5.1 The Essay as a Literary Genre: A Survey

Though a late entrant in the history of literature, the essay as a literary genre has a respectable history. Like other literary forms, it has evolved to become an independent form of literature.

The beginnings of the essay as we know it today can perhaps be traced back to Theophratus, the Athenian, who wrote satirical sketches about contemporary figures. The culmination of this process was in the eighteenth century, when the essay came to have a regular form, not explicitly specified perhaps, but tacitly agreed upon by writers. Different forms of the essay were defined and different kinds of content identified as being suitable for treatment in the essay. This process was carried on into the nineteenth century. Boulton (1954:132) sums it up as follows:

"At a fairly late stage in history, there comes a small class of literature in which content is quite unimportant and the style itself is the very reason for
writing. In the eighteenth century, essays were usually either informative or moral, though the moral purpose was not necessarily the inculcation of important virtues and might be merely the correction of some deviation from taste or good manners. In the nineteenth century such writers as Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt wrote some essays on very trivial topics. For, as it seems, the sheer joy of playing with those topics in admirable polished and individual prose."

The essay has continued to grow and flourish since then, and in the twentieth century, the word 'essay' has come to connote many things.

5.1.1 Problems of Definition

The essay lacks the literary or folk tradition of poetry or drama, therefore literary critics have tried to define this literary form using different criteria. The following definitions illustrate this point:

A loose sally of the mind, an irregular indigestive piece, not a regular and ordered performance.

(Johnson: Dictionary)

...a peculiar Kind of Composition; whose Character is to be free, easy, and natural; not tied to strict Order, or Method, nor worked up and finished like a formal System.

The Matter of an Essay is supposed to consist principally of sudden, occasional Reflexions, which are to be wrote much at the Rate, and in the Manner a Man Thinks;
sometimes leaving the Subject, and then returning again, as the Thought happens to arise in the Mind.

(Chambers:1728: Cyclopaedia)

The two aspects of the essay touched upon in these two definitions are 'content' and 'style'.

Most literary critics and historians have discussed, evaluated and criticised essays keeping these two aspects in mind. Given below are a few examples which illustrate the tenor of critical and historical evaluations.

Writing about Bacon's essays, Bush (1962:195-6) says: "Of the fifty-eight essays in the final edition, more than half deal with public life or public affairs...... such varied pieces as those on truth, marriage, love and friendship."

Hill (1900:XXXIX) has this to say about Lamb's Essays of Elia: "But generally speaking, he (Lamb) shows great skill in adapting his style to his subject. In dealing with matters purely modern, as in 'Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago', his style is purely modern also; in his rural descriptions his tone is almost Wordsworthian."

Other than style and content the aspect focussed on is the treatment of ideas by
essayists. The general view is that Steele sentimentalises ideas, whereas Addison deals with them urbanely and wittily. The triviality or seriousness of the topics chosen is also commented upon.

The point to be discussed now is: How far do these definitions and critical evaluations tell us what an essay is? Content is commented upon and so is 'style' in a general way. But is an essay just a 'loose sally of the mind' or is there a more definitive explanation:description?

The problem of definition/description is very knotty when one considers all the different types of writing which come under the general head 'essays'. A student's written exercise on a given theme, a short dissertation in journals for intellectuals, articles in papers and magazines by renowned columnists or well-known intellectuals on diverse topics - all these are clubbed under the generic title 'essay'. Add to this the diversity of topics covered and the problem of definition becomes even more acute.

Another point is, the essay has changed in its content and tenor with the changes in society.
A review of the essay in the twentieth century shows that in keeping with the functional tenor of the age, the essay is almost always related to a discipline - science, politics, sociology or aesthetics. The literary essay where people wrote on all sorts of topics without necessarily relating it to any discipline is a rarity today. Essayists no longer write about Spinoza or God, turtles and Cheapside for the joy of using the language. If it is Spinoza or God who are written about, the mooring point would most probably be Marxism or Fundamentalism. If it is turtles and Cheapside, the discipline it would relate to would be either ecology, conservation or sociology.

The changing tenor of the essay is best reflected in the way it is classified. Literary essays were generally divided into character descriptions, critical essays or polemical essays. They were even divided according to whether they were 'complete', i.e., short and complete in themselves or 'incomplete' i.e. where the thought could not or would not be exploited thoroughly. The historical or critical essays are examples of the 'incomplete' essay. Or again, literary
essays were classified according to their tone - humorous, serious, chatty or academic.

Course books today, on the other hand, tend to classify essays in two ways. One, according to their rhetorical function-narration, description, classification, process analysis, definition etc. Two, according to features of composition - the organization, the paragraph, sentence patterns etc. This type of classification has become possible because literary essays are being increasingly replaced by essays which have their roots in specific disciplines.

Although the classification of the Essay reflects awareness of its changing tone, the same awareness is not reflected in the analysis of the essay.

The essay as a literary genre is mentioned in most books on the history of literature. The essay which is considered in these books is the literary essay. The criteria applied to this type of essay for purposes of criticism are the norms of literary criticism extant at the time of the reading/review. Thus an Arnold would look at the essay differently from an Eliot.
When the essay is considered in such books, one word which occurs very often is 'style', and its significance is highlighted. Style is discussed by the literary critic in terms of the formalised rhetorical devices identified by tradition and ratified by critics. Yet the term 'style' in statements such as "People with a real sense of 'style......" or "......good style comes naturally to very few people" or "In all prose writing style should have some importance", though not very clear, shows evidence of an awareness of this important factor in prose writing. But the criticism and evaluation of style in the essay, as in the criticism of other genres using literary criteria, tends to be impressionistic.

With the developments in linguistics, one could perhaps have expected the essay to have been studied with special care, considering the fact that a wide range of personalities have used it as a vehicle to express their thoughts - Bertrand Russell, J. Bronowski, Carl Sagan, Chomsky, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Foster, V.S. Naipaul are just a few well known names among those who have used the essay as a medium of writing. A second reason
for expecting linguistics/stylistics to be used in the study of the essay is the fact that as a genre it is taught and studied in almost all undergraduate courses which have English on the curriculum.

It is indeed ironical that the essay which is most used by intellectuals as a vehicle of their thoughts and taught widely in almost all undergraduate courses is persistently ignored by stylistics especially at the discourse level.

Though there is no adequate theory of prose style in general, the methods of analysis evolved by stylistics can be applied to the essay too at the micro-level, viz the lexis, and the syntax. But this does not in any way deal with the essay as a separate type of discourse.

The effect of new analytical tools which are so apparent when it comes to poetry, drama or the novel, is not seen at all when it comes to the essay. Tools of T.G. analysis, theory of equivalences etc. have been applied to poetry; speech act theories have been applied to drama; narratological frameworks of analysis to novels and short stories. Yet the essay has not been
granted a separate identity. It is not seen as a distinct type of discourse but only as a part of the bigger entity, 'prose'. This view has led to the ignoring of the essay as a distinct, separate genre by stylistics.

A further irony is the fact that the essay has been recognized as important in the field of literature. As Chapman (1982:94) says: "The shaping of the early novel can indeed be traced through some of the essayists of the previous generation." This awareness, nevertheless, has not led to the analysis of the style of an essayist like Lamb in a way comparable to the analysis of the style of a novelist like Golding.

5.2 The Essay in the Classroom

One of the ironies, as mentioned earlier is the fact that the most taught genre is the least researched. The essay is taught both for the purposes of reading and writing in undergraduate courses.

(The essay which will be considered here will not be the literary essay, but the non-literary essay, written in the late nineteenth or twentieth century.)
The test of a student's competence is measured in terms of the essay s/he writes. The reading which the students do in colleges is mostly the expository type of prose, literary essays, philosophies, histories, political and economic theories, studies in government and law—all of which are very often in the form of essays.

Outside the college too, the student is most likely to read a column in a newspaper or a 'paper' on his/her field of specialisation or interest. That is—the essay. Very few students become producers of fiction: what they are most likely to write is some sort of an essay when the occasion demands it.

Considering all this, it is surprising how much the essay or rather the essay as a genre, is taken for granted. Students are expected to produce essays without adequate teaching being done on how to write an essay. The assumption is that all writing skills should have been acquired at the school level and no 'teaching' of skills needs to be done at the undergraduate level. This notion is partly valid—most of the mechanical and structural skills are covered at the school
level and a student is supposed to have acquired the basic writing skills. But when we consider the essay, we realise that a different set of skills is required - the student must be able to deploy his/her linguistic abilities for a specific purpose; either to analyse or put forward a point of view.

This is where stylistics is relevant. An exposure to the writings of good essayists ('good' here means 'effective') and a conscious look at the devices they employ and the skill with which they employ these will help the students understand the skills of language manipulation better and this in turn will be reflected in their production.

Extensive research in poetry has provided some insights which can be applied to classroom teaching. The same has been done/is being done with regard to narrative fiction, again providing some insights which can be applied in classroom teaching. But, as far as the essay is concerned, there are almost no research findings which can serve as a take-off point for debate on stylistic methodology in the classroom. In fact, any
teacher who wishes to try such a methodology will have to start from scratch. There are of course, many excellent course books, but these have very little theoretical backing.

Infact, the essay has a great advantage over the novel. It is a manageable unit very much like the poem. Each essay is a complete unit and stylistic analysis can be done without much trouble. The danger of being bogged down by a diversity of stylistic features is not there and the painful necessity of making a choice of what interesting feature to include is absent. The essay can be read and analysed for prominent stylistic features without the fear of feeling inadequate to cope with a diversity of stylistic devices which are present in a work of fiction like *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Another aspect which makes the analysis of the essay feasible is the fact that it is generally classified according to whether it is expository, narrative or descriptive or argumentative.

Some course books have tried a stylistic approach to teach the essay. There are three books worth mentioning here—Kane & Peters,
Writing Prose (1986), Kreuzer & Cogan, *Studies in Prose Writing* (1966) and Taylor & Okada ed., *The Craft of the Essay* (1977). All three books consider the language used in the essay and attempt a sort of stylistic-cum-literary analysis. Prominent language features are highlighted, analysed and discussed. The discussions tend towards finding out how this special use of language helps the writer to achieve his/her aims. As can be seen above, all three books are publications for use in the American and English Universities. No comparable publication is available to teach the essay (if the syllabus includes essays) in Indian colleges.

If it is necessary to teach the essay in our colleges in such a way that students achieve the necessary competence to both read and interpret the essay as well as write it, then, logically, an effective method for the teaching of the essay has to be evolved. As stylistic teaching can prove useful, a general methodology using stylistic analysis should be developed for the teaching of the essay.
5.3 Teaching the Essay

Some of the stylistic features which can be used to analyse and interpret the essay have been discussed below. The discussion here begins with words and phrases and goes on to clauses and finally discourse features.

(i) Grammatical categories

a. Verbs and verb phrases play a very important role in the stylistic analysis of a text. The use of stative verbs as opposed to dynamic verbs makes considerable difference to the tone of the essay. Passives are often viewed as being 'weak and wordy' by many writing manuals. Yet the deliberate use of this feature in some essays emphasises a point of view the writer wants to convey. In the passage given below, Whitman makes repeated use of the passive while describing military action, e.g. 'were put', 'were taken', 'were placed', etc. Yet the use of the passive here is subtly appropriate. The question whether this is an impersonal account or whether the author here makes an evaluation and offers his comment can be discussed in the context of the
use of the passive.

At this instant a force of our cavalry, who had been following the train at some interval, charged suddenly upon the secesh captors, who proceeded at once to make the best escape they could. Most of them got away, but we gobbled two officers and seventeen men, in the very act just described. The sight was one which admitted of little discussion, as may be imagined. The seventeen captured men and two officers were put under guard for the night, but it was decided there and then that they should die. The next morning the two officers were taken in the town, separate places, put in the center of the street, and shot. The seventeen men were taken to an open ground, a little one side. They were placed in a hollow square, half-encompassed by two of our cavalry regiments, one of which regiments had three days before found the bloody corpses of three of their men hamstrung and hung up by the heels to limbs of trees by Moseby's guerrillas, and the other had not long before had twelve men, after surrendering, shot and then hung by the neck to limbs of trees, and jeering inscriptions pinned to the breast of one of the corpses, who had been a sergeant. Those three, and those twelve, had been found, I say, by these environing regiments. Now, with revolvers, they formed the grim cordon of the seventeen prisoners. The latter were placed in the midst of the hollow square, unfastened, and the ironical remark made to them that they were now to be given "a chance for themselves." A few ran for it. But what use? From every side the deadly pills came. In a few minutes the seventeen corpses strewed the hollow square. I was curious to know whether some of the Union soldiers, some few (some one or two at least of the youngsters), did not
abstain from shooting on the helpless men. Not one. There was no exultation, very little said, almost nothing, yet every man there contributed his shot.

(Kane & Peters : 154)

b. Pronominals function subtly yet effectively in stretches of prose writing. The 'we' used in essays which set out to persuade or put across a point of view is very important - as important as the 'I' used in literary essays where the essayists want to establish a sense of intimacy. The use of this pronoun 'we' flatteringly admits the audience into a select group of people who are knowledgeable, rational and capable of logical thinking.

Pronouns are also used as a linking device. In an essay on the Civil Rights Movement, Alice Walker consistently uses the pronoun 'they' to link paragraphs and achieves remarkable coherence.

Still, white liberals and deserting civil rights sponsors are quick to justify their disaffection from the movement by claiming that it is all over. "And since it is over," they will ask, "would someone kindly tell me what has been gained by it?" They then list statistics supposedly showing how much more advanced segregation is now than ten years ago in
schools, housing, jobs. They point to a gain in conservative politicians during the last few years. They speak of ghetto riots and of recent survey that shows that most policemen are admittedly too anti-Negro to do their jobs in ghetto areas fairly and effectively. They speak of every area that has been touched by the civil rights movement as somehow or other going to pieces.

They rarely talk, however, about human attitudes among Negroes that have undergone terrific changes just during the past seven to ten years (not to mention all those years when there was a movement and only the Negroes knew about it). They seldom speak of changes in personal lives because of the influence of people in the movement. They see general failure and few, if any, individual gains.

They do not understand what it is that keeps the movement from "laying down" and Negroes from reverting to their former silent second-class status. They have apparently never stopped to wonder why it is always the white man - on his radio and in his newspaper and on his television - who says that the movement is dead. If a Negro were audacious enough to make such a claim, his fellows might hanker to see him shot. The movement is dead to the white man because it no longer interests him. And it no longer interests him because he can afford to be uninterested: he does not have to live by it, with it, or for it, as Negroes must. He can take a rest from the news of beatings, killings, and arrests that reach him from North and South - if his skin is white. Negroes cannot now and will never be able to take a rest from the injustices that plague them - for they - not the white man - are the target.

(Taylor & Okada : 257)
c. Subordination is an important device in prose writing; the writer's emphasis on the important idea in the sentence is achieved through this device. If a minor point outweighs a major one in a sentence, then the logical weighting of writer's ideas is upset and precision and clarity lost.

Given below is an example of two versions of the same sentence from Forster's essay *The Ivory Tower* to illustrate the point made above.

1) Forster's sentence:
The phrase "The Ivory Tower" was first used, in the literary sense, by Sainte-Beuve when he was examining the work of his friend and contemporary Alfred de Vigny.

2) Second version:
Sainte-Beuve was examining the work of his friend and contemporary Alfred de Vigny when he first used the phrase "The Ivory Tower" in the literary sense. (Kreuzer & Cogan: 227-8)

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used, other than the co-ordinating linkers. Given below is an excerpt from a Henry James essay where he uses parallelism to achieve a humorous effect.

How he would go into the causes of the badness, and trace its connections with English civilization! How earnestly he would expiate and how minutely he would explain; how fervently he would point the moral and entreat his fellow countrymen not to be as the English are lest they should lapse into histrionic barbarism!

(Kreuzer & Cogan: 210)

(ii) Sentences and Beyond

a. A stylistic feature which has been identified by both linguists and literary critics is the variation of the sentence length. It can be noticed in good essays that the variation is done skilfully and is often used to emphasise a certain point with telling effect. In the examples below, a short sentence either precedes or follows a long sentence. These short sentences acquire considerable emphasis when juxtaposed with longer sentences.

You have no idea how many problems an author has to face during those feverish days when he is building a novel, and you have no idea how he solves them. Neither has he.

(Kreuzer & Cogan: 210)
Lincoln too used this device while delivering the Annual Message to Congress in December, 1862.

Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them.

(Kane and Peters : 367)

b. Paragraph structures are very important in essays – they are the basis on which the whole work rests. The use and position of topic sentences (does the paragraph have a clear topic sentence? what is its position – beginning, middle or end?), the development of the topic sentence (exemplification, argument, explication), the organisation of paragraph (are they knit together well, or are they loosely connected, are the connections implicit or explicit?) are some of the features which need consideration when reading an essay intensively.

Topic sentence first: Given below is an example of how the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph is developed using exemplification by Mark Twain in a speech, Advice to Youth:
Be respectful to your superiors, if you have any, also to strangers, and sometimes to others. If a person offend you, and you are in doubt as to whether it was intentional or not, do not resort to extreme measures; simply watch your chance and hit him with a brick. That will be sufficient. If you shall find that he had not intended any offense, come out frankly and confess yourself in the wrong when you struck him; acknowledge it like a man and say you didn't mean to. Yes, always avoid violence; in this age of charity and kindliness, the time has gone by for such things. Leave dynamite to the low and unrefined.

(Fencl & Jager: 1979: 9)

**Topic sentence last**: This excerpt from Barbara Jordan's *Who then Will Speak for Common Good* illustrates how the topic sentence can be placed at the end of the paragraph for achieving a special effect.

If we promise as public officials, we must deliver. If we as public officials propose, we must produce. If we say to the American people it is time for you to be sacrificial; sacrifice. If the public official says that, we (public officials) must be the first to give. We must be. And again, if we make mistakes, we must be willing to admit. We have to do that. What we have to do is strike a balance between the idea that government should do everything and the idea, the belief, that government ought to do nothing. Strike a balance.

(Fencl & Jager: 9)

**Implied topic sentence**: Sometimes the topic
sentences occur in the middle of the paragraph while yet again they are not stated but are implied. The excerpt below from *A Treasury of American Anecdotes* is an example. The implied topic sentence could be 'An impossible goal can be reached despite heavy odds'.

While (William H.) Raper was traveling a circuit in southeastern Indiana, he lost his way in the woods one dark night and wandered about for several hours. At last, in his wanderings he came to the banks of a stream. The rain had been falling steadily for several days, and he knew the water must be very high. He felt that to remain out all night in his exhausted condition meant death, and determined to cross the stream, if possible, and seek shelter on the other side. He dismounted and groped along in the darkness as best he could, until he came to what he supposed to be a bridge, and carefully led his horse onto it. As he proceeded, he felt it giving under him, step by step, but kept on until finally he reached the other side in safety. At a short distance he discovered a house, and, after arousing the inmates, obtained permission to stay all night. They asked him how he had been able to cross the creek; he said by the bridge; they were confounded, and told him there was no bridge there. In the morning they went to the place and discovered that in the darkness he had crossed on floating driftwood that had become jammed.

(Fencl & Jager : 10)

C. Directly connected to paragraphing is the
overall organisation of the essay. The scientific essay is generally the most easily identifiable in terms of organisation. An essay on a political point of view will probably not be as explicitly organised as a scientific essay. Coherence is another factor which is directly related to organisation. Unlike in literary essays, like Lamb's *Dream Children*, where coherence is achieved through non-obvious methods, the essay which is rooted in some discipline achieves coherence through several explicit organisational devices. For example, discourse designs like the simple 'step by step' exposition, the 'chain' type exposition where propositions are linked, the 'stack' exposition, or the 'balance' strategy in comment passages.

(Quirk et al: 1985: 1435)

Step-by-step exposition

The hundred metre race was run immediately after lunch. This was followed by the 400 metre relay. After a brief interlude with an acrobatic display, spectators spread round the track to watch the first cycling event.

(ibid: 1435)
There is something very unsatisfactory about the maxim 'honesty is the best policy'. It seems to equate virtue with profit, yet our common experience denies this. We could all cite instances of where an honest and virtuous action has brought disappointment and even ruin. We could easily point to people who have behaved with gross dishonesty and have become successful, powerful, wealthy. In any case it is surely rather immoral to incite people to honourable behaviour by seeming to promise reward. 'Honesty', if it requires a motive, must be valued for reasons other than 'policy'.

(ibid : 1436)

Balance strategy

For a spring break, Cumbria is hard to beat. There is of course a strong risk of bad weather during the early months of the year. On the other hand, the early tourist is rewarded by empty roads and the feeling that he has the countryside to himself. Not all the hotels are open, it is true, and you may be obliged to drive on to the next village. But this is well offset by the welcome that awaits you in a guest house where you may turn out to be the only resident: Early visitors to Cumbria rarely regret their initiative.

(ibid : 1436-37)

All the above stylistic features make for the effectiveness of an essay. An understanding of the use of these devices will help towards the understanding of what makes an essay good, even great.
5.4 Proposed Methodology

Before considering a methodology, it would be useful to consider a few points about the special position of the essay in the 20th century. These points have a special bearing on the teaching methodology, as these are the types of essays usually prescribed.

The position of the essay in our society is rather unique. The widening scope of the newspaper and the journal in the eighteenth century which "...... presupposes a class of readers who possess economic and social security and who can appreciate rational reflection upon civilised manners and morals" (Bush : 1962 : 193) has reached such proportions in the twentieth century that the essay has become the most popular means of conveying ideas and opinions, and is only next to the television/radio in its reach. This is due to the fact that dissemination of information has become very important in the wake of the information explosion. Also, increasing literacy and easy access to information, make it vitally important to educate public opinion. People in power have found that masses can be
influenced best through the media (both visual and aural, but here the discussion will be limited to the printed page).

Intellectuals and professionals have not missed this point, and it is common to come across well written and well crafted essays by eminent people in magazine sections of better known newspapers and also some quality journals. There are the semiprofessional journals too which are a forum for the publication of essays of various kinds. The higher the profile the author gets in the media, the wider the audience. It is amazing but true that Chomsky is better known to the public as a political thinker and writer than as a linguist for the simple reason that his writings in this field have received wide coverage.

This being the case, when the essayist is well-known, the readers know more or less the stand s/he will take on a particular issue, as his /her ideas will be well known. In other words, background knowledge plays an important part while dealing with the modern essay (i.e., of the twentieth century). This background knowledge which is peripherally important in a lyric poem
becomes significant when teaching an essay.

If then, an essay by a writer who is familiar to the class is taken (familiar either through his/her work in a specific field or through a general awareness of the personality through the media) prediction become possible, for pre-knowledge of the personality is brought into use.

Before the Reading

A. Prediction: If the author is well-known the prediction of what the essay can be about is possible. Or, the title of the essay could be used to predict the content of the essay. For example, the title Against Education (by James Agate) makes prediction easy - it will be an essay about the present concept or system of education. The provocative title means that the author is trying to shock people into taking notice of what he is saying. Of course, if the author were well known the prediction would become even more specific and this would make the reading of the essay easier. Using the device of prediction would make the students read the
essay with interest to confirm expectations. If expectations are not confirmed, the analysis of the essay could be in terms of Why; if they were confirmed, the How of it could be discussed.

B. Linguistic items required for the analysis of the essay could be either discussed or highlighted through tasks if necessary. But if the essay is simple in terms of the use of language, then the discussion of the linguistic items need not be done.

During the Reading

A. Skimming: To find out whether the predictions based on the title/author's reputation are valid, the students will be asked to skim through the essay.

B. Scanning: Students will be asked to pick out features relevant to the stylistic analysis to follow. The features will be mainly syntactic. Lexis will be considered where necessary/relevant.

C. Stylistic Analysis: Students will next interpret the results on the basis of the data
collected. The teacher at this stage will be just a facilitator. The focus of interpretation would be on what the author means, for in an essay, the author's point of view is very important.

After the Reading

A. Personal Response: The response here is less affective and more intellectual. Therefore, students will have to evaluate what the essayist has said in terms of reason, more in terms of feeling. Their opinions may, of course, differ from the author's, but they will be required to reason out and logically argue their case if it is opposed to what the essayist has said.

B. Written Work: Written work can be in the form of summary writing, identifying the line of thought in the essay or evaluating what the author has said. One type of exercise to test whether the students have comprehended the style of the author could be the giving of another essay by the same author and setting tasks involving predictions of various types.
e.g., content (development of argument / idea), discourse structure (suggesting a conclusion or even the title).

5.5 Procedural Details

5.5.1 The Text

The choice of the text could be made only after the following question was answered: What will the term 'essay' here signify?

Considering the present student population in both urban and non-urban areas, the sort of essay they would need to handle would be that which was related to some discipline. The literary essay, it is true, is an excellent exemplification of individual style, but it is not the sort of material the students would need to read or write.

The essay chosen would also have to be on a contemporary topic/issue. Students would relate better to topics they were familiar with and which were topical. This would also help the students to interact better with the text.

The other point which would govern the choice of the essay would be the linguistic capability of the students to handle the text on their own. The
literary essay is a challenging piece to work with, but it demands of the reader a certain minimum level of language competence. Since the essay would be taught to undergraduate classes, a text written in modern English with very few studied embellishments would have to be chosen.

So here, the term 'essay' would refer to a piece of written work in modern English, dealing with current topics/issues.

The essay chosen was Bertrand Russell's *Ideas that have Helped Mankind*. This is a short essay, very clearly structured with lively examples and enough provocative statements to keep alive one's interest while reading it. He has a tongue-in-cheek manner which leads one to look beyond the denotative meanings.

The language is crisp and clear. There is also the use of explicit linkers to serve as clues to the development of the main idea.

Stylistically, this piece would lend itself to intensive work.

5.5.2 The Class

The class consisted of I year B.A.LL.B.
students of the National Law School University of India. These students had been chosen on the basis of a competitive examination, and all of them were fluent in English and very articulate. It was expected that the class would proceed at a brisk pace.

The other class consisted of teachers of high schools who had come to the Regional Institute of English, Bangalore, to undergo a four-month training course. The teachers belonged to the four Southern States, viz Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. They had been exposed to different methodologies in the teaching of English and had even tried out some during their teaching practice sessions and were therefore an informed audience as far as the stylistic approach was concerned. Their English was generally average though some teacher trainees had an M.A in English or were studying for their M.A.

5.6 Text

Given below is the text and the teacher's analysis.
Before we can discuss this subject we must form some conception as to the kind of effect that we consider a help to mankind. Are mankind helped when they become more numerous? Or when they become less like animals? Or when they become happier? Or when they learn to enjoy a greater diversity of experiences? Or when they come to know more? Or when they become more friendly to one another? I think all these things come into our conception of what helps mankind, and I will say a preliminary word about them.

The most indubitable respect in which ideas have helped mankind is numbers. There must have been a time when homo sapiens was a very rare species, subsisting precariously in jungles and caves, terrified of wild beasts, having difficulty in securing nourishment. At this period the biological advantage of his greater intelligence, which was cumulative because it could be handed on from generation to generation, had scarcely begun to outweigh the disadvantages of his long infancy, his lessened agility as compared to monkeys, and his lack of hirsute protection against cold. In those days, the number of men must certainly have been very small. The main use to which, throughout the ages, men have put their technical skill has been to increase the total population. I do not mean that this was the intention, but that it was, in fact, the effect. If this is something to rejoice in, then we have occasion to rejoice.

We have also become, in certain respects, progressively less like animals. I can think in particular of two respects: first, that acquired, as opposed to congenital, skills play a continually increasing part in human life, and, secondly, that forethought more and more dominates
impulse. In these respects we have certainly become progressively less like animals.

As to happiness, I am not so sure. Birds, it is true, die of hunger in large numbers during the winter, if they are not birds of passage. But during the summer they do not foresee this catastrophe, or remember how nearly it befell them in the previous winter. With human beings the matter is otherwise. I doubt whether the percentage of birds that will have died of hunger during the previous winter (1946-47) is as great as the percentage of human beings that will have died from the same cause in India and central Europe during the same period. But every human death by starvation is preceded by a long period of anxiety, and surrounded by the corresponding anxiety of neighbours. We suffer not only the evils that actually befall us, but all those that our intelligence tells us we have reason to fear. The curbing of impulses to which we are led by forethought averts physical disaster at the cost of worry, and general lack of joy. I do not think that the learned men of my acquaintance, even when they enjoy a secure income, are as happy as the mice that eat the crumbs from their tables while the erudite gentlemen snooze. In this respect, therefore, I am not convinced that there has been any progress at all.

As to the diversity of enjoyments, however, the matter is otherwise. I remember reading an account of some lions who were taken to a movie showing the successful depredations of lions in a wild state, but none of them, got any pleasure from the spectacle. Not only music, and poetry, and science, but football, and baseball, and alcohol, afford no pleasure to animals. Our intelligence has, therefore, certainly enabled us to get a much greater variety of enjoyment than is open to animals, but we have purchased this advantage at the expense of a much greater liability to boredom.

But I shall be told it is neither numbers nor multiplicity of pleasures that make the glory of man. It is his intellectual and moral qualities. It is obvious that we know more than animals do,
and it is common to consider this one of our advantages. Whether it is, in fact, an advantage, may be doubted. But at any rate it is something which distinguishes us from the brutes.

Has civilization taught us to be more friendly towards one another? The answer is easy. Robins (the English, not the American species) peck an elderly robin to death, whereas men (the English, not the American species) give an elderly man an old-age pension. Within the herd we are more friendly to each other than are many species of animals, but in our attitude towards those outside the herd, in spite of all that has been done by moralists and religious teachers, our emotions are as ferocious as those of any animal, and our intelligence enables us to give them a scope which is denied to even the most savage beast. It may be hoped, though not very confidently, that the more humane attitude will in time come to prevail, but so far the omens are not very propitious.

All these different elements must be borne in mind in considering what ideas have done most to help mankind. The ideas with which we shall be concerned may be broadly divided into two kinds: those that contribute to knowledge and technique, and those that are concerned with morals and politics. I will treat first those that have to do with knowledge and technique.

The most important and difficult steps were taken before the dawn of history. At what stage language began is not known, but we may be pretty certain that it began very gradually. Without it, it would have been very difficult to hand on from generation to generation the inventions and discoveries that were gradually made.

Another great step, which may have come either before or after the beginning of language, was the utilization of fire. I suppose that at first fire was chiefly used to keep away wild beasts while our ancestors slept, but the warmth must have been found agreeable. Presumably on some occasion a child got scolded for throwing the meat into the fire, but when it was taken out it
was found to be much better, and so the long history of cookery began. The taming of domestic animals, especially the cow and the sheep, must have made life much pleasanter and more secure. Some anthropologists have an attractive theory that the utility of domestic animals was not foreseen, but that people attempted to tame whatever animal their religion taught them to worship. The tribes that worshipped lions and crocodiles died out, while those to whom the cow or sheep was a sacred animal prospered. I like this theory, and in the entire absence of evidence, for or against it, I feel at liberty to play with it.

Even more important than the domestication of animals was the invention of agriculture, which, however, introduced bloodthirsty practices into religion that lasted for many centuries. Fertility rites tended to involve human sacrifice and cannibalism. Moloch would not help the corn to grow unless he was allowed to feast on the blood of children. A similar opinion was adopted by the Evangelicals of Manchester in the early days of industrialism, when they kept six-year-old children working twelve to fourteen hours a day, in conditions that caused most of them to die. It has now been discovered that grain will grow, and cotton goods be manufactured, without being watered by the blood of infants. In the case of the grain, the discovery took thousands of years; in the case of the cotton goods hardly a century. So perhaps there is some evidence of progress in the world.

The last of the great pre-historic inventions was the art of writing which was indeed a prerequisite of history. Writing, like speech, developed gradually, and in the form of pictures designed to convey a message it was probably as old as speech, but from pictures to syllable writing and thence to the alphabet was a very slow evolution. In China the that step was never taken.
5.6.1 Analysis

a. The use of the pronominals 'I' and 'We' is significant in this essay. The author uses 'we' when he wants to make a general statement and 'I' to make a personal comment. For example,

If this is something to rejoice in, then we have occasion to rejoice; Without the herd, we are more friendly to each other; I think all these things come into our conception of what helps mankind; I do not mean that this was the intention.

b. The use of modals is significant: 'must have been' which signifies deductive logic occurs most frequently. For example,

'There must have been a time when *homo sapiens* was a very rare species' 'In those days, men must certainly have been very small'.

c. The author very often uses the present perfect, especially when talking about development of civilization or the human species. As a scientist he sees all things which develop as part of a continuum, even to the time of speaking.

d. The essay has a number of linkers which help the development of the argument. For
example, 'however', 'but', 'therefore', etc., are used to present the matter logically and coherently.

e. The author often explicitly states how he will develop the argument, e.g.

'I will say a preliminary word about them', 'I will treat first those which have to do with knowledge and technique'.

f. The essay has been structured very clearly: six questions are posed in the first paragraph, and all these six are dealt with one by one in the essay.

The above are some of the stylistic features present in the essay which contribute to making it a 'scientific' or 'science-based' essay.

5.6.2 Lesson I

One 60 minute period in the afternoon with the I yr. B.A., LL.B. students.

Before the Reading

The teacher began by asking what an essay was. The answers were varied, and in the end the class reached the conclusion that essays were of three main types: analytic, descriptive and
comment based.

prediction: Since these students were better read than most, the teacher asked them what they knew about Russell. They knew that he was a scientist and had once been jailed for his ideas/beliefs.

After getting this information the teacher asked the students to guess what an essay written by Russell and titled Ideas That Have Helped Mankind could contain. The students came up with many answers.

T: Now, if I gave an essay with the title Ideas That Have Helped Mankind What would you expect it to be .... or find in the essay?
S: Scientist attitude
T: I'm asking you to guess, so guess what you would expect.
SS: Discoveries
Technical advances
Innovative ideas
Philosophic ideas
T: Under which category would it come?
S: Descriptive
S: Talking about technical advances
S: Descriptive ...... (tape unclear)
T: When Russell says Ideas that have Helped Mankind (word helped underlined on BB) I get bothered.
S: Past ...
S: Idea which has helped
T: Something which has really worked/
S: Mankind is in need of help.
T: Right, Mankind is in need of 'help', therefore he uses this term.

The students also suggested that this essay would most probably come under the category 'Descriptive'.

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During the Reading

Skimming: The students were asked to skim through the essay quickly and find our if their predictions were fulfilled. They felt that quite a few of their predictions were correct as Russell talks about both technological advances and advances in ideas. They said that to a great extent the essay was descriptive.

The teacher asked whether the author was putting across a point of view. The class agreed that he had a specific point of view about ideas that had helped mankind but they could not identify it clearly.

Scanning: The students were asked to scan the essay and find sentences which had the pronoun 'we' for subject and sentences which had 'I' as subject. These were listed on the blackboard. The list read as follows:

I

We

(Introductory Para)

I think all these things....
I will say a preliminary word...

(Para 2: Population)

I do not mean that this was...
the intention

Before we can discuss.....
We must form.......

then we have occasion....
to rejoice
I

(Para 3: Less like animals)

I can think in particular of two respects

(Para 4: Happiness)

I am not so sure.....
I doubt whether the percentage I do not think that the learn- ed men of my acquaintance...
I am not convinced that there...

(Para 5: Diversity of experience)

I remember reading an account...

(Para 6: Knowledge)

But I shall be told ...

(Para 7: Friendliness)

within the herd, we are more friendly to each other.... (our) attitudes, emotions, intelligence.....

(Para 8: Intro. to next part)

I will treat first those ...

(Para 9: Knowledge & technique)

But we may be pretty certain..

We

(Para 3: Less like animals)

We have also become .......
We have certainly become ...

(Para 4: Happiness)

We suffer not only the evils.
We are led by forethought....

(Para 5: Diversity of experience)

But we have purchased this..

(Para 6: Knowledge)

... that we know more than animals do

(Para 7: Friendliness)

within the herd, we are more friendly to each other.... (our) attitudes, emotions, intelligence.....

(Para 8: Intro. to next part)

..that we shall be concerned with

(Para 9: Knowledge & technique)

But we may be pretty certain.
I suppose at first fire was used.
I like this theory.
I feel at liberty to play with it.

Stylistic Analysis & Interpretation:

Students noticed that when the author used 'we' he meant 'all mankind'. That is, this inclusive use of the pronoun 'we' was used to make general statements. On the other hand, the pronoun 'I' was used when he wanted to make a comment. So the basic use of the pronouns was to make general statements and personal comments. The whole essay is structured in this way - the author makes a general statement and then follows it up by a comment.

The students were asked to go back to the essay and find occurrences of the modal 'must have been'.
The students required explanations about the use of modals to indicate logical deduction. They realised that being a scientist and not a demagogue, Russell would make statements based on logical deductions. The appeal was more to the intellect, than the emotions.

The students also located the tense form which occurs frequently in this essay, viz the present perfect. The idea of seeing the development of everything as part of a continuum was discussed.

The linking devices used by the author were also discussed briefly. The point made was that the use of linkers contributes to aid clarity.

An interesting point which arose during the discussions was the fact that since Russell was a scientist, he would not be didactic in his approach, but would give the listener/reader an apparent choice - to agree or to disagree. The students felt that Russell was trying to be persuasive in a subtle way, trying to get people to accept his point of view.
Personal Response

This was in the form of written work. Students were asked to decide whether the author really felt that ideas had helped mankind. Some students felt that there was an apparent contradiction in what the author was saying - in one breath he said that mankind was much better off and in the other that it was not. The students who said this were trying to go beyond the apparent meaning of the text to the author's point of view. This contradiction was resolved when the text was analysed and the structure of the essay established.

Follow Up

As follow up work, the students were given another short essay by Russell, Man versus Insects. The last sentence of the essay was deleted and the students were asked to provide the last sentence after reading and analysing the text.
Amid wars and rumours of wars, while 'disarmament' proposals and non-aggression pacts threaten the human race with unprecedented disaster, another conflict, perhaps even more important, is receiving much less notice than it deserves—I mean the conflict between men and insects.

We are accustomed to being the Lords of Creation; we no longer have occasion, like the cave men, to fear lions and tigers, mammoths and wild boars. Except against each other, we feel ourselves safe. But while big animals no longer threaten our existence, it is otherwise with small animals. Once before in the history of life on this planet, large animals gave place to small ones. For many ages dinosaurs ranged unconcerned through swamp and forest, fearing nothing but each other, not doubting the absoluteness of their empire. But they disappeared, to give place to tiny mammals—mice, small hedgehogs, miniature horses no bigger than rats, and such-like. Why the dinosaurs died out is not known, but it is supposed to be because they had minute brains and devoted themselves to the growth of weapons of offence in the shape of numerous horns. However that may be, it was not through their line that life developed.

The mammals, having become supreme, proceeded to grow big. But the biggest on land, the mammoth, is extinct, and the other large animals have grown rare, except man and those that he has domesticated. Man, by his intelligence, has succeeded in finding nourishment for a large population, in spite of his size. He is safe, except from the little creatures—the insects and the micro-organisms.

Insects have an initial advantage in their numbers. A small wood may easily contain as many ants as there are human beings in the whole world. They have another advantage in the fact that they eat our food before it is ripe for us. Many
noxious insects which used to live only in some comparatively small region have been unintentionally transported by man to new environments where they have done immense damage. Travel and trade are useful to insects as well as to micro-organisms. Yellow fever formerly existed only in West Africa, but was carried to the Western hemisphere by the slave trade. Now, owing to the opening up of Africa, it is gradually travelling eastwards across that continent. When it reaches the east coast it will become almost impossible to keep it out of India and China, where it may be expected to halve the population. Sleeping sickness is an even more deadly African disease which is gradually spreading.

Fortunately science has discovered ways by which insect pests can be kept under. Most of them are liable to parasites which kill so many that the survivors cease to be a serious problem, and entomologists are engaged in studying and breeding such parasites. Official reports of their activities are fascinating; they are full of such sentences as: 'He proceeded to Brazil, at the request of the planters of Trinidad, to search for the natural enemies of the sugar-cane Froghopper.' One would say that the sugar-cane Froghopper would have little chance in this contest. Unfortunately, so long as war continues, all scientific knowledge is double-edged. For example, Professor Fritz Haber, who has just died, invented a process for the fixation of nitrogen. He intended it to increase the fertility of the soil, but the German Government used it for the manufacture of high explosives, and has recently exiled him for preferring manure to bombs. In the next great war, the scientists on either side will let loose pests on the crops of the other side, and it may prove scarcely possible to destroy the pests when peace comes. The more we know, the more harm we can do each other. If human beings, in their rage against each other, invoke the aid of insects and micro-organisms, as they certainly will do if there is another big war, it is by no means unlikely that the insects will remain the sole ultimate victors.

[Perhaps from a scientific point of view, this is
not to be regretted, but as a human being, I cannot help heaving a sigh over my own species]

This text was chosen as it is typical of Russell's style. He makes a proposition which is almost a platitude and then debunks it. He uses examples from different disciplines to make his point. His use of subordinators too is typical – for example, "He is safe, except from the little creatures", as also his use of sentence disjuncts, like 'Fortunately'. If students could pick out these stylistic devices, they would be able to complete the essay in a more or less satisfactory way. Samples of answers are given below:

_In Praise of Idleness, 1933_

To conclude suppose this happens it will result in non-existence of
human man he end on this planet.

_In Praise of Idleness, 1933_

The science which has been making a steady progress, which is effecting the human life, must be controlled for further continua of human being.
The ultimate point I want to consider is that though we are getting more knowledge we should use it for good purposes and not to harm our inmates.

Perhaps another thousand and another thousand centuries should pass to bring about a new evolution of human beings. Biology and civilization should develop once again if these human beings also be vanished. At such a moment way by a small creature will be decided.

As dinosaurs made way for small animals, man and mankind will make way for insects and micro-organisms.

It may not concern anyone from cosmic point of view. But as human beings everyone should be concerned about it.
Observations

This class was better than most others as the students were above average. They could therefore handle ideas and language with ease. They needed very little help from the teacher for the analysis, once they knew what had to be done, they did it quickly and efficiently. So a reasonable amount of time could be devoted to the discussion of the author's point of view.

These students, it must be mentioned, do not have any English classes as such. All subjects are done through English.

5.6.3 Lesson II

The teacher-trainees had no classes from 2 p.m. onwards, so there was no particular time when this class had to end. It was decided to go on with the class till either the teacher or the class felt fatigued.

Before the Reading

The teacher began by asking the class what an essay was. Various answers were given as can be seen from the tape script:
T. Today, we'll be doing an essay. What, according to you, is an essay?
S. Essay is -------- is an attempt.
T. Right. That's the meaning of an 'essay'. An essay is 'an attempt'. What else?
S. Something about a Topic
T. OK. Something about a topic
S. Elaboration of a subject
T. Elaboration of -------?
S. Subject.
S. Description.
T. Description. And?
S. Can we say narrative?
T. Yes, it could be a narrative also. Can you give an example of a narrative essay/ If you remember.
S. We can say some ------- stories. Trips can be narrated.
T. Yes.
S. There can be events which are be narrated.
S. Describe some journeys.
T. What does an essayist try to do? When he writes an essay, what is he trying to do, what is he trying to say? What is he trying to put across?
S. He tries to convince the people by his ideas.
T. He tries to convince -- (writes on black board)
S. Convince ------- ideas.

Next, the teacher asked the class what they knew about Bertrand Russell. Interestingly, one student said "He has written a lot of essays".

Prediction: The title was given and the class asked to guess what the essay could be about. One student guessed that the essay could be about "... criticize the ideas that have harmed mankind". The class in general seemed to feel that there
could be a catch in the title. This was deduced on the basis of their knowledge about the author.

During the Reading

Skimming: The class was asked to go through the essay quickly and say whether what they had predicted was fulfilled. Quite a few of their predictions about the essay were fulfilled.

The teacher asked the class this question: Does Russell say that ideas have helped mankind or that ideas have not helped mankind?

The answers to these were varied. Again, the class felt that he had said that ideas had helped mankind. Yet when they were asked to quote one sentence or give one instance where the author had stated clearly that ideas had helped mankind, they were unable to do so.

Scanning: Students were now asked to scan the essay for sentences with the pronouns 'I' and 'We'. A list was put up on the black-board with the help of the class.

Stylistic Analysis & Interpretation

After an analysis of the two lists, the class came to the conclusion that the author had used
'we' in two ways: one inclusive of the audience and the other inclusive of mankind. They saw that all the 'I' sentences were comment clauses. It was also pointed out that in two places, para 2 and para 6 two different structures had been used to make a comment; an 'if' clause in para 2 and the passive in para 6. (If this is something to rejoice in, then we have occasion to rejoice(para 2); But I shall be told that ...(para 6)

The class saw that Russell did not really feel that ideas had helped mankind. They could perceive the irony in many of his statements and a few students ventured ironic statements of their own:

T: ..... and he compares robins with Englishmen. Robins peck old ones to death..... English people are given old-age pension.
S: But not Americans, I think!

Next, the class looked at the modals used and came to the conclusion that 'must have been' was used to convey the fact that the statements were based on logical deduction.

They had no problems at all in identifying the dominant tense form, and no difficulty in identifying its function as they had just
completed a course in Grammar and Usage dealing with Time and Tense.

A few words, the meaning of which they were uncertain were glossed.

Personal Response

This was elicited orally. The class felt that some ideas had helped mankind, especially technical inventions. They felt that the use of certain tools were good and much needed in our society. But they agreed with the author about the selfish and primitive nature of man; they gave their own examples too to support their argument.

Follow Up

The other essay, Man versus Insects was given to the class and the task set was similar to the one set for the students of National Law School University. The difference was in the diffidence with which the teachers approached the task. They felt that they could not write in a style even remotely comparable to Russell. Samples of their work are given below:
In Praise of Idleness, 1933

but I hope it will not happen as we are more intelligent, with our Pówekí techne-than might take all the care to see that his people would be destroyed.

So, from point of view, this is not to be tolerated but can be considered as a human being; we cannot help hearing high over their own species.

In Praise of Idleness, 1933

The in school, as scientific knowledge has been used for destructive purposes instead of development-purpose, the aid of insects and microorganisms is also going to destroy human race.
In Praise of Idleness, 1933

But if men do not hate each other in each, they may perhaps yield or else else, or may make ourselves get [text obscured] to eradicate us.

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In Praise of Idleness, 1933

near future there will be none other than microti on earth unless we find some means to stop wars.

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In Praise of Idleness, 1933

Infact, I am very much worried about the survival of my own species.
5.6.4 Observations

This class responded well to the approach; the teachers were interested not only in the essay but in the methodology too. Perhaps their age made them relate a lot of what Russell was saying to personal experiences. There was also a tendency to use analogies, which again was perhaps because of their maturity.

5.7 General Observations

Student response in both classes was satisfactory and this approach seems to have worked with two totally different sets of students. The higher level of formal linguistic knowledge of the teachers helped only as far as the pace of the class was concerned. The teachers who are required to have and who have formal training in language were quicker to identify devices and linguistic structures, but their response to the text otherwise was quite similar to that of students at the National Law School. In their personal response, there was a marked difference, as each group was bringing in its experience to evaluate what was being said. This
again underlines the fact that in reading literature, one cannot and should not expect just one type of response. A stylistic approach seems to clarify what one 'feels' and also helps students to express what they perceive as 'the truth' in acceptable terms, using the text as the base.