THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PHASE

Though it is difficult to group Indo-Anglian plays and playwrights into definite categories, they can be surveyed broadly in two sections: (1) the pre-Independence phase and (2) the post-Independence phase.

In the pre-Independence phase, there are major playwrights like Sri Aurobindo, Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai who easily lend themselves to an authorwise study; and others can be studied in groups themewise. (Tagore's plays, being translations from the Bengali into English are considered separately, later). This phase presents plays and playlets, the themes of which are from legends and epics, events from history and problems of the contemporary society. As mentioned already, an ancient country like India with its diversity in religion, custom, language and geographical features could abundantly provide themes for plays (though the playwrights had perform either to be silent about the dark side of the foreign rule or to use the allegorical form to project it). The phase shows how the playwrights almost totally neglected the rich dramatic tradition of the country, and unnecessarily came under the spell of Shakespearian drama.
Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is one of the foremost writers in Indo-Anglian literature in general and in drama in particular. His writings bear testimony to his profound knowledge of Eastern and Western thought. His plays are mostly constructed on the Elizabethan model; and, here and there, they show some flavour of the Sanskrit drama though all have Aurobindonian overtones. With his mastery over languages like English, Sanskrit and Bengali, "Sri Aurobindo produces in one the impression that he is a born lord of language".¹

As the volume Collected Poems and Plays by Sri Aurobindo was first published in 1942, his plays can be taken up for study under the pre-Independence phase, in spite of the fact that they were separately published after 1947.


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5. **Prince of Mathura.** The collection *Conversations of the Dead* (1951) contains five dramatic dialogues: 1. Dinshah, Perizade, 2. Turiu, Uriu, 3. Mazzini, Cavour, Garibaldi, 4. Shivaji, Jai Singh and 5. Littleton, Percival. Also, there are two unfinished playlets in *Juvenilia:* (a) The Witch of Ilni and (b) Fragment of a Drama.

Of the five complete plays by Sri Aurobindo, *Rodogune* is a tragedy and the other four are comedies. Whatever the sources, the themes of all these plays seem to warrant a critical study of the romantic impulse as the chief undercurrent flowing through them.

**Perseus the Deliverer** is a play in five acts written during the early part of Sri Aurobindo's literary career. The playwright weaves a romantic story around the Greek legend of Perseus as the nucleus on the Elizabethan model.

According to the legend, Perseus is born of Danae, the Argive King's daughter and the god Zeus. Warned by an oracle, the king sends Perseus on some dangerous adventures outside his kingdom. With the aid of the goddess Athene, he succeeds and on his way back comes to Syria. Here the play begins with a Prologue in which a heated argument is held between the cruel god Poseidon and Athene, the goddess of wisdom. This is followed by a scene in Syria filled with terror created.
by the cruel god's priest Polydaon, who has an eye on the Syrian throne. Phineus, King of Tyre also desires to have the throne and Andromeda the beautiful princess of Syria. Meanwhile two Babylonian merchants saved by Perseus from a ship-wreck, have been caught by the wicked priest and released by Andromeda. The priest's consequent attempts to kill Andromeda and her parents are ultimately foiled by Perseus; which comes as a fatal shock to Polydaon. In the end the rival Phineus is also foiled, and Perseus, praised by the people as their deliverer, marries Andromeda.

It appears that Sri Aurobindo has drawn the theme from numerous sources ranging from ancient Greek poets to Kingsley. With a greater accent on Andromeda's character and on Perseus as the deliverer of all, and with his attempt to bring out the conflict between the two types of godheads, Poseidon and Athene, the playwright has modified the Greek legend to some extent. As in Kalidasa's Abhimanā Sakuntalam, the supernatural intervenes and averts the probable tragedy in Perseus. The playwright maintains the spirit of deliverance found in the legend; and this is revealed by a comparative study of works like Thesmophoriazusae by Aristophanes, the Celtic myth of Devorgilla and our Indian myth of Krishna and Rukmini.

3. Ibid., p.164.
The Viziers of Bassora is a play in five acts by Sri Aurobindo ('A Dramatic Romance' as the author calls it) is also Elizabethan in cast. The theme is from The Arabian Nights ('The Tale of Beautiful Sweet Friend'); and in this play "the original tale (has) been dramatized with almost faithfulness"5, the sub-plot being the author's own invention. The ninth century city of Bassora is the scene of the main incidents in the play.

Nur Al-Din (Noorudden) Ali, the good Vizier Alfazzal's son and Anice-al-jalice, a slave girl fall in love with each other. The wicked Vizier Almuene, with his evil designs, puts many obstacles in their way. Finally, with the help of Haroun al Rashid, the Caliph of Baghdad, they marry and also get the throne of Bassora.

As in Perseus, Sri Aurobindo makes free use of sub-plots in The Viziers also while centring the story around the romance of Nureddene and Anice. The initial incident of the purchase of the slave-girl gives rise to a number of conflicts in the life of Nureddene who ascends to the romantic heights where "Life without

4. Sri Aurobindo, The Viziers of Bassora (Pondicherry, 1989). According to the Publisher's Note, the credit of preventing the MS. from being disposed of as waste paper goes to the alert curiosity of a Record-Keeper in the Govt. Archives, Bengal.

her is not to be thought of; and nothing can stand in the way of their strong bond of love which finally triumphs.

Next, Sri Aurobindo experiments with the presentation of the Indian legend of Vasavadutta in an Elizabethan attire. As the Editor of The Collected Plays of Sri Aurobindo says, there are several versions of his play Vasavadutta and only a few of them are complete. It is a posthumous publication, (first published in 1957) based on the version of the play dated 1916. The story of Vasavadutta traceable to Somadeva's Kathāsaritsāgara (dramatised by Bhasa in his Sanskrit play) seems to have influenced Sri Aurobindo, and the romance is heightened in the play.

Vuthsa Udayan, the young King of Cowsambie is kidnapped by his political rival, Mahasegn the King of Avunthie and kept in jail under the vigilance of princess Vasavadutta. But, as love works making the jailor herself a prisoner, Mahasegn fails in his attempt to make Udayan a slave and, in future, a vassal of his empire. Then, to free themselves from the bondage of Mahasegn, Udayan and Vasavadutta escape into Cowsambie with the help of the latter's brother Vicurna, her captive-princess Munjoolica and others. This hurts the prestige of Mahasegn who

6. The Viziers of Bassora, p.162.
7. Sri Aurobindo, Vasavadutta (Pondicherry, 1965), vide Publisher's Note.
makes a futile attempt to capture Udayan again. Consoled by Gopalaca and reconciling himself to the situation, Mahasegn finally sends him to Cowsambie to convey his approval of Udayan's freedom and Vasavadutta's marriage to him.

Dated February 1906, Rodogune belongs to the period of Sri Aurombindo's stay at Baroda. It was posthumously published first in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1958 and also in book form in the same year. It is a modified version of Corneille's French tragedy based on an account given by Appian of Alexandria. Sri Aurobindo removes from the story of Cleopatra not only the crudities found in Appian but also the violence introduced by Corneille.

The King of Syria captures the Parthian princess Rodogune and gives her to the Queen Cleopatra as a slave. Antiochus and Timoicles, the sons of Cleopatra by her first husband, who had been under the care of their uncle Ptolemy in Egypt, now return to Syria at the death of Cleopatra's second husband. Like King Lear, the doting queen mistakes Timoicles's flattery for real love and rejects Antiochus, who then revolts to claim succession to the Syrian throne. Meanwhile, Antiochus and Rodogune, mutually attracted by love, join together in this venture. Timoicles too falls in love with Rodogune, and for some time comes under the influence of the scheming Chancellor Phayllus and his sister.

Cleone. To win Rodogune and the throne, the brothers enter into a civil war. At last, Antiochus does not mind losing the throne, but not Rodogune. Phayllus exploits Timocles's love for Rodogune to meet his selfish ends and gets Antiochus secretly killed; and the unexpected shock ends the life of Rodogune. His attempt being thus thwarted, Timocles kills Phayllus and Cleone; and in the end, only Cleopatra and Timocles are left to bemoan their wicked acts.

Eric, a play in five acts, was written by Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry in 1912-13 and was first published there about the same year. The text, based probably on two or more drafts was next published in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1960 and issued in book form in the same year.

The play deals with Norway of ancient times and the Viking culture of the Nordic race. Eric is the King of Norway; Swegn, his enemy, sends Aslaugh and Hertha (sister and wife respectively) under disguise as dancing girls to kill him. But Aslaugh falls in love with Eric; and the tactful Hertha too becomes helpless. Even when she is about to kill Eric with a dagger, Aslaugh wavers and at last falls at his feet. He boldly offers her a chance to dance with the dagger and end his life; but love triumphs over vengeance. In the ensuing battle, Eric defeats Swegn, but spares
him according to his promise, restores his lost titles and wife, and marries Aslaugh.

A survey of Sri Aurobindo's themes reveals the vast learning of the playwright. In choosing his themes, he does not confine himself to one particular country, and a wide range of countries from Scandinavia to India provides material for his plays. While the action of Eric pertains to ancient Norway and that of Vasavadutta to India, the other three plays deal with the Middle East.

It is obvious from a study of these plays that Sri Aurobindo was seized of the acute problem of the slavery of his countrymen under the foreign rule, and, while presenting the urge for freedom, he indirectly employs the legends of Perseus, the Viziers of Bassora and Vasavadutta. There is the romantic impulse in his themes which takes the audience to a world of chivalric love and adventure, of the mysterious and the supernatural, in brief, to a world of romance; and he tries to view the contemporary struggle against that setting. The heroic act of Perseus, the steadfastness of Eric, the intrigues regarding Anice, Vasavadutta's romance and the tragedy of Rodojune — all could be considered strands of the single thread on the romantic impulse which binds these plays together.

The legend of Perseus offered the playwright a good chance to create a romantic atmosphere and make his countrymen feel the pangs of bondage and the
consequent urge for freeing themselves from the foreign rule. The very title of the play itself shows that Perseus, the hero, is the deliverer of all — the Babylonian merchants, Andromeda and her parents, and the Syrian people as a whole. He is the ideal saviour of a nation in travail while Andromeda symbolises total sacrifice. The repressive policies of the British Government are reflected in the reign of terror created by the cruel priest of Syria. Andromeda chained to the rocks to be eaten by sea-monsters is obviously Mother India in distress crying out for divine help.

The aid of the supernatural (here, of the goddess Athene) adds to the heroic prowess of Perseus and enables him to risk his life in many adventures including those which he had to encounter in Syria. The romantic thrill created does not end with the killing of the sea-monsters and the death of Polydaemon. It can be felt even in the last scene where Perseus again invokes the supernatural and finishes off his last rival Phineus and his followers by turning them into statues. Further, it is the chivalric love of Perseus that attracts Andromeda who reveals her heart by addressing him thus:

"I cannot lift my hands to thee, they are chained To the wild cliff, but lift my heart instead."

The romantic impulse urges the playwright to raise his hero from the physical plane to the mental. The super-power of Good should prevail in the end after encountering some transitory phases of the evil forces which come in the way of man's mental evolution. In the words of Perseus —

Then let the shrine
That looked out from earth's breast into the sunlight,
And the dread Form that lived within its precincts
Transfigure into a bright compassionate God
Whose strength shall aid men tossed upon the seas. 10

It is this mental adventure that makes the philosopher-playwright speak through Perseus again before the curtain finally drops —

"... little by little earth must open to heaven
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light", 11

that is, till man becomes Superman. To make Perseus the sole Deliverer of all, Sri Aurobindo resorts to the Elizabethan practice of creating more than one plot and also adds the scene of Phineus's rivalry to the main plot of Polydaon's cruelty. Thus the audience can feel the romantic impulse from the beginning to the end of the play.

Like Perseus, The Viziers of Bassora is replete with romance which is indirectly employed to uphold the urge for freedom from the clutches of the evil. The source The Arabian Nights itself is a collection of stories

10. Ibid., p.145.
11. Ibid., p.146.
of medieval romance, which is further heightened in the play with the introduction of sub-plots. Here the slave girl Anice and the throne of Bassora are the cynosure of many eyes; and the events that are woven round them engender the romantic spirit throughout the play. The audience is at once taken to the slave-market where there is a bid for Anice who creates a keen interest among the Viziers. The purchase of the slave-girl leads to various conflicts including the bankruptcy and absconding of Nureddene. There is a romantic thrill in the scene where Almuene makes the fate of Nureddene hang in a balance and also in the sudden appearance of his father. The supernatural too has an indirect hand in the political intrigues of Bassora through the Caliph, Allah's Vice-Regent, who in time comes to the aid of Nureddene in his attempt to win both Anice and the throne of Bassora.

In heightening the romantic impulse, Sri Aurobindo introduces characters which shine in contrast — the good Chief Vizier Alfazzal Ibn Sawy and the wicked second Vizier Almuene; Nureddene who is good like his father and provides a thorough contrast to Fareed who is a lusty tyrant; the Sultan who is bad enough to be guided by Almuene, and Ajebe who is noble unlike his uncle; the women characters Anice, the heroine of the play, Doonya, Ameena and Khatoon (both, sisters) —
all exceptionally good; and the kind Caliph who "puts down all evil and plucks the virtuous out of danger's hand". 12

But the playwright seems to be over-ambitious in projecting the medieval romance of Bassora and there are scenes which seem to be superfluous and check the movement of the story: for example, the scenes of the conversation between Balkis, Mymoona and Ajebe (III, iii) and the meeting of Almuene, Fareed and Khatoon (V, i).

The romantic element in Vasavadutta mainly comprises the love between the hero and the heroine, though an allied theme is the urge for political freedom. Unlike in Perseus, it is this aspect of romantic impulse in the play that supersedes the importance of the political rivalry between Udayan and Mahasegn and their adventurous spirit. Even Vasavadutta's loyalty to her adamant father becomes powerless before her irresistible passion for Udayan. This leads to their bold, successful attempt to escape. To win her object, Vasavadutta does not mind her father's humiliation at the triumph of Udayan.

When it is a question of heroism, even Vicurna does not hesitate to oppose the unjust conditions laid down by his father regarding

12. The Viziers of Bassora, p. 198.
Udayan and boldly flings remarks:

"Thus are vassals made?
Thus empires built? This is a shameful thing.
Release him first, then with proud war subdue".  

Even Gopalaca, the favourite son of Mahasegn, can appreciate the heroic spirit in Udayan, and consoling his father, he rightly remarks in the end:

"We sought to bribe him to a vassal's state
Dangling the jewel of our house in front;
He keeps his freedom and enjoys the gem".  

To heighten the romance, Sri Aurobindo makes his heroine a developing character throughout, when she first obeys her father and tries to subdue Udayan, and also, when, conquered by Nature, she loses her heart to the young king. Udayan, of course, is noble enough to know his position when he says:

"No, queen, What's wholly mine, that wholly take,
But this (kingdom) belongs to many other souls".  

But, even with his heroism and prowess, he seems to be rather inactive though he is more independent than Bhasa's hero. Further, true to the logic of romance, he is shown to be so unwise and innocent as to accept the friendship offered by his enemy's son, that too, much against the caution given by his Minister. In the development of the romantic plot, the minor characters play their own part: the ever-cautious Minister

13. Vasavadutta, pp. 82-83.
15. Ibid., p. 76.
Yougandharayan; the ambitious and determined King Mahasegn; Gopalaca and Vicurna shining by contrast in loyalty to their father and the captive-princess Munjoolica who aids the romantic affair of Vasavadutta and helps her in her escape.

Further, the romantic impulse in the play also expresses itself in some general statements like the words of Yougandharayan —

"Man out of Nature wakes to God's complexities, Takes her crude simple stuff and by his skill Turns things impossible into daily miracles". 16

Sri Aurobindo scores over Bhasa in giving a tinge of greater naturalness to the story by introducing the conflict in Vasavadutta between her loyalty to her father and love for Udayan and thereby intensifying the romantic impulse. But the playwright does not seem to care much for suspense, as the hero and the heroine are shown to have already heard of each other and are thus mutually infatuated; (how much more of a romantic thrill it would perhaps have brought, had Sri Aurobindo effected their first acquaintance itself in Avunthiel!). The only event that reaches dramatic heights is their successful attempt to escape to Cowsambie from the strong fort kept under the vigil of Mahasegn.

16. Ibid., p.7.
But, in imbuing the legend with a romantic spirit, Sri Aurobindo perhaps unnecessarily yields too much to the temptation to copy the model of Elizabethan drama, totally ignoring the features of the Classical Sanskrit Drama which would have harmonized better with the Indian legend here.

*Rodogune* also falls in line with the other plays of Sri Aurobindo so far as the romantic impulse is concerned. Compared to the themes of others, it is a tragedy and, in a way, it is more powerful than the rest. There is fight for love, for throne; there are political intrigues which take away the audience to a distant past and distant land. Thus the entire stage is set for romance, except the fact that, compared to *Perseus*, the supernatural is totally absent in the play.

As already mentioned, Sri Aurobindo has tried to refine the character of Cleopatra. Yet, with her scheming and self-centred nature, she remains a romantic figure. Further, the whole play is replete with events full of suspense and tension. In the beginning of play itself there is the atmosphere of fear and excitement. Antiochus and Timocles, Cleopatra's sons by her first husband had been kept under the care of their uncle Ptolemy to save them from the wrath of her second husband. Next the audience is thrilled by the anticipation of significant developments when she foolishly behaves like King Lear towards her sons and
rejects the claim of Antiochus to the throne. Like a
crooked politician, she enjoys creating trouble.
Necessary developments follow the rivalry created among
the brothers to win the throne on one hand and Rodogune
on the other; and the wicked Chancellor Phayllus and
his sister Cleone have a full chance to exploit the
situation to their personal benefit. Thus, there is
romantic thrill, there is horror, there is anxiety, and
there is conflict after conflict till the end of the
play, till only Cleopatra and Timocles are left to lick
the severe wounds caused by themselves.

The cynosure of the play is Rodogune herself who
is 'the haunting creature of beauty and romance and
tragedy'. Antiochus's love for Rodogune is so
powerful that at last he gives up his claim to the
throne, but not to her, and consequently becomes the
victim of a plot; and the shock itself ends Rodogune's
life. Thus the bond of love between them demonstrates
its force in a tragic way; and at the same time
Cleopatra is an example to show how unthinking
maternal love leads to undesirable consequences.

In handling the powerful romantic theme of the
play, Sri Aurobindo is all attention to characterisation.
The use of sharp contrast in characterization
heightens the romantic spirit of the play. In

thorough contrast to the heroine, there is the self-centred vengeful mother Cleopatra. Antiochus is a hero subjected to Fate. He is frank and straightforward enough to wish to climb the throne, not by vulgar riot, not by fratricidal murder, but up the heroic steps of ordered battle. Even when caught in danger, he does not turn his back, but is prepared to die a heroic death if he cannot win the battle. His brother Timocles, though brought up along with him by Ptolemy, presents a thorough contrast to him.

Eric also recreates a world of ancient romance. Here is an attempt to kill a political enemy, not by modern constitutional means nor by a declared war, but by resorting to vile methods like sending disguised 'dancing girls' to finish off the enemy; and a battle follows only after this attempt fails.

Further, to heighten the romantic impulse, suspense is maintained particularly in the scenes where Eric and Aslaugh meet. At a stage, the audience is anxious to know what is happening in the mind of the straightforward Eric, whether he is still unable to realise the danger ahead; at this point, he wins the sympathy of the audience. The tension is reduced when Aslaugh, fully conquered by passion for Eric, lowers the dagger and falls at his feet. Again, there is the romantic thrill when Eric offers her a chance to kill him. At the end
also, the playwright creates a romantic effect by making Eric forgive Swegn and marry Aslaugh.

To assist the romantic plot, Eric is portrayed as a Man of Destiny, and the whole play almost revolves round Eric and Aslaugh. He is so bold that even after knowing Aslaugh's intended aim, he throws a challenge at her. The climax of her inner conflict between her duty and passion is effectively presented by her act of lifting and lowering the dagger twice, throwing it away and finally kneeling down at Eric's feet.

Thus Sri Aurobindo employs ancient legends to highlight the contemporary urge for freedom from bondage, and heighten the elements of heroism, adventure and mystery in the actions of his imaginary characters; and as such, all his plays are imbued with a strong romantic impulse, which appears to be the driving force behind all his plays.

But, in spite of his vast learning, Sri Aurobindo appears to have ignored the rich tradition of the Indian Drama, so far as dramatic technique is concerned. In expressing his romantic impulse, he seems to have relied excessively on the model of the Elizabethan Drama.

First, Perseus itself can serve as an example in this regard. Apart from its 5-act structure, it is strange that, in presenting the opposing forces of the
good and the evil, Athene and Poseidon, the playwright unnecessarily employs a lengthy Prologue though he knew the compact Sūtradhāra technique. Further, failure to produce a concentrated effect on the audience is caused by unduly long, rhetorical speeches, and these too, in verse: for example, the speech by Andromeda in Act V (i) and by Perseus in V (ii). Also, like King Lear and many other Elizabethan plays, this play is of an unwieldy nature, and the introduction of a large number of characters (28 in all) makes for confusion.

Excessive reliance on the Elizabethan model has had some detrimental effect on The Viziers of Bassora also. Like his Elizabethan counterparts, Sri Aurobindo creates some unwarranted sub-plots (for example, the episode of Ibrahim and the sub-plot relating to Belkis, Hymoona and Ajebe) which are responsible for the loose structure of the play.

In The Viziers, Sri Aurobindo tries to blend oriental and occidental thought by referring to the English Romantic poets, the theory of Fate and Oriental Philosophy. For example, in appreciation of his own song, Ibrahim quotes Shelley's famous line, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought".

20. The Viziers of Bassora, p.156.
While Almune says,

".....All things come round at last
With the full wheel of Fate; it is my hour". 21

there is an echo of oriental philosophy in the words of Ibrahim:

".....hanker not unlawfully after perishable earthly goods; for verily, they are a snare and verily, verily, they entrap the feet of the soul as it toileth over the straight rough road to Heaven". 22

There cannot be a better example than \textit{Vasavadutta} to show how an Indian legend presented in a western form looks artificial like an Indian lady wearing the western dress. Of course, as already noted, Sri Aurobindo does attempt at making the original story more natural by introducing the conflict in Vasavadutta's mind between her loyalty to father and love towards Udayan. But it is surprising that the playwright, who has beautifully rendered the Sanskrit play \textit{Vakramörvasi}yam into blank verse and who could with advantage follow the model of all such Indian romantic plays, should unnecessarily resort to an alien model. To mar the dramatic effect further, there are some lengthy verse-dialogues of the Elizabethan type: for example, speeches by Vasuntha, 23

by Ungarica. 24

Rodogune stands apart from the other four plays of Sri Aurobindo so far as the utilization of the Elizabethan model is concerned. Like Macbeth and other tragedies, it is full of horror from the beginning to the end. Such tragedies have no place in the Indian Classical Drama; and as such, what Sri Aurobindo has done in using the Elizabethan form in the complicated tragic plot of Rodogune, seems to be logical and convincing. But here again, some lengthy speeches of the Elizabethan type (like Antiochus's soliloquy when he decides to return to Syria) and the romantic verse fail to suit the modern stage, where the spoken word and style are mostly relished.

Again in Eric, for projecting a romantic theme of political rivalry and love, there was Bhasa and there was Visakhadatta who could have served as models for the playwright. In fact, (apart from some traditional verses interspersed in prose) Bhasa was well ahead of his times in skilfully dealing with such legendary themes according to the requirements of the stage, and set good examples in his plays like Pancarātram, Dūtavākyam and Swapna-Vāsavadattam. These models with their compact presentation and crisp dialogue could have been utilised with advantage by Sri Aurobindo. Instead, he not only imposes an Elizabethan structure on his subjects, but also introduces lengthy Elizabethan speeches including soliloquies which reduce the scope for action in his play and consequently tell upon their stageworthiness.
The influence of Elizabethan drama on Sri Aurobindo can be further observed in the Shakespearian echoes that are heard time and again in his plays. For example, in Perseus, his Polydect shows an Othello-like weakness and King Lear's madness when he gets frustrated in his attempts to perpetuate his rule of terror. Less unnatural is the intervention of the supernatural (Perseus's taking the help of the special powers granted by Athene) as the Elizabethan concept (as in A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Winter's Tale etc.) is not new to the Indian tradition (for example, God Indra's role in Bhasa's Karnabhāra). Next, a Shakespearian echo is heard in Andromeda's reactions to Diomede's description of the wreck:

"Also, the unhappy men, the poor drowned men
Who had young children somewhere whom they loved,
How could you watch them die? Had I been god,
I would not let this cruel thing have happened." 25

These lines resemble Miranda's:

"......Poor souls, they perished,
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er
It should be the good ship so have swallow'd and
The fraughting souls within her". 26

Sri Aurobindo's passion for imitating Shakespeare can be seen even in the title The Viziers of Bassora (similar to Timon of Athens, The Merchant of Venice and The Two Gentlemen of Verona). Also, the raising of the dagger and lowering it by Aslaugh in Eric reminds us of Macbeth's hesitation in killing Duncan. Further, as King Lear foolishly relies upon the display of affection by his first two daughters, Cleopatra in Rodogune mistakes her son Timocles's flattery for real love and rejects the claim of her other son Antiochus. Rodogune seems to echo the series of murders and complications introduced by Shakespeare in his plays like Hamlet, King Lear, Titus Andronicus and Antony and Cleopatra. Even in weaving many plots together into one action as in The Viziers of Bassora, Sri Aurobindo appears to be under the spell of Shakespearian plays like The Merchant of Venice which has five stories interlinked.

While playwrights like Marlowe created characters who would cling to one ambition, good or bad, throughout their life, Shakespeare held that nobody could be a constant slave to any sentiment or ambition, but could change by circumstances. Sri Aurobindo upholds this natural view; while his Eric offers honourable treatment to the defeated rival, even the adamant Mahasegn changes and reconciles himself to Udayan's self-asserted power.
Also, unlike his predecessors, Shakespeare made the external appearance of his villains on the stage milder, and they were more dangerous within. Sri Aurobindo too appears to have been fascinated by the idea when he presents on the stage his villains like Polydaon, Almuene, Mahasegn, Cleopatra and Swegn. Further, even in his concept of the tragic hero, in *Rodogune*, Sri Aurobindo follows Shakespeare; according to whom, the hero suffers not so much by the intervention of fate or the supernatural as in Greek plays, but by a tragic flaw in his own character. Again, the impact of the Elizabethan playwright on Sri Aurobindo is seen even in the non-observance of the three unities of time, place and action, in all his plays including *Rodogune*.

Thus, Shakespearian drama appears to have had a continuous sway over Sri Aurobindo. It is rather sad that in these plays Sri Aurobindo made little attempt to draw upon his vast knowledge of the rich tradition of the Classical Sanskrit theatre and resorted to Elizabethan techniques like the five-act structure, lengthy speeches, many sub-plots and Elizabethan horror. As already discussed, *Rodogune*, with its tragic theme may look natural in its Elizabethan garb. But this can be hardly said about the rest of the plays. If on the other hand the playwright had employed with advantage the model of playwrights like Bhasa and Kalidasa (the Sutradhara technique, the
pravesaka, the viskambhaka, delineation of rasas, the five sandhis etc., of course, dispensing with their undesirable elements like the verses interspersed in prose dialogue), his plays would have perhaps been a far more original achievement, considerable as it already is.

Equally intriguing is Sri Aurobindo's language as well as his dialogue. There cannot be a second opinion about his command of the language which is far superior to that of many of his contemporary counterparts. He can use language with ease, and shows his command of the blank verse form. But a stageable play requires crisp dialogue mostly in the spoken tongue in keeping with the level of the characters; and such a stage sense alone can strike a balance between dialogue and action, keep up the tempo of the play and thereby make it stageworthy. Though Sri Aurobindo had mastered the general principles of dramatic design, he perhaps failed to give due importance to this aspect of the theatre.

Sri Aurobindo's plays are either in verse or a mixture of prose and verse. Of course, at times he shows his ability to compose realistic dialogue in colloquial English, and as such the dialogue in The Viziers is more natural than in other plays.
Here is a talk in the Slave Market in I (iii) of the Viziers:

Muazzim: Well, gentlemen, the biddings, the biddings! Will you begin Sir, for an example now?

Balkis: Who is the handsome youth in that rich dress?

Muazzim: It is Azebe, the Vizier's nephew, a good fellow with a bad uncle.

Balkis: Praise me to them poetically, broker.

Muazzim: I promise you for the poetry. Biddings gentlemen.

A merchant: Three thousand for the pretty one.27

The poet-playwright does show his mastery over blank verse. To illustrate, the tumult in the heart of Polydson could not be better expressed in verse:

"O terrible Poseidon,
Thyself avenge thyself! on this people
The sea and the Assyrian. Where is the power
Thou said'st should tarry with me? I have failed.
Tomorrow, Syrian? tomorrow is Poseidon's".28

Again in Rodogune, Sri Aurobindo demonstrates the ease with which he can handle blank verse. He can, without any difficulty, express the intended thought in the form appropriate to the seriousness of a situation; Antiochus's words to Rodogune illustrate the point;

"0, play not with the hours, my Rodogune
Why should brief man defer his joys and wait
As if life were eternal? Time does not pause,
Death does not tarry."29

27. The Viziers of Bassora, p.127.
28. Perseus the Deliverer, pp.81-82.
But the fact remains that, on the whole, his blank verse remains derivative and unindividualized.

In *Vasavadutta*, though Sri Aurobindo scores over Bhasa in giving a natural touch to the legendary story, his dialogue in verse suffers in comparison with the natural prose dialogue employed by the latter. To illustrate, here is a piece of crisp dialogue in Bhasa's play when the Chamberlain brings the news to his king (of Ujjain) that Vatsarāja (Udayan) is captured:

**King**: King of Kausambi?
**Chamberlain**: Indeed.
**King**: That expert musician?
**Chamberlain**: So they say.
**King**: It is indeed Vatsaraja?
**Chamberlain**: Yes Sir, Vatsaraja?
**King**: Then, is Bha.undharāvana dead?
**Chamberlain**: No, he is in Kausambi.
**King**: Then Vatsaraja is not captured?
**Chamberlain**: Let Mahāśeṇa believe me.

Contrast this with the following passage from *Vasavadutta*, where after Vuthsa is captured, Mahasegn holds a conversation with his queen Ungārica:

**Mahasegn**: I conquer still though not with glorious arms. He's seized! the young victorious Vuthsa's mine A prisoner in my hands.

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Unearica: Thou holdest the sun
Under thy armpit as the tailed god did.
What will thou do with it?

Mahasegn: Make it my moon
And shine by him upon the eastern night.

Unearica: Thou canst?
Mahasegn: Loved sceptic of my house? I can.
Have I not done all things I longed for yet
Since out of thy dim world I dragged thee alarmed
By force, by fortune? 31

As already illustrated in the analyses of the plays like Perseus, Vasavadutta, Rodogune and Eric, Sri Aurobindo introduces lengthy speeches which check the easy movement of the action. His dialogue would perhaps have been far more effective, had he employed prose (spoken language) in a crisper style, at least for certain portions of his plays.

One curious feature of Sri Aurobindo's style is that, unlike Kailasam and others, he does not seem to be much inclined to the use of Indian words. On the other hand, as he explains in a lengthy note 32 he tries to bring the image of an alien culture into English in his own way; and the expression 'antelope eyes' (harinākshi) in I (i) of Eric is an illustration for his skill in this direction.

To sum up, a study of Sri Aurobindo's plays reveals the vast learning of the playwright.

32. 'On Translating Kalidasa', printed in Sri Aurobindo's Vikramorvasia (Pondicherry, 1952).
As already observed, in the choice of his themes he does not confine himself to one particular country, and locales ranging from Scandinavia (Perseus) to India (Vasavadutta) appear in his plays. It is clear that the playwright indirectly projects the realities of the contemporary world by taking the audience to a distant past, to a world of adventure and chivalric love; in brief, to a world of romance, sometimes allowing the intervention of the supernatural also (as in Perseus). There is a strong romantic impulse behind all these themes — the heroic act of Perseus, the intrigues about Anice and the throne of Bassora, Vasavadutta's romance and the tragedy of Rodogune.

As regards the management of plot, Sri Aurobindo effects a smooth transition from exposition to crisis; as for example, from the purchase of Anice to the bankruptcy of Nureeddene in The Viziers; from the rescue of the merchants from the ship wreck by the hero to the release of the victims of imprisonment in Perseus; from the incident of the necklace to the triumph of passion in Eric; from Vuthsa's unwise action of entertaining Gopalaca to the scene of fulfilment in Vasavadutta. Further, as already indicated, his characterization goes hand in hand with the development of plots; and the events are presented in a logical order.

As already discussed, Sri Aurobindo does not achieve full success in facing the language problem.
These lapses and the unnecessary use of lengthy speeches create the impression that the plays are, on the whole, not very stageworthy.

That Sri Aurobindo can employ legends so as to create a world of romance and also characters to suit the development of plot, and thereby bring home to the audience the contemporary urge for freedom is definitely his achievement in the field of Indo-English Drama. Also, his plays display a great exuberance of thought and language, and have an appeal to the scholar; but, as already explained, they cannot fully meet the demands of the stage and are at best closet drama.

II

The next playwright of considerable importance is Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam (1885-1946) (popularly known as T.P.Kailasam) who, though essentially a Kannada playwright, occupies a prominent place in the firmament of Indo-Anglian Drama. It appears that his knowledge of ancient Indian lore and his long stay in England urged him to contribute something concrete to this sparsely-cultivated field. In spite of a few drawbacks, his plays breathe throughout a deep reverence for our ancient culture and values of life though the modern critical approach is also present. A blending of vision and stage-craft is found in his plays in general, though his ready wit and subtle humour are found solely in his Kannada plays in particular.
Kailasam's published plays and playlets are:
The Burden (1933), The Purpose (1944), Fulfilment (1933),
The Curse or Karna (1946), Keecheke (1947) and
A Monologue (1933). It is learnt that some thirteen
English playlets were also composed by him and recited
extempore to his friends (in his usual eccentric
fashion), but none of these has been published.

While the story of The Burden is from The Rāmāyana,
the other plays and playlets excepting the monologue are
based upon some episodes from The Mahābhārata. When asked
why he turned more to The Mahābhārata than to The Rāmāyana
for the themes of his English plays, Kailasam
is stated to have replied, "You see, the characters
in The Mahābhārata are all like us, living, rooted to
his world. They may have their adhyātmic ambitions,
but in the way the great sage Vyasa has depicted them,
they are all human. But, in The Rāmāyana, the sage
Vālmīki has transgressed humanity. The material dross
has never tainted their feet". 33

The playlet, The Burden, the theme of which is
from The Rāmāyana, is perhaps an indirect attempt at
modification of Bhasa's Sanskrit work Pratimā-nātsakam
(The Statue-play) further elevating the theme to
tragic heights.

While returning from their grandfather's place
to Ayodhya, Bharata and Satrughna scent some

33. Quoted by M. Sivaram, Kailasam and I (Bangalore, 1967),
p.87.
catastrophe in the capital on seeing the dimlit royal path. They first meet two aged Chamberlains-at-court and make enquiries with them, but fail to know what the matter is. At last, with great difficulty they get information about the death of their father Daśaratha and the banishment of Rāma; and are totally upset. Bharata is so much enraged that he takes even the royal priest Vasishtha to task for not having saved his father. In the end, Vasishtha consoles him and directs him to do his duty.

The Purpose, a play in 2 acts, is one of the main contributions made by Kailasam to Indo-Anglian drama. It is a mark of Kailasam's dramatic talent that the few words mentioned by Vyāsa about Ekalavya in the Adi Parva and a passing reference made in the Drona Parva of The Mahābhārata could become a powerful play in his hands.

According to Kailasam's version, Ekalavya, a young hunter, desires to learn archery with the sole intention of protecting the fawns from the wolves of his forest. He observes from a distance the skills daily taught to the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava princes by their preceptor Drona, and having the image of his Guru in his mind, he himself gets an excellent training in the art. An occasion arises when Arjuna, one of Drona's star pupils, comes to know of Ekalavya's skill in archery and takes his preceptor to task, charging him with having failed to keep his promise to make Arjuna
himself the greatest archer in the world. Though caught amidst a dual loyalty (towards his indirect teacher on one hand and the fawns on the other), Ekalavya himself cuts off his right thumb, offers it as teacher's fee and thereby rescues Drona from an embarrassing complication.

Kailasam's next playlet Fulfilment is a natural sequel to The Purpose. It is said that C. R. Reddy, after listening to a recital of The Purpose, posed a question — "Well! What becomes of Ekalavya then?" Kailasam readily replied, 'fulfilment', and Reddy said, "Kailasam, you must write the whole series". As B.S. Rama Rao informs us, an MS. possessed by him connects the two pieces (forming a full-fledged tragedy), and according to it, Ekalavya had given his consent to join the Kauravas in the ensuing fray.

In Fulfilment, the divine-human Krishna tries to dissuade Ekalavya from joining the Kauravas; but his lengthy argument fails to convince him. At last, while Ekalavya goes on narrating the story of the Bird's Tree, Krishna stealthily stabs him and tries to justify his act with the words, "It is the purpose of the killing and not the manner of killing that decides the fairness of killing". Then he promises to see that 'somehow', 'anyhow', his mother is spared "from even a moment's misery of losing a son"; slays her too.

36. Ibid., p.70.
and thus 'fulfils' the purpose.

The Curse of Karna, a play in 5 acts, is based on the story of Karna appearing in the Adi, Sabhā and Karna parvas of The Mahābhārata. It appears that it was originally designed by Kailasam to be a screen-play. It is learnt that this conception of Karna's character came as a flash to him on the occasion of giving a recital of The Purpose in 1927 at the West End Hotel in Bangalore. He left C.R.Reddy for a few minutes and went out all the time mumbling questions like "Karna? ..... his birth ..... Oh, yes; son of the sun; flung adrift; Rādha the mother, sootha, the Guru's curse .... The swayamvara, the Sabha scene, the killing! "Then he rushed in and said to Reddy, 'I have it, Sir'. 37. Thus sprang the play traversing the entire gamut of Karna's life .... from Paraśurāma’s curse, through the crowning of Karna as the King of Anga, his participation in the War, to his death. There is not much deviation from the original story of the epic except in places like Kunti's attempt to hide her identity while eliciting the desired promise from Karna, the importance given to Karna's foster-mother Rādha and the characterization of Karna himself.

Kailasam's last play, Keechaka, is a posthumous publication. It is learnt that it is based purely on the memory of the playwright's close associates like

37. B.S.Rama Rao, 'A Play is Born', The Curse or Karna, Appendix, p.2.
B.S. Rama Rao; and thus the authenticity of the published version seems to be limited.

It is reported that the idea of a play about Keechaka occurred to Kailasam at the end of a performance (in Bangalore) of John Gielgud the British actor. The playwright 'excitingly poured forth' the story with some dialogue to Ram Gopal, a celebrated dancer who was then with him, and finally remarked, "Ram, you are that Brihannala. I have found him in you, and I have also seen the real truth about Keechaka's death tonight. Yes, it is about this time he must have died. Well, you will be the one to tell this story of the life and death of Keechaka to the world abroad in your language — the dance; what is more, you will show them a Brihannala of those hoary days of our ancestors — The Kurus." 38

The play has five scenes, and its theme is drawn from the Virāṭaparvam of The Mahābhārata. But Kailasam's hero is entirely different from the Keechaka of the epic. In the idealising the character, the playwright keeps the incidents in the epic only as props — Keechaka's return from war commanding campaigns, his infatuation for Sairandhri (Draupadi in disguise during the period when the Pandavas remained incognito) and his subsequent fight with Valala (Bhima in disguise) leading to his death.

Lastly, a Monologue is not a drama in the full sense of the term, and is said to have been intended by Kailasam to portray the woman as the eternal sufferer and the man as the conventional consoler. "These scenes, these words, you've seen, you've heard", says the playwright. The suffering woman is presented in four stages — as a little child sobbing over a broken doll; then as a little girl weeping over a broken slate; next as a maid grieving over a broken necklace; and lastly as a woman in widow's robe. At each stage, she is consoled by the man with some hope or assurance. It appears that Mam's description of the helplessness and the consequent dependence of woman on man in different stages of her life, might have indirectly provoked this thought in Kailasam.

The presentation of human life as a series of dramatic pictures shows Kailasam's compassionate heart and also his gift of dramatisation.

While Sri Aurobindo freely employs legends of different countries for his themes, Kailasam restricts himself to the epics The Rāmāyana and The Mahābhārata. Further, it appears that unlike playwrights like Sri Aurobindo and Karnad, he makes no attempt to interpret old myths to present contemporary problems. He tries to make everything fit into the framework of Shakespearian tragedy. But he too takes the audience to a world of romance highlighting the greatness of

the epic heroes. In his passion for glorifying the underdog, he even goes to the extent of giving an altogether unconventional picture of a mythical character. However, he has a keen sense of dramatic values and being himself an actor, he tries to make his plays stage worthy.

In *The Burden*, Kailasam dramatises a single thrilling episode from *The Ramayana*; and the title has its own significance as Bharata is directed to do "the man's task of bearing the burden that fate hath placed." In spite of the limited scope available for delineation of character in the short piece, Bharata is exalted by Kailasam. But unlike his much-modified Keechaka, the idealisation made here is well within bounds. An unselfish prince, Bharata cannot even tolerate anybody praising him with the designation 'Boy-King'. His love for all and respect for elders, and his detached attitude towards worldly affairs are well-portrayed.

But Kailasam's concept of the situation pales into insignificance before Bhasa's wonderful imagination of the statue symbol employed to create suspense and romantic thrill in *Pratima*. Further, though Kailasam appears to have been influenced by the western one-act play, the playlet looks rather like a scene in a play, rather than a self-contained short play.

In The Purpose, Kailasam demonstrates how an episode briefly narrated in an epic could be expanded into a powerful play. In handling the theme romantically, he lays emphasis on the power of penance, its potentiality of concentration and single-minded effort on the one hand and the purpose of doing a thing (here, learning archery) on the other. Among the three kinds of people (Kśarml) whose purposes are different, Ekalavya belongs to the third category whose "one aim is in his labour that others might reap the harvest of his toils without the least profit to himself (Karmanā parārthāhā)". Ekalavya learns archery solely to protect the fawns from the tyranny of the strong; hence he has moral force enough to excel even his indirect preceptor Drona in this science. As a contrast, Kailasam highlights the selfish and mean motives of Arjuna who can only be jealous of Ekalavya and avid for worldly glory.

To focus the attention of the audience on the noble purpose of Ekalavya's life, Kailasam makes some important changes in the original episode. His Drona is caught in a mental conflict when Arjuna takes him to task for 'telling a lie', and is helplessly silent. Then, Ekalavya, though caught in the dilemma of a dual loyalty (towards his teacher on one side and his fawns on the other), realises his teacher's awkward position, and voluntarily offers his right thumb as the teacher's fee (gurudakshina). This act of romantic sacrifice exalts Ekalavya. Further, unlike in the epic, the playwright makes his Ekalavya first

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Ias The Pur ose (Bangalore, 1966), p.18.
observe exercises in archery from a distance and then practise before Drona's statue. This certainly makes the whole episode more natural and logical.

Ekalavya's act of voluntarily cutting his right thumb and placing it at the feet of his teacher takes the story to a climax and the scene is so moving that even Drona is aghast looking at the maimed hand of Ekalavya. Can there be a better tragic denouement for the suspense? On the model of Sanskrit plays, Ekalavya is made the hero (nāyaka) and Arjuna, the villain (pratināyaka) of the play. The 'purpose' (here, of learning archery) is the key-note of the play, and the word meaningfully occurs as many as 23 times in the play; thus it is needless to say that the title is highly significant.

It is in Fulfilment which is a natural sequel to The Purpose that Kailasam shows his ability to employ suspense and surprise. There is suspense in the playlet as the audience has no inkling at all of Krishna's plan to kill Ekalavya whose attention is deliberately diverted to the narration of the story of the Birds' Tree. It is no wonder that K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar has remarked, "Fulfilment is almost the crown of Kailasam's dramatic art" in spite of its lengthy speeches.

42. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p.237.
But, as compared to Ekalavya who is ennobled, Lord Krishna's character seems to be totally debased here. It is difficult for one to reconcile oneself to the horribly treacherous act committed by Krishna, though Ekalavya is supposed to have transgressed his purpose in life and become a human-wolf and his death is preordained by fate.

The Curse or Karna also bears testimony to Kailasam's originality in handling a theme from The Mahābhārata. To Kailasam, the entire epic is nothing but the tragedy of Karna (as remarked by Pampa, a Kannada poet). As such, the playwright makes Karna the nucleus, around which all the main events take place. In his design of idealising the hero, he deviates from the original and distorts facts also at places. His concept of Karna is briefly stated in his sonnet, according to which Karna is a —

Befooled babe 'gainst fate's bewild'ring odds! Bejewelled bauble of the jeering gods!

To project an ideal picture of his hero on the stage, Kailasam gives all importance to characterisation, particularly in some scenes. In the court scene, instead of rejoicing at the insult attempted by Dussasana to Draupadi, Karna shows his chivalrous nature by threatening the tyrant with the words, "Desist! Move but a step and you die!" His longest

44. For a detailed comparative study, see R.A. Malagi, 'The Curse or Karna', Perspectives (Madras, 1977).
45. 'Commiseration', Little Lays and Plays, p.19.
46. The Curse or Karna, p.50.
speech in the scene gives his frank analysis of human nature. In addition to his manliness, he is portrayed as "one who never did brush aside a call for aid from distressed souls." His loyalty to Duryodhana makes him affirm,

Brothers, kith or kin; blood or birth;  
Power, pelf, kingship or crown; all these are naught!  
The King...my Emperor ...tis he comes before all!48

Further, even just before his death, he takes Aswaththama to task for the latter's curse; this innovation made by Kailasam adds a sense of pathos and deepens the tragic situation.

While highlighting the greatness of his hero, Kailasam also ennobles some minor characters. Like Bhasa, the playwright ennobles Suyodhana (Duryodhana) who advocates Karna's right to become a king by saying,

Thy lowly birth, my brother, it will prove  
No robber of thy noble worth, not while  
I'm Crowned Prince of Kuruland.49

Further, while Kailasam's Kunti does not reveal her identity to Karna at the time of exacting the fateful promise, his foster-mother Radha is given greater importance, and in her he can observe a real mother that 'may not, will not see or know a world beyond her son'50.

47. Ibid., p.81.  
48. Ibid., p.89.  
49. Ibid., p.24.  
50. Ibid., p.92.
In his scheme of characterisation, Kailasam does not appear to have given much importance to status and birth. According to Karna, "intrinsic worth it is, not accidental birth", and "'tis worth that counts, not idle boast of blood or birth". This reminds us of the Karna of Bhattanārāyaṇa who says to Āsватṭhāma in his Sanskrit play Venīsamhāram: "I may be a soota (charioteer) or the son of a soota or somebody else; fate is responsible for one's birth, but valour is at least mine". But in The Curse, one fails to find the noble ideal of The Purpose elevating man's duties to the divine level. Thus, Karna does not hesitate to tell his teacher Bhārgava a lie about his caste; and it is difficult for us to reconcile ourselves fully to the playwright's attempt to idealise the hero.

As K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar remarks, "The working out of the curse punctuates the dramatic action, giving every time a new edge of despair to Karna's giant endeavours to redeem himself and his royal friend and master Duryodhana", and thus the tragedy deepens at each stage. But it is difficult to understand how the play could be 'an impression of Sophocles in five acts' though Kailasam himself calls it so. With the exception of the curse, there is nothing in common between the two plays. Of course, the tragedy is caused by Fate in the form of Bhārgava's curse.

51. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
52. Bhattanārāyaṇa, Venīsamhāram, Act 3.
53. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 238.
which makes Kama's skill at archery ineffective at a crucial moment; and the audience is made to experience pathos throughout. But the playwright has not met with complete success in making Kama a tragic hero of the Greek type because it is actually towards the end of the play that the real victimisation of the hero begins. Still less is his success in making Kama a tragic hero of the Shakespearian type for Kailasam's hero lacks a major tragic flaw of his own.

Kailasam does not forget the importance of the title in this play also as he highlights Bhargava's curse as the main cause of Kama's tragedy. Also, as in some of the Shakespearian plays, coming events cast their shadows in the opening scene itself. Further, as in Kalidasa's Sakuntalam, the fourth act claims greater attention of the audience though for a somewhat different reason. It is in this thrilling situation of romance that Kama stands up to save the honour of Draupadi in the royal court; also it is this attempt of the Kauravas to humiliate her (who is 'a flane brought forth to burn his house of cold Moon'\(^{54}\)) that sows the real seed of the ensuing battle.

But, however powerful the theme, the way in which Kailasam deals with it makes the play lack suspense; and the entire action looks like a series of incidents. The ill-fated Kama reveals the secret of his curse at every stage: To Gandhara, when he fails

\(^{54}\) The Curse or Karna, p.92.
to confront Duśāsana; and in the battlefield. There would have been some suspense if others were made to know the curse with surprise at a later stage.

Kailasam's Keechaka is disappointing so far as the handling of the epic theme is concerned. Entirely different from Keechaka of The Mahābhārata, the playwright's hero is so much exalted and idealised that the essence of the original story is lost.

Unlike the cruel and lusty epic hero, the playwright's Keechaka is a man of valour, who is highly skilled in mace (not in archery) and who returns disappointed from the wedding contest of Draupadi where, to his misfortune, archery is given importance. Thus frustrated, he resorts to war campaigns and brings wealth and fame to the Virata kingdom every year. Also, he differs from the epic hero as he is tired of too many victories and craves for defeat and death at the hands of an equally strong man. The playwright further makes him a man of chivalry, a man who gives a fair fight to his opponent whatever be his rank. In addition, this Keechaka is known for his impartiality in seeing the potential talent in others (here, in Brihannala), in his reverence for the guru (teacher), and for his frankness and objective thinking in admitting his fault of forgetting his teacher and in expressing his repentence to Draupadi.

But, this idealisation of the hero is out of all proportion, as it distorts the original completely and
the whole play looks like an essay on an ideal prince. Further, on account of the over-focussing of light on Keechaka, other main characters are relegated to the background, though occasionally one gets glimpses of characters like the fair-minded Bhima who does not want to be unfair to a dying man.

Thus, Kailasam goes to an extreme in his search for greatness in epic characters. No doubt, he strives to bring in the element of Fate to intensify the tragic helplessness of his hero. But, deficient in suspense and climax, his theme does not reach the heights of a Greek or Shakespearian tragedy; nor does he handle the original in such a way as to invest it with contemporary relevance. With all his innovations, his Keechaka is not of the type of Khadilkar's Keechaka-vadha which is a political allegory. Hence it is difficult to agree with S.Radhakrishnan who opines that "Even when he used classical themes, his purpose was contemporary". 55

As regards models and techniques, Kailasam too shows his inclination towards the Elizabethan drama like Sri Aurobindo though to a lesser degree. In spite of his deep reverence for the great values of our rich past, he too seems to ignore the ancient Indian dramatic tradition. The five-act structure in The Curse, the lengthy speeches in verse and the deliberate use of the western tragic concept in characterization illustrate the point.

But, how far is this imitation of the Elizabethan drama successful? Could the playwright not have followed the Sanskrit drama and our folk-stage?. The Purpose would perhaps have been more effective on the Indian stage if a Sutradhāra had been brought on the stage to introduce the theme to the audience and also if some folk-motif had been introduced to create the environment of the hunters. In The Curse, the five-act structure is episodic and achieves little development of the plot; and as already discussed, the revelation of the secret of his curse by Karna at every stage makes the whole play devoid of suspense and climax. Instead, Bhaṣa would have better served as the playwright's model in developing the tragic plot to its logical end.

Probably influenced indirectly by Greek tragedy and directly by the Elizabethan one, Kailasam makes rather a futile attempt to create tragic heroes of these types. As already noted, the playwright achieved some success in this regard in presenting the hero of The Purpose. Particularly his innovation that Ekalavya voluntarily sacrifices his right thumb, heightens the tragic situation; but in Fulfilment, though the playwright's imagination, no doubt, exalts Ekalavya, the murder of Ekalavya presented on the stage does a great injustice to the divine-human Krishna. The employment of the concept of the tragic hero in The Curse and Keschaka fails because the
over-idealisation of the hero totally eclipses the tragic flaw.

Though essentially a Kannada playwright, Kailasam employs the English language for these plays; and his explanation was; "The delineation of ideal characters requires a language which should not be very near to us". Though this seems to be true to some extent, it does not altogether justify his fascination for nineteenth century English and Elizabethan rhetoric. Kailasam's language in his English plays cannot equal the natural, easy-flowing spoken language of his Kannada plays (mostly of the educated class of ex-Mysore State which he himself calls 'Kannadanglo') which is quite in keeping with his characterisation and the development of plot. A.N.Krishna Rao is right when he observes, "His (Kailasam's) works in English lack spontaneity, the limpid grace, the liquid quality of his Kannada works. A greater admirer of Shakespeare, he imitates the bard and is far behind modern developments in English style".  

Like Bhasa, Kailasam shows his ability to compose crisp prose-dialogue at some places. For example, is a piece of dialogue in The Burden held between Anga a Chamberlain-at-court and Bharata when the former

feels nervous to report Rama's exile and Dasaratha's death:

Anga: (stragglingly and incoherently) The King ..... my liege is the Prince is ..... 

Bharata: (impatiently) Nay! 'tis dotage dulls his senses and we but waste our time! (aloud) Forgive us, m'lord but we would to our royal brother Rama ..... (attempts to walk past Anga).

Anga: (feebly attempting to restrain Bharata) Nay, Sire! th King ... the Prince ... the Princess ... Heavens ... I can .... no ... more! (falls forward).58

Another instance can be cited from a different play:

Ekalavyas You will see some body stop you! (sharply to Drona) Tell me Gurujee, if I had not learnt archery, would he have really been the greatest archer of the world?

Drona: Yes, Little, but ........?
Ekalavya: And you would have kept your promise?
Drona: Yes, Little man, but ........?
Ekalavya: (with flashing eyes and decisive voice)
Gurujee! You keep your promise ... and I will stop his mouth forever! 59

Kailasa sometimes uses prose in dialogue (eg. The Purpose), sometimes blank verse and sometimes a mixture of both (eg. The Curse). But his sudden swing from prose to verse (and vice versa) is difficult to explain; for example, the conversation of Bheeshma and others after Suyodhana talks to Karna in Act 2. His language often rises to true poetic heights. Here is an example:

58. Little Lays and Plays, p.42.
59. The Purpose, p.18.
Krishna: ".............

The arrow head in vanity of slaying, doth
Forget the shaft that guided it!
The shaft again in vanity of guiding arrowhead
Forget the string that sped it on
The string again in vanity of guiding shaft
Forget the bow that help'd it spring;
The bow again, in vanity of springing string
Forget the man that bended it;
And he again, in vanity of bowmanship
Forget th' Eternal He that ever stands
Behind him using man for his own use inscrutable!
Smother vanity, Paartha, and think of but the Cause. 60

At the same time, he is often rhetorical, and his language is not so refined as that of Sri Aurobindo. His fondness for forced alliteration in particular eclipses his line of thought. All the plays except Fulfilment provide many examples:

Ambitious Arrogant Aryan Boy; 61
An unmeant untruth unwittingly uttered; 62
Abjure ambition; absorb absolution!
Perish flesh! Cherish ... nourish spirit!
Erase thine entity! Embrace Entirety! 63

Like Anand, Kailasam resorts to the practice of using Sanskrit and other Indian words to convey the required shades of meaning as the vast cultural background of the country demands; for example, 'Gurujee' 64 (for 'preceptor'), 'brahmacharya' 65 (for 'celibacy'). But he seems to overdo such a

60. The Curse, pp. 119-120.
61. The Purpose, p. 64.
62. Ibid., p. 69.
63. The Curse, p. 120.
64. Ibid., p. 1.
65. Ibid., p. 47.
practice even where there are good equivalents in English. For example, 'pariksha'\textsuperscript{66} (test, contest), 'Sabha'\textsuperscript{67} (assembly, court), 'Khadga'\textsuperscript{68} (sword), 'Nishada'\textsuperscript{69} (hunter). Also his style is marred by excessive use of archaic words: for example, 'atween'\textsuperscript{70}, 'ascaled'\textsuperscript{71} and also by his queer usages like 'own own brother'\textsuperscript{72}, 'own own son to Kunti'\textsuperscript{73}.

Kailasam's English plays provide a curious contrast to his Kannada plays in themes and language. While his English plays deal with epic themes and a world of romance, his Kannada plays reflect the contemporary society and its problems. In fact, Kailasam is one of the two dramatists (the other being 'Sriranga') to whom goes the credit of revolutionising Kannada Drama which was languishing in the stagnant, stereo-typed and age-worn mythological style. In the words of K.D.Kurtakoti, he "brought various specimens of the society on the stage for the first time — hollow students even with University degrees, empty-handed lawyers who boast of themselves, boy-scouts

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Ibid.}, p.20, 34, 105.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ibid.}, p.57.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}, p.26.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{The Purpose}, p.35 & \textit{Little Lays and Plays}, p.54.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{The Curse}, p.95.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Ibid.}, p.97.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}, p.88.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}, p.97.
unconsciously showing nobility, widows who were subjected to bitter suffering, hen-pecked husbands impoverished by their wives. With his power of observation, his knowledge of contemporary society and his deep understanding of human nature, he could create immortal characters like Pōlee Kittee, Ranganna, Nāgatte and Sātu in his Kannada plays. Thus he "captured the public imagination by the fresh breath of life and vitality", and "brought down drama from over-dramatic heights". It is a pity that Kailasam did very little of this kind in his English plays.

In the field of Indo-English Drama, Kailasam stands apart from his contemporaries like Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. He appears to share only one thing with Tagore i.e., his technique of giving prominence to neglected characters of the epics. The language used by Sri Aurobindo and Tagore (in English translation in the case of the latter) is more refined and poetic; and most of their characters are highly symbolic, compared to those of Kailasam. Sri Aurobindo mostly employs old myths and legends like that of Perseus to project contemporary problems;

75. K.Sampathgiri Rao, Appendix - The Purpose (Bangalore, 1966), p.(i).
76. D.V.Gundappa, Foreword, Kailasam avara smarane (Bangalore, 1952), p.(vii).
but Kailasam shows his interest only in highlighting the greatness of tragic heroes of the epics. But Kailasam has a better stage sense and his plays appear to be capable of greater success on the stage than most of those of Tagore and of Sri Aurobindo which are chiefly of literary interest.

III

The pre-Independence phase provides some noteworthy examples of poets who ventured in the field of drama also. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (b. 1898) noted for his versatality, has to his credit a number of plays and playlets — social, historical and devotional.

Five Plays (1937) a collection of Chattopadhyaya's social playlets contains: The Window, The Parrot, The Sentry's Lantern, The Coffin and The Evening Lamp. Playlets of a slightly different type are: The Saint (1946) and The Sleeper Awakened (n.d.). Also, there are a few devotional and historical plays: Jayadeva (1924), Pundalik (1924), Saku Bai (1924), Raidas (1925), and Tukaram, Choka Mela and Eknath (all 1925–6)/Siddhartha (1956).

While Chattopadhyaya's social plays, 'manifestos of new realism,' are mostly symbolic, didactic and propagandistic, the main content of the hagiological

77. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 234.
plays is the conflict between good and evil, and the final triumph of the former over the latter and the assertion of God's grace.

The Window, the first in the collection of the author's five social plays, attempts a rather melodramatic picture of the cruelty inflicted by capitalistic industrialists on poor labourers and the consequent misery to which the latter are subjected. As a mark of sympathy for the people in misery, the playwright has dedicated the play to "The Brave Textile Workers of Parel, Bombay". Here is a presentation of realistic pictures of workers' untold sufferings and unjust law-making which curbs all their fundamental rights. The workman's wife takes Aju and Jyoti to task for wasting a match-stick though her poverty does not come in the way of her generously giving away an earthen pot to her neighbours. Their desperate condition makes her believe in the law of Karma. The workman who enters the house, attacks God, for God, according to him, has been bought up by the mill-owners; he shows his utter disgust at the new taxation policy of the Government; he remarks that they would tax everything — even dreams, songs, sobs and laughters. In the end, the idea of revolt in the mind of the workers makes him smash the window panes. The action is followed by his shouts, 'Light, Light' and thus the play ends on a note of hope.  

The Parrot is a tragedy dedicated to "All those whose morality is not a parrot-cage". The theme of the play is man's inner urge for freedom from the bondage created by himself in the form of customs like marriage. Subjected to conventional morality, the woman in the play leads a hard life and her talkative son is the only solace to her. Then the man (her husband) enters dead drunk and forcibly takes away the sleeping son for a 'sea-bath'. In his absence, the tramp, the woman's first lover comes back with the hope of freeing her from bondage. Meanwhile the man returns with the report that he has himself drowned the boy as he did not want his son to grow up to be a drunkard. Then the woman surprisingly discloses that the boy was not his son at all.

The Sentry's Lantern brings to light the evils of imperialism as can be seen in the playwright's significant dedication itself: "To all the victims of Imperialist Gallows". Here is an expression of sentiments and thoughts by three victims, namely, a merchant, a bourgeois poet and a worker just before they are hanged. Compared to the poet and the worker, the merchant is thoroughly upset at the prospect of losing material wealth and happiness once for all, and is too timid to face death; he dreams of multiplying his wealth in his next birth. The bourgeois poet, always sheltered from the hard lot of labourers, is an impractical man worshipping Nature's beauty and he would
not bid a good-bye to this beautiful world so easily. He has a hope of rebirth and conviction that his poems will live and he, through them. On the other hand, the pragmatic approach of the worker to the world of misery leads him to a total disbelief in a merciful God and a firm belief in revolt; and he is prepared to face death boldly.

'Dedicated to the progressive writers of India', The Coffin, a two-act play satirises a bourgeois artist and his false world and highlights the responsibilities of writers.

Mohan the protagonist is seen planning to go to Europe. His aunt Kumudini, a bundle of complexes is the sole protectress of the family. She expects her nephew Mohan to be a puppet-poet in her hands and keeps him away from the stark realities of life. Mohan loses control over his wife Nalini who is gradually attracted towards a rich man. He helplessly supports his aunt in driving out the milkman who demands money. Then the carpenter enters with a wooden cradle ordered by Nalini; and to Mohan's little daughter it looks more like a coffin. Meanwhile, the aunt loses a lot of money on account of a Bank crash; and all the vain grandeur of their family thus destroyed, she becomes almost mad. Subsequently the real man in Mohan bursts out and gets rid of the illusion of life caused by the aunt. In the
end, the little girl falls dead and the aunt shrieking rushes out with the cradle.

The *Evening Lamp* the last play in the collection is a poetic evocation of life, and the picture presented is that of a young man who queerly observes his own shadows. It is dedicated "to those who may be able to light it towards the new dawn of realism".

The young man, probably in quest of the realities of life, wishes for all the aspects of life in shadows. He is glad to see the maid with a lamp because it makes her cast a shadow. He sees purity in shadows and wants to chase them until they bring him to the door of Light. His mother complains of his lack of interest in his studies. He would like to convert his mother also to the cult of shadow-lovers. Even the doctor who enters there to cure him, is contemptuously looked at by him; and this lover of shadows cannot be expected to love a girl. The play ends with his symbolic remarks; "At last, we, the Lovers of Shadow, ourselves the shadows moving to our new home.... come, let me lead you into our new home". 79

The serious-minded author of social plays now resorts to farce in showing another evil of our society. The *Saint* contains only one scene, the theme of which is the exposure of dangers caused by the 'saints' in society.

At the foot of a tree in Benares, lies a man as if dead. To some men who enter the spot, he is a 'saint'; but there is a Seventh Man with a rational outlook, who goes on passing critical remarks on their words of undue praise for the 'Saint'. Then, an old woman sentimentally brings her grand-child to seek the blessings of this 'miracle-man', places some money at his feet and departs. A young woman who has been sitting silent all the while, picks up the coins and slowly walks out without a word. Meanwhile the word 'opium' uttered by the Seventh Man wakes up the 'Saint'. The young woman returns with some opium; which he gulps down and sits up. At that time two policemen enter and arrest him.

The themes of Chattopadhyaya's social playlets show that he, like Anand in his Untouchable, is committed to certain ideas as indicated by his deep compassion for the hardships of the labour class, his attack on the artificially-created morality, his exposition of the dark side of imperialism, his call to the writers regarding their genuine duties, his aspiration for the emergence of a real life and his exposition of the havoc made by pseudo miracle-men. These playlets with their message are the products of the Progressive Writers' Movement of those days.

While dealing with social themes, the poet-playwright often becomes symbolic. He employs symbolism even in
the titles: In the first playlet, the word 'The Window' is significantly used several times as the symbol of hope to workers and their children. The pathos is enhanced by the condition of children who have to derive light (hope) only by looking at the beauties of Nature through the window and also by Jyoti's innocent (but symbolic) comparisons — the red cloud looking like a fire in the furnace which had taken the life of her grandfather. The Parrot is truly dramatic in its management of suspense (of the secret of the boy's birth) and has an effective climax. But, in spite of these dramatic elements, the whole piece can be better read as a symbolic poem highlighting man's craving for freedom; and this is corroborated by the women's address to the parrot:

"Poor caged bird! — and he bought you at the market for a rupee — one rupee — and for that one stupid little round coin of silver you have lost your freedom. You have lost the sky and the meaning of your wings .... You have lost the language of your soul and with it your mate .... you yearn for freedom? But it's no use. Someone has bought you for a rupee! .... What ... am I you, poor caged bird?"\(^80\)

In The Sentry's Lantern, the sentry with a lantern in hand appears in the beginning of the play and also at the end when he puts out the flames of three wicks symbolically indicating the hanging of the three victims. Equally symbolic are the words of the workers when he proclaims

\(^{80}\) Ibid., pp.35-36.
his faith in revolution. "...The Revolution will come .... red like this dawn, red like this dawn". Further, the pragmatic worker appears to be the mouthpiece of the progressive playwright. Correcting the poet who soars high in the sky of the imagination, he remarks, (the poet).

should be born as something more honest than a comfortable bourgeois poet .... at least as an earthen pot in a worker's kitchen which will be of some service ...."82

Chattopadhyaya becomes highly symbolic in The Coffin also. While to Mohan's daughter the cradle significantly looks more like a coffin, the carpenter does not find much difference between a cradle and a coffin. Mohan, jealously guarded by his aunt like the dragon in the fable, comes out of the illusory world created by her. The playwright speaks through this new Mohan that a writer should give a realistic picture of life instead of shutting himself in an ivory tower; keeping aside his description of "the soul and God and the consciousness behind the universe",83 the poet should "write about starving babies, about cruel masters, about poor sad women, about people who are shot because they asked for bread".84 Thus, in accordance with the dedication "to the Progressive Writers of India", the

81. Ibid., p.70.
82. Ibid., p.70.
83. Ibid., p.99.
84. Ibid., p.138.
theme is well brought out, highlighting the responsibilities of writers. The suspense caused by Mohan's schizophrenic attitude and the climax reached on account of the aunt's death give full scope for action and thereby make the play stageworthy.

In *The Evening Lamp*, the shadows cast symbolise purity in life. The play has no story, no action, no suspense. It is nothing but a projection of the author's aspirations for the emergence of a new life, free from impurity, ugliness and corruption. Acting the role of the aspirant, he remarks: "Shadows are pure and have no false relationship; the shadow of a snake is free from venom, and the shadow of a tiger from its ravening hunger. Why, the shadow of a priest is unpolluted by the despicable thing that casts it, and with the corruption inside it.....". Surely one could expect such words only from a didactic writer.

While Chattopadhyaya symbolically presents some social evils in these plays, he employs farce in *The Saint* to expose the corruption practised in the name of religion. The pseudo-saint, who is the hero, is portrayed effectively though he speaks only a few words. In contrast to the six devotees who are fully superstitious, the Seventh Man stands out with his pungent critical remarks. The climax is reached in the

sensational scene where the policemen suddenly arrive at the spot and arrest the 'saint'. As G.S. Balarama Gupta remarks, the playlet "achieves its effect by concentration that is needed for a short play". The rapid action couched in mordant irony, adds to the stageworthiness of the play; as an illustration, here are the remarks made by the Seventh Man on hearing the old woman's prayer to the 'saint':

Old Woman: O Saint of God! cure my grandchild. If she gets cured, I will offer her to the temple.

Seventh Man: And to the lust of idle priesthood.

Old Woman: She will be the woman of God, and your bride when she grows up.

Seventh Man: God and he are one. They will have to share the poor child when she grows into a woman.

Thus, in his social plays, Chattopadhyaya shows considerable skill in presenting social evils and problems by employing symbols. To make the presentation more effective, he makes many of his characters and situations stand in sharp contrast with one another: the tramp, the real lover of the woman, and her husband in The Parrot; the poet in his imaginary world and the practical-minded

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worker in *The Sentry's Lantern*: the same Mohan in two worlds, one false and the other real in *The Coffin*; the pseudo-saint and the Seventh Man (the rationalist) in *The Saint*.

In addition to this technique, the playwright has, as already discussed, concentrated on a single topic in each play; which is an essential feature of a short play. But, in his passion for commitment, he at times shows a greater enthusiasm in composing thought-provoking dialogue than in dramatising a particular situation. This can be observed particularly in *The Sentry's Lantern* and *The Evening Lamp*, which are lacking in action, suspense and climax. However, except in *The Parrot* where the theme appears to have been stretched to a dangerous extreme, the other plays do possess stageworthiness. As for the form, it is clear that the playwright's model is the western short-play and one-act play; and, as discussed already, he meets with considerable success in *The Coffin* and *The Saint*.

In his playlet *The Sleeper Awakened* (n.d.), Chattopadhyaya turns to allegory in extending his imagination to the past. The theme is the triumph of the ancient life of simplicity over the transient spell of luxury derived from the artificiality of modern civilisation.
The play begins with the scene (nightmare) of the Mother who leads a simple life with her young son and daughter, their belief being in the essential nature of hard labour. One day Civilisation tries to tempt them with fascinating descriptions of atheism and the whole material world. Lured by temptations, the Young Man tastes some whisky. This results in his experience in the palace of Nightmare under the supervision of the Grand Vizier of the 'civilised' world. Characters like Modern Education, Degradation and Private Property join together to drive home the tenets of 'civilisation'; and also resist the entry of Agriculture and Spinning Wheel. After fully tasting the pleasures of 'civilisation', the Young Man is bitten by a poisonous snake. Instructed by the Soul Force, he is taken back to his house in the Old City where the spell is broken and he is redeemed.

The playwright has allegorically projected the image of the illusory benefits of modern civilization and also the shams practised in its name. But the theme is handled in such a way that, instead of suggesting remedial measures for the ills of modern civilization as the practical-minded thinker Swami Vivekananda did, the author only harps on the spiritual; which is corroborated by the departing advice of the Soul Force: "Take care of your soul. Save it from the painted pollution of earthly desires". 88

An unnatural technique in the first scene is that, when the door is knocked at, the people inside go on guessing about the person without opening the door for a long time. This is a rather artificial way of creating suspense; but the dialogue is certainly crisp at many places. Here is an illustrative conversation between Civilisation and Soul Force:

Civilisation: Who are you?
Soul Force: I am Soul Force.
Civilisation: What does that mean?
Soul Force: It means something more powerful than a bomb or a machine gun.

Civilisation: You are evidently either drunk or mad.
Soul Force: Indeed I am both.
Civilisation: Then get out of the house.
Soul Force: That is not possible.
Civilisation: I'll drive you out.
Soul Force: You cannot.
Civilisation: You think I cannot?
Soul Force: I know you cannot since I am that whereby the beauty of the world blossoms on the verge of Time. I am everywhere and and in all things, in the flower and the mountain, the sky and the storm, in the heart that loves, and lo! even in the heart that is hot with anger.89

Nevertheless, the play is more to be read than staged as an effective presentation of the allegorical characters on the stage naturally poses difficult problems.

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89. Ibid., pp.86-88.
In his treatment of hagiological themes, Chattopadhyaye seems to be more interested in showing how good gains an upperhand in its conflict with evil than in dramatising events. Sometimes, as in *Siddhartha, Men of Peace* (1956), he adopts the method of playwrights like Sri Aurobindo and Girish Karnad, and interprets the legend to suit a contemporary purpose.

*Jayadeva* is a short verse-play in 5 scenes presenting a part of the poet-saint Jayadeva's life. The main body of the play contains an account of the miracles that happen as the saint wanders from place to place winning reverence from pilgrims. Once, during his journey through a forest, two robbers cut off his limbs and rob him of his belongings. The good King Crouncha who happens to pass by, sees Jayadeva in that condition and takes him to his palace. He spends his days taking spiritual guidance from the saint. Meanwhile the two robbers visit the king's court under disguise and are shocked to see Jayadeva there. The noble king treats them well and sends them away with many riches. But, after some time the palace guard reports that both of them are dead; which deeply upsets the saint.

The play is incomplete as it stands, and it does not touch upon one of the important incidents in the saint's life and his wife Padmavati's, namely, that which led him to compose his magnum opus *Ashtapadi*.
The first scene (at Jagannath) is almost complete in itself and has little bearing upon the following scenes. It is the preface that gives us an idea of Jayadeva's place as a poet in his times; it deals with the crowning of Jayadeva as poet both by men and by the gods. The scenes that follow deal with such incidents as tend to bring out vividly the saintly strength and patience in his character. His magnanimity is well brought out, particularly in the last scene where he takes to task even God for His vengeful attitude towards the robbers. In the middle scenes, the playwright seems to go on spinning the thin plot out. Further, on account of lack of sufficient action, the play, however enchanting its poetry might be, lends itself to good reading rather than staging.

Almost similar in theme is Raidas, the Cobbler-Saint. Once, when Raidas is worshipping the image of Lord Vishnu as usual, three Brahmins, proud of their higher birth, visit the place and pass some bitter remarks on his mode of worship and his disqualification for it. Thereupon Raidas rips open his chest and reveals to them the qualifying sacred thread inside. The incident opens the eyes of the Brahmins, who then prostrate themselves before the cobbler-saint.

The playwright seems to be concerned here with the prevalent evils of the caste-system and highlights the
individual in the realm of religion. The plot which moves rather slowly in the beginning and in the middle, takes a dramatic turn in the end. Even within the limited scope available, the characters shine by contrast and help the development of the plot: Raidas, the real devotee of the Lord; the washerman and the stone-cutter who conceive God from their own individual points of view; and the three Brahmins representing the type of people who are too insolent to know the core of religion.

The other short plays on saints noted earlier (Pundalik, Saku Bai, Tukaram) follow a similar pattern.

In a later play, Chattopadhyaya tries to project a contemporary image with the help of a hagiographical theme. In Siddhartha, Man of Peace, he tries not only to focus on Siddhartha's enlightenment, but also to project an image of the present crisis caused by the nuclear race; this is indicated in the Prologue itself:

War! bloody war!
Human life bled and broken!
Mothers' wombs rendered travesty!
Millions dying and dead
in Europe
in Russia
in China.90

This is an experimental play in eight acts (with a number of very short scenes) rich in both poetry and drama.

Right from his childhood, Prince Siddhartha of Kapilavastu puzzles all in the palace with his unusual, saintly outlook on life. Alerted by the sage Asita Muni's prophecy, the king keeps him in the palace shut from the dark realities of life like old age, disease and death. To attract him further to the material world, he provides marital happiness too for Siddhartha, whose wife Yasodara duly begets a son. Meanwhile, in spite of all precautions, he is made to see the ugly side of life by his villainous cousin Devadutta. Siddhartha's irresistible urge to bring salvation to the suffering humanity can no longer be suppressed. One night he leaves the capital. After he wanders from place to place for some time, the path to salvation is revealed in a flash to him, and he becomes the Buddha, the Enlightened one. He is attacked by many who finally become his followers.

In addition to the presentation of the catastrophe caused by the present nuclear war, Chattopadhyaya successfully employs the parrot in the cage as a symbol of Siddhartha's spiritual hunger; its liberation from the cage coincides with the enlightenment of Siddhartha.

The development of the plot (that is, the prince's renunciation) goes hand in hand with the growth of Siddhartha's personality. The hero of the play shines throughout as a noble and compassionate man who, without caring for the hereditary throne, "has come to shatter
human bonds, to rid the world of mournful shadow." The forces pulling him in various directions are represented by some minor characters like the materialistically minded king; Siddhartha's cousin Devadutta who is a villain; the unscrupulous jester; Chamma the most faithful friend of Siddhartha; the robber Angūlimāla who, under Buddha's influence, eschews violence; Yasodara who sacrifices her comfort in favour of her lord; (which is shown in the touching scene of Buddha's last visit to his place).

At times the playwright in Harindranath is overborne by the poet and he thrusts into the mouth of characters drawn from common humanity words which appear to be above their capacity; here is an illustration:

First Milkman: Fed on the milk of our cows, he is bound to grow round like a moon.

Woman Attendant: What a Prince we have now to attend on! He seems to be one who is born to yield as much peace and beauty as the world may be in need of.92

Thus, in his 'Saint plays' Chattopadhyaya idealizes his heroes so as to highlight their greatness and devotion to God. Incidentally in some cases like Raidas, he also tries to expose the evils of the caste-system in our society. So far as this desire to interpret a saint's life in terms of a contemporary problem is concerned, he goes to a higher plane in Siddhartha where Buddha's quest

91. Ibid., p.22.
92. Ibid., p.24.
for liberation from the self-created human bondage is coupled with the anxiety caused by modern perils like the nuclear race.

So far as models and techniques are concerned, Chattopadhyaya seems to have been less influenced by the Western drama in depicting the lives of the saints (of course, with the exception of Siddhartha) than in his social plays. Though the models of Indian Classical Drama and folk-play are not directly followed, these plays mostly resemble the tradition. For instance, in addition to the traditional development of plot focussing attention on the devotional aspect, he introduces Jayadēva in a preface, which is perhaps a variant of the Sutradhara technique. But in Siddhartha, Chattopadhyaya seems to be over-enthusiastic in his use of various western techniques like the Prologue and the Epilogue, the commentary, the chorus, voices, and light and sound techniques. But these modern stage-techniques and directions fail to create the desired effect on the stage on account of the unwieldly nature of the play which has many short scenes, and suffers from a general lack of action.

Chattopadhyaya mostly employs verse for dialogue in his hagiological plays (except in Siddhartha which is a mixture of prose and verse) whereas his social plays are in prose which is a blend of spoken English and rhetoric. e.g. In the very first play The Window
itself, the optimistic revolutionary worker declares:
"Crushed body and soul under heavy machinery that belongs to the few, we shall rise...." 93

At the same time the playwright can also very well bring out the worry of a character in a soliloquy couched in a colloquial style. To illustrate, here are the remarks made by Mohan when he is helplessly under the full control of his aunt: "0 What a typical old maid! I must do this and, I must do that. I mustn't do this and I mustn't do that. I mustn't read newspapers because they are vulgar, and I mustn't meet so-and-so, and I mustn't move a finger to anybody .....". 94

In Siddhartha, Chattopadhyaya's prose and verse are both distinctly coloured by romanticism. Here is an illustration: When the King rejoices at the birth of a grandson, he says:

**King:** The dream of life has now started for you ...Rejoice!
**Siddhartha:** Rejoice?
**Minister:** Prince, .... The dream of life has started for you.
**King:** The real dream of life .......
**Siddhartha:** To be followed by the true awakening.
**Minister:** One more link in the chain of the royal line.
**Siddhartha:** One more suffering.... 95

A typical example of the verse is seen in the speech of Mara the demon when he approaches Siddhartha to destroy

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94. Ibid., p.80.
his penance:

Afraid of death and old age and disease.......  
O off! and you are a warrior, if you please!  
Come, give up all this farce. What man attains  
To real liberation except through chains!  
Go back, go back from where you came. Go back! 96

To sum up, Chattopadhyaya's social themes demonstrate  
his commitment to the Progressive Writers' Movement of  
the time, and symbolically present social problems like  
the hardships of the labour class, the evils of the  
British imperialistic rule, the attitude of some writers  
sitting in an ivory tower and the exploitation of popular  
superstition; he even indirectly suggests solutions  
to the problems. He also shows his ability to dramatise  
a situation well. While The Coffin and The Saint serve  
as examples of stageworthy plays, The Sentry's Lantern  
and The Evening Lamp limit themselves to a mere discussion,  
and lack suspense and action; and though The Parrot is  
dramatic in the end, the playwright seems to be confused  
about the theme.

Like Kailasam, Chattopadhyaya employs hagiological  
themes mainly to dramatise episodes in the lives of saints  
bringing to light their greatness, and incidentally  
exposes social discrimination in a play like Raidas.  
In Siddhartha, he (like Sri Aurobindo) partially tries  
to interpret the saint's life from the angle of a  
contemporary problem like the madness of the modern  
nuclear race; but, in contrast to Sri Aurobindo's

96. Ibid., p.186.
Perseus, the unwieldy nature of the play and the lack of planning of the plot in Siddhartha preclude full success in this direction. As already discussed, the playwright does not totally forget the Indian classical tradition in highlighting the spiritual-mindedness of saints. However, as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks, "Harindranath's plays and playlets on the lives of the saints are perhaps less dramatically effective than his plays of social protest, but they have their individuality too". 97

Though Chattopadhyaya and Sri Aurobindo cannot be considered to be in the same class so far as the use of language is concerned, the social nature of some of Chattopadhyaya's themes ensures a more crisp dialogue and use of the spoken word. In stage sense, he equals Kailasam though some of his plays like Siddhartha lack suspense and concentration.

Thus, Chattopadhyaya, though essentially a poet, makes a brave attempt to dramatise events in the lives of saints and also to expose the current problems of society in the form of short plays. But, in spite of his knowledge of the ancient Hindu dramatic tradition, he fails to meet the demands of the stage so far as full-length plays are concerned.

97. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 234.
It appears that women writers were not very much attracted towards Indo-Anglian Drama. Among the few women playwrights, Bharati Sarabhai (b. 1912) is outstanding. She is the author of two plays, viz., *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952). While traditional womanhood and Gandhian social doctrine form the theme of the former, the complex sensitive nature of the modern sophisticated woman and her private world are presented in the latter.

Moved by a story published in *Harijan*, Bharati Sarabhai wrote *The Well of the People*. An old woman fails to achieve her ambition to go on a pilgrimage to Kashi and Haridwar, and decides to please God by building a well for 'the untouchables' in her village with her savings.

The same concept that God is within, is presented in *Two Women* in another way. The westernised Kanakaraya comes into conflict with his wife Anuradha who is very much inclined to go to the Himalayas in her quest for spiritual peace. At last, Kanakaraya gives up his rigid stand; but at the same time, Anuradha gradually comes to find little meaning in her desire as she can see the Himalayas everywhere. But the sudden death of Kanakaraya renders the new-found realisation useless to the couple.

Sarabhai attempts to co-ordinate the ancient religion of India and the new society, and the old woman in
The Well of the People acts as her mouthpiece in this regard. The play appears to be a pageant in verse where the inner life of man is projected. The author herself explains in the Preface: "Well, if you will have it so, the elements of conventional drama are not here. I am content to leave The Well of the People as it first came to me, the presentation in terms of concrete background of states of man's experience." 98

In stages, the playwright projects a picture of the synthesis of religion and social service. Here she shows the influence of Gandhiji's socio-political ideology with which she symbolically charges the simple story.

The play opens with two groups of people on the stage, viz., Gandhian workers (Sanatan and Vichitra) and the other one of some tradition-bound old women forming the chorus. Then, a description of Haridwar which attracts millions of devotees, is followed by the presentation of the old woman with her quenchless desire to visit the place of pilgrimage in spite of her physical and financial disability.

The theme is next developed by the introduction of social workers who cannot find any wisdom in the faith of devotees. Chetan remarks:

For when they came back, it was blindingly clear
The slums, the village hovels, had not changed
And would not change ...............99

Then a voice calls the individual soul to turn inward:

Why do you go to Haridwar, to Kashi,
O my Soul, when I am within?
Pilgrim, pilgrim, why, what is it you seek outside?100

Next there is a village scene to which this search for faith leads. The chorus sung by young peasants reveals how they were tortured both by the rich in the country and the British. This naturally leads to the next chorus sung by social workers heralding the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, to whom millions of villagers are 'Daridra Narayana, our apotheosis of the poor'.101

Against this setting, a series of pictures of the mode of the fulfilment of the heroine's desire are projected -- the old woman's inability to save enough money required for the desired pilgrimage in spite of her hard toil during a long span of about twenty years; the added disadvantage of her physical infirmity; the consequent turmoil in her mind; the sudden dawning of wisdom in the idea of digging a well for the Harijans and seeing the sacred Ganga in it. Instead of performing the traditional worship of the Lord Narayana, she has successfully accomplished the worship of Daridra Narayana before her end.

99. Ibid., p.18.
100. Ibid., p.22.
101. Ibid., p.29.
Thus the theme of *The Well of the People* presents a beautiful synthesis of religion and social service, and shows how suffering and sacrifice can lead to a better life. It is "a bold attempt on the part of Bharati Sarabhai to have taken up the challenge to present a spiritual problem in terms of physical action".\(^\text{102}\)

This can be observed in the attitude of the characters forming the chorus and symbolising different aspects of the human mind. The typical Indian village and the typical old woman who has assimilated the real religion, are authentically drawn. It is the indirect inspiration derived from Gandhiji that elevates the old woman's mind from the personal plane to the universal.

Sarabhai further extends her theme of the practical realisation of God to her next play *Two Women* in a different way. Like the old woman in *The Well of the People*, Anuradha in *Two Women* ultimately realises that God is within. In *Two Women* also, one can see the blending of the practical and the mystic elements in the Indian ethos. As C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer remarks in his foreword to the play, the author "has sought in this play to depict some aspects of the outer and the inner life of India in transition, interpreting them as a series of dualities".\(^\text{103}\)

The two women who represent the two faces of modern Indian womanhood are Anuradha, the wife of the anglicised

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Kanakaraya and Urvashi, the widowed girl who becomes a devotional singer. Of the two, Anuradha, though appearing to have bound herself to family and superstition, is freer than Urvashi; for the latter fulfils her life only when she accepts a proper blending of the material and the spiritual, and the life-partnership of Darshan. The two women seem to be complementary, and true to the Vedantic thought, they finally show that God can be found here and now, in the field of action.

In the three-act play, the conflict between tradition and modernity is shown in the beginning of the first act itself in the conversation between Kanakaraya and his sensitive wife. To create suspense, Kanakaraya is made to nurse a fear of losing Anuradha forever if she is allowed to come under a spiritual influence. Thus, he is worried at the news of her old friend Urvashi's arrival, which has already made a strong impact not only on his daughter Lata and Anuradha's brother Darshan, but also on Anuradha herself.

With Anuradha resolved to be free from the family bondage and to go to the Himalayas, the playwright extends the suspense in the second act where Kanakaraya arrive and Anuradha at a compromise for a time, but go back to their respective rigid positions again; and even a proposal for a holiday-tour fails to solve the problem.

In the third act, Sarabhai builds up the action to a natural climax where Kanakaraya and Anuradha
bluntly decide to follow their own separate ways. Further complications lead to Anuradha's sudden realisation of the existence of the Himalayas everywhere. But a secret disease results in her husband's death, and thus the couple cannot benefit from the new-found realisation. Thus the playwright logically develops the plot to a tragic end.

The characters in Two Women are admirably designed to help the presentation of the conflict in the plot. The westernised Kanakaraya is full of natural dignity and refinement, and is able to find in Anuradha a woman who "is modern in many ways, but remains a Hindu wife". 104 While Lata is the symbol of pure youth, there is the sharp-tongued, frank Sudha, who, according to Miss Boulton, is 'a convent-product of Anglo-India painted all over her' and who 'is not my (Darshan's) idea of India'. 105 Minor characters like Miss Boulton, Chandra Bai and Shastriji provide humour, e.g. Shastriji, on seeing Sudha dressed in slacks asks Kanakaraya, "Diwan Saheb, can you tell me the unique function of this substitute for a sari?" 106 Thus Sarabhai's characters ably bring out the central idea of the play, which is "the tension at the heart of Hindustan, the opposing pulls of tradition and revolt, the paralysis that makes the impulse to move forward so futile a gesture". 107

104. Ibid., p.68.
105. Ibid., p.61.
106. Ibid., p.63.
Though the ultimate realisation of the omnipresence of God is the essence of both the plays, *The Well of the People* deals with a problem relating to the country in general while *Two Women* presents a picture of Indian womanhood. Apart from the language used (poetry in one and prose in the other), there is also a marked difference between the two in suspense, which is found to a greater extent in *Two Women*.

Sarabhai treats her themes in accordance with the Indian tradition of a beautiful blending of the material and the spiritual. She appears to take her characters the old woman and Anuradha, from the custom-bound world, and leads them to the ultimate Reality of the Vedantic heights by making them visualise the omnipresence of God.

At the same time, the playwright does not seem to reject the western influence. For example, *The Well of the People* reminds us of Yeats in the simultaneous representation of different characters fixed in their different environments with the same background (e.g. in the beginning of the play we see in Haridwar itself a band of Gandhian workers like Chetan vis-a-vis millions of tradition-bound pilgrims).

Of the two plays, *The Well of the People* is lacking in suspense, since it appears to be one continuous scene. But the playwright makes up for the absence of regular scenes by adopting the technique...
of the chorus to indicate a change of scene; and this technique enhances the stage-effect. Though this reminds us of the chorus in Greek plays, the playwright might have been indirectly influenced by the Indian folk-stage: (e.g. The shadow of the old woman, the heroine, is cast on the stage before her actual appearance).

Unlike Sri Aurobindo and others, Sarabhai does not unnecessarily resort to the Elizabethan model and techniques. This can be observed even in Two Women where she does not introduce lengthy speeches, while she logically takes the story to a tragic end without introducing sub-plots.

So far as the language is concerned, The Well of the People is poetic and symbolic where as Two Women employs a realistic idiom. But the poetic voice heard in The Well of the People is not the voice of the Romantic-Victorian poet. It has distinct affinities with the style of modern verse drama, as evidenced by the easy flow of the verse spoken by the characters. For example, here is a description of the advent of Mahatma Gandhi:

We sought the pattern of our regeneration
In him; for him our seven hundred thousand
Villages were to be each in intention
A miniature nation; for him Daridra
Harayana, our apotheosis of the poor.
We saw straightened his immemorial back.
To his own self, its golden age, we made him look.
We said, pilgrim, pilgrim of this late time,
Drink, drink from the dreaming soul of rebel Gandhi.\textsuperscript{108}

Though her poetic language is not so refined as Sri Aurobindo's, Sarabhai does not employ rhetoric like Kailasam. An effective staging of this opera-like play requires a proper rendering of the verse in the folk-tradition.

\textit{Two Women}, written in prose, is more realistic, though Sarabhai fails to employ an effective spoken language here. As the occasion demands, she can bring out the humour of a character in good prose as already explained; occasionally she employs a metaphorical language with far less success. For example, the troubled mind of Anuradha seeks peace and she says:

".....Sometimes I feel like one of our fields, starved of rain and water from the well, driven by the ploughs of society and the family. I am a field that everyone has fed from and that no one has bothered about, to see that it is rested, renewed, kept green for their future crops....."\textsuperscript{109}

Thus, Bharati Sarabhai has projected in her two plays different facets of Indian womanhood representing the best in the Indian feminine mind. And her \textit{The Well of the People} is the most memorable tribute in dramatic form to the Gandhian age.

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In addition to these major playwrights, the pre-Independence phase presents quite a good number of others.

\textsuperscript{108} Sarabhai, \textit{The Well of the People}, p.29.
\textsuperscript{109} Sarabhai, \textit{Two Women}, Act.2.
who employed the dramatic medium in various ways for their hagiological, historical and social themes. Most of these plays deal with burning problems of the contemporary society like the corruption practised in the name of religion, evils of the caste-system, widow-marriage and many kinds of social evils; while some extol the greatness of legendary figures. Here and there one can find some attempts to expose the evils of science and also some ventures to bring to light the atrocities committed during the British regime and the consequent urge in the people to throw off the foreign yoke.

**Hagiological and Epic Themes**

The Upanishads, the two epics, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata, the popular puranas like The Bhagavata have entered into the very fabric of the Indian society; as such, they have been a perennial source of themes for our writers. Like Kailasam and other major playwrights, some more authors in the pre-Independence phase also were attracted towards such sources.

Two dramatists, Nalini Mohon Chatterjee and Swami Sivananda, have been influenced by The Bhagavata in their plays, Krishna (1937) and Radha’s Prem (1945) respectively. Chatterjee’s play deals with the miracles believed to have been performed by Krishna, the
Legendary incarnation of God. Some citizens of Brindavan converse narrating the exploits of the Lord: The attachment between Krishna's mother and the cowherd; the scandal about Radha and other women who are lured away by Krishna from their husbands; the killing of the venomous serpent Kaliya; the upholding of a mountain on his little finger; King Kamsa's fear about Krishna right from the latter's birth; and finally Krishna's leaving of Brindavan.

Though the author calls it a play in 5 acts, the theme is handled in such a way that the whole work looks more like a series of conversations about some episodes in Krishna's life than a dramatic presentation (the scene of the scandal about Radha and other women of Brindavan is an exception). Added to this, the lengthy speeches and lack of action further render the play unfit for the stage. At best, the poetic prose employed in the dialogue makes good reading.

Swami Sivananda's didactic play Radha's Prem (1945) falls in line with Chatterjee's Krishna (1937). It is also just a series of conversations of some spiritual aspirants about Krishna. Though the playwright divides it into five 'scenes', the play lacks the dramatic element, excepting the scenes dealing with Radha and the flute episode (scenes 2 and 5). Thus neither of the two playwrights whose source is The Bhagavata handles the theme in such a way as to satisfy the needs of the stage.
For his play *Droupadi* (1939), K.S. Ramaswami Sastri draws his theme from *The Mahābhārata*. The story of the epic as presented in this verse-play in 5 acts revolves around Droupadi as the nucleus, at the same time highlighting the divinity of Lord Krishna. The author does not forget to dramatise the important incidents connected with the heroine's life, viz., her marriage, the game of dice between the Pāndavas and the Kauravas, the former losing everything including their kingdom, their life in the forest, their life of incognito, Keechaka's death, the war, the Pāndava's victory and the final journey of their life.

Like Kailasam in *The Curse or Karna*, the playwright tries his best in all the scenes to focus light on the central character. Particularly, the vengeful attitude of Droupadi is well portrayed in the scenes of the Pāndavas' defeat in the game, her suffering in the forest and in the Virāta Kingdom, and finally the death of Duśśāsana and Duryōdhana. Though thus vengeful, she could pardon even enemies like Āswatthāma and also rise to spiritual heights making a final appeal to the Lord "to absorb me in thy love's eternal sea." 110 Thus the Droupadi of the play is idealised to some extent as compared to the heroine of the epic. Here the idealisation is not carried too far to make us forget the original story itself as done by Kailasam in his *Keechaka*. But the numerous dialogues...
between imaginary minor characters unnecessarily slow down the tempo of the action.

The Upanishads which are acclaimed as the highest proof of the man's quest for truth, have influenced some playwrights. In his *Zero B.C. or Christopanishad* (1947), T.K.N. Trivikram attempts to glorify the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. After a chorus in the beginning, an earnest disciple by name Usha eager to get her doubts about Christ's life clarified, starts questioning her teacher (Maharshi). In addition to the story of Adam and Eve, there are conversations in each 'act' according to the sub-titles given in the beginning 'Know me' etc. Parallel examples from the Indian mythology are profusely quoted.

Introducing the work, S. Radhakrishnan says,

"If this book contributes to a deeper understanding of the Christian scriptures and brings them into close relation with other religious traditions, it will have served useful purpose in these days of increasing cultural conflicts". So far as this didactic aspect is concerned, Trivikram's efforts may be a success; but not from the point of view of the dramatic art. Though the author calls it a play in '7 acts', it can hardly be grouped under plays, as it is merely a series of dialogues between a student and a teacher, without any plot, characterisation.

111. S. Radhakrishnan, Foreword to Trivikram's *Zero B.C. or Christopanishad* (Bombay, 1947), p.4.
or action. Further, as regards the Upanishadic form too, the author fails to bring out the complexity of the Upanishadic form, mainly because of the fact that the religious thought of a single individual cannot wholly yield to the mode of expression of a multi-faced religion in which the search for the same Truth is expounded by many seers in many ways.

It is thus clear that the rich sources of our great epics and legends of saints' lives have not been fully exploited by the minor playwrights in the pre-Independence phase. Even the few plays based on these themes reveal that their authors seem to be more interested in composing dialogue about the saints and about the incarnations of the Lord and their teachings, rather than in dramatising the episodes like Chattopadhyaya, a play like Ramaswami Sastri's Droupadi, being an exception. Anyway, so far as such themes are concerned, the output in this phase is disappointing both in quality and quantity.

**Historical and Political Themes**

Our vast country which comprised a number of kingdoms in the past and which was subjected to one foreign regime or the other has a very long history of her own. It is no wonder if different kinds of political intrigues and incidents of the past also fascinated some Indo-Anglian playwrights.
Annayya's three-Act play, *The Bride of God* (1931) illustrates an experiment in this direction, and its theme is from the history of the Mughal period. It is a dramatisation of the episode of the killing of Dara by his cruel brother Aurangzeb for the sake of the throne and of the escape of his daughter Dilara from the clutches of the tyrant.

In order to ensure proper development of the plot, the playwright rightly introduces sequences like the search for Dara by Aurangzeb's men who threaten the villagers at sword-point and the capturing of both the father and the daughter who had been given shelter in the ashram of the saint Sarmad. Further, the characterisation is adequate: The heroine Dilara, the innocent Bride of God who knows no other love except that towards her father; Zia-un-nisa who, with a true sisterly heart, risks her life for the sake of Dilara; Dara the father of Dilara who, unlike his most cruel brother Aurangzeb, is so large-hearted as to think that various religions are 'all petals of the one Flower Divine'; Sarmad, a true saint highly respected by all for his compassion for the suffering; the good and sympathetic Sulaiman, the foster-brother of Dara; and Nasir Khan, whose love for Dilara is so selfless that he shows his readiness to help her without any self-interest — "a word from you, and my life is yours".  

113. Ibid., p.36.
Whether it is the search for Dara and Dilara, or the trial of the former, or the escape of the latter, the theme is handled in such a way that the play has suspense and stirring action throughout. Thus, excepting a few lengthy speeches and the scene where Dara bound hand and foot is taken in a procession, the play can be a success on the stage.

The heart-moving story of Punna's great sacrifice forms the theme of A.S. Panchapakesha Ayyar's *A Mother's Sacrifice* (1941), a historical play in three acts. In his evil design to usurp the throne of Chitor, the greedy Minister Bunbeer himself assumes the powers of the Maharana Vikramjit. After killing him, the Minister tries to finish off the infant prince Udaya Singh also. But Punna the faithful nurse, determined to save the boy at any cost, secretly substitutes him by her own son, and the prince thus sent safely to a neighbouring state, grows and later, drives out Bunbeer.

Ayyar rightly indicates his theme in the title itself, and elevates the motherhood of Punna to a higher plane. Further, as in Shakespeare's plays, the talk of discontent by some nobles in the very first scene itself indicates the tragedy awaiting Vikramjit. The playwright creates suspense particularly in sequences like the killing of Vikramjit, Bunbeer's next attempt to murder the boy-prince, Punna's supreme sacrifice followed by a moving dialogue between her and the loyal cook Jaggu,
and the sheltering of the prince at a great risk
by Assa Sah and Yasoda.

Apart from these full-length plays dealing with
Mughal history, V.V.Srinivasa Aiyangar (though mainly
an author of comic playlets) has also written a playlet,
At any cost (1921) which consists of only one scene
about the good treatment given by Akbar, the Mughal
Emperor, to the wife and the sister of Rana Udai Singh
after the siege of Chittore. Unable to face Akbar's
forces, the cowardly Rana flees to the forest. Then
his queen Veera Bai and his sister Padmini go under
disguise to Akbar's tent in order to assassinate him.
Akbar's suspicion is corroborated by the timely
information given by one of his soldiers. Then he makes
the two women disclose their identity by cleverly
pronouncing a death-sentence on the Rajput Captain
Pratap Singh, caught in his espionage activities. The
women demand a death-sentence for themselves; but the
Emperor admires their bravery and gives them back their
kingdom.

Even in this simple dramatisation of a small episode,
the playwright bestows some thought on characterisation.
While Akbar's ever-cautious nature and nobility are well
realised, the two women show their courage and presence
of mind, but their scheming is most uncharacteristic of
the bold and straightforward behaviour of the Rajputs.
Further, it looks rather ridiculous that the women with
melodious feminine voice go disguised as men-singers
to the enemy camp. However, the action which is brisk
throughout, contributes to the stageability of the
piece.

The Freedom Movement provides the theme for
Mrinalini Sarabhai, a celebrated dancer and choreographer
in her Captive Soil (1945), a small but powerful verse-play
in two acts with a prologue and an epilogue, presenting
the actions and reactions found among different sections
in our country during the Movement.

The Prologue presents a few policemen as the only
substantial figures guarding cemetery, and the voices
of a few ghastly figures (of martyrs) giving the details
of injuries sustained in police firing; while the
Epilogue projects silhouettes of some freedom-fighters
(in a march past) who move with renewed zeal and declare
with one voice their urge for freedom. Thus the
playwright effectively employs the Prologue and the
Epilogue, bringing in between a series of sequences
starting with the arrested girl-rebels demanding the
resignation of the judge and ending with the scene
of a newly-wedded young man beaten up by the police
and going back to jail.

Mrinalini's characters are mostly types here: for
instance, the girl-convicts who are determined to fight;
the police 'killing the indigent to protect the opulent';

114. Mrinalini Sarabhai, Captive Soil (Bombay, 1945), p.16.
the idealistic and romantic girl and her practical-minded husband. But in giving importance to the presentation of tyranny under the foreign rule, the playwright does not seem to have given due attention to the development of the plot. Without any interaction of characters and without a proper link between the two acts, the whole play seems conspicuously lacking in organic coherence. Balarama Gupta is almost to the point when he remarks, "Notwithstanding the noble theme, the dramatist must be reckoned to have failed to concretise her ideas in dramatic form". 

The Absconders (1947) by N.R. Deobhankar is a play in four 'acts' (without sub-divisions as scenes) presenting some events which bear a close resemblance to the conditions obtaining in our country during the Freedom Movement of the Nineteen forties. Misra, the Deputy Superintendent of Police is at the mercy of his English boss, Mr. Hogg. His position being at stake, he tries to seek the help of the Magistrate, Sambu Deyal by compelling his daughter Ushā to marry him. Meanwhile, Mahesh Prasad, a political absconder, is caught by the police. At the same time, Paltu Khan, the Chief Inspector of Police plans to snatch away Dulari, the beautiful mistress of the Kotwal Guman Singh who is in charge of the absconder Mahesh. Guman Singh kills Paltu Khan and releases Mahesh, who absconds.

again. While a fresh search for him begins, Mahesh unknowingly seeks shelter in Misra's house when Usha is alone, making preparations to escape her imminent forced marriage. On the arrival of Hamid, the Assistant D.S.P., Usha hides the absconder; but is forced to reveal the secret to their own advantage as Hamid, out of sympathy, himself helps the 'two absconders' to escape in his car.

The plot is well-knit, but the playwright seems to have averted a tragedy in a melodramatic way; and the character of Hamid created for this purpose looks rather contrived. Other typical characters are: Mr. Hogg fully representing imperialism; Misra the type of Government Officer who sacrifices his conscience just to gain his selfish ends; Paltu Khan, the corrupt policeman; Mahesh and Usha, the patriots sticking to their principles even at the risk of their lives. In spite of its suspense, the strong element of melodrama unnaturally introduced into the action, mars the artistic quality of the play.

Thus, when they turn to historical and political themes also, the Indo-Anglian playwrights of the pre-Independence phase do not appear to have been very successful. While the failure to tap history and legend as sources of drama more vigorously is somewhat of an enigma, the fear of the foreign rule may have been a possible deterrent so far as themes from
contemporary politics were concerned. However, on the whole, the playwrights' total contribution disappoints us so far as the historical and the political themes are concerned.

**Social Themes**

In this ancient country, there have been innumerable conflicts arising out of social problems like widow-remarriage, the caste-system, poverty and corrupt practices in the name of religion. Success or no success, the Indo-English playwrights in the phase vie with one another to use these as themes for their plays and playlets.

To begin with, A.C.Krishnaswami's playlet *The Two Twice-Borns* (1914) deals with widow-remarriage, the evil consequences of ill-assorted marriages between young girls and old men. Mr.C.I.E. is a retired Indian official who marries as his second wife Lalita, a girl of the age of his widowed daughter Suguna, but regrets that he did not marry an aged widow instead. Suguna falls in love with Sekar, her father's sister's grandson, and Lalita with C.I.E.'s friend Visvanath. By mistake, the letters of appointment sent to their lovers get exchanged causing more complication. Meanwhile, C.I.E. rushes to save Lalita from her suspected attempt at suicide, but slips and falls down dead. In the end, the two widows get happily married.
The characters are obviously designed as props for the theme: C.I.E. is the average man with the ideals of a reformer; but his reform begins, not at home, but only on the platform, and ends when he leaves the presidential chair. Among other 'social reformers' also one can find hypocrisy in various degrees.

The title is significant as Krishnaswami probably taking his cue from the Sanskrit word dvija, means that, after their marriage, the two widows become 'twice-borns' and begin a new life. But, in his zeal for creating complications in the plot, the playwright brings in the thoroughly unnatural sequence of the forged love-letters; a girl may naturally long for a husband and meet a man half-way if she thinks that he will offer marriage; but, what is unthinkable is that she should forge her friend's signature so that, if any trouble should crop up in future, her friend may suffer. In addition to this defect, the playlet suffers from excessive talk and lack of action, and on the whole, it seems to be a crude experiment in presenting a social evil.

For some decades, the caste-system and even the division into sub-castes had full sway over the people in the country, and the condition led to various types of complications in the day-to-day affairs of our society. This social problem forms the theme of some Indo-Anglian playwrights like S.M. Michael in his Nation-Builders (n.d.), a play in 3 acts which deals with inter-caste as well as with inter-sub-caste marriages among the Hindus.
Much against the wishes of their parents, Kamala falls in love with Sundaram (an inter-caste alliance among the Hindus) and Lakshmi with Ramanujam (an inter-sub-caste alliance among the Brahmins). After many complications, both the marriages take place, and the parents of the brides get reconciled to the unexpected happening.

In the play, Sundaram is the Founder-President of the Madras Inter-caste Marriage League, the members of which call themselves 'Nation-Builders'. But the title is too comprehensive to be appropriate as only one of the several social problems is discussed here. The only interesting scene is that between Kamala and Sundaram, who, befuddling the Mudaliyar's nephews (both simpletons), get their marriage registered. There is some success in the characterization of Shankara Iyer and Mudaliyar as their tradition-bound nature is well-presented; but in spite of the thought-provoking theme, the play smells too much of didacticism; and the dialogue also limps on account of the many 'asides'.

Farce holds a strong fascination for some writers like V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar (1871-1954) whose Dramatic Divertissements (1921) is a collection of playlets exposing the angularities of the sophisticated middle class people of Indian cities. It appears that he wrote the pieces in order to provide some light entertainment during the public functions. The author
himself admits in his preface that they can hardly be called dramas. But, as Justice Coutis-Trotter says in his foreword, "these plays give us charming little sketches of social life in India". The collection includes the following plays: 1. Blessed in a Wife, 2. Vichu's Wife, 3. The Surgeon-General's Prescription, 4. The Point of View, 4. Wait for the Stroke. Some playlets like The Two Selves (n.d.) and Sub-Assistant Magistrate of Sultanpet (n.d.) were published separately.

The story of Blessed in a Wife revolves round Ramanathan, who indulging himself in the pleasures of a concubine, neglects his wife Lalita for a long time. When he falls ill and his condition grows worse, the good wife cannot keep quiet and with Dr. Naidu's permission, disguises herself as a nurse. In the end, the patient realizes the error of his ways. Meanwhile, his mother makes an unsuccessful bid to get a will signed by her ailing son.

The play is full of talk and lacks action. Though there is no unity of time, there is the unity of place as the hero's residence is itself the setting for all the scenes. As regards the characters, Ramanathan gradually repents for his ill-treatment of Lalita and at last finds himself 'blessed in a wife'. Dr. Naidu plays an important role in giving psychiatric treatment to

the patient and tactfully disposing of the patient's mother Parvati who is selfish enough to try to grab the whole property. This situation is unconvincing as no mother will normally cast her evil eye on her son's property when his condition is serious. Equally incredible is the disguise of Lalita who is not recognised in her nurse's attire even by her mother-in-law.

Of *Vichu's Wife*, Aiyangar says in his note that the two 'acts' were written to the order of his young friends, the members of the Juvenile Corps of the Hindu Good Templars' League, Madras. As he himself admits, there is not much of a plot in the play. Viswanatha Iyer (Vichu) first shows his sympathy towards marriage in general and his own marriage in particular. Then, asked by his friends Sundararaja Aiyangar and Rajabhadur Mudaliyar, he gives a description of the girl of his desire. To fool him, they play a trick upon Vichu with another friend, Madanagopal being disguised as Miss Bhaskar.

The plot of *Vichu's Wife* is excessively thin and contrived. Further, the element of suspense is lost as the trick played on Vichu is already made known to the audience. The only saving grace of the play is its witty dialogue; for example, here is Vichu's ideal of a wife:
Well — She must not be under sixteen ....
She must be tall ........
She must have bright and loving eyes ....
She must be very handsome .... a sort of Greek beauty ....
She must be a painter and a poet ....
She must be highly cultured, soft, tender, and delicate in manners, with high ideals noble ..... great .......

According to the author's preface, The Surgeon-General's Prescription was written for being staged at the Madras College, and the then Surgeon-General of Madras was really responsible, albeit unconsciously, for suggesting the title and the plot of the play. Sitapati Mudaliyar settles the marriage of his daughter Eamala and Somasundaram Mudaliyar, a rich landlord and old widower of Pulicat against her preference for the young Manamohan. This upsets her mind, and in her alarming condition, an Ayurvedic doctor first treats her, but in vain. At last, much to the surprise of her parents, the Surgeon-General prescribes a simple remedy with the proposal to change the alliance settled 'from the Zamindar to Mr. Manamohan'.

The playlet is one continuous scene, and it can hardly be called a play. Though the theme is thought-provoking, the playwright does not give importance to a proper development of the plot, and makes every thing take place so easily and suddenly. This seems to be a very superficial attempt to bring

117. Ibid., pp. 52-53.
out the conflict between the old-fashioned ideas about marriage and the inclinations of the present-day youth. The only dramatic element in the play is the unexpected prescription given by the Surgeon-General (which is similar to the well-known verdict given by a Court in respect of Dr. Kotnis's love-affair with a Chinese nurse); and this prescription rightly forms the title of the play.

The Point of View exposes evils like the lust for property and the unethical practices of doctors and lawyers. Ramachandra Rao Bahadur, Zamindar (Landlord) of Rajampet falls ill. Dr. Naidu examines him and makes much of the illness to the advantage of the many who have been waiting for the Zamindar's death. His mother Sundari Bai and his wife Girija Bai, each without the knowledge of the other, go to Lawyer Pitamber's house to consult him in the matter of getting a will signed by the patient in their favour. It is only Subban, a trusted servant of the Zamindar who really cures his disease with the help of an Ayurvedic medicine. At that stage, the landlord's beloved daughter Ladmini Bai arrives. To expose Sundari Bai and others, the Zamindar pretends that he is almost dead. When they are all disappointed regarding their plan to get the will signed by him, he suddenly gets up from the sick bed to their total discomfiture.

As in his other plays, Aiyangar has filled this play also with intelligent and witty conversation. There is
some suspense; but there could have been more if the Zamindar were not to disclose his plan to his daughter. The characters are typical rather than well-realized individuals.

Wait for the Stroke cannot be called a play, as the piece consists of only random thoughts and comments in the form of a conversation. As the author writes in the preface, the title was suggested by a game of billiards which he happened to see. It is rather difficult to agree with the author who claims that the real beauty of the play will be revealed only by trained acting. There is not much of action here, excepting the last portion showing the dramatic triumph of Sivashankara Iyer over his opponent Krishnalengar in the Billiards match in a club. The playlet presents a congregation of persons of different professions, their aristocratic ways, witty conversation about the cheque system and penniless hypocrites, the Barristers' sarcastic remarks about the judge etc.; but, however interesting, they cannot add up to a play.

The Two Selves has a domestic theme. Saraswati Bai the wife of Sri Vasudeva Sarma does not bear children, and then he marries Dhana Bai. As days pass, Sarma gradually shifts his love fully towards his second wife and also takes to drinking. After some days, caught in a mental conflict, he dreams that he is being threatened by the 'two selves', the Higher Self and the Lower Self. Now his weak mind finds support in Saraswathi Bai again.
There is neither development of the plot here, nor much of an attempt at characterisation. But the dream-sequence presenting the conflict between the Higher Self and the Lower Self, is an interesting part of the playlet. The pithy dialogue may make staging easy; but the philosophical overtones in the title are not adequately supported by the actual action.

In another play, Aiyangar also pillories the shameless self-aggrandizement of some Indian officials during the British regime. In *Sub-Assistant Magistrate of Sultanpet* (n.d.) a play in 3 acts, Chetput Krishna Sarma, promoted to the post of the Sub-Assistant Magistrate of Sultanpet, becomes power-mad and misuses his position in many ways. At the same time, he grovels at the feet of the British Collector Mr. Headstrong and his wife during their camp at Sultanpet. After sometime, Sarma meets his nemesis when he is arrested by the police.

Unlike in his other playlets, the author does not seem to be sure of his plot here, as the events leading to Sarma's arrest are not clearly indicated. As a consequence, Sarma's fall is not shown as effectively as it could have been.

To sum up, Aiyangar draws his themes from South Indian society, particularly from that of Madras. While handling these social themes, he shows greater interest in composing dialogue (often witty) on current social problems than in the construction of a dramatic plot.
Sometimes he introduces contrived sequences as in *Vichu's Wife* and *Blessed in a Wife* for giving some entertainment to the audience; sometimes he is not sure of his plot as in *Sub-Assistant Magistrate of Sultanpet*. While most of his playlets are full of talk without action, some like *The Surgeon-General's Prescription* and *The Point of View* provide good farce. But he fails to produce full-length plays dealing with a theme with all seriousness. As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks, "... his art cannot transcend the stage of intellectual analysis... But he had a real talent for the concoction of enjoyable farces and comedies".  

Corrupt practices in the name of religion are as old as the great religion of our country, and it is no wonder if they constitute the themes of some plays.

Niranjan Pal's *The Goddess* (1924) is a play in 3 acts, dealing with corrupt priestcraft and the exploitation of people in the name of religion. In the author's note, Pal acknowledges his indebtedness to Tagore's *Bisarjan* for the inspiration it provided for *The Goddess*. He further states that, after four years of its writing, it saw the light of day on account of the interest evinced by Guy Bragdon, an American dramatist and stage-director.  

The story of the play is woven round Abhiram, the High Priest of a temple of the Goddess. Befriending a

beggar-maid Maya, Ramadas, a subordinate Priest, tries to become prominent. Meanwhile, Abhiram continues his corrupt practices like the hoarding of lambs and foodstuffs inside the temple in the name of sacrifice to the goddess. When he finds that his influence over the people is waning, he threatens them with impending famine. In the end, he collapses, but his death coincides with the coming of rain, and the famine-stricken people get food, and hail Maya as an incarnation of the Goddess. She also dies in the end near her beloved Ramdas.

The main character, Abhiram is well-portrayed as one wielding all authority over the devotees and showing himself as 'the interpreter of the Divine Will.' In making him typical of his class, the playwright tries to expose the various tactics employed by priests to exploit the weak-minded masses. "Had the play been given a Western setting, it might even have been taken as a biting satire on organised Christianity", observes a reviewer in Queen. But, in spite of its interesting theme, the play is filled throughout with unnecessarily prolonged conversations without much action. Further, in his ambitious scheme of making the plot over-complicated, the playwright introduces some incredible sequences like Abhiram's hoarding of the bleating lambs alive inside the temple without causing the least suspicion in the minds of the people. Owing to these limitations it is obvious that

120. Ibid., p.64.
121. Ibid., Review quoted from the cover page.
the play cannot achieve full success on the stage.

V. Narayanan's four playlets in his collection *Where God is Not and Other Playlets* (1933), expose the evils of both organized religion and society.

The lawyer and his daughter attacks the cruelty to young widows in the name of religion. Padma, the daughter of an orthodox lawyer Raghava, is a virgin widow. According to an old custom prevailing among some castes of the Hindus (which is now almost extinct), she is compelled by the father to get her head shaved; but she protests. Unlike his first two sons, Nathan the youngest and the mother Janaki lend their support to her. With the help of Nathan and his friend Shankaran, Padma is at last able to extricate herself legally from the clutches of his adamant father and marry Shankaran.

There is suspense in the playlet; and the powerful dialogue, going hand in hand with action is well-employed in presenting the conflict between an age-worn custom and modern rational thinking.

In *Where God is not*, the playwright holds the mirror to another evil of society, namely, the corrupt priestcraft. He describes how temple festivals are conducted in a bohemian spirit, more with a view to impressing the gaping crowds with temple-wealth rather than to inculcating any religious spirit in them. On a festival day in a temple, Rukmini and Sita, two women of easy virtue are looking for new 'customers'. Sita has just now started her 'business',
for she can never dream of a diamond gift from her poor husband. When they are asked by the Priest to wait, Rukmini scents danger and goes away. Then, the Priest persuades Sita to accompany him and decorates her with all the temple-jewels.

As a play, this is less successful than the first one in view of the poor development of its plot and characters. Also, it appears improbable that Rukmini who is trained in the 'business' goes away from the scene. The abrupt ending and lack of climax have further marred the dramatic element.

In Beauty is a Leveller of Castes, the title itself reveals the theme. Gopal, belonging to a 'high caste', falls in love with Kamala, a beautiful pariah girl. This exasperates his father Shammugam Pillai, and Gopal has to leave home. On his way to Kamala's house, he is chased by some ruffians who are also after the same girl; and falls down wounded. By chance Kamala finds him there and takes him to her cottage. Meanwhile she overhears the young rivals' plot to set fire to her house and immediately leaves the place with her father and Gopal for Krishnapalyam. After five years, Gopal's parents happen to meet them there, and reconcile themselves to the inter-caste marriage.

There is not much scope for the characters to unfold themselves here and the play remains a very simplistic presentation of a significant theme.
The dowry-system is the target of attack in You are not my husband. The orthodox Pama Iyer is at loggerheads with his pragmatic son Chandran on the question of the marriage of his daughter Iswari. Chandran makes a compromise with his father and offers his sister to his friend Srinivasan, who marries her against the wishes of his parents who have a rich man's daughter in view. Meanwhile, Iswari's mother-in-law demands a thousand Rupees from her parents to accept her completely. Out of sheer disgust, Iswari leaves home without notice.

In the play, Narayanan is successful in presenting the tug-of-war between the orthodox father and the practical-minded son, the complications that are caused by the dowry-system, the liberal-mindedness of some young men thwarted by elders. The plot thus logically developed, has a natural ending, creating a critical situation which makes Iswari flee from home. From the point of view of stageability, You are not my husband may be said to top the list of this author's works.

On the whole, unlike V.V. Srinivasa Aiyanger who only provides light entertainment, Narayanan handles his social themes with a greater seriousness and a more refined dialogue. He can maintain suspense, and does not introduce unnatural sequences. Though his dialogue harps upon social problems, he does not overdo it so as to eclipse action, thus making his plays more stageworthy.
A.S.P. Ayyar one of whose historical plays has already been considered, also published a collection of 3 playlets, viz., Sita's Choice, Brahma's Way and The Slave of Ideas in 1935. His plays mostly contain scholarly discussions about conflicting opinions on social customs which are "the beatings on the drum of society for creating the harmony of life".¹²²

Sita's Choice is a play in 5 acts, the theme being widow-marriage.

Sita, the young daughter of Srinivas and Mangala, is forced by her mother to marry Vengu who is very poor in both health and wealth. Within a couple of months Vengu succumbs to his deadly disease. At the same time, the misery of Sita and her parents deepens since Srinivas has incurred a debt to clear off which he is compelled to sell his house. Mangala saves the situation by arriving at a compromise with his creditors. Then, to set right her grave blunder in marrying Sita to a decrepit old man, she, in spite of protests by Srinivas, now agrees to her re-marriage with Achyuth, an employee in Persia.

Ayyar creates some interesting characters here — Sita who wisely chooses her second husband; Srinivas in whom orthodoxy is combined with vices; the shrewd Mangala. But, the way Mangala deals with the money-lender Rathnam seems to be a little too above the capacity to be expected.

¹²² A.S.Panchapakesha Ayyar, Sita's Choice and other Plays (Madras 1935), Preface, p.ii.
of a middle class woman particularly of those times. In spite of the serious discussions on social matters, the play has some touches of humour also.

It is very difficult to call Brahma's Way a play, for it is merely an interesting dialogue on religious matters: the existence of God, the caste-system in its right spirit, Karma, the unity among the three schools of Indian philosophy, the principle underlying vegetarianism, widow-marriage, co-ordination between the material and the spiritual aspects of life, etc.

The play is almost without a plot, and the characters represent set attitudes: a clear contrast is drawn between Rangarāju an orthodox and religious-minded barrister and Subhadra, his modernist wife who drinks and eats meat against all canons of orthodoxy; in addition to these, there are a few minor characters — Anandaswēmi a sanyāsi, his guru Brahmānandayōgi, Nāgamma Rangaraju's mother, Mangamma and Sureyya his children.

The Slave of Ideas has some characters in common with Brahma's Way, and this play in seven acts looks like its continuation or complement. But here, conflicting views result in excitement and action, and thus make it a real drama.

Aided by Anandaswēmi, the Barrister Rangaraju meets his guru, Brahmānandayōgi and proposes to go on a pilgrimage on the former's advice. But his wife Subhadra
refuses to accompany him, and he goes away alone. Meanwhile, Subhadra, addicted to meat, wine and the activities of the club, attends non-vegetarian dinners at Rangaraju's cousin Thimmara^u's house and yields to his sexual advances also. Rangaraju who is back from the pilgrimage, comes to know of the matter. Instead of killing her at once according to the ancient Raju custom, he remembers his guru's advice and gives her a chance to apologise; which she refuses. Then losing control over himself, Rangaraju kills her. He is arrested, tried and hanged.

The playwright weaves the plot around his hero who, in the words of Anandaswami, is 'a slave of ideas' instead of being their master. The adamant and uncompromising nature of the couple takes the story to a climax. In addition to the characters of Brahma's Way, there are two more characters, viz., Rangaraju's cousin Thimmara^u, who seduces Subhadra; and Pinnchayya, who, though a jail official, feels sorry for the death-sentence to be executed on the religious-minded Rangaraju. Though the play is full of action, some of the lengthy conversations may hamper its possible success on the stage.

The theme of In the Clutch of the Devil (1926), a play in 5 acts, is drawn from the havoc caused by the superstition about devils and witchcraft prevailing in rural India in general and in Kerala in particular.
Raghavan and his wife Meenakshi are made to believe that the death of their children is caused by the performance of some horrible rites by some enemy (may be, by Janaki, the wife of Raghavan's brother Gopal). They are thus tempted to waste all their resources in arranging counter-rites to appease the devils, and punish their 'enemy'. In the end, Raghavan thinks that he is possessed by the devil, becomes almost mad and causes terror to many in the town.

The play has plenty of action and the story is made highly complicated on account of a number of characters (19 men and 10 women characters). But most of them are competently drawn: Raghavan the chief victim, the money-lenders, the priests, the astrologer and the wizards who exploit the weakness of Raghavan and Janaki, and others. But the numerous changes of scenes and the complicated arrangements for the performance of the rites must render stage-production difficult.

As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks, "Ayyar handles the prose medium effectively, and he is seen to be a vigorous critic of contemporary life".123

D.M. Borgaonkar's three-act problem-play Image-Breakers (1938) has almost the same theme; but it is rather an unsuccessful presentation of the growing discontent of the youth in India and their consequent revolt against the

123. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 242.
conventional marriage system which cares only for caste, horoscope, wishes of the elders, dowry and similar extraneous factors, totally discarding human considerations.

Rai Bahadur Jagadish Shankar, a rich Hindu widower, forcibly celebrates his only son Niranjan's marriage with Leela, the daughter of another rich man; but Niranjan loves a Muslim girl, Roshan. His sister Sarojini is loved by Vijay and Bikram; and Leela has fallen in love with a Muslim by name Nadir. Since social conventions do not allow matches of their choice, they form themselves into a League of Image-Breakers. On Niranjan's suggestion, they plan to hoodwink conventional society for sometime and then throw off their mask when time warrants.

Meanwhile, Niranjan dies in an accident; and by that time, Leela openly defies the orders of the Rai Saheb and elopes with her lover Nadir, taking her child Duleep with her. The Rai Saheb files a suit against Nadir on the charges of seducing Leela and taking away her child (thinking that the child is really born of Niranjan). While the affairs of Sarojini get complicated, the case against Nadir proceeds in the court; and the lovers' plans are disclosed. In the end, the Rai Saheb himself offers liberally to accept Roshan's child and thereby 'turns out to be the true image-breaker'.

The entire play appears to be melodramatic. The playwright makes his plot so unnatural that it looks like a series of toy-marriages, though the good intentions of

the author are to be admired; further, nothing but a tragic end is almost a certainty in such conflicts as occur in the play (arising out of love-matches among different religious groups). The action is hampered by long discussions and the didactic intentions of the playwright become plain in remarks like: "We have been image-breakers, not with sinful intentions to spite social discipline, but to escape its defects ...."\(^\text{125}\)

It is thus doubtful whether the play can ever be a success on the stage.

The conflict between love and social barriers is the theme of S.Pyzee-Rahamin's *Daughter of Ind* (1940) which has 3 acts with a Prologue and an Epilogue; and it deals with the deep love of a low-caste ('untouchable') girl for an idealistic Englishman, its tragic consequences and the corrupt practices of priesthood.

Malti is a low-caste Indian girl. Her father Sukhdeo is working as a gardener in the house of an Englishman, Norman Graham, who is in India for a short stay as a Tutor to a Native Prince. By and by, Malti unconsciously wins the heart of Graham. The conservative-minded Resident is horrified at this and orders his immediate return to England. Meanwhile, Sukhdeo who does not know of Malti's love-affair, arranges her marriage with an young man of his caste by name Harnath. This gives a chance to a money-lender and a priest to exploit Sukhdeo's poverty. Just before the

\(^{125}\) Ibid., p. 50.
time of the marriage, Harnath happens to see Malti and Graham talking together. Infuriated by this, he reports the matter to her father and both join hands to finish off the lovers. Sensing the danger to Graham's life, Malti successfully forces him to quit the place at once and substituting for him in his bed, becomes a willing victim to the plot of murder.

The playwright handles the tragic theme effectively. He makes excellent use of the prologue and the epilogue. In his first appearance on the stage, the Narrator (like the Sanskrit Sūtradhāra) requests the audience to "follow the feelings of the woman (in the play) and give what is due to her";\(^{126}\) and again in the Epilogue, he comments on the noble love of the heroine, "Malti — she knew the meaning of love, and held life as an instrument to gain its end! .... she was the candle that burnt itself to give light to others."\(^{127}\) The effective dialogue ably assists the development of plot and characterisation. Even the scene of the money-lender and the Priest rather casually introduced, heightens the dramatic effect. Further, to highlight Malti's deep affection for the plants and flowers in the garden, the second act presents a delightful personification of Nature (plants and flowers having tongues), and this reminds the audience of Kalidasa's Sakuntalam which also projects the image of an unsullied girl as one with Nature; however, this

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126. Fycee-Rahamin S, Daughter of Ind (Bombay, 1940), Prologue.  
127. Ibid., p.78.
scene appears to be out of harmony with the element of realism in the play. Yet, with its gripping theme, good dialogue and action, the play is sure to be a success on the stage. In the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "Though a sentimental story, it is scaffolded by a singular dramatic machinery. The icy wind of politics blows in, and satire and symbolism stalk together. In spite of these discordant elements, Daughter of Ind has a power of its own." 128

Balwant Gargi's The Vulture and other plays (1941) is a collection of four playlets, viz., The Vulture, Mung-We, The Fugitive and The Matriarch. He too seems to be interested chiefly in the problems directly affecting society. According to Mrs. Freda Bedi, his plays 'have the breath of actuality in them'. Subscribing to this view, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya also remarks, "Balwant Gargi has dealt with themes which are engaging the attention of people everywhere". 129

The Vulture exposes the hoarder, a hideous cancer in the breast of the present-day life of our country. An old couple, Fazloo and Rahima working in rice-fields are made to starve daily by their blood-sucking landlord. One day it happens that the old man is tortured for his inability to carry the body of the landlord's son who dies of plague. While Rahima is in a helpless condition, her hungry child Noori returns empty-handed after her bitter

129. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Foreword, Balwant Gargi's The Vulture and other Plays (Lahore, 1944).
experience even while begging. The combined effect of all these happenings makes Fazloo mad, and resolving to kill 'the vultures', he goes out and meets his end.

Here, the vultures that gather on the edge of the desolate waste, symbolise the greedy tyrants. Like the scene of the famine-stricken village in Bengal, the characters are also typical: Fazloo and Rahima represent the agricultural labourers who till lands standing knee-deep amidst the rice-shoots in the midday sun but have no grain to eat. Scenes like the one in which the weak and sick Fazloo is compelled by the landlord's men to carry the body of his son are full of pathos, and Fazloo's utter frustration and the consequent madness take the story to dramatic heights. In support of the action, there is realistic dialogue throughout. In spite of its obvious sentimentality, The Vulture has all the qualities of a stageworthy play.

Mung-Wa and The Fugitive are not 'social' plays. The former is a war play depicting Chinese patriotism and the latter is only a series of conversations on matters like ends and means, Art etc.

The consequence of wielding excessive authority over youngsters forms the theme of The Matriarch. Parameshwari, the mother of Surjit and Kirpi, feels happy at the spirit of subordination shown by her nephew Baldey. She expects excessive obedience from her son Surjit also. One day she scolds him so much merely for the loss of a buffalo that he runs away in spite of Kirpi's attempt to stop him. The
whole play revolves round the matriarchal authority of Parameshwari; there is not much of action except in the end.

A modern touch is given to an age-old belief by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas in his one-act play, *Invitation to Immortality* (1944), its theme being an attempt to discover true immortality. The Scientist feels extremely happy over his triumph in inventing an Elixir of life which makes man immortal. He heaves a sigh of relief, as he thinks that at last Science has conquered Death; and says it could be given to a deserving person who justifies his claim. Then, a film-star, a British officer, a Priest, a 'Hitler'—these persons, in turn, fail to convince the scientist of their worth. At last it is the worker who points out that true immortality is in work. The play reads like a modern Morality drama.

The necessity of the diversion of one's personal love towards the cause of society is the theme of J.M. Lobo Prabhu in his 3-act play *Mother of New India* (1944). The author hopes that the play "will be a forerunner of a movement for popular drama on a scale equal to the Russian, and with success exceeding it".  

Narsa gets a mental shock on hearing the news of the death of her would-be husband Inder. On the advice of a psychiatrist, her uncle Amaranath attempts to divert her mind to village reconstruction. Her marvellous achievement in the case of an ex-soldier's family attracts other women.

130. Lobo Prabhu, J.M, *Mother of New India* (Bombay, 1944), Author's Note.
of the village, resulting in the wrath of their husbands. Even at a risk to her life, she is at last able to make the villagers repent for their misunderstanding and join hands in her programme of village uplift. Now respected as 'Mother', she leaves the village to continue her mission in other rural parts of the country.

The play is obviously didactic and the sudden transformation in the character of Marsa is hardly convincing.

Ajoy Chunder Dutt's *Milly* (1945), a play in 3 acts, is a domestic drama set in Bengal. Milly, the eldest daughter of S.N. Roy, is lost when she is a child and found again miraculously after many years. During her absence, his second daughter Ila is his solace, as the mother also disappears. Milly's husband, Arun, frustrated at the loss of his wife, takes to social work. After many years, Milly happens to return to Roy's place and is appointed a maid-servant and companion to Ila. After leading a hectic life, Arun too returns to the same place. Then, Roy reveals the identity of Milly, and all rejoice at the reunion of Milly with her husband and others. It is clear that the dramatist has no social purpose in writing the play which depends so heavily on chance and accident.

When women fight for the same rights and privileges as men, the situation can be made to yield a lot of comedy. Purshottam Tricumdas's *Sauce for the Goose* (1946) is a farcical comedy in 3 acts (published both in Gujarati
and in English), dealing with the problem of the immoral man 'who is virtuous only of necessity'. The solution proposed by the aggrieved heroine (Romola) is that women should proclaim that they intend adopting the same standard of morals as men. The playwright might have been influenced by Aristophanes' Lysistrata, a play about rebellion by women.

As the play is a farce, the main intention of the playwright is not a serious discussion of the matter on hand, but inducement of laughter in the audience. There are highly diverting scenes like the discussion in the meeting of the Wives' League about male infidelity; Romola's humorous suggestions that all married women should behave in the same way as their husbands; the feminist leader Sunitadevi's argument ("Chastity is not natural to women. It has been enforced by man to satisfy his vanity")\(^{131}\); etc.

V. Rampall's play Almighty Gold (1947) is a tragedy in five acts originally designed for a film. The playwright feels for 'the toiling millions of this sub-continent — subdued, silent, crushed and demoralised under the weight of poverty'\(^{132}\) and tries to find a solution to the problem of the worship of almighty Gold.

Ashok, the son of a big mill-owner, is compelled to marry a rich girl by name Kamni, against his wish to marry Sumna, a poor girl. While Kamni has two daughters,  

\(^{131}\) Purshottam Tricundas, Sauce for the Goose (Baroda, '1946), p. 20.  

\(^{132}\) V. Rampall, Almighty Gold (Lanore, 1947), Preface.
Sumna gives birth to a son Inderesh (who is Ashok's illegitimate child) and dies soon. Complications arise as Inderesh grows into an young man and rejuvenates a factory on socialistic lines. To avenge the injustice done to his mother, he kills Ashok and one of his daughters, and finally commits suicide.

The play is obviously a melodrama with stock types — Ashok the good but weak man, his father Krishenchander a worshipper of the Almighty Gold, and Inderesh who stands out by his practical socialism. The plot is unduly complicated by the introduction of side-events like the marriage of Ashok's second daughter. Further, the lengthy speeches in some scenes and a number of descriptions and explanations given in the form of stage-directions, give the play the appearance of a readable novel, rather than that of drama proper.

*A Star is Born* (1947) a three-act play by 'Rangenath' deals with social evils like the professional dishonesty of doctors, jobbery and corruption, and early marriages. As the title suggests, 'a star is born' in the form of Balu the son of Viswanath, who brings an idealistic approach to both the medical profession and marriage.

Apart from Balu's treatment of the old man, the playwright has not introduced any dramatic element. The play fails, as the whole piece appears to be a series of conversations about different topics. There are some typical characters in the play: Balu's friends who cannot easily understand his idealism; and others. Looking like
a part of the play, there is an interesting preface by the author, containing some thought-provoking ideas (about life in general and marriage in particular) in the form of a letter addressed to "My august father-in-law".

To sum up, in the pre-Independence phase, many playwrights are attracted towards social themes like widow-marriage, the exploitation of the poor by the rich, evils of the caste-system, and corrupt practices existing in the name of religion. But, in dealing with these themes, most of them show greater enthusiasm in composing dialogue on these topics than in creating appropriate situations and dramatising them. However, except a few playwrights like V.V.S. Aiyangar whose intention seems to give a light entertainment to the audience, others like Narayanan and A.S.P. Ayyar show some seriousness in exposing the evils of the contemporary society. Compared to others, Narayanan, with his stage sense, creates natural sequences and dialogue. Gargi presents symbolically problems like the oppression of the poor, but he shows too much obsession with discussion. In his zeal for depicting rebels against conventions of society, Borgeonkar becomes melodramatic, while playwrights like Dutt and 'Ranganath' offer dialogue in place of dramatic action. In addition to Narayanan, two more playwrights, namely, Fysee-Rahamin and Abbas are successful to some extent in fairly developing their themes in dramatic terms.
Allegorical Themes

Though to a lesser degree, allegory too has a role to play in the pre-Independence phase of Indo-Anglian Drama. Some playwrights resort to the allegorical technique in presenting issues like the struggle between good and evil, the educational system and the need of service to mankind. These plays are in the didactic tradition exemplified in plays like Krishnamisrayati's Prabodha-candrodavam in Sanskrit.

Princess Kalyani (1930) by Mrs. Svarnakumari Devi Ghosal is a full-fledged allegorical play in 3 acts with a Prologue and an Epilogue, illustrating some eternal truths in the guise of a story of the demoralised India of the pre-Independence period. In the Prologue, there is a prayer to Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning by a clairvoyante (herself transformed into the Goddess later) joined by the presiding deities of heaven, earth and ocean. In the play, Kalyani (the embodiment of goodness and beneficence) is the Princess of Devagiri. The General who is the brother of the jealous and wicked Queen, incites the people against the good king in order to occupy the throne. His attempt is foiled by a sincere soldier Dhruvakumar (the embodiment of Truth). At last, the Queen satisfies her jealousy by offering the good princess as a sacrifice in the temple. The Epilogue contains a prayer by the king who, upset by the incident, has renounced the world.

In the Prologue itself, the didactic author makes her
intention clear to the audience by way of a woman-devotee's prayer to the Goddess of Learning to awaken "in the hearts of men the supreme sense of truth and brotherhood". In the play, a clear contrast is drawn between two sets of allegorical characters, one representing the good (Kalyani, the King, Hashi, the jester etc.) and the other (the Queen, Matangini etc.) the evil in the world. The universal conflict between the two forces, the temporary triumph of the evil over the good, the need for sacrifice to conquer the evil could not have been shown in a better way. But the play is excessively lengthy. Also, though each event is focused on the good princess, the plethora of characters unnecessarily prolongs the action.

A rather crude experiment in allegory has been attempted by M.S. Gopal in his play *The Eastern Farce* (1931). The theme is the cultural reconstruction of the Indian society in general: The King advised by his Master, is interested in reforming education. The Hero's 'Inner Conscience' acts as his Prime Minister, his 'Superior Intellect' and 'Lower Intellect' being the Education Minister and the Vice-Chancellor respectively. The King is also assisted by the Police Officer (power and kindness coupled in one), the Private Secretary (Miss Just Estimate), Misses Seven representing Literature, philosophy etc, the Ascetics and finally the Master. The Vice-Chancellor exposes the hypocrisy prevailing in the

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University education. He

"Would rather resign and work in conscience
Than rule over the pernicious edifice
As boasted Vice-Chancellor". 134

In the end, the Master advises the King to practise the ideals of the Ascetics who represent the best in the ancient Indian religion.

P.A.Krishnaswami's Kailash (1944) is an allegorical verse-play in 7 acts which emphasises the idea that service to mankind is service to God. Swayanaya and Premabala (the brother and the sister represented by two clouds) discuss religious matters with some yogis. Next, seeing people's need for rain, Premabala decides to help by giving herself to them, daring the wrath of her brother. In the end, she meets Swayanaya again through the waters of the Jumuna; and on the advice of the Lord of Kailash, both decide to dedicate their lives to the service of mankind.

In her introduction to Kailash, Komolini Sircar says, "Mothers are the vehicles of physical life; they also can become the New Life of the spirit". 135 Accordingly, in each act there is a delineation of feminine sacrifice. While the didactic intention of the author is to be appreciated, it is obvious that the dramatic element has been smothered by the message.

The allegorical technique has at times been also employed to deal with problems of modern civilization.

135. P.A.Krishnaswami, Kailash (Lahore, 1944), p.3.
Shanti Jhaveri's *Deluge* (1944) is a stinging satire on the world-view of the modern man. It is a play in 5 acts with a Prologue and an Epilogue. It deals with the ghastly tragedy of Man who has proclaimed death upon man, and also the desired beautiful new life after the deluge. The action takes place throughout on an Arctic island thousands of years after the deluge.

In the Prologue, the ghost of Man converses with the New Man. The five acts that follow form a flashback and describe how the selfish Man brought about his ultimate ruin by wars and other means; other typical characters representing mankind explain their views and experiences. The Epilogue contains the scene of the redemption of man; judiciously emphasizing the legacy of mankind, the New Man promises hope in future.

The playwright employs the Prologue and the Epilogue to link the present state of the world with the past and the future. The lengthy conversations without much action try the patience of the reader, and the play may be a total failure on the stage.

Apart from this full-length play, there are two short plays in the same vein. In his one-act play, *The Trial Celestial* (1940), Suryadutt J.Bhatt gives expression to modern doubt and atheism. The Old Man of the play who is in quest of God (the Almighty), first goes to the Astral Spirit, according to whom the quester is misguided about life and God. Next he is taken to the
Almighty, and he discusses the matter first with the phantom of Voltaire, the satirist-writer seated there, and then with the Almighty Himself. The Old Man now realises that he was hitherto struggling through life on the strength of a misplaced and wrong faith, and that God should at least be made incapable of interfering with man's affairs, if not dethroned.

Indeed, as V.B.Karnik remarks, "People need disillusionment similar to that of 'the old man in quest of his God' and a thought-provoking reading like this may guide them in this direction" 136. To expound his theme, Bhatt composes powerful dialogue: The Astral Spirit quotes Voltaire,

"The tragedy of the faithful is that they are always in a maze and lose their way. Their allegiance to the supernatural, their pursuit of the unreal and their craving for the immaterial debar them from seeing the natural, the real and the material". 137

To drive home the point of the wrong concept about God, the Spirit further says to the Old Man,

"you must label your things without knowing their contents". 138

The Old Man who is determined to see the Almighty, is prepared to risk anything:

"the bitter drought, the forbidden fruit, the Pandora's Box, anything." 139

136. V.B.Karnik, Foreword, J.Suryadutt Bhatt's The Trial Celestial (Bombay, 1940).
137. Ibid., p.11.
138. Ibid., p.18.
139. Ibid., p.21.
Next, at the end of his conversation with the Spirit of Voltaire, the Old Man admits:

"We lived in a slippery world. Everything unreal. Everything a piece of mockery! Faith, religion, culture; how unreal and how slippery". 140

According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "this play is presumably the dialectic antecedent to the threatened revolution". 141 But, so over-ambitious a scheme like this charged with excessive thought-content, cannot provide much scope for plot and action. Thus in spite of the effective dialogue, Bhatt has clearly failed to develop his theme for the stage.

A.S.P. Ayyar, the author of several social playlets has an allegorical mock-trial also to his credit. In his short piece The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity (1942), Science the Accused is tried before a Full Bench of three judges, namely, Philosophy, Culture and Intuition on many charges including that of threatening to kill the entire humanity by 2000 A.D. The charges are supported by the jurors like Trade, Research, Politician, Zamindar and Religion. The Public Prosecutor and the Defence Counsel examine Medicine, Knowledge, Transport and Electricity as the witnesses of the Accused. After hearing the arguments from both sides, Judge Philosophy in concurrence with the Jury, decrees that 'the case is not proven' and acquits the accused.

140. Ibid., pp.49-51.
141. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p.243.
Ayyar’s humorous method of provoking serious thought in the audience reminds us of playwrights like Shaw and Kailasam. There are sequences full of humour; for example, the expert’s examination of the ‘unsound mind’ of the Juror Research; the reading from an almanac forecasting the death of Humanity by 2000 A.D; and also witty exchanges like:

**Defence Counsel** (about God): Nothing we cannot see exists.

**Religion**: So, since I cannot see your brains sir, may I take it that you have none? 142

Next Electricity deposes that with the help of Science, corpses can be preserved for 30-40 years; then —

**Public Prosecutor**: What good is it keeping corpses for 30 years? Is it not better to bury or burn them and be finished with them?

**Electricity**: Corpses like yours, of course, had better be disposed of at once. 143

Though the piece is just a court-scene, it has the suspense, and the cut and thrust of searching questions and clever answers required by a mock-trial; and by employing modern green-room techniques for the personified roles, it can be staged with success.

**Models and Techniques**

So far as models and techniques are concerned, many of these minor playwrights of the pre-Independence phase do not appear to have followed the form of either romantic drama (as in the case of Sri Aurobindo's plays) or the Indian Classical Drama or the Folk-stage. Though most of their themes are from their contemporary society, they have, on the whole, fought shy of writing full-length plays.


143. Ibid., p.24.
based on these themes.

The only exceptions worth mentioning are Ramaswami Sastri's *Drupadi*, Mrinalini Sarabhai's *Captive Soil*, Mrs. Ghosal's *Princess Kalyani*, Fyzee-Rahamin's *Daughter of Ind* and Krishnaswami's *Kailash*. Though plays like Ayyar's *The Slave of Ideas* are divided into several 'acts', they do not reveal any specific structural principle at work.

The one-act play form attracts only a few in this group of minor playwrights, and among them, Abbas makes a fruitful attempt to produce a concentrated effect in his *Invitation to Immortality*; while Narayanan achieves compactness in a slightly different way in his playlets. Of the mock-trials, Ayyar's *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* successfully follows the one-act play technique. In the field of farce, V.V.S. Aiyangar and Purushottam make some successful experiments; while Gopal's *The Eastern Farce* is an utter failure on account of inefficient and over-ambitious use of the features like Preface, Introduction, Prologue and back-drops. Most of the other playlets of the group are devoted to a mere discussion of topics. The only writer who uses the Upanishadic form is Trivikram, but his *Zero B.C.* can hardly be called a play.

Some playwrights make a judicious use of the Prologue and the Epilogue techniques. While Mrinalini employs these techniques as two terminal props to the sequences of her plot in *Captive Soil*, Fyzee-Rahamin finds them convenient to expound the love-theme in *Daughter of Ind*. 
Similarly, while Mrs. Ghosal’s Prologue containing a prayer to the Goddess of Learning partly serves the function of the Sūtradhāra of the Classical Sanskrit Drama, Shanti Javeri’s mode of employing these techniques attempts at linking the past and the future with the present. Swami Sivananda is mostly concerned with composing dialogue on spiritual topics, the only noteworthy aspect of drama in his work Radha’s Prem being the flashback technique employed to dramatise an episode in Lord Krishna’s life.

Apart from an indirect use of the Sutradhara technique by Mrs. Ghosal, these playwrights have also ignored the models and techniques of our classical drama and the folk-theatre.

As regards the use of language, some of these playwrights have been concerned about searching for English equivalents for Sanskrit and other terms essential for their hagiological themes. Further, many appear to have failed in meeting the demands of the stage so far as the spoken word is concerned.

Among those who succeed is Swami Sivananda whose dialogue in the discussion of religious themes is crisp and pointed. e.g.,

Gyan Dev: ..... Take the case of a lantern ...What is its purpose?

Murkh Raj: It is there to remove darkness during night time when we light the lantern.

Gyan Dev: All right. When once the lantern is lit, is not darkness removed?

Murkh Raj: Yes.
Gyan Dev: Can we put out the lantern when once the darkness is removed?

Murkh Raj: If we put out the lantern, there will be darkness again.

Gyan Dev: That is the answer to your question. Sins are removed by uttering the mantra once, but they will again come to you when you stop uttering it.144

The playwright uses original Sanskrit words like Ājna, Īkapatnīvrata, vairāgya, Sākara and Nirōkāra as the use of English equivalents cannot fully bring out the concept; but he seems to have overdone the use of such words and particularly of the Hindi devotional songs interspersed in dialogue. Trivikram follows suit and his Zero B.C. or Christōpanisad, is replete with many Sanskrit words like the Ājna Chakra, the Kuṇḍalinī force.145

Mrinalini Sarabhai shows her command of language in Captive Soil. Here is an example: one member of the Supreme Council of State feels that it is "cold justice wedded to Barren Honour"146.

The playwrights of the group encounter some difficulty particularly in handling social themes which generally require the use of the spoken language; and many fail in this regard. Though not achieving complete success in this direction, V.V.S. Aiyangar manages well his mixture of the spoken and written language for his farces. Also, there seems to be some unconscious influence

144. Swami Sivananda, Radha’s Prem (Rishikesh, 1945), p.50.
146. Mrinalini Sarabhai, Captive Soil, p.21.
of the speech-style of Sanskrit drama at places in his plays; to cite an instance, the words 'As Master orders' \(^{147}\) remind us of the oft-repeated Sanskrit sentence \(\text{yada Jayapayati Aryah.}\)

Narayanan employs social themes more seriously and commands a more refined language; yet he too fails to use the spoken idiom.

When Ayyar is critical of the contemporary society (as in *Sita's Choice* and other playlets), he composes powerful dialogue of a serious nature. At the same time, he can be witty as the occasion demands, as in the *Trial of Science*.

Similarly, Borgaonkar too can compose thought-provoking dialogue in prose. For instance, here are the remarks made by the judge in his *Image-Breakers*:

"You were image-worshippers in a strange garb. Virtue, Chastity, Honour, Monogamy, Respectability... You have worshipped all these images behind your masks, and have broken none. A true image-breaker ... breaks the old image because he has a new one to substitute in its place ... Yours was not a search after truth, but a dishonest effort to escape from it ..."\(^{148}\).

Gargi's dialogue too is impressive at several places; but he also shows more inclination to the use of the written language. Among other playwrights dealing with social themes, many like Lobo Prabhu, A.C. Dutt, Rampall and 'Ranganath' cannot fully overcome their temptation to use excessively literary dialogue. Purshottam makes a

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greater use of the spoken language in his farce 
*Sauce for the Goose*; but he too disappoints us at places 
by his wrong use of words, like 'society' for 'company'.\(^{149}\)

Gopal who fails to ensure proper development of plot 
(as already discussed), disappoints us even in the use of 
language. He betrays a passion for rhetoric and the use 
of unwarranted alliteration, which result in absurdities 
such as:

Born in the brewery and bred in brewing breathlessness, 
Baboon's barbarous babes, beyond bailiff's baleful bait, 
Bargaining their red eyes for bullion's bankruptcy ... \(^{150}\)

Further, he unnecessarily brings in \(^{151}\)Hindi and Sanskrit 
words which have good equivalents in English; e.g. *nautch*, \(^{151}\) 
suputra and *veerapita*. \(^{152}\)

The allegorical plays of the phase demonstrate the 
playwrights' ability to use the language suitable for their 
logical argument. While Ayyar can compose witty dialogue 
also (as illustrated already), Suryadutt Bhatt shows his 
ability to stimulate thought; one of his characters, the 
spirit of Voltaire illustrates the point when he declares,

"Change is the law of life .. The irresistible urge of 
life for new expression will manifest itself in revolutions. 
The revolutions will break the fetters of society ... The 
society will be remoulded; culture will be regenerated.\(^{153}\)

The minor playwrights of the phase thus experiment with

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151. Ibid., p.109.
152. Ibid., p.113.
the language in their own way. While none can obviously equal Sri Aurobindo's mastery of the language, a few playwrights like Ayyar, Gargi and Mrs. Ghosal show their ability to employ the language as suits the needs of their themes; and Mrinalini can compose viable dialogue both in prose and verse. A common feature discerned among almost all the playwrights of the phase is their inclination towards the written language rather than the spoken tongue which makes their dialogue artificial.

Conclusion

To conclude, the pre-independence phase presents a host of playwrights most of whom were satisfied with writing short plays; and as regards the few full-length plays written during the period, very few can be said to have been successful. So far as the themes are concerned, the plays dealing with social themes occupy the first place in output, those on legendary and historical themes coming only next to them; and allegory plays a small role in the phase. Among the few who drew their themes from the ancient myths and legends, Sri Aurobindo is unique in interpreting them in terms of a contemporary problem as in Perseus; and as already discussed, Bharati Sarabhai and Krishnaswami make only small experiments in this direction. But playwrights like Kailasam and Ramaswami Sastrin show their interest either in highlighting the greatness of epic heroes and heroines or in giving importance to neglected characters. A romantic impulse appears to be
a strong under-current in the plays in the phase. A few authors like Swami Sivananda employ the dramatic medium more for didactic discussions than for construction of their plot and dramatisation of episodes. Regarding social themes, many playwrights like Chattopadhyaya, Ayyar and Narayanan appear to be fully seized of some burning problems of contemporary society; whereas V.V.S. Aiyangar, Borgaonkar and others are content with a farcical or melodramatic presentation of some problems. History and current politics draw the attention of only a few like A.S.P. Ayyar, Annayya and Mrinalini Sarabhai, who achieve some success in presenting their themes. Anyway, the playwrights of the phase have not fully exploited the abundant sources of our history, epics and legends.

As regards models and techniques, it is quite evident that most of the playwrights of the phase have not availed themselves of the rich tradition of our Classical Sanskrit drama and the folk-stage. As already discussed, Sri Aurobindo adopts the Elizabethan model in full and this has given a distinctly derivative air to his drama. Forcing his plots into the Shakespearean mould, Kailassam too adopts a dated technique in spite of his stage sense; while Bharati Sarabhai comes under the Yeatsian influence. Even playwrights like Chattopadhyaya ignore the utility of our ancient techniques like the Sutradhāra. Many follow neither the western nor the Indian tradition, and show little sense of dramatic strategy as their main
interest appears to lie in composing dialogue for discussion of topics of their choice. Here and there a few writers attain some success in achieving the concentration required of a short play: for example, Kailasam's *The Purpose*, Chattopadhyaya's *The Saint*, Narayanan's *You are not my husband*, Ayyar's *In the Clutch of the Devil*, Gargi's *The Vultures*, Abbas's *Invitation to Immortality*. Regarding the allegorical form, it is difficult to trace the exact influences though, as noted earlier, it is represented in Sanskrit drama.

Among such plays, Mr. Ghosal's *Princess Kavani* achieves some success, as opposed to Krishnaswami's *Kailash* which fails. Further, in the case of a few playwrights, the 'acts' which their works are supposed to consist of, are nothing but scenes; and they thus show a lack of understanding of the structure of a play.

Language poses a big problem to almost all the playwrights of the phase. Of course, starting from Sri Aurobindo with his mastery of the romantic idiom up to Gopal with his raw style, they do attempt to overcome the problem in their own way, but without much success. Sri Aurobindo's lengthy speeches in verse often hinder the action of his plays. While Kailasam sometimes mars the beauty of his language with his excessive rhetoric and archaisms, Chattopadhyaya, Ayyar and a host of others show their command of the written style, but seem to struggle for the spoken tongue, the use of which would have minimised the artificiality of their dialogue on the stage. On the whole, most of the playwrights of the phase do not seem to write with a distinct awareness of the question of the staging of their plays. Their plays appear to be primarily meant to be read.