none of the terms like "art, nature, inspiration, form, ornament and aesthetic" were used in traditional philosophy as we use them today might hold good. But this does not imply that Prof. Hiriyanna used the word "aesthetic" in its present connotation as elaborated upon by Coomaraswamy. Even a superficial reading of Art Experience reveals the metaphysical heights to which Hiriyanna elevates art experience. It could therefore be safely concluded that both Coomaraswamy and Hiriyanna agree in spirit if not in letter, in toto, as regards such terms as "aesthetic", etc. Hiriyanna's expectation of art is as high as Coomaraswamy's despite his use of the word "aesthetic" which obviously carried no pejorative sense for him. It is however significant that the title of his book is Art Experience and not Aesthetic Experience despite a liberal use of the word within its pages.

Coomaraswamy entertained no doubts about the purpose of art in a traditional society. It was purely functional, having a purvyojana and a purusartha. Such an art alone was wholesome. There was simply no question of art for art's
Music must not only sound well but mean something. (p. 107) "Whatever is made only to give pleasure is a luxury and that the love of art under the conditions becomes a mortal sin .... in traditional art function and meaning are inseparable goods." (p. 52) Coomaraswamy cites the instance of ancient scriptures and authors like Dante and Ashvaghosa who wrote with other than "aesthetic" ends in view. Primitive man himself made no real distinction of sacred from secular. Nor was there any distinction of "fine" from "applied" or "pure" from "decorative art". "All art was for 'good use'". (p. 111) Which explains why Coomaraswamy could invest even primitive ornament with both a "magical" and a "metaphysical value" (p. 18) or attribute a "metaphysics" to embroidery and weaving, for the detailed exposition of which "a whole volume might be required." (p. 40) In principle, there is no distinction between an orator and a carpenter, argues Coomaraswamy, for in an organic society one is as indispensable as the other. Not for nothing did Plato whom he quotes with approval plead for an art that provided for the needs of the soul and the body at one and the same time. So completely satisfying does Coomaraswamy find this attitude that he looks upon even mathematics as capable of fulfilling this demand. This takes us to the vital question he raised in his essay "why exhibit works of art?"-the real problem as he saw was "why exhibit?" He could only explain the desire of the living artist to be "hung"
or "shown" as nothing but his "vanity", a desire which "betrays a complete misunderstanding of the function of art." (p. 93) "For things are made normally for certain purposes and certain places to which they are appropriate, and not simply 'for exhibition!'" (p. 7) but if they are preserved in museums and exhibited for "educational reasons" by virtue of their being ancient, foreign or fragile, then the positive aspect of such an exhibition for him means the opening up of immense possibilities. From his own point of view it has taught him that "the art of the American Indian sand painting is superior in kind to any painting that has been done in Europe or white America within the last several centuries". (p. 12) From the Stone Age until now what a decline! A decline in intellectuality, not in comfort, he clarifies—thus setting at nought all that modern man claims to have accomplished by one stroke, as it were. Indeed, one of the functions of a well organized Museum exhibition, as he explicitly puts it, is "to deflate the illusion of progress." (p. 12) An even more positive service it can render lies in its implicit "exhortation to return to these savage levels of culture." (p. 13) Whoever is scandalized by such remarks must note that Coomaraswamy is indulging in no sentimental glorification of the past, he is too intellectual to do that, but is offering, as subsequent quotations from him will prove, a detached and an objective analysis of all
those elements that have made for strength and vitality in the art of the primitive times. "... their art is more abstract, more intellectual, and less than our own a matter of mere reminiscence or emotion". (p. 29) Neither their lack of interest in anatomy or perspective nor their apathy for verisimilitude appears to him as a blemish and rightly so, as he reveals the truth of this argument so ably and memorably in his work, Transformation of Nature in Art. In vindicating the validity of primitive art Coomaraswamy demonstrates the truth of his own statement that "all education implies revaluation". (p. 22) Such periodical revaluations in the history of man are necessary for the growth of healthy perspectives. Nevertheless he is far too dynamic to let himself or anybody else rest content with a mere appreciation of museum objects. His inquiring mind persuades the public in turn to ask "why it is that objects of "museum quality" are to be found only in Museums and are not in daily use and readily obtainable. For the Museum objects, on the whole, were not originally "treasures" made to be seen in glass cases, but rather common objects of the market place that could have been bought and used by anyone. (p. 13) What underlies the deterioration in the quality of our environment and what has brought about our dependence on "antiques" today according to him is the fact that while museum objects were made by free men for use, things in our factories and department stores are made primarily for sale, either
by machines or men who are not free beings. Invoking Plato who enjoined upon artists to make only "sane" and "free" things, becoming of free men, Coomaraswamy also is emphatic that "the artist in whatever material must be a free man". (p. 14) But with the tremendous earnestness of a responsible art-critic he qualifies that by "free" he does not mean an "emancipated artist" in the vulgar sense of one having no obligation or commitment of any kind, "but a man emancipated from the despotism of the salesman", (p. 14) a man who is not "free" to ignore truth; free not to express himself but that which is to be expressed. It is freedom of this kind that the medieval artist enjoyed and that the present-day artist is deprived of. What is at stake is a moral issue and thanks are due to Coomaraswamy for making us aware of all these ethical implications of a fundamentally artistic problem. But then does he not remind us in his Transformation that for Eckhart art is religion, religion art, not related but the same.

"The course of art reflects the course of thought" (p. 45) for Coomaraswamy which accounts for the close relationship he develops in his works between art and philosophy in a traditional society like the Indian. Some of his observations run thus:

Works of art are reminders; in other words, supports of contemplation. (p. 10)
The Indian actor prepares for his performance by prayer. (p. 32)
The man incapable of contemplation cannot be an artist, but only a skilful workman; (p. 37)

... art is essentially symbolic...

and finally that art, even the highest, is only the means to an end. (p. 53)

An idea which is central to Indian thought and which is central to Coomaraswamy's writing is the anonymity of the artist. He loves to tell us again and again that the true ideal should be to conceal the artist's identity, for ultimately it is not the teller but the tale that is important. "In traditional arts it is never who said? but only what was said? that concerns us" (p. 40) he writes adding that in a traditional culture "it hardly occurred to the individual artist to sign his works", (p. 42) which makes "the modern mania for attribution" all the more reprehensible. For him it is nothing but "conceit" and a product of "perverted individualism" - the legacy of Renaissance and 19th century humanism. For one who left behind so little biography of himself on the plea that all protraiture is asvargya, the modern conception of art as the expression of personality must have appeared exceedingly retrogressive, as borne out by his repeated rejection of it and a constant harping back on tradition so as to keep himself whole. If "the traditional artist devotes himself to the good of the work to
be done" (p. 39) without ever consciously trying to express himself it is because he belongs to "a type of culture dominated by the longing to be liberated from oneself" (p. 41); is nourished by a philosophy that is directed against the delusion "I am the doer". (p. 41) But today art has declined because the artist has begun to exploit and exhibit his own personality in the name of "self-expression". Coomaraswamy sums up the essential difference between ancient and modern approaches to art thus: "Art is a superstition: art was a way of life." (p. 85) As a critic he discharges his function by reminding his readers of the traditional idea of self-effacement and the highest purpose of life as consisting in achieving a freedom from oneself rather than a freedom for oneself. This is the eternal truth behind the undying art of India of the past millennia, seems to proclaim Coomaraswamy.

At this juncture it might be profitable to consider his essay, "Traditional Conception of Ideal Portraiture" (as opposed to modern portraiture which was "born in the charnel house"! p. 44) where, true to his temperament, he is eager to bring out the "intellectual and impersonal character of Oriental and medieval Christian art, in which the form is all important, and the figuration irrelevant." (p. 124) He floods us with references to both Indian and European sources to justify his faith in the "impersonality
and serenity of medieval Christian and Asiatic art" (p. 126)
A distinction between "the looking-glass image" and "the veritable spiritual-essence of the man" is sharply drawn
by his recourse to the Chandogya Upanishad, the Bhagavad
Gita, the Uttaratantra, Lankavatara Sutra, Divyavadana,
Sukranitisara, Pratimanataka from the Indian side and to
St. Thomas, Augustine, Eckhart, Plotinus, Plato and the
Bible from the European along with his references to
Cambodian and Javanese practices of erecting statues of
deified ancestors in the likeness of divine images similar
to Indian "Votive bronze statuettes" representing "rather
the deified man than the man as he had been on earth",
(p. 117) "scarcely distinguished, from divine images",
(p. 117) where "the facial expression is altogether that
of a type, without individual peculiarities". (p. 117)
Most appropriately he cites the episode from the Pratima-
nataka where Bharata, visiting an ancestral chapel, is
unable to recognize the effigies of his own parents, but
at the same time wonders at the perfection of the workman-
ship and feels the moving power of the figures, an example
which symbolizes India's basically hieratic and ideal
conception of portraiture. Discovering a corresponding
tradition of ideal portraiture in Europe also, Coomaraswamy
summons his vast knowledge of Western scriptures which
spurned all attempts at achieving real likeness to the
living subject, for as Eckhart said "My looks are not my
nature, they are the accidents of nature..." (p. 123) or
"If I paint my likeness on the wall, he who sees the likeness is not seeing me"; (p. 123) and again "Any face thrown on a mirror is, willy-nilly imaged therein. But its nature does not appear in the looking-glass image: only the mouth, nose and eyes, just the features, are seen in the mirror," (p. 123) sufficient to warrant the conclusion: "The medieval and Asiatic artists did not observe; they were required to be what they would represent, whether in motion or at rest," (p. 126) calling for an equal degree of identification on our part with the Medieval and Asiatic patron and artist "in whom the final and the formal causes of the work subsisted, and whose knowledge was therefore, not as ours is, derivative and accidental, but essential and original". (p. 127) In other words the modern student cannot appreciate Medieval art without the kind of equipment Coomaraswamy prescribes for him—an equipment that includes "an understanding of the spirit of the Middle Ages, the spirit of Christianity itself", (p. 114) "the spirit of what has been well named the 'Philosophia Perennis' or 'Universal and Unanimous Tradition'", (p. 114) and not simply a modern "course in the appreciation of art". (p. 114) Hence the validity of his plea: "The language of art is one that we must relearn, if we wish to understand Medieval art, and not merely to record our reactions to it." (p. 114) Otherwise "the greater the ignorance of modern times, the deeper grows the darkness of the Middle Ages." (p. 29).
Like Prof. M. Hiriyanna who treated the study of art as "a quest after perfection" Coomaraswamy also looks upon works of traditional art as being "bound up with a technique of pursuit." (p. 127) For him, to repeat what has been mentioned earlier, the work of art is always a means, and never an end in itself—the artist being one who "prepares all creatures to return to God"; (p. 124) Music is a "means of breaking the cycle of birth", (p. 132) etc., which accounts for his constant endeavour to connect beauty with utility. Indeed "to think of beauty as a thing to be enjoyed apart from use is to be a naturalist, a fetishist, and an idolator." (p. 77) Hence "such disparagement of the arts as can be recognized in Indian thought (especially Buddhist) from first to last is a disparagement not of the arts as such, but of the secular arts of mere amusement as distinguished from the intellectual arts that are a very means of enlightenment." (p. 132) In fact, "the worldly arts of mere amusement are regarded literally as 'deadly'." (p. 132) The whole malady can once again be traced to a general attitude that "'Art' is a part of the higher things of life, to be enjoyed in hours of leisure earned by other hours of inartistic 'work'." (p. 61) Coomaraswamy exposes the falsity and hollowness of such a life where art and work have become "incompatible" or at least "independent categories" leading to an "absolute divorce" between artists and workmen, those, for example who paint on canvas and those who paint
the walls of houses; those who handle the pen and those who handle the hammer. Coomaraswamy himself, who is aware that "praying is a better act than spinning" confesses that he is not denying a distinction between these but only objecting to an "absolute divorce", which forgets that "the artist is the servant of the work to be done" (p. 71); that "service is perfect freedom." (p. 71) Indeed, the critic's active service lies in reviving our faith in the "normal but forgotten view of art which affirms that art is the making well, or properly arranging, of anything whatever that needs to be made or arranged, whether a statuette, or automobile, or garden". (p. 89) In fact, "Whatever is well and truly made will be beautiful in kind because of its perfection." (p. 76) In a manner recalling Gandhi's efforts to convince the average man in India of the dignity of labour Coomaraswamy has to warn the elite against the dangers of compartmentalizing life, work and art. To succeed in bridging the gap between the active and the contemplative life; sacred and profane is "to illuminate daily life with the light of heaven." 8

Coomaraswamy proves his success as an educator of men's tastes by teaching them to ask first of all the two following questions of a work of art, "Is it true? or beautiful? and what good use does it serve?" (p. 22)

He has himself, with the zeal of a missionary, proclaimed time and again that the "human value of anything made is determined by the coincidence in it of beauty and utility, significance and aptitude." (p. 22) Where a work of art does not conform to this ideal but aims only at giving pleasure, it is, as Plato put it, a mere "toy". A greater crisis which modern man today faces is "the manufacture of 'art' in studios coupled with an artless 'manufacture' in factories" (p. 22) which in Coomaraswamy's view "represents a reduction of the standard of living to subhuman levels." (p. 22) In his bid to avert this catastrophe, Coomaraswamy reminds modern man of the Brahmanical idea of the "City of the Gods"—devanagari and impinges upon his awareness the urgency to rededicate himself to that ancient ideal, for "the building of that city anew is the constant task of civilization". 9 This seems to be the message of his Dance of Shiva. Of great interest are his essays on "India's contribution to human welfare", "Hindu view of art", "Beauty as a state," "Indian images," "Indian music" and "The status of Indian women" not to speak of his most popular essay "The Dance of Shiva" itself which not merely calls attention to the grandeur of the very conception of Shiva's Dance but captures the sounds and rhythms of the cosmic dance that takes place not in

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9 The Dance of Shiva, op. cit., p. 5. All subsequent references will be cited in the body of the text itself.
any Taraka forest but in one's own heart.

The Indian conception of art as yoga and the artist as sadhaka is not merely pointedly referred to here as elsewhere but substantiated by "abundant literary parallels" (p. 28) the most notable of them all being the composing of the Ramayana with the aid of yoga-power or yoga-contemplation. The beholding of past, present and future by sage Valmiki "like a nelli fruit on the palm of his hand" (p. 28) answers to what the Chinese Chuang Tzu said: "The mind of the sage being in repose, becomes the mirror of the universe, the speculum of all creation." (p. 28) As if one authority has not sufficiently elucidated his claim he invokes another, partly to reinforce his stand and partly to universalize certain fundamental concepts and ideals. One soon discovers that it is not to flaunt his vast erudition that he is constantly alluding to various sources but to impress upon us that ideas are not anyone's monopoly but the common property of mankind. (Indeed, one of his chief claims to distinction rests on his recognition of "first principles"). This time it is from a different tradition—the source being the Italian Croce for whom, the artist "never makes a stroke with his brush without having previously seen it with his imagination". (p. 28) This is Coomaraswamy's mode of writing—"using one tradition to illuminate the other."
The Dance of Shiva, a collection of fourteen essays, dealing predominantly with Indian themes appears to have popularized its author in India and abroad more than any other. His penetrating and incisive essays on "Indian images," "Indian music," "Indian women", "India's contribution to human welfare" besides "Hindu view of Art" and "Buddhist Primitives" not to speak of the title essay, "The Dance of Shiva" make the Volume a veritable treasure-house of art-criticism; an invaluable guide to the art student in the recovery of the multi-splendoured past of India.

The opening essay which analyses India's contribution to human civilization is a masterly exposition of the most distinguishing characteristics of Indian culture that have endured over the ages. Coomaraswamy's distinction lies in pinpointing the feature that has made India unique among other nations — namely her Indianness, a character which she has built up in her long and chequered history. This is her essential contribution to world civilization. Of equal importance is his observation that India's "great humiliation would be to substitute or to have substituted for this own character (svabhava) a cosmopolitan veneer, for then indeed she must come before the world empty-handed." (p. 3) A master writer as he is, he can with great precision capture the whole ethos of a society in barely two lines—as when he does in referring
to "a constant intuition of the unity of all life" (p. 4) as "the heart and essence of the Indian experience". (p. 4) His observation: "All that India can offer to the world proceeds from her philosophy" (p. 4) might very well sound commonplace today but in Coomaraswamy's hands even this banal statement acquires weight and meaning thanks to his measured judgment and critical awareness that points to a presence of this philosophy elsewhere—in the gospel of Jesus and of Blake, Lao Tze, and Rumi—and the particular use to which it is put in India: "but nowhere else has it been made the essential basis of sociology and education" (p. 4). It is true that in his considered opinion the Hindus did grasp "more firmly than others the fundamental meaning and purpose of life". (p. 4) But that does not inhibit him from admitting the non-feasibility of directly applying ancient Indian solutions to special Indian problems in modern conditions, however various and valuable such lessons might be, thus avoiding all rigid and doctrinaire approaches to so flexible a thing as Life—a measure of his maturity.

It is his interpretation of Shiva's dance, however, which has invested both the Divine Dancer and the Dance with a new meaning that helped hundreds of readers of this little classic to look upon the figure of the Dancing Shiva with a new vision. He explains fully not merely the general significance of the dance, but also the details of
its concrete symbolism. Focussing our attention on some of the peculiarities of the Nataraja images, Coomaraswamy calls attention to "the grandeur of this conception itself as a synthesis of science, religion and art." (p. 77) It is true that he has "refrained from all aesthetic criticism" (p. 77) and has endeavoured only to "translate the central thought of the conception of Shiva's dance from plastic to verbal expression, without reference to the beauty or imperfection of individual works" (p. 77) but he still feels moved by the "range of thought and sympathy of those rishi-artists who first conceived such a type as this, affording an image of reality, a key to the complex tissues of life, a theory of nature, not merely satisfactory to a single clique or race, nor acceptable to the thinkers of one century only, but universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover, and the artist of all ages and all countries." (p. 77) But it must be clarified that an absence of "aesthetic criticism" here implies not an absence of aesthetic awareness itself, for Coomaraswamy realizes "the full extent of the creative power which ... could discover a mode so expressive of fundamental rhythms... so profoundly significant and inevitable", (p. '77) not to speak of the supreme "power" and "grace" that this dancing image conveys to "all those who have striven in plastic forms to give expression to their intuition of Life!" (p. 77) There is no doubt that Coomaraswamy is here paying an indirect
tribute to the art that has depicted "cosmic activity" as the "central motif of the dance" (p. 70) and captured all that "primal rhythmic energy" (p. 66) which defies even the greatest artist of today to "create an image of that Energy which science must postulate behind all phenomena" (p. 78) either "more exactly" or "more wisely". It remains to conclude that a scholar of Coomaraswamy's sensibility and temperament is alive not merely to the visual symbolism of the drum and the fire embodied in the Nataraja image but to the root idea behind the dance which is—"to give release to those who seek Him", (p. 75) "They never see rebirths who behold this mystic dance" (p. 74), he quotes a Tamil text to reinforce the importance of this motif, so integral to all Indian art. To him it is not strange that the figure of Nataraja has commanded the adoration of so many generations. We may add that this essay has had not a little part in bringing it about.

If in this essay he interprets even the dances of human dancers as leading to freedom (p. 75) in his essay on "Indian music", a cultivated art in India for at least three thousand years, he hints at the possibility of its being an agent of redemption and himself provides intimations of such an end by presenting the impersonality of Indian music and by "reducing" it ("leading it back") to theology and deducing a "metaphysical interpretation of technique". (p. 95) A few of his comments and quotations
might be considered in this context: "It is the inner reality of things... that the singer voices". (p. 95)

"Those who sing here", says Shankaracharya, "sing God"; and the Vishnu Purana adds, "All songs are a part of Him, who wears a form of sound," (p. 95) "we may say that this is an imitation of the music in heaven ... the music of the spheres—" (pp. 94-95). Besides this exalted notion of music an astonishing feature of the essay is the author's technical knowledge of the discipline—a knowledge that includes an intimate grasp of both Indian and European music, the likenesses and the differences. One might note with what ease and authority he enters into minute details like "microtonal inflections", "microtonal interval", "microtonal grace", "intonation", "modal colouring", "stress", "scale", "tonality", "modulation", "overtones", "rhythm", "cross rhythms", "unity", "melody", "pulsion", "bar", "unit", "harmony" and "assonance".

As one able to appreciate the delicate nuances of music he can talk with the inwardness of an insider, of ragas, raginis, their origin, their meaning and their ethos; 'alaps', tala, "quarter-tone", "portamento" and "glissando", interspersed with gleanings from mythology, ritual and psychology. These technical terms are not simply bandied about to impress but used with precision to convey the final effects of a song upon our inner being—"a timeless and spaceless peace"—that underlines all art, whether in Europe or in Asia.
One of the notable contributions of Coomaraswamy to Indian art is his strong and effective defence of Indian images with many arms. In an essay of that title he answers all the Western charges brought against such images convincingly and eloquently, silencing even the most vehement of European critics who have voiced forth their disapproval in unequivocal language. A few excerpts from their writings placed at the beginning of the essay are revealing. Indian sculpture in their view is stiff, formal, clumsy, hardly art, "the many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses ... have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous and grotesque." (p. 79) The Puranic deities have "monstrous shapes" and deities with animal heads and innumerable arms are "hideous". This kind of criticism does not make Coomaraswamy either apologetic or mildly defensive which would have aroused only contempt in the Western quarter, but a distinguished scholar that he is with all knowledge at his finger tips he summons the authority of other ancient civilizations like Greek, Egyptian, Byzantine with specific examples and modern works such as some of Rodin's which "must suffer equal condemnation" (p. 80) if the "critics be consistent". (p. 80) The "critics" in question could not have expected this boomerang! He questions the very assumption that multiplication of limbs or heads, or addition of any animal attributes is "a very grave defect, and fatal to any claim for merit in the works concerned." (p. 80) This is in striking resemblance to what Aurobindo did in the realm of literature.
We have seen how effectively he could silence Max Mullers and William Archers for whom our sacred literature and Upanishads were "hideous", "barbaric" and "monstrous". What Aurobindo did in the field of literature Ananda Coomaraswamy does in the realm of "Fine" Arts. This is graciously acknowledged by one of the British critics themselves, Rothenstein, for instance, who believed that by the time of his death in 1947, Coomaraswamy chased away the last vestiges of the "smoke clouds which had all too long obscured the splendid achievements of Indian sculpture." ¹⁰

He also impressed upon the European mind the need to "submit the Indian, Greek or Egyptian figures to recognized standards, and to criticism a little more penetrating than is involved in merely counting heads or arms." (p. 80) Apparently he is telling Mr. Vincent Smith, Mr. Maskell, Sir George Birdwood and critics of their kind that their standards are neither ultimate nor universal, for that matter not even "recognized" by other parts of the globe and hinting that their criticism which confined itself merely to counting heads or arms must be to say the least, very immature. Before setting down his own standards for the judgement of a work of art he invokes the authority of no less than the great European master Leonardo, who says: "that figure is most worthy of praise which by its action

best expresses the passion that animates it." (p. 80)

Then two more authorities to back Leonardo:

Hesieh Ho demands that the work of art should exhibit the fusion of the rhythm of the spirit with the movement of living things. (p. 80)

Mr. Holmes suggests that a work of art must possess in some degree the four qualities of Unity, Vitality, Infinity and Repose. (p. 80)

Coming back to Coomaraswamy, "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." (p. 81)

The purpose of these remarks evidently is to prepare the reader to "take each work of art upon its own merits" (p. 81) with the aid of "the simplest tests" quoted above. Coomaraswamy's distinction consists in educating the spectator's sensibilities and training him not to concern himself with "arithmetic" as long as an image has all the four qualities demanded by Mr. Holmes and as long as it is "felt". For Coomaraswamy a work of art is a failure only when it does not conform to the above tests. It is natural therefore that he should dismiss the question of "additional members" as inconsequential to creation and focus our attention on the only pertinent question we have to ask of these works: "are these or are they not, clear and impassioned
expressions of their subject matter?" (p. 82) At the same time he has the rare introspection to note that amongst Indian images there are some of which we can say that they are such adequate expressions, and of others that they are not. But he is uncompromising about his methods of evaluation. He argues with conviction that "to recognize those and these requires a rather more subtle approach than that involved in the arithmetical process of counting arms or heads." (pp. 82-83)

Here is a complete negation of the Western man's empirical approach to art. His passion for facts here takes the form of a passion for numbers not realizing that such a passion inhibits an intuitive approach, mature and metaphysical. The "arithmetical process of counting arms or heads" makes a mockery of all the tall claims that Western man is making for himself in "civilized" matters. It simply means that criticism which lacks "subtlety" (in other words implying crudity) has not yet come of age. Did Shukracharya write in vain as far as these European art-critics are concerned? "The lineaments of images are determined by the relation which subsists between the adorer and the Adored." (p. 176) In other words, Art, too, like Literature needs its own Sahādaya. Western art criticism must reckon with the truth that after all, the "sure and safe foundation of art" (p. 83) is "the getting said what had to be said." (p. 83) In a tone bristling with sarcasm Coomaraswamy reminds his western readers that "it is no
criticism of a fairy tale to say that in our world we meet no fairies ... it is no criticism of a beast fable to say that after all animals do not talk English or Sanskrit. Nor is it a criticism of an Indian icon to point out that we know no human beings with more than two arms." (p. 84) The sheer logic of the passage should carry immediate conviction to those who have all along lived and sworn by reason!

However, Coomaraswamy's advice to the modern spectator not to concentrate his attention upon the "peculiarities" of art, "etrical or formal" in order to appreciate it but "endeavour to take for granted whatever the artist takes for granted" (p. 84) (italics mine) might at its face value appear highly questionable and unconducive to the very survival of art-criticism. But on reflection, it seems simply to mean that for the sake of a higher truth every great piece of art yields, the spectator ought not to lose himself in the surfaces, not make much ado about them but rather transcend them to partake of the spirit that animates the whole. It would be a worthy sacrifice. In other words it is the whole and not the part that must appeal to the connoisseur, Coomaraswamy seems to say. For this the spectator needs to be properly equipped. What he said of the listener in his essay on Indian Music seems to hold good here as well: "... the listener must respond with an art of his own, and this would be entirely in accord with Indian theories of aesthetic." (p. 86) What is more, the "model
audience"— "technically critical" is somewhat indifferent to voice production in India thereby suggesting that the voice does not make the singer "as so often happens in Europe". (p. 87) All this is a re-affirmation of the truth that "styles are the accidents of art" in the same way as "our looks are the accidents of our being" — not our nature.

The three essays, "Hindu View of Art: Historical", "Hindu View of Art—Theoretical" and "That Beauty is a State" present Coomaraswamy's understanding of the "Hindu Aesthetic as it is expressly formulated and elaborated in the abundant Sanskrit and Hindi literature on Poetics and the Drama." (p. 35) Beginning with the Vedic aesthetic which consisted "essentially in the application of skill" (p. 23) he concludes with the later Hindu view which "identifies aesthetic emotion with that felt when the self perceives the Self". (p. 24) Supporting the orthodox view which regarded art as a kamadhenu, yielding every treasure, and poetry as a means of achieving all or any of the Four Ends of Life, he immediately settles for a discussion of the essential element in poetry. Leaving aside style, figures, suggestion, etc., he confines himself to a discussion of rasa and the conditions of its experience.

The frequent references to Visvanatha underline the extent of his influence on Coomaraswamy's understanding of rasa and his disposition to connect it with "totalistic monism".
"It marches with the Vedanta" (p. 43) he declares. This in a way accounts for his interest in the metaphysical aspect of the rasa theory, (not however, at the cost of aesthetic as accused by some critics), its "timeless" and "supersensuous" or "hyperphysical" (alaukika) quality and the swiftness with which he moves from rasas (nine) to rasa (absolute). Actually in his view the "nine rasas" are "no more than the various colourings of one experience, and are arbitrary terms of rhetoric used only for convenience in classification." (p. 37) Quite understandably Coomaraswamy too attempts an interpretation of terms like rasa, rasavant, rasika and rasasvadana. Though he initially interprets rasa as "flavour" it is however intriguing that he should later equate the term with "Beauty" and persist with it. Similarly his interpretation of Chitra as 'romantic' might be inaccurate but to accuse him, as some have done of "mistranslating" the famous stanza from Sahitya Darpana, "Brahmananda Sahodarah" as "the very twin-brother of mystic experience" or "twin-brother of the tasting of Brahma" seems unjustified.

The question of beauty receives detailed treatment at the hands of Coomaraswamy who goes into various aspects of it—beauty as "discovery", beauty as "absolute", beauty as "reality", beauty as immeasurable and the vision of beauty as "spontaneous". Even so abstract a subject as that does not fortunately lead him to vague or confused statements.
On the other hand the clarity of his perception is seen in his observation:

In the works called beautiful we recognize a correspondence of theme and expression, content and form; while in those called ugly we find the content and form at variance. (p. 49)

Like Prof. M. Hiriyanna, Coomaraswamy also holds the basic Indian view that the vision of beauty depends on "a state of grace that cannot be achieved by deliberate effort" (p. 50) though he himself concedes on another occasion that "the capacity and genius necessary for appreciation are partly native ('ancient') and partly cultivated ('contemporary'): (pp. 38-39) but is quick to add in the same breath with an air of finality: "but cultivation alone is useless, and if the poet is born so too is the rasika, and criticism is akin to genius". (p. 39)

It may be one of the poignancies of life not to be able to appreciate a work of art—but as Coomaraswamy rightly puts it: "we gain and feel nothing merely when we take it on authority that any particular works are beautiful. It is far better to be honest, and to admit that perhaps we cannot see their beauty. A day may come when we shall be better prepared." (p. 51).

Again in a manner reminiscent of Prof. Hiriyanna's 'hrdayasamvada, tanmayabhavana and rasanubhava' Coomaraswamy
conveys to the reader his idea of the great office of the critic and depicts the entire artistic process involving the artist, the critic and the audience. Unlike of course, Hiriyanna Coomaraswamy does not resort to Sanskrit termino-
logy and therefore his description may fall short of the same evocative power but he nevertheless succeeds in impressing upon our minds the uniqueness of the critic's role in the creative process:

The critic, as soon as he becomes an exponent, has to prove his case; and he cannot do this by any process of argument, but only by creating a new work of art, the criticism. His audience, catching the gleam at second-hand—but still the same gleam, for there is only one—has then the opportunity to approach the original work a second time more reverently.

(p. 51)

Here is the answer to anyone who should treat the critic as subordinate to the creative artist. For that matter the dichotomy never existed in ancient India, in itself a tribute to the critical maturity of the people. They were the two eyes of the society; in fact, a critic was rarer than a poet. In treating critical activity as essentially creative, Coomaraswamy is performing at least two functions: (1) he is indicating the vitality of tradition by continuing it and also (2) revealing his own perceptive understanding of the matter. Some of these ideas recur in one of his major works, The Transformation of Nature in Art. No estimate
of The Dance of Shiva would however, be complete without a reference to his essay that celebrates the "intellectual fraternity of mankind" where he makes a very important statement that "the work of Shakespeare is in close accord-
dance with Indian canons of Dramatic Art" (p. 137) and quotes from the Indian scriptures to illustrate "the singular agreement of Eastern and Western theories of Drama and Poetry" (p. 137)

"I made this Drama," says Brahma, "to accord with the movement of the world ... all its weal and woe".

Was it not Shakespeare's intention too in making his drama?

The essay "The Theory of Art in Asia" can be safely concluded as the most important piece in The Transformation judging by the profundity of the author's observations, the sharpness of his insights and the number of theories he enunciates in, the course of the essay, comparable in importance to some of the essays of Eliot like the "Tradition and the Individual Talent" or "Metaphysical Poets." What Eliot was doing in the field of literary criticism Coomaraswamy seems to be doing in the realm of art criticism.

Though Coomaraswamy is primarily an art-critic writing predominantly on art there is no doubt that some of the principles he applies to "fine" arts could as well be applied to literature, for the same values and ideals that have governed and inspired the one have nourished the other
too. Besides, in this essay there is a specific reference to Rasa and a detailed discussion of all those elements that have come to be associated with it today. Of course, there is not any new interpretation of either Indian poetics in general or the Rasa theory in particular but there is certainly a sensitive grasp of all its implications, as revealed by his equally sensitive rendering. The essay includes as his essays in The Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art do, a discussion of Poetry as a means of the four-fold attainment of Life, the definition of Rasa and its elements, its metaphysical overtones, references to Visvanatha, intuition, self-identification of the artist with the appointed theme, self-identification of the spectator with the presented matter and the accessibility of aesthetic experience to the fortunate and the competent. But here the tone is more confident and the details linking up Rasa with the "predominant trends of Indian thought, and its natural place in the whole body of Indian philosophy" (p. 55) are more elaborately and emphatically delineated. Here also as in his Philosophy of Art, he points out the dual aspects of Rasa: (1) relative and plural and (2) absolute and singular. But here he spells out more explicitly the nature of the aesthetic experience, its pre-requisites and offers an extended interpretation to terms primarily employed in connection with poetry. As elsewhere here also he is interested in upholding the intellectual character of aesthetic experience as opposed to the sentimental which
accounts for his affirmation: "Aesthetic experience is a transformation not merely of feeling ... but equally of understanding;" (p. 50). For readers of Coomaraswamy there is no doubt it is this intellectual element that gives the core of his writings the value, the power and endurance of a diamond. We might remind ourselves that an ornament was more than a means of adornment to him. It was "characterization"; it was "attributes."

Brief as his reference to dhvani is he nevertheless establishes it as "essentially metaphysical and Vedantic in method and conclusion" (p. 54) besides delineating it as "the immediate vehicle of single rasa and means to aesthetic experience" (p. 53). Similarly his reference to alankara and riti is brief, though justified on account of the reasons he himself advances:

These theories, which have not held their own in India, may be compared to the minor European conceptions of art as dexterity, or as consisting merely of aesthetic surfaces which are significant only as sources of sensation. (p. 54)

However, it is more for his general comments on and theories of aesthetics rather than poetics that his essay "The Theory of Art in Asia" is immensely valuable and significant. The essay confirms more than any other that "the moorings of Coomaraswamy's thoughts are in ancient
India and in medieval Europe as Prof. P.S. Sastri very appropriately puts it. There are many passages of singular beauty and power, marked by great originality of interpretation. He prefaces his essay with the manifesto:

In the following pages there is presented a statement of Oriental aesthetic theory based mainly on Indian and partly on Chinese sources; at the same time, by means of notes and occasional remarks, a basis is offered for a general theory of art co-ordinating Eastern and Western points of view.

(p. 3)

This sums up the entire thesis of the essay in a nutshell. At the very outset he makes it clear that whenever he refers to European art by way of contrast or elucidation, the reader should bear in mind that European art is of "two very different kinds, one Christian and Scholastic, the other post-Renaissance and personal." (p. 3) He also observes that from his study of Eckhart and St. Thomas it was evident "there was a time when Europe and Asia could and did actually understand each other very well." (p. 3) In his view "Asia has remained herself; but subsequent to the extroversion of the European consciousness and its preoccupation with surfaces, it has become more and more difficult for European minds to think in terms of unity,

and therefore more difficult to understand the Asiatic point of view". (p. 3) But he is optimistic that there may be a possibility of a "renewed approach" thanks to certain corresponding tendencies in modern European art as well as the penetration of Asiatic thought and art into the Western environment.

In his words Coomaraswamy's purpose in the present volume is "to place the Asiatic and the valid European views side by side, not as curiosities, but as representing actual and indispensable truth." (p. 4) Accordingly he addresses himself immediately to consider the nature and value of art from an Asiatic, that is, mainly Indian and Far Eastern point of view. He finds it natural to lay most stress on India, because "the systematic discussion of aesthetic problems has been far more developed there than in China, where we have to deduce the theory from what has been said and done by painters, rather than from any doctrine propounded by philosophers or rhetoricians." (p. 5) The very fact that art represented a "purely mental activity" (Citta-sanna) in India, shows, that India had "developed a highly specialized technique of vision" (p. 5) where the artist proceeds to visualize the form of the devata, angel or God by means of sadhana, mantra, dhyana.

Even at this early stage in the essay Coomaraswamy stresses the need for complete self-identification of the artist with his theme. Also he refers to an important principle
involved in the true knowledge of an object, namely the
resolution of all duality, and transcendence of all
distinctions between knower and known; seer and seen and
a total elimination of empirical observation or perception
(pratyakṣa). In other words theme must become an immediate
experience for the artist. Malavikagnimitra where a certain
painter fails due to loss of concentration, the Sukranitisara
with its maxim, dhyatva kuryat and Shankaracharya's metaphor
of the arrow-maker are cited by Coomaraswamy pointedly and
repeatedly so as to establish an intimate connection between
art and yoga. The divine or angelic origin of the arts is
another important aspect of Indian art he emphasizes with
sympathy and understanding; quotes with approval the Saiva
Agamas which teach that the architecture of our temples is
all Kailasabhavana. It was this urge for self-forgetfulness
or self-annihilation that drove the Indians to speak of
imitation or anukṛiti, imitation taken in a philosophical
and not a literal sense. The Chinese and the Japanese too
speak of imitation of Nature, of "shape-resemblance" — but
again by imitation, warns Coomaraswamy, the Chinese certainly
did not mean the reproduction of the outward appearance —
but the idea in the mind of the artist — the immanent
divine spirit; the breath of life. "The painters of old
painted the idea and not merely the shape" (p. 15), he
quotes Chinese sayings. As from the Indian side, the
affirmation of art as purely a mental activity and the
denial of empirical perception in the understanding of
truth gave rise to the notion of the artist's dependence
on "an inwardly known model" or "antarjneya-rupa". The rest
was all *abhyaśa* or practice, also known as *anusila* or devoted application—the one thing most necessary to the workman. "It is thus", proclaims Coomaraswamy, that "all the forms of Indian art and its derivatives in the Far East are ideally determined." (p. 9) Indeed "Asiatic art is ideal in the mathematical sense". (p. 11)

Coomaraswamy draws an interesting parallel between the threefold Chinese classification of painting into (1) Divine (2) Profound or Mysterious and (3) Accomplished and Rajashekara's *Kavya Mimamsa* where the creative faculty, *karṇāṭraṇa Pratibha* is spoken of in three kinds (1) sahaja (natural) (2) anārya (gotten) and (3) aupađesaśka (learnt). A striking example to show how Coomaraswamy's analytical mind was always thinking of parallels in human history. Indeed, much of his greatness lies in precisely this ability to perceive and establish connections.

A noteworthy feature of the early pages of this essay is the author's discussion of certain principles like *sadrśya* and pramana as vital to the creation of art, thereby disclosing his desire to judge Indian art by Indian standards. He goes as far back as to *Visnudharmottara Purana* which holds that "sadrśya" is essential to the very substance (pradhana) of painting." (p. 9) Not merely does he give its literal meaning — its common literal translation: "likeness" or "similitude" but also draws our attention to
its misinterpretation as "visual correspondence" between "two appearances", that of the work of art and that of the model whereas in actuality it is "a correspondence of mental and sensational factors in the work" (p. 13), "a quality wholly self-contained within the work of art itself." (p. 13) He also offers an interesting comparison between 'sadrśya as the ground (pradhana) of painting' and 'sahitya as the body (sarira) of poetry." After dealing at length with literal and secondary meanings of the term he makes an important observation:

That aesthetic sadrśya does not imply naturalism, veri-similitude, illustration, or illusion in any superficial sense is sufficiently shown by the fact that in Indian lists of factors essential to painting it is almost always mentioned with pramana, "criterion of truth"... (p. 12)

This logically leads him to a consideration of Pramana, "the principle most emphasized in Indian treatises as essential to art." (p. 15) Defines the principle of the "self-evident immediate (svtaṇḍh) perception of what is correct under given conditions" (p. 16); "implies the existence of types or archetypes" (p. 17) and "aesthetic pramana finds expressions in rules (vidhi, niyama), or canons of proportion (tala, talamana, pramanani), proper to different types, and in the laksanas of iconography and cultivated taste, prescribed by authority and tradition." (p. 17).
It is interesting that Prof. Hiriyanna also dwells
on this concept of pramana at even greater length and
stresses its indispensability to not merely art but life
as well, for Indian philosophy is a philosophy of values
and pramana is required to measure the values of life.

Perfection in art symbolizes to Coomaraswamy not
merely a reconciliation of pictorial and formal elements
but a complete identification of the two towards which all
art tends. Yet paradoxically, "when painting has reached
divinity (shen) there is an end of the matter" (p. 22)
according to the Chinese. The disappearance of the artist
and the painted dragons on attainment of perfection in the
myths bear testimony to this faith. Yet this is the
perfection towards which art and artist tend. "Teach me
to write so well that I shall no longer want to," said
Eliot, for "any lack of temporal perfection in a work of
art is a betrayal of the imperfection of the artist, such
perfection as is possible to human work being a product of
the will." (p. 26) But the Indians were emphatic in
denouncing all human claims to immortality just on this
count.

... to lay claim therefore to a state of
liberty and superiority to discipline
(anacara) on behalf of the human artist,
to idolize one who is still a man as some-
thing more than man, to glorify rebellion
and independence, as in the modern deification
of genius, is plainly preposterous, or as Muslims would say blasphemous, for who shall presume to say that he indeed knows Brahman, or truly and completely loves God? (pp. 22-23)

From this it becomes obvious why traditional art believed in the "good of the work to be done" (p. 26) as the workman's "first consideration," for it is only so that "he can praise his theme." (p. 26) What is needed in the evaluation of such "work" is "a proper and ruthless critical faculty". (p. 26) In Coomaraswamy's words.

Expatiating upon the peculiarities of Oriental art Coomaraswamy notes that "the Indian or Far Eastern icon, carved or painted, is neither a memory image nor an idealization but a visual symbolism, ideal in the mathematical sense." (p. 28) Accordingly, "the Indian icon fills the whole field of vision at once, all is equally clear and equally essential." (p. 29) At this point it must be noted that Coomaraswamy's enormous praise for Indian iconography (prompting the statement that an icon is the truest art form) resulted in some outstanding works of art criticism where he undertook to interpret a certain pose of a dancing Nataraja or the meaning behind a certain gesture, the true sense of a padmasana or the origin of a Buddha image, before making them objects of universal adoration and understanding.
It is in the essay "The Theory of Art in Asia", more than in any other that Coomaraswamy brings out certain revealing and extraordinary differences between Western and Oriental art—which only a scholar of his genius and equipment could have done.

In the first place "in Western art the picture is generally conceived as seen in a frame or through a window, and so brought toward the spectator; but the Oriental image really exists only in our own mind and heart and is thence projected or reflected onto space." (p. 29) In other words, Western presentation is "optically plausible" while the Chinese painting, for instance, calls for not plausibility but "intelligibility."

Secondly "where European art naturally depicts a moment of time, an arrested action or an effect of light, Oriental art represents a continuous condition. ... modern European art endeavours to represent things as they are in themselves, Asiatic and Christian art to represent things as they are in God, or nearer to their source." (pp. 30-31) As before, Coomaraswamy's observation which can seldom be charged arbitrary is backed by concrete examples. The enlightenment of the Buddha, the Dance of Shiva and the Krishna Līlā—all represent a continuous condition. The point of citing these instances is to show "Indian adherence to types and indifference to transient effects." (p. 31) This accounts for the action of the Indian painter who
points not merely the rupam but also the svarupam and the existence of the Chinese books on portraiture which insist on the "essence" of the subject to be portrayed without saying anything about "anatomical accuracy". In fact, "there cannot be adduced from the whole of Asia such a thing as a treatise on anatomy designed for use by artists." (pp. 33-34) What was rather expected, nay, even demanded of the artist was a "rendering of very soul and mind." (p. 33) "Let us not forget," Coomaraswamy reminds us that "the mind is a part, and the most important part, of our knowledge of Nature, and that this point of view, though it may have been forgotten in Europe, has been continuously current in Asia for more than two thousand years." (p. 30)

A final gesture of tribute from Coomaraswamy to Asian art however, is directed towards its Life itself. Asia's crowning achievement seems to lie in its perfecting of life. In a country where art was never a "superstition" but "a way of life", life itself in Coomaraswamy's view "represents the ultimate and chief of the arts of Asia; and ... the forms assumed by this life are by no means empirically determined, but designed as far as possible according to a metaphysical tradition, on the one hand conformably to a divine order, and on the other with a view to facilitating the attainment by each individual of approximate perfection in his kind, that is, permitting him, by an exact adjustment of opportunity to potentiality,
to achieve such realization of his entire being as is possible to him." (p. 35) "Even town-planning depends in the last analysis upon considerations of this kind" (p. 35), he adds.

A scholar for whom Art and Life seemed to be almost synonymous, Coomaraswamy wrote in praise of the aristocratic women of India and Japan who, "sheltered from necessities of self-assertion" (p. 36), enjoyed no "freedom" whatever in the modern sense, yet "achieved an absolute perfection in their kind." (p. 36) So impressive that Coomaraswamy writes in an act of salutation: "perhaps Asiatic art can show no higher achievement than this." (p. 36) In his Dance he is again going to pay his tribute to the Indian women for being, "with all their faults of sentimentality and ignorance" (p. 101) "the guardians of a spiritual culture which is of greater worth than the efficiency and information of the educated." (p. 101)

At the cost of sounding rhetorical, one is tempted to say that only a Coomaraswamy with all those thousands of years of civilization and tradition in his bones could have affirmed such an absolute faith in the Indian woman. That, if anything is his conception of art. To claim life itself as an art and look upon the protection of one's women from self-assertion as an artistic achievement bespeaks of the place of art in Coomaraswamy's own life— a
place that he so ardently tried to regain in the life of others through his writings.

His detailed references to the development of Imagist or mystical art throughout Asia in the second millennium make the essay complete and comprehensive. He analyzes the outstanding aspects of this art which gave rise to the Ch'an-Zen art of China and Japan, Vaishnava painting, poetry and music in India and Sufi poetry and music in Persia. It is however, his fascinating estimate of the Zen art of China and Japan whose sources are partly Indian and partly Taoist, that brings out the most tender and poetic aspects of his writing. His style grows extraordinarily lyrical and graceful, gently moving at one time and deeply stirring at another. His descriptive style found at its best here wins immediate attention both to itself and its profound subject. The passages describing the uniqueness of Zen art are sheer poetry, powerful enough to touch one's inner chords. The glowing terms he uses do not sound romantic at all. On the other hand he infuses an element of inevitability into his account which is as final and irrevocable as Ch'an-Zen art itself.

Coomaraswamy sums up the most significant elements in the Asiatic theory as follows: "(1) that aesthetic experience is an ecstasy in itself inscrutable and (2) that the work of art itself, which serves as the stimulus to the release of the spirit from all inhibitions of vision,
can only come into being and have being as a thing ordered to specific ends. The seemingly innocuous words used in these two sentences "ecstasy", "inscrutable", "release", "spirit", "vision" hold the key to the entire character of the theory of art in Asia so engagingly presented here by Coomaraswamy.

His essay on Meister Eckhart, the 14th century German mystic whose "great energy" enabled him to "resume and concentrate in one consistent demonstration the spiritual being of Europe at its highest tension" (p. 61) is a penetrating study of the analogy between Eckhart's modes of thought and those current in India. In fact, he calls Eckhart's Sermons the Upanishads of Europe. The reason why Coomaraswamy feels so strongly attracted to this saint is presumably because Eckhart's conception of human life is fundamentally aesthetic; "it runs through all his thought that man is an artist" (p. 62); every man a special kind of artist making every activity an aesthetic process. For Eckhart "art is religion, religion art, not related but the same." (p. 62) What must have appealed to Coomaraswamy about Eckhart, in particular, might be the fact that Eckhart wrote, not a treatise on the arts as such, though he was evidently quite familiar with them, but sermons on the art of knowing God. (p. 63) Yet he referred constantly to the practice of specific arts, "to the art in the artist, and to the perfecting of art and artist." (p. 63).
Coomaraswamy confesses that "to extract from Eckhart's thought a theory of taste (ruci) would be doing violence to its unity." (p. 67) But if he still "ventures" out at all to extract from it a theory of art, it is "not as an exercise in dialectics but because it is required for the specific interpretation of Christian art." (p. 67) Since "Christian art is a manner of speaking about God" (p. 73) and Eckhart insisted again and again that all content is God it is but natural that every aesthetic experience should here be conceived as "the vision of the world-picture as God sees it." (p. 93)

The affinity of thought between Eckhart and Indian metaphysics is indeed very strikingly brought out in such concrete instances as in Eckhart's insistence on duty, action, selfless service, the artist's complete surrender to the work before him, the need for humility and suppression of the self on the part of the artist, art as a mental activity and the illusory nature of the visual art made according to and only for the eyes besides the emphasis on the artist's goal as one of displaying not skill but to "serve and praise the first cause of the work".

Coomaraswamy harps lovingly upon some of Eckhart's views like, "It is as artist ... that man sees things in their perfection ..." (p. 82), "... the perfection of the work is 'to prepare all creatures to return to God'" (p. 91) and so on. Remarks such as these are a fitting
prelude to the magnificent finale Coomaraswamy provides
in a passage that is worth quoting in full:

So much of pure aesthetic experience as is possible to anyone is his guarantee of ultimate perfection and of perfect happiness. It is as artist-scholar that man prepares all things to return to God, in so far as he sees them intellectually (paroksat) and not merely sensibly (pratyaksena). This is from Eckhart's point of view the "meaning" of art; "That is as far as I can understand it." (p. 95)

With this passage which pre-eminently expresses Eckhart's view of art but simultaneously carries distinct echoes of a similar Hindu view, the essay has virtually completed its full circle. It may be recalled that this community of thought between two traditions was the starting point of the essay.

Not merely does Coomaraswamy make out a case for such a theory but also proves abundantly throughout how an Indian approach can be made by having recourse to Indian ethics. He also reveals how our understanding of Eckhart can be further enriched along with a knowledge of our own tradition. This is Coomaraswamy's intention in providing Sanskrit equivalents in brackets wherever they serve to explain or better define the meaning.

Moving back home from Germany and Schoolmen Coomaraswamy
turns his attention to "Reactions to Art in India". In an essay of that title he brings together mainly from the general, non-technical literature, a few passages which report the reaction of the public to works of art, partly as a contribution to the vocabulary of criticism and more importantly to show how art was actually regarded by those for whom it was made.

Accordingly the essay abounds with references to plays where characters express their reactions to pictures and paintings and comment on colours and moods. In plays like *Dutavakya*, *Sakuntala*, *Malavikagnimitra*, *Pratimanataka*, *Uttara-Rama-Carita*, *Swarna-Vasavadatta*, *Mrchodkatika* and *Malatimadhava* there is an energetic and first-hand response on the part of the characters to not merely painting, but music, dance and drama as well. Competitions in these fields bring forth their capacity for technical appreciation also. Their praise for *rekha-suddhi* in painting and mood and scales and pauses in music testify to their expert knowledge. Naturally such a lively and vigorous interest in the arts must find an equally lively and vigorous expression. As a result we come across some most evocative critical terms like 'manorama', 'rasayana', 'netramrta', 'Ujjvalatara', 'sunya-hr̥dayata', 'muhurta sukha' etc., along with hundreds of other terms covering every aspect relating to art, artist and audience. The rich vocabulary itself could be a major contribution to art-criticism.
Coomaraswamy juxtaposes the traditional view of art (which invests every work of art with a theme and a corresponding utility or meaning) with the monastic point of view, notably the Buddhist and Jaina who reject the arts on the ground that they are merely a source of pleasant sensations or at best a momentary pleasure.

This conflict of opinion or rather plurality of approaches very rightly suggests to his mind the image of art as Kamadhenu, yielding to the spectator just what he seeks from it or is capable of understanding, which accounts for several levels of enjoyment. Coomaraswamy demonstrates how Indian art could be appreciated from every point of view: the Pandita, the bhakta, the rasika, the acarya, and the alpabuddhi-jana equipped with the qualities of learning, piety, sensibility, knowledge of technique and simplicity. He even spells out in detail the area of interest for each category mentioned above—according to his samskara, so to say.

It is highly legitimate that Coomaraswamy should devote a whole chapter to Sukranitisara, a medieval Indian treatise on statecraft and encyclopaedic work on social organization which more importantly lays down certain aesthetic principles in the making of images. He calls for a fresh version of certain passages which are misunderstood and mistranslated; himself quotes extensively from this ancient text which deals with types and lineaments of
images, emphasizing much of the time in a characteristic Indian way the absolute necessity of dhyana or visual-contemplation on the part of the human imager (pratimakara), for that was the only way an artist could realize his theme, never by direct observation. Tagore too expressed a similar belief when he said "... mere eyesight is not enough, it must be reinforced by the insight of the mind..." But at times it is intriguing that Coomaraswamy should agree with almost every tenet laid down in the text and accept without so much as a murmur even such statements as:

By the power of the intension (tapas) of the officiant (arcaaka)... the faults of an image immediately pass away. (pp. 115-116)

Such a highly subjective view might sound inimical to the growth of art-criticism but who can dispute the validity of his observation: "the decline of art has always followed the decline of faith and religion."  

However, the criteria that he offers at the end of the essay again appear to be somewhat subjective and in the nature of a broad generalization. But perhaps owing to paucity of technical terms in the analysis of "fine" arts

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13 The Dance of Shiva, p. 40.
(if the phrase can be pardoned) unlike in literature, even so distinguished an art-critic like Coomaraswamy has to make do with generalities.

Indian art can only be studied as showing at different times a greater or less degree of consciousness, a greater or less energy; the criteria are degrees of vitality, unity, grace, and the like, never of illusion. (p. 117)

Or, the other alternative could be that Coomaraswamy found them adequate in the assessment of visual arts which could not be tested in any other way. Both seem plausible.

It is noteworthy that this Volume given almost wholly to the exposition of Indian art should conclude with an essay on "The Origin and Use of Images in India", which like most of Coomaraswamy's essays has a mission to perform. The essay is obviously written with the purpose of exposing the naivete of the popular Western view of Hinduism as a polytheistic system and the absurdity of its attack on the use of images in worship. In his opinion few who condemn idolatry or make its suppression a purpose of missionary activity have ever seriously envisaged the use of images in a historical or psychological perspective or understood the significance in their use by all races of people as aids to devotion. The image is a link between the devotee and the deity. Even the philosopher has perceived the inevitability of imagery as evidenced by the
great Shankara's worship of image—despite his Vedantic monism. Coomaraswamy is all praise for these thinkers precisely because they were endowed with the gift to recognize a human necessity involved in such a mode of worship, understand the nature of that necessity and analyse systematically its psychology. His own experience has taught him that for the majority "it is so much easier to worship than to know." (p. 160) As if in answer to the feelings of the devout, "Indian religion adapts herself with infinite grace to every human need." (p. 161) Despite this popular appeal he takes care to show that neither image-making nor image-worship is the activity of the superstitious and ignorant masses, for both acts call for the employment of mental faculties, an identification of consciousness with the form evoked on the part of the artist as well as the worshipper. In fact, the Agamas (references to which are scattered throughout the book), went so far as to lay down for the devotee: devo bhutva devam vajet — "To worship the Angel, become the Angel." Hence even in this essay Coomaraswamy's preoccupations with the cerebral character of Indian art are very much apparent. His spiritual eye discerns the most important elements in the creative process as envisioned by the ancient thinkers namely, rejection of direct perception and exclusive reliance on yoga-vision or trance-vision. This is Coomaraswamy's mode of defending Oriental art, religion, life, manners, customs and even superstitions, not simply by stating but elucidating with examples, which carries
His praise for the *Silpa Sastras* which "provide invaluable data for the modern student of iconography" (p. 166) can be appreciated, but his unconditional endorsement of everything mentioned in the *Sukranitisara* including the observation:

Even the misshapen image of an angel is to be preferred to that of a man, however attractive the latter may be; (p. 167)

certainly appears hazardous to the very survival of art as art. But operating in a traditional milieu, which all along upheld the supremacy of the Absolute and the transcendence of man's ego-centric predicament it should n't be startling that an art-critic of Coomaraswamy's calibre—so totally given to the traditional view must see eye to eye not only with the above argument, but the following one:

the representations of the angels are means to spiritual ends, not so those which are only likenesses of human individuals. (p. 167)

(But elsewhere he also takes a 'critical' stand resulting in somewhat of a self-contradiction. This is perhaps the only reservation that a reader of Coomaraswamy needs to express about his art-criticism).

Hence his disapproval of the "modern aesthetician" who "interested only in aesthetic surfaces and sensations,
fails to conceive of the work as the necessary product of a given determination, that is, as having purpose and utility." (p. 169) In comparison, therefore, the worshipper "who naturally regards the icon as a devotional utility" (p. 169) for whom the object was made, "is nearer to the root of the matter than the aesthetician who endeavours to isolate beauty from function." (p. 169) The fact that Coomaraswamy should drive home this point in essay after essay only shows the extent to which modern man has alienated one from the other and placed himself in a dangerous predicament of missing the highest truth in art. Precisely here does Coomaraswamy step in to restore the balance, offer the erring 'aesthete' a right direction and a healthy corrective to his sensuality. To the extent he focusses our attention on the dangers implicit in this form of dissociation and succeeds in impressing upon us the value of a unified approach he discharges his responsibility as an art-critic of supreme abilities and illuminates the dark corners of our minds with the wisdom of the ages. Few had told us before that "'Form' in the traditional philosophy does not mean tangible shape, but is synonymous with idea and even with soul"\(^\text{14}\) or "the lotus on which the Buddha sits or stands is not a botanical specimen, but the universal ground of existence inflorescent

\(^{14}\) Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, p. 17.
in the waters of its indefinite possibilities..."15

All of Coomaraswamy's works are in a way a tribute to the "lotus of iconography" — that which symbolizes the "angelic" or "adhidaivata" view of art and the only tribute we could pay him could perhaps be expressed thus: here was an art-critic who helped us see things "intellectually" (paroksha).

The distinguished British artist Sir William Rothenstein spoke for all the world when he said:

Today, if India takes her due rank as a first-class artistic power, it is in a large measure owing to Coomaraswamy.16

Indeed, India owes much to this consummate and accomplished scholar for making her great heritage a live influence again. But the rest of the world owes no less to this genius for the new outlook on art he provided, amounting to what may without exaggeration be called "one-man revolution." An unfailling transmitter of eternal traditions, he was still a revolutionary breaking down dogma and narrow orthodoxy surrounding art. He could ask without inhibition:

15. Ibid., p. 48.

16 S. Durai Raja Singam, Ananda Coomaraswamy: Remembering and Remembering Again and Again, p. 281.
Why should the ascetic invite annoyance by hanging in his cell some representation of the nude, or the general select a lullaby to be performed upon the eve of battle? When every ascetic and every soldier has become an artist there will be no more need for works of art: 17

Certainly he has gone much farther than Tagore who said, "A real artist must be a seeker, an ascetic." 18 Coomaraswamy's advice, for instance, to the trade union member was not to seek better facilities nor expect to have a "larger share in the cultural crumbs that fall from the rich man's table" 19 but to "demand" the "opportunity to be an artist." 20 That is his right. "No civilization can be accepted that denies him this." 21

This is Coomaraswamy's legacy to the world: to "break down the superstition of "Art", and that of the "Artist" as a privileged person, of another sort than ordinary men." 22 3 If he is "still a salutary influence" 23 it is probably more because of his efforts to make art a way of life than an accomplishment.

17 The Dance of Shiva, p. 47.
18 Tagore, On Art and Aesthetics, p. 3.
19 Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, p. 100.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
23 C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Introduction" to Ananda Coomaraswamy Centenary Essays.