Chapter-VIII

Philosophy and Vision

In the midst of variety of themes dealt with by Aurobindo in his plays, there is a remarkable unity of vision or a focus in his whole dramatic corpus. Faith, freedom, love, fate, heroism and, above all, evolution are the recurrent themes. Sri Aurobindo emerges from his dramas as the forerunner of the earth's evolutionary destiny as also the minstrel of love and faith. The triple themes of evolution, love and faith acquire special significance as forming the chief link between Sri Aurobindo's dramatic literature and his other literary as well as philosophical writings.

From the viewpoint of recurrence, love may be considered as the most important theme in Sri Aurobindo's dramas. Significantly, a good number of them are dramatic romances or romantic comedies. The theme occurs predominantly in as many as three of his plays- The Viziers of Bassora, Eric and Vasavadutta and as a minor theme, in a couple of others, viz., Perseus the Deliverer, Rodogune and The Prince of Edur. All of them depict this cardinal human emotion and its divine nature and power.

Love is viewed by Sri Aurobindo as a great force, a divine power. In his plays it is really a many splendoured
thing. The whole spectrum of love with all its varied shades and tinges may not have been reflected in his dramas, but they do succeed in showing quite a few and perhaps the more important facets of the multi-faceted diamond.

Love is shown here as being born in the eyes, that is, as a result of discovering irresistible beauty in the personality of the beloved. Whether it is the love between Vuthsa and Vasavadutta, Eric and Aslaug, Nureddene and Anice-Aljalice or Bappa and Comol Cumary, it is an inevitable response to bewitching beauty. Vuthsa is the god of love, wearing a golden human body, and his voice is like the sudden call of Spring. He is the golden marvellous boy who causes immediate birth of love in Vasavadutta. She is so swayed by the charms of his divine personality that she passes unconsciously into the "strain" of love right at their first meeting and seems no more to have control over her speech and action:

I govern no longer what I speak and do. Is this the fire my mother spoke of?

Though beginning at the physical level, as "admiration physical" love soon transcends the bounds of body and reaches the realm of heart. In this stage the love-laden heart accepts no control of the mind, but listens to its own

beats and throbs, to its own intuitive wisdom, and not to the calls of intellectual wisdom, dignity, pride or state-
craft. That is why, Vasavadutta, so committed to her father's will and to her nation's greatness, finds that love has rejected all considerations extraneous to heart and has crushed them under its flower-soft feet. Mark her confession:

Have I a father or a house? O none,
O none, O none exists but only he.¹

From an aesthetic urge of physical nature to be quenched by sensuous beauty, love develops into a heart's desire, into something higher and deeper than pure physical thirst. But to attain a still higher stage of perfection as a divine passion, love, according to Sri Aurobindo, must transcend the level of the vital and get transmuted into a spiritual fire, into an unchanging timeless love², into the will of "the immortal part"³ within us or, as Vuthsa says, into a yearning for the music of kindred souls:

The harmony of kindred souls that seek
Each other on the strings of body and mind,
Is all the music for which life was born.⁴

When love grows spiritual, it awakens a desire not only of

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Plays*, B.C.L. Vol.6, 280.
³ Idem.
⁴ Sri Aurobindo, op. cit., p. 231.
fusion of the bodies and minds of the lovers, but also of 
the one losing his soul into the sweet answering soul of 
the other. It is of this stage of love that Vuthsa speaks 
to Vasavadutta:

We will not be as man and woman are
Who are with partial oneness satisfied,
Divided in our works, but one large soul
Parted in two dear bodies for more bliss.¹

Love's physical manifestations, or "the tumult of outer 
love"² are depicted in the plays only as marking the begin-
nning of love. But it seldom continues here as a pure 
"sensual longing"³ or as "the hunger of the vital self."⁴
It is rather "raised, refined, uplifted to the yearning 
heart."⁵ In Rodogune, for example, the love of Antiochus. 
for Rodogune, "heaven's pledge of bliss"⁶ for him, cannot be 
condemned as carnal as Timocles does.⁷ Though it seems to 
have its origin in Rodogune's matchless beauty: "her tall 
dainty grace and the large eyes/And vague faint pallor just 
like twilit ivory"⁸, it soon seems to turn into "the passion 
of oneness" of two hearts that "denies the steps of death 
for ever."⁹

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4. Idem.
5. Idem.
6. Ibid., p. 382.
7. Ibid., p. 410.
8. Ibid., p. 372.
9. Ibid., p. 383.
When at its best, love is a sacred spiritual fire. It is a unique power, a divine force capable of working miracles. Love, as projected in Sri Aurobindo's plays, enlightens, burns away all evils in human nature — ego, pride, hate, jealousy, selfishness, etc., and turns the dross of man's nature into a golden nature divine. The purge and ennobling of Aslaug in Eric is an example in point. Eric here treats love as the bringer of a wider, broader and deeper living:

For if life's barrier twixt our souls were broken
Men would be free and our earth paradise
And the gods live neglected.1

Similar transformation is seen taking place in Rodoquane where the pure and self-sacrificing love of the Parthian princess for Antiochus and his own love for his country come into play to purge him of his hubris, his egoistic pride and unquenchable war-hunger. It is love that gives him the strength to face death fearlessly and welcome it as a promise of wider life and light:

What were Death then but wider life than earth
Can give us in her clayey limits bound?
Darkness perhaps! There must be light behind.2

There are some other dimensions also of love in Sri Aurobindo's plays. Eric shows love as revealing itself to the mighty king of Norway as the best unifier. The unity

2. Ibid., p. 453.
achieved through sword-power may prove brittle, but the
unification that love-power effects is everlasting. In
Vasavadutta too, love plays the same role. The love of
Vasavadutta and Vuthsa, culminating in marriage here, result:
in two rival kingdoms tending to shed their fierce ancient
hostility.

Another important aspect of love highlighted in the play:
is love as the true deliverer. Manjoolica and Vuthsa in
Vasavadutta, the Babylonian merchants and Andromeda and
indeed her entire family in Perseus the Deliverer, and the
Parthian princess in Rodogune are a few examples of captives
set free through the power of love. Notably, Perseus
refuses to free Smerdas due to his aversion for him and
does not agree to make concession for the Babylonian
merchant's meanness and cowardice. But the same Perseus
rushes to rescue Andromeda, for now he is possessed by love
which provides motive to his power for quick and decisive
action. The significance of all this obviously is that
love, and not power devoid of love and grace, is the true
deliverer. This becomes clearer when we see Andromeda set
free the same merchant at great risk to her life, for she
loves and pities him as a weak suffering human being.

Love, however, frees man not only from physical bonds
of slavery, but also from the shackles of ignorance, super-
tition and other elements of dark nature. When Perseus frees
Andromeda, her brother and parents, he emancipates Syria from
the clutches of a dark religion and ushers in the country a new religion of love, kindness and humanism. He thus paves the way for the creation of a new, enlightened, brighter, and happier world instead of the old world of primitive manners, terror, cruel violence, blood-thirst and suffering. Love in this form becomes an effective instrument of evolution, which is perhaps its role the dramatist stresses most in his dramas.

Love's importance is further emphasised in *Eric*. Here the king discovers that love is the ultimate victor, and that, along with strength in the nature and wisdom in the mind, it is love in the heart that completes "the trinity of glorious manhood." His victory over Aslaug and Swegn is possible only when the other powers in him are combined with the supreme power of love.

It is *Eric*, again, that hints at the possibility of love attaining a greater victory, that is, victory over Death, man's mightiest foe:

Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by Love.

1. To quote K.R.S. Iyengar:

Love is not love if it acquiesces in evil; great and true love is a power, and it can break open the doors of captivity; it can change dross to gold, it can defy death—or it is not Love!


Evolution is another pre-eminent theme in the plays of Sri Aurobindo. With this theme is related a distinctive feature of Sri Aurobindo's dramas, i.e., their happy ending. Like the Classical Sanskrit dramatists, he envisages for his dramas an end on the note of harmony, peace and happiness even though they might have begun, like Vasavadutta, with disharmony, or even if the prevailing atmosphere in them, as in The Viziers of Bassora, might have been that of conflict, tension and confusion. In The Viziers of Bassora the despotic rule of Alzayni and his evil-minded Vizier, Almuene, comes to an end yielding place to the rule of good forces, represented by Nureddene, the new king of Bassora. In Perseus the Deliverer, Syrians cleanse their shrine of its "red memory of blood" and the place of the dreadful god Poseidon is taken by Athene, a bright compassionate goddess. Thus, a dark cult of primitive violence gives place to a new bright religion of humanism. In Eric, while Aslaug gives up her dark design, Swegn shuns revolt under the influence of the all-conquering power of love so that when the play closes, there is no blood but peace, no death but life, and the hearts of sworn-in enemies are unified by love, "the hoop of the gods hearts to combine." This is how we are given glimpses of a better world emerging through conflict in most of the plays of Sri Aurobindo.

This, of course, can be understood in the perspective of Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary principle, his belief in the
inevitable manifestation of the Supramental Light or Power or Truth-consciousness in man as well as in general earthly life. It is because he, like the ancient Indian Rishis, sees everywhere the "Golden Immortal" pressing for manifestation, and aspires "to suffuse and transform" the life of man and the earth's with him.¹ He believes that man, who is "a centre of the consciousness and power of the infinite"², a pilgrim of the Eternal, carrying within him the sanction and the presence of the Divine³, must ascend to a higher consciousness beyond mind, the supermind. So, be it in happy endings of the plays or in transformation of characters from their lower selves to higher selves, what reverberates almost throughout in the dramas of Sri Aurobindo is his belief in man's evolutionary destiny, in "the flowering of the Divine in the human."⁴

Another major theme in the plays is faith. Faith in God as the Supreme Being: All-Powerful, All-Merciful and All-Loving, and in His Will as the ultimate Law of the Universe is implied in Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary philosophy. He also believes that the Divine Will and the Law governing the

3. Idem.
Universe, which he calls Fate, work to the same end — to help man's self-realization, his rise to divinity which is his true self. Sri Aurobindo has absolute faith in God, in His Love, Mercy and Justice. He has an equally total faith in God's creation, too. Reflecting this faith of the dramatist, Nureddene says with reference to his own companions:

God made them; what he made is doubtless good.¹

Man, he believes, may be under the influence of evil forces; the goodness in him may also apparently fail to assert itself but that does not mean that man is not essentially divine:

Man
Is not ignoble, but has angel soarings,
Howe'er the nether devil plucks him down.
Still we have souls nor is the mould quite broken
Of that original and faultless plan
Which Adam spoilt. ²

In The Viziers of Bassora the dramatist speaks of "God's great stamp and heavenly image"³ on man. In Roodcune we come across reference to "the divinity that sits in the soul of man"⁴; in Perseus the Deliverer, to "the godhead lurking in man's secret soul"⁵; and in Eric, to the immortality that

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2. Ibid., p. 643.
3. Ibid., p. 569.
4. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 335.
"thinks in us and plans and reasons."\(^1\) All these references are proofs of the dramatist’s immense faith in man’s essential divinity to attain which, according to him, is not only the sole purpose of man’s life, but also his destiny.

It is this faith in God, in man, in his divine destiny, etc., that is enshrined in the various plays of Sri Aurobindo especially in *The Viziers of Bassora*. Here, in the clash between the forces of good and evil, good inevitably triumphs. The victory of good is effected through God’s Deputy, the Caliph of Bagdad. This is suggestive of God’s intervention to help and protect the good, for, as the Supreme and Just Ruler, He must ensure destruction of all evil and protection of the virtue. There is an instance of God’s intervention to shield virtue in *Perseus the Deliverer* also. The Deputy of God here is Perseus who comes to the rescue of Andromeda and the royal family, and liquidates the sea-monster, Polydæo the megalomaniac priest, Phineus and the entire troop representing the dark god, Poseidon.

The next important theme in the dramas is Fate, which is but another dimension of Sri Aurobindo’s faith. His faith in Fate forms part of his evolutionary creed. According to him, Fate is the Divine Law governing the whole creation. She is there to help man unfold his inherent divinity. Man’s

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trials and tribulations, his defeat and discomfiture are the anvil on which she shapes him on the divine model. She, as the agent of God, endeavours ceaselessly to evolve man into a divine being. Apart from suffering, love is also used as an instrument to effect man's divinisation. This is the theme of Eric, Rodocune and Vasavadutta, where love serves as the purgatory to dissolve evil in the natures of Aslaug, Swegn, Antiochus, Vasavadutta, etc.

Through his dramas Sri Aurobindo unequivocally suggests that man suffers mostly due to his ignorance of the nature and purpose of Fate. Due to ignorance he fails to realise that the Divine Will works through Fate to a secret and sacred purpose which is no less than the perfection of the Universe as well as human beings. So he confronts his own individual will with the Will of the Supreme Soul and endlessly suffers. The way to peace in life is to realise that Fate is nothing but "the world's mystic will/That loves and labours"¹; to "bow to the will of God"² as inevitable, ultimate and benevolent as Ibn Sawy does; and to know that Fate "alone is the prompter on our stage."³ It is only arrogant and foolish minds that struggle against Fate as repugnant to their narrow individual interests and "dream themselves masters of

1. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 536.
the things they do\(^1\), whereas the fact is that "our own ends seeking Heaven's ends we serve."\(^2\) To emphasise this idea Sri Aurobindo, in his plays like Rodogune, introduces such characters as Cleopatra, Antiochus, Cleone, Phayllus, etc. As victims of the tragic irony of fate alone, they realize that they can neither impose their will on Fate nor take the invincible Fate for granted. Cleopatra, with all her self-assurance that grief can never again overtake her, has the pathetic realisation that Fate is supreme. Antiochus, with "godlike stirrings" in him and with his "gigantic appetites/ That make a banquet of the world"\(^3\), too has to yield to Fate. Rodogune in the same play presents a sharp contrast to such characters. Her love, self-effacing nature and absolute surrender to Fate explain the calm and serenity she enjoys. Her fund of inexhaustible patience as well as her strength to face the worst in life with an enviable inner equanimity are derived from this faith. Similarly, in Perseus the Deliverer, the inner equipoise of Tyranus may be ascribed to his resilience derived from absolute faith in, and surrender to, Fate as the Divine Will. Significantly, Tyranus is rescued from his impending doom, but Smerdas is not, for the latter does not acquiesce in the inevitable Fate and exhibits

2. Idem.
3. Ibid., p. 431.
despicable meanness of greed, fear and treachery in attempts to save his life. Thus, faith in Fate emancipates man from sordid fear, gives him courage and strength and attracts the grace of God, the only saviour in life. Ibn Sawy in *The Viziers of Bassora* too has the same sources of strength. When all his world becomes a shambles, he faces it unflinchingly. The strength he shows emanates from his firm faith in God, His justice and His Grace as well as in His unquestionable ways vis-a-vis man. His faith restores his lost world to him and he gratefully exclaims:

Nay, God is kind; this world most leniently ruled.¹

The message is clear. Those who succeed in identifying their own individual will with the Divine Will are "monarchs of a calm royalty within." They are nearer to divinity than are those who dissipate all their energies in fighting feverishly and foolishly against the invincible Fate, which has divine sanction and executes the Will of the Supreme Soul. She is not at variance with, but rather conducive to, man's highest purpose and his ultimate destiny.

The close relationship, thus, of the themes of love, faith and fate to the central theme of evolution in Sri Aurobindo's dramas is clear. Man's evolution from ignorance to enlightenment, from darkness to light and from earth-consciousness to divine-consciousness is to be achieved through the forces of

love, faith and fate.

Freedom, another theme in the plays, is related to the main themes in the same integral manner. For Sri Aurobindo, the theme of freedom seems to have had special fascination. The reason is not far to seek if we know him as a nationalist, as an ardent lover of the Motherland and as a devout seeker of her freedom.¹

One reiterated message of his plays is that freedom is a prerequisite of progress. Syria's march forward towards a newer, greater and happier world is facilitated by her freedom from the slavery of the forces of darkness. Slavery in any form, according to Sri Aurobindo, is alien to man's basic nature. It must be got rid of as it is an obstacle in the way of his progress. It is therefore a recurrent theme of his plays. It is because Sri Aurobindo's mind was always preoccupied with the thought of his country's captivity.

Nationalism finds expression in a few of his plays as their underlying theme. In Rodoque Antiochus stakes his life

¹ Sri Aurobindo's great attraction towards the character of Pururavas is due to the fact that he sees in him the prototype of a deliverer, with marked qualities of heroism, self-sacrifice, love, etc. His love for the hero, among other things, led him to attempt beautiful translation of Kalidasa's Vikramorvasie as The Hero and the Nymph. When he was accused of "a false imitation of Elizabethan drama" in this translation, Sri Aurobindo justified his style by arguing that the plays of Kalidasa did indeed resemble the Elizabethan romantic comedy. However, instead of essaying any more translations of drama, he decided to write dramas of his own and give expression to his idea of the Hero who was a nation's Deliverer at the same time.

for the sake of his country. Viewed in the context of India's nationalist movement of the pre-Independence era, such plays assume special significance as the dramatist's attempt to inspire in his fellow countrymen political awareness and patriotic fire, which to him meant "the love of one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race, the divine ananda of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their sufferings, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with fathers of the race."¹ Antiochus' love for his country inspires him to return to Antioch, disregarding the impending danger:

Whatever else
O'ertake me, in this the strong god shall not win.
I will give up my body and sword to Timocles,
Repel the Parthian, save from this new death,
These dangerous allies from Macedon,
Syria, then die.²

The ennobling effect of patriotism is obvious on Antiochus. It helps him rise above his ego and pride and inspires in him noble self-sacrifice. Thus, love of one's country also prepares the ground for man's forward march on the path of

2. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Plays, B.C.L. Vol. 6, 432.
self-realisation. Hence its significance as a theme in Aurobindonian drama.

Manifestly, the various themes in Sri Aurobindo's dramas have an integral relation to one another. From the coloured glass of the individuality of each drama there shines the same white light of his evolutionary creed, showing a perfect unity of vision in his dramatic creations.

The unity of vision, however, is not limited only to Sri Aurobindo's dramatic works. It can be found in his entire work, literary as well as philosophical. Through the multiplicity of his creation, the unity of vision, idea and purpose is clearly visible. The central focus or the main burden of all his writings is his "laws and facts of evolution"¹ or the inevitable manifestation of the Divine in man as well as in the world. This is the general tenor of Sri Aurobindo's plays, and this very theme finds a variety of formulations in his poetical and philosophical writings. What is contained in Perseus the Deliverer or Eric in germinal form is said also in Savitri and the same truth is expressed through The Life Divine or The Synthesis of Yoga, etc. In Savitri he suggests:

A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he puts ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine,  
Our life is a paradox with God for key.¹

Only the words seem to have been altered but the import is
retained in the following passage from The Life Divine:

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey,
The Work of works, the acceptable sacrifice. This
alone is man's real business in the world and the
justification of his existence ...²

Sri Aurobindo who speaks of man's ascent to the divine life
here and who in 'Man, the Thinking Animal' says about man:

Aspiring to godhead from insensible clay,
He travels slow-footed towards the eternal day.³

implies exactly the same in the following conversation between
King Cepheus and Perseus:

Cepheus:

Then man too may arise to greater heights,
His being draw nearer to the Gods?

Perseus:

Perhaps.

But the blind nether forces still have power
And the ascent is slow and long is Time.
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase:
The day shall come when men feel close and one.
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained,
Since little by little earth must open to heaven

Till her dim soul awakes into the Light.  

**Perseus the Deliverer** does not only depict the victory of Athene, the goddess of **Light**, over Poseidon, the god of Darkness. It also hints at the transformation of Poseidon himself, resulting from the conflict between the opposite forces:

*Fear not Poseidon; the strong god is free.*  
He has withdrawn from his own darkness and is now  
His new great self at an Olympian height.  

The queen, Cassiopea, seems unconvinced about the transformation. She asks Perseus if the immortal gods and Nature too can change. Perseus categorically replies:

*All alters in a world that is the same.*  
Man most must change who is a soul of Time;  
His gods too change and live in larger light.  

This clearly foreshadows the transformation of Death in **Savitri** into a "god of Light". Similarly, in **Eric** there is a distant foreshadowing of Love's conquest of Death. The inevitable conclusion, therefore, is that the main metaphysical and cosmological ideas reflected in his more serious works later were germinating quite early in his life in the Baroda days. There is an underlying unity traceable in his works of all the stages of his life. Sri Aurobindo, the harbinger of the life divine as manifested in **The Life Divine**, and the singer...  

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2. Ibid., p. 200.  
3. Ibid., p. 201.
of immortal and invincible Love as revealed through *Savitri*, had already taken birth in his plays, like *Perseus the Deliverer, Eric*, etc. As such, his dramas may be considered as the "poetic correlate" of the same vision that finds expression in his major philosophical works.

This unity of vision can be appreciated better if we remember that Sri Aurobindo's vision is not so much a vision as it is a realisation. Whether it is in his dramas, in poetry or in what is seen as his philosophy, he reveals only that which he seems to have realised. Most of what he has written is revelatory expressing, as he says, in terms of intellect, what had been revealed to his silent mind, consequent upon Yogic *sadhana*. Hence, a unique thread of unity runs through his entire work which expresses only different facets of the many-sided knowledge he came by through Yoga.

So, Sri Aurobindo's dramas, which are early creations of his youth, and a good number of which he himself describes as dramatic romances, embody, much against their promise, the philosophy contained in his later works, like *The Life Divine* and poetic works, like *Savitri*. The pith and volume of course differ vastly, so that the dramas, compared to the later writings, are as a miniature is to a picture on a full-length canvas.

It may be interesting to seek and discover the particular affinity that exists between the main bulk of Sri Aurobindo's poetry and his dramatic writing. If his dramas contain his
philosophy in germinal form, his poetry is "suffused with a philosophical or mystical glow."¹ Both the literary forms bear witness to the fact that never in his life was he blind to the spiritual reality behind the material facade; and he ever aspired to achieve an integral view of Man, Nature and God.¹ A good number of Sri Aurobindo's poems are varied formulations of the themes of love, faith, evolution, fate, etc., as are his dramas. The philosophical and mystical glow is unmistakable even in his early short poems, like 'Who', 'The Vedantin's Prayer', 'God', 'Revelation', 'Perfect thy motion', etc. 'Urvasie' and 'Love and Death' have as their themes "Love, deathless Love, the oldest dream and passion known to mankind."² Poems like 'The Rishi', vividly remind us of his evolutionary faith. So does 'Ahna', one of his longer poems, which speaks of an ancient dream of man, viz., the marriage of earth and heaven³, just another name for evolution in Sri Aurobindo's terminology. As far as his later poems are concerned, they are elaborate and exquisite poetic renderings of the poet's vision of the world, which finds expression also in his dramas. Only,

¹. K.R.S. Iyengar and Prema Nandkumar, Indian Writing in English, p. 160.
³. Ibid., p. 75.
unlike the earlier poems, these poems are not characterised by intellectual debate, but are evidence of the poet's "leap from thought to sight." They are "his self-discovery's flaming witnesses, offering their marvel and multitude."

Tracing of the development of themes in the plays of Sri Aurobindo, involves some difficulties. First of all, the exact date of composition of a few of his dramas is not known. Then, more than half of his plays have been left incomplete so that one cannot be very sure about themes they might have been intended to embody. However, it is possible to divide the plays as roughly belonging to three periods of the dramatist's creative life, namely, pre-Baroda period (before 1893), Baroda period (1893-1906) and Pondicherry period (1910-1950).

To the first period belong his fragments The Witch of Ilni (1891) and perhaps Achab and Esarhaddon. The Viziers of Bassora, The Maid in the Mill, The Birth of Sin and The House of Brut seem to belong to his Baroda period, presumably the early part of it. Perseus the Deliverer, Rodogune (1906) and Prince of Edur (1907) belong to the later Baroda period whereas Eric (1912 or 1913), Vasavadutta (1915-16) belong to the opening years of Pondicherry period.

1. Quoted in Sisirkumar Ghose's The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo, p. 120.
The Witch of Ilni and Achab and Esarhaddon, the earliest dramatic writings of Sri Aurobindo, contain intimations of the emergence of a better world, thus anticipating his later dramas like Perseus the Deliverer and Eric. In Achab and Esarhaddon, the King of Assyria, Esarhaddon, seeks the help of Achab, the priest, to establish in the country a mild, merciful and human religion in place of the harsh and bloody cult of Baal. This is clearly reminiscent of Cepheus' in Perseus the Deliverer agreeing to replace the dark cult of Poseidon with a human religion, proclaiming faith in the bright goddess, Athene, or of Eric, who comes to realise that Freya ultimately triumphs, not Odin and Thor.

The predominant theme in the dramas written during the Baroda period is deliberance, obviously because of its political implications. Sri Aurobindo's resolve to shear the bonds of his Motherland, writhing under the heels of alien rule, "in the grip of a blood-thirsty Rakshasa", is reflected in his writings in the Bande Mataram as much as in his dramas of the period, especially Perseus the Deliverer, Prince of Edur and The House of Brut. When Sri Aurobindo, in The Viziers of Bassora, projected the picture of Bassora getting free from the clutches of the tyrannical rule of Alzayni and Almuene, his villainous crony, he was hinting perhaps at similar bright prospects for his country's freedom too. Similarly, the true patriotic feelings of Antiochus
in *Rosciane*, who considers the national interest supreme and is ready to sacrifice his all for it, has its origin in the nationalist feelings of the dramatist himself.

As a result of his "realisation of the Cosmic Consciousness and of the Divine (Sri Krishna) as all being and in all that is"¹, Sri Aurobindo withdrew from the political field in order to devote himself to his Yogic sadhana in Pondicherry. By the time he reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910, "politics had completely receded from the arc of his creative vision."² Its place had been taken by the power of love which is the theme of the two plays — *Eric* and *Vasavadutta* — that were written during his early years at the place and, of course, of *Savitri*. But, as is revealed by a perusal of his early poetry as well as the dramas written earlier, there was a natural transition to the theme of love treated in the later works of the writer. Love is the theme, major or minor, in most of the plays and plays like *Eric* clearly anticipate *Savitri*.

In conclusion, it may be said that the thematic variety and diversity we come across in the plays of Sri Aurobindo, belonging to different periods of his creative life, and indeed in all his various literary as well as philosophical writings, has an essential unity of thought and vision, comparable to the unity of diverse shades in a spectrum.

1. *Index and Glossary*, p.10.
CONCLUSION

The philosophical, political and spiritual aspects of Sri Aurobindo's versatile genius were so dominant that the dramatist in him got overshadowed. It failed to attract much scholarly attention till very late though, as a matter of fact, his dramas also mark a high peak of "this Himalaya of various extremes of height". Perhaps, the first, though very brief reference to Sri Aurobindo's dramatic genius was made by Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar in his celebrated book, in 1945. In his second monograph on Sri Aurobindo, published in 1961, all his compete plays were examined, but again very briefly. Another study of the plays was published by Mr. M.V. Seetaraman in 1964, to be followed by Mr. P.C. Kotoky's brief reference to them in his book in 1969, and by Dr. Prema Nandkumar's learned articles on the plays in Sri Aurobindo Circle, etc., between 1963 and 1977. Dr. A.K. Sinha's thesis on Sri Aurobindo's dramatic art also appeared in 1979. But in it his main interest obviously is in the art of the dramatist rather than in a detailed study of themes in the plays.


Though we may not necessarily agree with P.C. Kotoky, who says that "occasional magazine notices are all that can be had by way of critical appreciation of his dramas"¹, we do feel that there still exists a need to study independently the themes in the plays of Sri Aurobindo. However, the themes cannot be and should not be studied in isolation. An appreciation of some of his philosophical and spiritual moorings is a must for a fuller grasp of the thematic plank of these plays.

The present study makes no tall claim to lay bare before the reader all that lies hidden in the labyrinthine deeps of the works of a dramatist of Sri Aurobindo's stature. In this study of the basic thoughts, enshrined in his plays, an humble attempt has been made to work out the major themes in the plays; assimilate stray materials related to the topic at one place; make whatever additions are possible to the existing interpretations on the strength of an intensive study of the text as also to show the relationship of the themes of Sri Aurobindo's plays with his philosophical concepts, with a view to highlighting the unity of vision, idea and purpose that is visible everywhere in the multitudinous creations of Sri Aurobindo.

Extended over eight chapters, the present study makes in its introduction some observations on Sri Aurobindo's career as a dramatist, his place among the Indian English dramatists, his views on drama, and the extent to which he himself observes his dramatic principles. Touching briefly on influences on him of the English and the Classical Sanskrit models of drama, a few distinctive features of his plays, related with the themes, have also been mentioned. The next five chapters (i.e. from two to six) are devoted to the exposition of his leit-motif or inner meanings of the five complete plays. In the seventh chapter, Prince of Edur and other fragments of his plays have been studied together. Here it may be mentioned that there has been, perhaps, no special reason for deviation from the usual pattern of theme-wise division of chapters in a study like this except that in view of the rather smaller number of plays, a play-wise study has been considered more appropriate. In the pattern adopted here, it has been possible to provide introductory information regarding choice of themes in individual plays, their narrative sources and ostensible influences, if any, on the dramas — all contributing in some way to the appreciation of the themes. In the concluding chapter, a recapitulation of observations in the foregoing chapters has been provided while giving a brief summary of the main themes of various plays. An attempt has also been made to show that there exists an integral relationship not only among the various
themes in the plays, but also between their central theme and the chief vision of the writer as reflected in his other literary and philosophical works. Besides, the development of themes in the dramas from Sri Aurobindo's pre-Baroda period to his Pondicherry period has also been traced to see if any pattern emerges in the development.
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