CHAPTER-III

THEMATIC CONCERNS IN THE PLAYS OF SRI AUROBINDO

3.1 Introduction

Sri Aurobindo was a great scholar, poet, dramatist, and a nationalist. As a dramatist, he reveals significant aspects of his creative writing. S. K. Prasad observes, “Sri Aurobindo’s dramatic genius can be favorably compared with the Shakespearian as well as Kalidasian” (Jaiswal ‘Introduction’ Sri Aurobindo’s Plays: A Thematic Study 6). Among the nineteenth century writers, Sri Aurobindo is the first playwright, who wrote his plays directly in English. He has been recognized as the first major Indian English Dramatist with a variety of literary aspects.

As a dramatist, The Witch of Ilni is first play, written in 1891 and Vasavadutta is last play, written in 1916. During this period, he produced eleven plays. But out of them, only five are complete plays and six are fragmentary plays. He has portrayed vivid themes, diverse characters and psychological insight. P. C. Kotaky prais es, “As a dramatic craftsman, his sense of design and proportion is almost perfect, and in delineating his characters, he has shown a commendable psychological insight” (Jaiswal ‘Introduction’ Sri Aurobindo’s Plays: A Thematic Study 3). His vivid themes are based on different legends and historical stories. Prof. M. K. Naik sees, “The plays are a mixed achievement-great themes and charming romantic poetry flawed by jarring Shakespearian echoes” (Mathur ‘Introduction’ Sri Aribindo Critical Considerations 6). His dramatic world is fairly vast and varied, being peopled with different characters, vivid themes, various natures and dispositions.

Aurobindo’s master-piece, Perseus the Deliverer was first published in 1907, and reprinted in 1955. All other plays appeared posthumously though they all had been written before 1891. Vasavadutta published in 1957, Rodogune in 1958, The Viziersof
Bassora in 1959, Eric in 1960 and the fragments in 1961. All his five complete plays have distinctive features and recast old themes and legends. In search of themes for plays, Sri Aurobindo has moved almost through different countries cultures and peoples. He has got the story of Perseus the Deliverer from Greek, Vasavadutta from India, Rodogune from Syria, The Viziers of Bassora from Bagadad and Eric from Norway. In these plays, he has covered wide range of countries, cultures and peoples. The themes of plays are concerned with passions, conflicts, conscious evolution and platonic love; these belong to essential texture of inner life. Vibhakar Dabral notes, “The recurring theme of Aurobindo’s plays is the theme of the deliverance of man – his deliverance from all kinds of evils” (195). Each theme gets itself a story of action and each story of action conveys moral power, philosophy and criticism of life. S. S. Kulkarni points out, “All his dramatic stories evolve and express some general view of life which is native to the world depicted in the story” (6). In his all five complete plays, he concentrates and insists on the theme of evolution, deliverance, captivity, fate, theme of good’s victory over evil.

3.2 Theme in Perseus the Deliverer

During the middle period of Baroda (1893-1909), Sri Aurobindo wrote Perseus the Deliverer and published it in 1907. The Baroda period was a very significant period for Sri Aurobindo, because during it his metaphysical and cosmological ideas were crystallized. During the same period, he was connected with political activities. He was deeply aware about slavery of Mother India. In 1907, Perseus the Deliverer was published and soon after he gave up his job in Baroda College and participated actively in revolutionary political activities. After participating in the movement, Sri Aurobindo came to know that major Indian people considered the idea of independence as unpractical and impossible. To teach them that it is possible and easy
to revolt against the slavery, Sri Aurobindo chose the Greek myth of Perseus-Andromeda for his play *Perseus the Deliverer*. The second object of this play of this play is to project the slavery of Motherland.

When Sri Aurobindo chose the myth of Perseus-Andromeda for his play, he seems to have decided to make it as a patriotic and philosophical play. He did not merely rewrite an old myth, but gave it fresh and new meanings, and bearings. While treating the theme with fresh meanings, Sri Aurobindo makes some changes in names, characters, places and creates fresh scenes. In the preface, Sri Aurobindo writes, “In this piece of the ancient legend has been divested of its original character of heroic myth….In a romantic work of imagination of these outrages on history do not matter…. Ideas and associations from all climes and epochs mingle: myth, romance and realism make up a single whole” (Sri Aurobindo ‘The Legend of Perseus’ 1-2).

To shift the play from the heroic deeds of Perseus to the drama in the inner world of man’s mind, Sri Aurobindo used Elizabethan model. Prama Nandakumar writes, “Consciously he chose the Elizabethan model, for the five-act structure affords the greatest scope for the imaginative recreation of an age that is now past” (‘Perseus the Deliverer’ *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English* 16).

At the time of play writing, Sri Aurobindo’s mind was pre-occupied with the prominent theme of deliverance of Mother India from the captivity of British rulers. The last decade of nineteenth and opening decade of twentieth century had great relevance to the condition of India. If one looks at the background to Sri Aurobindo, it appears that he was burning with the patriotic fire. As a student at Cambridge, he was a member of Indian Majlis and delivered many revolutionary speeches. He decided to liberate his country and joined ‘Lotus and Dagger’. His articles in *Induprakash* showed Aurobindo’s interest in India’s freedom. A. B. Purani
writes, “His interest in India’s independence was not merely academic but dynamic; it was an intense flame that touched many hearts and set them ablaze” (31). Sri Aurobindo believed that he was able to deliver his mother India from the captivity of British ruler. He wrote to his wife:

I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength – I am not going to fight with sword or gun – But the strength of knowledge. The power of the Kshtriya is not only one; there is also the power of the Brahmin, the power that is founded on knowledge. This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission…. I do not say that the work will be accomplished during my life time, but it certainly will be done (Purani 82).

*Perseus the Deliverer* is the manifestation of his strength of knowledge. With the help of this play, he wanted to awake Indian people and motivate them for the struggle against slavery for liberty and freedom. When *Perseus the Deliverer* had written, the theme of deliverance from the captivity is the most probable and valid reason for the choice of the myth for the play.

Andromeda, the Syrian princess wants to help poor helpless men Smerdas and Babylonian. Both are foreign merchants. After the shipwreck, they became victim of dark violent sea-god, Poseidon. Syrian peoples believe in a primitive cult and worship of dark god Poseidon. After becoming a captive, both merchants were chained to rock for be scarificed at the altar of Poseidon. But Andromeda freed them and invited fiercest wrath of the sea-god. According to priest of sea-god Polydaon, Andromeda is responsible for all the havoc, the furious god causes in Syria. Instead of showing mercy to helpless merchants, Syrian people make them bleed to quench the blood-
thirsty of their dark violent sea-god. They enjoy the sight of their death. One Syrian lady, Praxilla comments:

…like a wild stupendous sacrifice

Offered by the grey-filleted grim surges

On the gigantic alter of the rocks

To the calm cliffs seated like gods above (Sri Aurobindo 32).

Praxilla advises Andromeda not to waste her tears over the death of foreigners. But Andromeda moves to pity for the poor helpless men who are soon to be killed according to the cruel laws of Syria on dark alter of sea-god Poseidon. She feels:

It is a shame, a cruel cold injustice.

I wonder that my brother had any part in it!

May sungod saved them, they belong to him,

Not to your hateful gods. They are his and mine

I will not let you kill them (35).

Andromeda’s pity and compassion towards suffering merchants are not virtues to Syrian people. They are simply alien to their semi-primitive race. But Andromeda is on the stage of action, she challenges dark sea-god to punish her if showing pity and compassion to weak and sufferer men are crime. She says:

O, and you,

If there is any god in the deaf skies

That pities men or helps them, o protect me!

But if you are inexorable unmoved

And punish pity, I Andromeda,

Who am a woman on this earth, will help

My brothers. Then, if you must punish me,
Strike home. You should have given me no heart;
It is too late now to forbid it feeling (78).

At any cost Andromeda wants to save the life of sufferers. She does not care for the consequence of her action. She frees Smerdas, who was left to his fate even by the sun-god, Perseus. Andromeda succeeds in saving the life of merchants. But the consequence of her action is severe, which was prophesied by Diomede and Athene. She is accused of ‘impious sacrilege’ the penalty for which is death. Polydaon and his accomplices urge against Andromeda. But when she is asked to account for her action, she tells:

Because I would not have their human hearts
Mother you worship as a god! Because
I am capable of pain and so can feel
The pain of others! For which if you
Must kill me, do it. I alone am guilty (112).

Andromeda is princess of Syria and in spite of her royal parentage; Polydaon declares the penalty for Andromeda’s sacrilege:

Poseidon wills
That on the beach this criminal be bound
For monsters of the sea to rend in fragments,
And all the royal ancient blood of Syria
Must be poured richly forth to appease and cleanse (112).

Polydaon is power-mad priest who desires to gain power by shedding innocent blood. He is a selfish monster who will gain what he desires by his wild activity. He has
chained merciful Andromeda to a rock. He feels devilish victory over mercy. Merciful Andromeda feels very helpless and miserable. She expresses:

    They have bound me
    Upon thy rocks to die. These cruel chains
    Weary the arms they keep held stiffly out
    Against the rough cold jagged stones. My bosom
    Hardly contains its thronging sobs; my heart
    Is torn with miser…
    In all I did and die accrued and hated.
    I die alone and miserably, no heart,
    To pity me (157).

Andromeda’s suffering finds in her piteous cry for help. She says that there will be no divine intervention to rescue her. Her hope of divine intervention also begins to fade. But on the most critical situation, Cydone, mistress of Iolaus, comes to give her with the assurance of release. Perseus, the divine representative comes and releases captive Andromeda from the captivity of cruel laws of sea-god, and lifts her in his arms to safety.

Freedom of Andromeda is a result of divine intervention. Sri Aurobindo deliberately interprets various divine utterances. He wanted, “to inspire in the hearts of his country-men the faith that India’s freedom is a certainty, that even the gods will it and are ready to intervene to effect it sooner than later (Jaiswal 72). When the play was written, that time was very critical for mother India. Sri Aurobindo observed such realistic situation and with the use of Greek myth, he presents that it is not impossible to get freedom from the captivity of British ruler. O. P. Bhatnagar writes, “The realism of Sri Aurobindo lay in dramatizing this natural fact and truth of life and
existence in a vision of the recurrent struggle and the need to overcome it with all the alertness and patience of wisdom. To enact this, Sri Aurobindo makes use of some mythical stories and characters with symbolic and allegorical extension, but his treatment of the situation was human and realistic” (203). An idea of freedom kept haunting his mind, hence Sri Aurobindo interweaves the theme of deliverance and captivity in his play *Perseus the Deliverer*. To present the theme of deliverance, Sri Aurobindo makes some changes in myth of Perseus-Andromeda. Through the play, he wants to give prophetic intimation of India’s freedom and make people aware to wrestle for their nation’s freedom.

The play *Perseus the Deliverer* is a work of contemporaneous relevance. It deals with a theme of evolution, which is equally important. When the play was written Sri Aurobindo chose man’s great evolutionary destiny. He believed in the essential divinity of man. And *Perseus the Deliverer* seems to express his belief in the evolutionary destiny. The playwright tries to show that conflict is very important in the growth of evolutionary progress. The conflict continues in different ways and at different levels. It is conflict between evil and good, between light and darkness, between God and Devil. K. R. S. Iyenger notes, “One might almost say, the Devas are waging a bitter war against the Asuras!”(121). Because of conflict, man should emerge triumphant, over-coming the numberless difficulties and dangers. Athene, goddess of Wisdom, herself says:

Me the Omnipotent

Made from His being to lead and discipline

The immoral spirit of man, till it attain

To order and magnificent mastery

Of all his outward world (6-7).
Athene must know that man shall progress as he has already progressed throughout the past. But it is most important that man is brave to ride successfully on the checks and counterchecks. A path to divinity must be filled with evil and anarchy, countless dangers and difficulties. Therefore, Athene challenges Poseidon:

Therefore I bid thee not
O azure strong Poseidon, to abate
Thy savage tumults; rather his march oppose
For through the shocks of difficulty and death
Man shall attain his godhead (8).

Through Perseus the Deliverer, Sri Aurobindo suggests the real meaning of life. According to him, life is circle of toil and hope, war and peace. Life is an endless long journey filled with difficulties and problems. Man must reach at his goal with the help of his destination and all things come into his path according to reason. This message, Sri Aurobindo expresses in the last lines of play:

CASSIOPEA. How can the immortal gods and Nature change?

ERSEUS. All alters in a world that is the same.

Man most must change who is a soul of Time;
His gods too change and love in larger light.

CEPHEUS. Then man too may arise to greater heights,

is being drawn nearer to the gods?

PERSEUS. Perhaps

But the blind neither forces still have power
And the ascent is slow and long is Time
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase
The day shall come when men feel close and one
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained,
Since little by little earth must open to heaven
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light (201).

Thus, the play depicts the conflict between sea-monster and Deliverer. Through the conflict the playwright presents the man’s evolutionary destination and progress. Prof. K. R. S. Iyengar writes, “But of course, *Perseus the Deliverer* is essentially a play of action – full of the turbulence and uncertainty of a human as well as a cosmic conflict, and people by a whole host characters many of whom are striking in their individualities (122).

Along with the theme of deliverance and theme of evolution, Sri Aurobindo interweaves the theme of love in the same play. He knows very well that without the power of love evolution will not make proper progress. So he paints the colorful and conscious love between Deliverer and Princess Andromeda, Syrian princess, becomes a beautiful beloved of Divine Deliverer. Perseus has strength of divine power. With the help of this power, Perseus saves Smerdas and Tyranus from shipwreck in the Syrian sea. But Perseus refuses to defend them from Iolaus and his soldiers. Then according to the rule of Syria, soldiers have chained merchants and must be carried to scarifice at the altar of sea-god, Poseidon. But Princess Andromeda is merciful, she has helpful and humanistic attitude towards weak and suffering humans. So she sets Smerdas free from chain of soldiers. She says:

It’s not enough
To see a face in tears and heal the sorrow,
Or must weigh whether the face is fair
Or ugly? I think that even a snake in pain
Would tempt me to its succor, though I knew
That afterward’s would bite me! (92).

Andromeda’s heart overflows with love for humanity. She is crazy about her powerful and shining Deliverer. She tells about her dream to her playmate, Diomeda:

I dreamed my sun had risen,

He had a face like the Olympian Zeus

And wings upon his feet. He smiled upon me (30).

It tells us about Andromeda’s love for Perseus. Both stand for humanity and justice. So Andromeda frees Smerdas from the captivity of soldiers. The motivating force behind the act of Andromeda is also her love for Perseus. Perseus has not love in his heart for common people like Smerdas and Tyran. But Andromeda’s merciful, sympathetic and helpful nature creates love in the heart of Perseus for common men. Perseus is deeply impressed by her beauty and falls in love with her:

Sweet tremors, grow

Upon her. Never shall harsher fears again

O’ertake your rosy limbs, in Perseus’ keeping.

How fair thou art, my prize Andromeda (164-65).

Perseus’ love provides strength and motivates Andromeda to act against the injustice of sea-monsters and free all suffering Syrians from the cruel violence of sea gods. The love between Andromeda and Perseus and its positive impact upon each other is nicely depicted by Sri Aurobindo. The dramatist also asserts that the Divine always helps the helpless. M. V. Seetaraman points out:

The drama is the spectacle of humanity with its bewildering variety of personalities progressing through endless study of consciousness to
higher and higher reaches of Light, with whatever travail and suffering but guided always by the chosen instruments and harbingers of ever new realization, the whole of this evolutionary endeavor being carried on by the secret Universal and Transcendent Divine consciousness (34).

### 3.3 Theme in *Vasavadutta*

*Vasavadutta* has been considered the last play of Sri Aurobindo, written in 1915, and published in 1957. It belongs to the Pondicherry period. The legend of Udayana and Vasavadutta from Somdeva’s *Kathasaritsagara* has been borrowed by Sri Aurobindo for his play *Vasavadutta*. It is a unique and popular fable. In the author’s note, Sri Aurobindo writes, “The fable is taken from Somadeva’s *Kathasaritsagara* (the ocean of the Rivers of Many Tales) and was always a favorite subject of Indian romance and drama” (‘Author’s Note’ 205). With the legend, Sri Aurobindo has used historical base for this romance play. He notes, “The action of romance takes place a century after the war of the Mahabharata” (‘Author’s Note’ 205). Once again over here Sri Aurobindo makes some necessary changes in the ancient tale of romance between Udayana and Vasavadutta. Sri Aurobindo reveals, “Some of the circumstances, a great many of the incidents and a few of the names have been altered or omitted and others introduced in their place. Vuthsa, the name of the nation in the tale, is in the play used as a personal name of king Udayan” (‘Author’s Note’ 205).

Sri Aurobindo tailors the ancient tale to suit his contemporary times. The play opens with the issue of power and superiority. Chunda Mahasegn, King of Avunthie, and his elder son Gopalaca discuss Vuthsa Udayan’s victory over them. Mahasegn confesses to his son that Vuthsa has frustrated his dream of empire but he is optimistic that yet cunning may succeed where prowess has failed. So Mahasegn advises his son:
Vuthsa Udayan drives my fortune back

Our strength retire from one luxurious boy,

Defeated (211).

Mahasegn and Gopalaca know very well that it is not possible to defeat Vuthsa on the battlefield. So they think of devising some alternate plan. Mahasegn orders his son:

Invent some strong device and bring him to us

A captive in Ujjayinie’s golden groves,

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To take the miracle of its keys and wear them
Swung on her raiment’s border? Then he lives
Shut up by her close in a prison of joy,
Her and our vassal (213-14).

Vuthsa Udayan, King of Cowsambie, is noble and bold, but a poet at heart. great admirer of nature, a seeker of beauty and lover of music. He hates statecraft and scheming. He says:

My will is for delight. They are not beautiful,

This state, these scheming (218).

This flaw of Vuthsa is tapped by Mahasegn who plans and deceives him and brings him as a captive of Avunthie. Vuthsa is imprisoned under the vigilance of beautiful and charming Princess Vasavadutta. Mahasegn plans:

Wine, music, flowers
And a girl’s dawning smile can weave him chains
Of vernal softness stronger than bonds can give
Of unyielding iron. Two lips shall seal his strength
Two eyes of all his acts be tyrant stars (214).

In Vuthsa’s ministry, Youngundharayan is a shrewd minister who handles all affairs of the state. He knows that in the heart of his king blooms the love for Vasavadutta. So he decides to bring Vasavadutta as a bride for Vuthsa. He tells Roomuwath:

    I know too well
    The gliding bane that these young fertile soils
    Cherish in their green darkness; and my cares
    Watch to prohibit the nether snake who writhes
    Sweet-poisoned, perilous in the rich grass,
    Lust with the jewel love upon his hood,
    Who by his own crown must be charmed, seized, changed
    Into a warm great god. I seek a bride
    For Vuthsa (215).

On the other hand, as per the plan of his father, Gopalca comes to Cowasambie and reveals his identity before Vuthsa:

    I am Gopalca, Avunthie’s son,
    Once thy most dangerous enemy held on earth (221).

But Vuthsa is not so aware of the deceitful nature of Gopalka. According to his nature, he shows generosity to him:

    And therefore welcome more to Vutha’s heart
    Foemen! They are our playmates in the fight
    And should be dear as friends who share our hours
    Of closeness and desire (221).

Yougundharayan does not like this and he warns Vuthsa:
Vuthsa, beware. His words

Strive to conceal their naked cunning (222).

But Vuthsa does not heed the warnings of Yougundharayan. He believes that Gopalca has been banished from Avunthie by his own father and now seeks refuge in Cowsambie. Hence he offers refuge to him. Gopalca expresses his gratefulness to Vuthsa: “Thine is the noblest soul on all the earth” (224).

The noble act of granting refuge to Gopalca is not appreciated by Yougandharayan. He disagrees with Vuthsa. But Vuthsa is a man who listens to the voice of his heart and acts accordingly. Vuthsa’s friends Alurca and Vasunth agree with Yougundharayan that Vuthsa’s defeat will be due to Gopalca. One-day Vuthsa goes to the Vindhya Rangas with Gopalca and falls in his trap. Vuthsa sets aside his sword, bow and arrows, and trustfully lies on the lap of Gopalca and says:

We two have kept tryst, Gopalca.

Hang there, my bow; lie down my arrows. Now

Of you I have no need…

Let me rest a while

My head upon the lap, Gopalca,

Before we plunge into this emerald world (239).

But Gopalca who is a cunning person has already designed a trap to capture the king of Cowsambie. The beautiful, dreamy, calm and trustful atmosphere is enough to deceive Vuthsa. This is how Vuthsa is abducted and taken as a captive to the Avunthian King.

Mahasegn explains his plan to Queen Ungarica for gaining the empire of Vuthsa who is now their captive. But Ungarica doesn’t like Mahasegn’s idea. The conflict between the King and Queen is nothing but the conflict between the mind and the
heart. Both agree on the marriage of Vasavadutta to Vuthsa but they don’t agree on the reason of marriage. The King’s reason for marriage is:

…without thee

I have no hold on Vuthsa, Thou my child,

Must be the chain to bind him to my throne,

Thou my ambassador to win mind

And thou my viceroy over his subject will (252-53).

Mahasegn is sure about his daughter. He wants her to serve his imperial interests:

Let royal wisdom teach a woman’s brain

To use for statecraft’s ends her dearest thoughts (252).

But Vasavadutta’s mother thinks that Vuthsa is an ideal match for her daughter. He ought to be won by love. But Vuthsa turns crafty and keeps the king happy. The Queen expresses:

The first man of the age

Will occupy her heart, the pride and love

That are her faults will both be satisfied

She will be happy (251).

The Queen desires to teach Vasavadutta that woman should fulfill the purpose of nature and not of statecraft. She draws Vasavadutta into her arms and reveals the meaning and mystery of woman’s life and love:

Rest here, my child, to whom another bosom

Will soon be refuge. Thou hast heard the king,

Hear now thy mother. Thou will know, my bliss

The fiercest sweet order that can seize

A woman’s heart and body. O my child,
Thou will house fire, thou will see living gods,
And all thou hast thought and known will melt away
Into a flame and be reborn…
My child, the flower blooms for its flower hood only
And not to make its parent bed more high
Not for thy sire thy mother brought thee forth,
But thy dear nature’s growth and heart’s delight
And for husband and for children born…
O Vasavadutta, when thy heart awakes
Thou shalt obey sovereign heart, nor yield
Allegiance to the clear-eyed selfish gods (254-55).

Ungarica wishes that Vasavadutta be guided by the power of her heart. But Vasavadutta understands nothing of what her mother tells her. She says to herself, “I love her best, but do not understand” (255). It is easy for her to understand the advice of her father Mahasegun, “My mind always grasps my father” (255). She is an obedient daughter of her father. She assures her father that she holds her nation high and will perform her duty to the country.

Commenting on the handsomeness of Vuthsa Munjoolica says, “I have seen the god of love, wearing a golden human body (261). When Gopalca comes with captive Vuthsa, Vasavadutta is appointed as a jailor to captive Vuthsa. At first she regards Vathsa as a toy who is easily manageable:

He is a boy, a golden marvelous boy
I am surely older! I can play with him.
There is no fear, no difficulty at all (264).
But when both are left together and Vuthsa interacts with Vasavadutta, her pride melts away and she is drawn to Vuthsa. K. R. S. Iyenger points out, “She is disturbed, she is out of her depth, and seeks safety in a panicky retreat. Her words show that the fortress of her self-confidence is quite vulnerable” (150). Vuthsa’s self-surrendering nature, his face, his smile, his voice, his words, his flower-soft eyes; all are something more for Vasavadutta. She is deeply influenced by his virtues. Her feelings, actions and speech are not governed by her mind but by her heart. Now she understands her mother’s advice, “O Vasavadutta, when thy heart awakes / Thou shalt obey thy sovereign heart (255). Her prudishness and craftiness are washed from her heart and love is born in it. She feels:

Will he charm me from my purpose with a smile?
How beautiful he is, how beautiful!
There is a fear, there is a happy fear….
….for his words troubled me
And still delighted, they have witchery
No, not his words, but voice. Tis not his voice,
Nor yet his smile, his flower-soft eyes,
And yet it is all these and something more (268).

She totally surrenders to Vuthsa and her heart burns with love:

I govern no longer what I speak and do
Is this the fire my mother spoke of? (273).

In this play also, Sri Aurobindo deals with the theme of love. Love is something divine and it has the power to transform every evil into virtue. M. V. Seetaram writes, “Love is great disentangle and the true diplomat” (71). Sri Aurobindo presents Vuthsa,
the King of Cowsambie, as a man of love and ‘priest of beauty.’ He feels captivity in
his own court, but gets full freedom in the free nature with its beauty and sweetness.
He desires to wage a war with Mahasegn, not for state or power but to wedlock
Mahasegn’s beautiful princess Vasavadutta. Vuthsa dreams:

A name of leaping sweetness I have heard!

One day I shall behold a marvelous face

And hear heaven’s harps defeated by a voice

Do the gods whisper it? Dreams are best awhile (219).

Vuthsa’s captivity is a great opportunity for him, to express his love that blooms in
the heart of Vasavadutta. When both are left together they haveverbal encounter
between them. This encounter shatters the pride of Vasavadutta. Vuthsa’s
surrendering nature, voice, words, face, smile, eyes, all have witchery about them. All
this culminatesin love for Vasavadutta. She feels very difficult to follow her father’s
advice. The charming appearance of Vuthsa enchants Vasavadutta. She feels:

His music is a voice that cries to me

His songs are chains he hangs around my heart

I must not hear them often; I forget

That I am Vasavadutta, that he is

My house’s foe, and only Vuthsa feel,

Think Vuthsa only, while my captive heart

Beats in world-Vuthsa and on Vuthsa throbs,

This must not be (273).

Their being together is conducive for love and Vuthsa feels the prison of foeman is a
temple of love. Vasavadutta is a goddess of love and he is her priest. He says, “Who
would escape from heaven’s golden bars?” (270). It is here that Manjoolica acts as a catalyst. Vuthsa has promised her if she must help him to gain Vasavadutta, he will help her to regain her freedom. The company of Vuthsa and the role of Manjoolica transform Vasavadutta and she feels like following her heart’s voice. She becomes a rebel in her own father’s kingdom. She revolts against her father’s advice and involves in love of Vuthsa. She realizes that she cannot live without Vuthsa’s love.

Both long for each other. Vasavadutta feels:

Oh, now I feel
My mother’s heart when over me she bowed
Wakeful at midnight...

..........................

O sleeping soul of my beloved, hear
My vow that while thy Vasavadutta lives,
Thou shalt not lack again one heart’s desire,
One tender bodily want. All things at once,
Wife, mother, sister, lover, playmate, friend,
Queen, comrade, counselor I will be to thee
Self shall not chill my heart with wedded strife
Nor age nor custom pale my fire of love (292).

Vuthsa too undergoes similar feelings:

VUTHSA.(...)By a long kiss
I’ll seal thy lips that vainly would forbid.
Let thy heart speak instead the word of joy,
O Vasavadutta….

VAVADUTTA.Do with me what thou will, for I am thin (294).
The playwright presents the victory of love over evil. Love unites Vuthsa and Vasavadutta and they become one. Vasavadutta forgets her enmity and gets rid of individual ego. This is how love conquers pride and craftiness.

When Manjoolica comes alone to Vuthsa, she tells him that she too was captured in the battle by Gopalca and brought as a disdainful gift for Vasavadutta. After knowing that Manjoolica is also captive in Avunthie, Vuthsa replies:

   Since our fates are one
   Should we not be allies?(270).

Vuthsa has promised Manjoolica that he will help her regain her freedom if she must help him to gain love of Vasavadutta. Manjoolica also helps him and love blooms between Vuthsa and Vasavadutta. Afterwards, Vuthsa makes a plan for their escape from the captivity of Mahasegn with the help of Manjoolica, Ungarica, Umba, etc. He keeps his promise and sets Manjoolica free from the captivity of Gopalca. They successfully escape from the captivity of Mahasegn and reach Cowsambie where Vuthsa and Vasavadutta get married and Vasavadutta becomes the Queen of Cowsambie. This is a marriage of two hearts.

With the presentation of love between Vuthsa and Vasavadutta, Sri Aurobindo depicts the power of love. Love can truly succeed in attaining the impossible and it can afford humanity true freedom from the captivity of evils.

3.4 Theme in Rodogune

Rodogune is the only tragic play among Aurobindo’s five complete plays. It reminds one of ‘King Lear’ and ‘Hamlet’. Sri Aurobindo had written Rodogune in 1906, at the end of the Baroda period. But unfortunately that version was seized by the British police during his arrest in 1908. But from the drafts, Sri Aurobindo again
reconstructed the same play between 1912 and 1915 in Pondicherry. This fact about the play is found in the Bibliographical note:

A version of *Rodogune* was written in January and February 1906 – just weeks before Sri Aurobindo left Baroda for Bengal. His fair copy of this version was seized by the British police at the time of his arrest in 1908. He never saw his copy again, but from his drafts, which remained in his possession, he was able to reconstruct the play in Pondicherry between 1912 and 1915. It was first published in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual in 1958 (Sri Aurobindo ‘Bibliographical Note’).

For this tragic play Sri Aurobindo chose his theme from the historical account of Syria. He referred the Greek book *The Syrian Wars* written by Appian and selected the story of Queen Cleopatra. But S. S. Kulkarni notes, “In *Rodogune* Sri Aurobindo chooses the French playwright, Corneille, as his source, since Corneille’s tragedy is based on an account of wars of Syria given by the ancient Greek historian Appian of Alexandria” (11). Sri Aurobindo, like Shakespeare, made drastic changes in the original story of Queen Cleopatra to suit his tragic play. It is totally based on the Shakespearian tragedy. The events and characters in the play are portrayed with imagination, mystery and purpose of tragic play. Sri Aurobindo refines Queen Cleopatra of her crudity to be found in the Appian historical account and violence of Corneille. Aurobindo’s Cleopatra is ambitious and merciful. Antiochus and Timocles are too ambitious for the throne. These brothers take upon each other for the sake of the throne and Rodogune. Rodogune enters as a doll in the hands of Fate. Kulkarni points out, “He has, no doubt made her as defenceless in the hands of Fate as
Corneille’s heroine” (14). Except these, Sri Aurobindo has introduced many changes in the names of characters and historical facts.

Sri Aurobindo has deliberately introduced changes in the play and made it a tragedy of fate. He has interwoven the play with the theme of Fate, theme of captivity and deliverance, theme of evolution and theme of love. The playwright believes that love evolves the human soul. M. V. Seetaraman writes:

> It is a tragedy of Fate working through the passions of human beings and therefore presents the mysteries of Life in this world. But the sufferings of the men and women in the play are shown to be purposive and serve the evolution of the souls of these human beings (1).

Queen Cleopatra occupies more importance along with the theme of Fate and passion. Fate serves the purpose of spiritual evolution. S.S.Jaiswal writes, “Sri Aurobindo’s views on Fate may serve as a background to the study of the theme of Rodogune. Through the plot, the characters and indeed the entire atmosphere of Rodogune, Sri Aurobindo seeks to underline fatality as a truth of human life”(108).

Dramatic irony is evident in the beginning of the play where there is contrast between the dreams of Cleopatra and her achievements. Cleopatra is very happy and excited to meet her sons Antiochus and Timocles, who were long separated from their mother. She dreams:

> Sometimes I think they are not changed at all
> And I shall see my small Antiochus
> With those sweet sunlight curls, his father’s curls,
> And eyes in which an infant royalty
> Expressed itself in glances, Timocles
Holding his brother’s hands and toiling to me
With eyes like flowers wide-opened by the wind
And rosy lips that laugh towards my breast (339).

But Fate plays a crude role in the life of Cleopatra as she is not accepted by her own son Timocles, once who was so dear to her. Timocles says, “I know your meaning/You are so jealous, mother” (419). Cleopatra, who had dreamt of a happy world on the restoration of her sons, feels ruined and lonely:

God’s spaces frighten me. I am so lonely
In this great crowded palace (418).

Her pathetic words, “I am alone, so terribly alone!” (420) express the irony of Fate. It seems that she is punished by her fate. Despite the fact that Antiochus is the first child of the family, Cleopatra chooses the younger son Timocles for Syria’s throne. She is unhappy and suffers from the sense of loneliness. The result of this loneliness brings about a transformation in her heart. The Fate has turned her from violent deeds to non-violent thoughts. She gets freedom from jealousy, hate, crudity, and wants peace of mind and soul not for herself but for everybody:

I do not wish for hatred any more
The horrible and perilous hands of war
Appall me. O, let our peoples sit at ease
In Grecian Antioch and Persepolis,
Mother and children, clasping those golden heads
Deep, deep within our bosoms, never allow
Their going forth again to bonds and death.
Peace, peace, let us have peace forever more (354).
To seek peace, Cleopatra is ready to do any good thing. She elevates Rodogune to the position of Queen, whom she had hated too much. Cleopatra calls Mentho, the nurse, who knew the true precedence of her twins. But god had made difference for her. T.S. Eliot writes in his play, “Destiny waits in the hand of god, shaping the still unshaped” (24).

Many other characters in the play suffer due to their own temperament, imperfection and passions. Antiochus and Timocles become victims of passions. Antiochus has great qualities with few faults. He is too proud and more conscious about his king like qualities. He considers himself to be the king of Syria:

I need no human voice to make me anything,
Who am king by birth and nature. Who else should reign
In Syria? Thoughts thou thy light and shallow head
Was meant to wear a crown?(387).

The playwright has depicted him in the heroic perspective. His royal and beautiful qualities are expressed by Rodogune:

He is all high and beautiful like heaven
From which he came. I have not seen before
A thing so mighty (359).

But as a son of Cleopatra, he is so cold and lacks the warmth. “His look is royal, but his speech is cold” (360). He is not ready to call Cleopatra ‘mother’.

ANTIOCHUS. Madam, I seek your blessing; let me kneel
To have it.

CLEOPATRA. Kneel! O, in my bosom, son.
Have you too dreamed of me, Antiochus?

ANTIOCHUS. Of great Nicanor’s widow and the Queen
Antiochus lacks humanity and Aurobindo presents him as a ‘stain of hubris’. His words express his jealousy and wild passions for reign. Timocles discovers the true face of Antiochus:

What’s his kingliness
But a lust of grandiose slaughter, an ambition
Almost inhuman and a haughty mind
That lifts itself above the highest heads
As if his mortal body held a god
And all were mean to him? …

…………………………

What’s his love?
A despot’s sensual longing for a slave,
Carnal, imperial, harsh, without respect,
The hunger of the vital self, not raised
Refined, uplifted to the yearning heart (410).

‘Aeschylean hubris’ is the cause of Antiochus’ tragedy. The playwright introduces fate at the right moment to guide him. His final decision to go to Antioch and fight for Syria becomes the main cause of his death. He thinks that, “How all things work out by a higher will” (443). He decides to return to Syria and gives up revolt against Timocles. He surrenders to the Syrian King:

My sword is thine, and I am thine and all
I have and love is thine, O Syrian Timocles,
Devoted to thy throne for Syria (442).
After giving up revolt against Timocles, Antiochus becomes a sincere patriot and follower. But to whom Antiochus surrenders his entrust, he executes Antiochus. Phayllus sudden strikes and murders him. Only Antiochus’s pride and wrong decision punish him to death. Actually, Eremite had warned him but he had replied, “If Fate/would have me yield, let her first break me, on!” (415). Death leads him to Antioch and Antiochus seems to realize the truth about Fate. The playwright shows Antiochus as a transformed man. Early in the play, Antiochus is a proud and passionate prince who fights for victory. But manifestation of patriotism transformed him into a man of vision and knowledge. He casts his pride and passions and feels above wild pleasure and pains. He feels that death is not the end but a beginning:

What were Death then but wider life than earth

Can give us in her clayey limits bound?

Darkness perhaps! there must be light behind (453).

The second son of Queen Cleopatra Timocles also becomes a victim of Fate. His ease-loving nature, noble sentiments and meanest of passions are responsible for his suffering. Fate has worked through his passions and temperament. His passionate love for Rodogune has separated two brothers from one another. Actually, Timocles has a very loving and joyful nature. Antiochus says:

Dear merry Timocles! He would not wish

To wear the iron burden of a crown;

If he has joy, it is enough for him.

Sunshine and laughter and the arms of friends

Guard his fine monarchy of cheerful mind (347).

Timocles passionately loves Rodogune than the kingship of Syria. But his Fate desires kingship, not love. So he becomes king of Syria. He becomes not a sincere king but
looks at it as an epicure. He says, “It will be all pleasure/ To reign in such a country” (351). But his passionate love for Parthian Princess creates jealousy towards Antiochus before becoming the king. He expresses:

All, all are for Antiochus, the crown,
And Syria and men’s homage women’s hearts
And life and sweetness and my love (390).

Due to his fate, Timocles has become the king of Syria and achieved everything except the love of Rodogune. And without Rodogune’s love, king Timocles feels insecure, frustrated and lonely:

You gods! Let me die first, let him be king.
O, mother, do not let us quarrel anymore;
Forgive me and forget (420).

Cleone, the sister of Phayllus loves Timocles and tries to console him. But he loves only Rodogune rather than Cleone or any other lady. As far as Rodogune is concerned, she does not care for Timocles’s love. She wants to leave Syria and lies in the arms of Antioches. This love between them burns the heart of Timocles:

O Rodogune, where hast thou taken those eyes,
My moonlit midnight, where that wondrous hair
Of secret sweetness? Under the Syria stars
Somewhere thou liest in my brother’s arms,
Thy pale sweet happy face upon his breast
Smiling up to be kissed. O, it is hell,
The thought is hell! (420).

This jealousy intensifies the loneliness and frustration of Timocles. He decides to get love of Rodogune at any cost. On the other side, Phayllus gets a good chance to add
fuel to fire, when Antiochus comes back to Syria. Phayllus does not unite them together but he whispers in Timocles’ ear for execution of Antiochus, and suddenly kills him. Phayllus uses the political opportunity and traps both brothers. This leads to loneliness and frustration for Timocles. Due to the death of Antiochus, Rodogune dies. Timocles has lost both life and love. T.S. Eliot writes about destiny, “Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statemen” (24). Timocles desires Rodogune and her love but she lies in arms of Antiochus. This passionate love creates dual thoughts, so Timocles is bound to suffer. M. V. Seetaraman notes, “We find in his mind, heart and action the coexistence of contraries the most noble sentiments and the meanest of passions” (6). The playwright purposely highlights Timocles’s agony of mind and meanest of passions. Through the suffering of Timocles, Sri Aurobindo shows how fate works through his passions and temperament.

Cleone, sister of Phayllus, also becomes a victim of Fate. She loves Timocles, but her love is impure and lust. With Timocles, she desires to gain power and become Queen of Syria. Phayllus also wants the same thing. Both the brother and sister aim for power and rule in Syria. So Cleone becomes a part of the conspiracy hatched by her brother. Her lustful ambition blinds her to the idealistic temperaments of Antiochus and Rodogune. She hates Rodogune and Antioches, and tries to persuade Timocles to win his love. She uses her beautiful body to trap Timocles. When Timocles is in a lonely or in a lustful mood, he gets fulfillment of her beauty:

Sit, Cleone
Here on my breast, against my shoulder! You rose
Petalled and armed, you burden of white limbs
Made to be kissed and handled, you Cleone! (421).
This lustful love cannot effect pure love. Timocles always thinks of and loves Rodogune. He knows that Cleone is nothing in front of Rodogune’s beauty. He feels Cleone’s love is:

The common flowers have a fair outside,
Of beauty but the common hand can pluck.
We wear such lightly, smell and throw away
She is not like them (369).

Cleone is more lusty rather than ambitious. Her behavior is shaped by lust. M. V. Seetaraman points, “Cleone has courage, falsehood, brains. She is too violent; lust desires her, not ambition and this works out her ruin” (7). Her lust and ambition bring ruin and frustration in her life.

Rodogune undergoes all the adversities without blaming her Fate. She believes in Fate and acquiesces in it as the doer of all:

I have no complaint against one human creature;
Nature and Fate do all (342).

As a result, she keeps perfect and peaceful life. She comments-

Always I strive to make it sweet
By outward harmony with circumstance
And a calm soul within that is above
My fortune (353-54).

Aurobindo portrays her as a model of peace, excellence and beauty:

She is all silent, gentle, pale and pure,
Dim-natured with a heart as soft as sleep (337).
Rodogune knows very well that Fate plays a very important role. It does affect life and makes one conscious. It is distinguished from frustrations and passions. When Phayllus tries to lure her by offering the crown of Syria in exchange for her love to Timocles she rejects it and says:

   Not by your help.
   Nor as the bride of Syria Timocles
   What are these things you speak? (373).

Rodogune knows that true love is greater than any crown. She sacrifices her life for her true love. When Antiochus finds that Rodogune’s life is in danger along with him he proposes her to go to Parthia. But Rodogune does not accept this proposal and replies:

   I have no country, I have only thee,
   I shall be where thou art; it is all I know
   And all I wish for (430).

Rododune proves what she says by offering her life to Antiochus. When Antiochus lies in blood and dies she falls down dead on his body. Her sacrifice on the death of Antiochus proves her infinite love for him.

Along with the role of Fate, Sri Aurobindo interweaves the theme of captivity and love in this play. Rodogune who is the heroine of the play is held captive by the Queen of Syria. Actually she is the daughter of King Phrates of Parthia. In captivity, she does not lose her pride of the Parthian race and Parthian princess. She says:

   God gave my heart and mind; they are not hers
   To force into this vile adultery.
   I am a Parthian princess of a race
   Who choose one lord and cleave to him for ever
Through death, through fire, through swords, in hell, in heaven (408).

Even in captivity, Rodogune doesn’t succumb to any pressure and lives and behaves freely. Prema Nandakumar comments, “Only Rodogune feels electrically free, though a captive. It is love that gives her this sublime sense of freedom” (Banasthali Patrika172). All other characters are captivated by their own passions, lust and greediness. M. V. Seetaraman writes, “But all the others are imprisoned in their egoistic desire and so feel the agony and travail of their lives” (15). But Rodogune is free from this sort of imprisonment because of her good Nature. She says:

I trust the stars
And mountains better, they were kind to me
My blood within me chills when I look forward
And think of Antioch (428).

The dramatist gives a clear message that love conquers hatred and gives freedom. In the beginning Cleopatra hates Rodogune but in the end Rodogune’s love transforms the hard hearted Cleopatra into a lovable woman. Cleopatra desires:

And I shall have my Parthian Rodogune
With her sweet voice and gentle touch, and her (440).

Sri Aurobindo paints the reciprocal love between Rodogune and Antiochus and makes them immortal lovers. For Nandakumar, “The one golden light in this dark night of passions is the pure love of Rodogune (Nandakumar Banasthali Patrika172). Her pure love transforms and elevates Antiochus also. He is stained by hubris and lacks humanity but love of Rodogune changes him for the better. He accepts the supremacy of the value of love. He feels:

The gods in heaven
Look down on us! let us look up at them

160
With fearless eyes of candid joy and tell them.

Not time nor any of their dooms can move us now

The passion of oneness two hearts are this moment

Denies the steps of death for ever (383).

The playwright himself believes that love is the supreme force on the earth. This supreme force of Rodogune deeply affects Antiochus. He accepts this power of love and feels love not for one woman but for all men and women. M. V. Seetaraman points out, “To love one truly is to love all and since this is the experience of genuine unselfish, non-possessive love, it does not enervate him or rob him of the essential qualities of his nature” (12). This great change in him is due to the love of Rodogune. He accepts, “Fate and looks to the greater truth and reality beyond which man moves through many lives, bound by fate, until he can overcome it (Jaiswal 130).

Thus, Sri Aurobindo has presented Rodogune as a lover of Fate, Nature and the Divine Master. Due to this she leads a life of peace and harmony even in captivity. The playwright shows that love and fate always conquer egoistic desires, agony, jealousy, passions and lust. The Divine will always overcomes all ills and evils. Lastly Antiochus also feels, “The Divine Master shaping the human flute and making it perfect to breathe through it ‘melodies eternally new’(Seetaraman 15).

3.5 Theme in The Viziers of Bassora

The Viziers of Bassora is the first full length play written by Sri Aurobindo, during the Baroda period in 1893-1909. Its manuscript had been safely preserved in the Bomb Case connected with the Alipure Bomb Incident in 1909. After four decades, these papers were retrieved by Jitendra Nath Ghosh Dostidar, in 1951, who was the record keeper of the Alipore court. Then this play was published in 1959 in ‘Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual.’ This five act romantic play is fully based on the Elizabethan theatre.
M. V. Seetaraman notes, “In fact the play has many affinities with and echoes of Shakespeare” (31). Basically this play is based on Persian folktale ‘The Tale of Beautiful Sweet Friend’ from *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. “Sri Aurobindo won the book as a school prize in England, and seems to have loved it” (Iyengar 129).

In England, Sri Aurobindo had experienced the Western lifestyle and their inclination towards wild pleasures, materialistic things and romantic views of life. On returning to India he experienced the faith in the will of God, in morality, in ethics, in familial values and divinity of love. It is here that he desired to present this Eastern faith in God, divine love and the spiritual evolution in his plays. He knew that pure love creates consciousness and harmony in life. “Perhaps the greatest of all the power of life is love which liberates all the hidden springs of harmony and heals the most bitter wounds in the struggle of forces and beings in this harsh world” (Seetaraman 16).

He chose the Persian folktale ‘The Tale of Beautiful Sweet Friend’ of the Islamic world to express himself. He altered the tale to suit his purpose changing names of characters as well as adding some characters in the story. Fareed, son of Vizier, was motiveless in the original tale, but Aurobindo introduces him as a contrasting character and shows contrast between Nureddene and Fareed. Haroun-al-Rasheed, the Caliph is presented as a noble virtuous man so as to create contrast between Caliph and Alzayni. Aurobindo adds new characters such as Khatoon, Balkis, Mymoona and Harkoon in the play.

Through *The Viziers of Bassora*, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the need to have faith in the will of God. In this play he depicts two opposite temperaments – the first one keeping God, Love, Grace and Light in mind and the second temperament develops with “brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape” (Seetaraman 17). These two temperaments present the conflict between Good and Evil and light and darkness.
“Every good kindly man is like the moon and carries a halo, while a chill cloud moves with dark and malignant natures. When we are near them, we feel it” (Sri Aurobindo 564). This contrast works out among the wild youths Nuredden and Fareed, the old viziers Ibn Sawy and Almuene, and the rulers Caliph Haroun and King Alzayni. Nuredden, Ibn Sawy and Caliph Haroun represent virtue while Fareed, Almuene and King Alzayni represent vice. Sri Aurobindo presents conflict between virtue and vice, and shows how virtue gets victory over vice.

Nureddene, Ibn Sawy’s son, is wild and bold. “His are the first wild startings / Of a bold generous nature” (Sri Aurobindo 567). He is a true handsome roisterer, “True, true, and of the taste / Of different wines and qualities of girls” (596). Nureddene explains and justifies his boldness and wildness of youth. M. V. Seetaraman writes, “He only ranges abroad and learns of manners and of men to fit himself for the after-time!” (17). He grows in indulgent love and affection of his parents. His family atmosphere creates boldness and wildness in Nureddene. His parents are not more anxious about his tomorrow, because of his generous nature. The broker, Muazzim says:

The son repeats the father

But with a dash of quicker, wilder, blood (579).

Ibn Sawy knows that his son is a rogue with wild and impetuous faults, still he believes that his son cannot add meaner vices because his blood is good. He expresses:

The rascal’s frank enough, that is one comfort,

He adds no meaner vices, fear or lying,

To his impetuous faults. The blood is good

And in the end will bear him. Through hope (579).
Naturally, Nureddene is good and believes in essential goodness of man. S. S. Jaiswal points out, “But for a time at least, he is wild. Due to his ‘grand profligacy’ he is reduced to a pauper by his own friends rightly described as blood suckers and thieves” (43-44). His cousin, Doonya knows Nureddene’s good qualities and addresses him as the ‘Caliph of Faeryland’. He is a romantic person who always dreams of being a noble chivalrous knight:

In a great palace built of porphyry

……………………

… I will sit

Drinking from cups of gold delighted wine,

Watching slow dances, while the immortal strain

Of music wanders to its silent home…

………………

My wealth be so great that I can spend

Millions each day nor feel they want. I’ll give

Till there shall be no poor in all my realms,

Nor any grieved (599).

Nureddene believes in humanity and loves humanity. He dreams of eradicating poverty from his realm. His deep faith in goodness of man is revealed when he says, “Man / Is not ignoble, but has angel soarings” (643). Nureddene’s faith in goodness of man means his faith in goodness of God. He believes that man is the creation of God so man is divine. He believes, “God made them; what He made, is doubtless good” (646).

Nureddene’s nobleness and greatness develops with his experiences of difficult life and the experience of pure love. In the absence of Ibn Sawy, Nureddene faces great
difficulties. Many a times he is tortured by Almuene. But the devil cannot get victory over the angel. Almuene is sentenced to death and Nureddene ascends to the throne of Bassora. This is victory of faith in God over vice.

To depict contrasting personalities, Sri Aurobindo introduces the second wild youth Fareed, who is son of the bad Vizier Almuene. Murad introduces him-

The Vizierr’s son, as our city knows

A misformed urchin full of budding evil (566).

Fareed is spoiled because of his father’s over indulgence. Khatoon, his mother blames Almuene, “You have indulged the boy till he has lost” (569). But Almuene does not care. Fareed is always in a state of excitement. His inhuman behavior is prompted by passion of lust, anger and hate. He desires a materialistic and passionate life. “Fareed’s materialistic, disrespectful and over demanding attitude towards his father and society at large imply Western way of living in the modern world” (Kulkarni *The Dramatic World of Sri Aurobindo* 73). Khatoon is honorable and good natured mother who cannot bear the bad behavior of her son. She scolds him, even beats him when his father is out. But this mother’s treatment to her son is disliked by his father, Almuene. He prompts his son to hate Khatoon. She warns her husband about this deed:

You prompt him

To hate his mother; but do not lightly think

The devil you strive to raise up from that hell

Which lurks within us all” (570).

But Fareed’s father does not heed to this warning. He encourages his young baboon. Both, father and son are inclined towards lust and passionate life. “Life is a field for the satisfaction of the passions with power as the means” (Seetaraman 22). Fareed
thinks that marriage is an opportunity and means for the satisfaction of lust. He wants woman only for the satisfaction of lust. His father Almuene also advises:

Be lust son,
And breed me grandsons like you for my stock (573).

Fareed’s heart is governed by only lust and passions. He cannot feel love and humanity. For him, all men are tools for the satisfaction of appetites. He hates all those, who have not served his satisfaction. Even he hates his mother and father also. Due to this lustfulness and ruthlessness, Ibn Sawy does not agree to marry his Doonya to Fareed. Doonya also decides that if forced she would throw herself from the window and embrace death. At the end, Fareed tries to take Doonya by force but does not succeed. He meets his death. He is attacked by the force of Turk and his soul gets freedom from lust and passions.

Fareed and Nureddene are complete opposite characters. Through such contrasting personalities Sri Aurobindo develops the theme of faith in goodness of man and virtue. He shows that virtue gains victory over vice and vice meets the tragic end.

The second set of contrasting personalities consists of old Viziers, Ibn Sawy and Almuene. Ibn Sawy is an ideal and noble Islamic person. “Bassora is bright only because of his presence” (563). His faith in God is his source of strength, and with the help of this strength Ibn Sawy faces all difficulties and dangers. In terrible crisis, he advises his son Nureddene to have faith in His justice and benevolence.

IBN SAWY. Bow to the will of God, my son; if thou must perish
On a false and hateful charge,
A crime in thee, impossible, believe
It is His justice still (728).
People of Bassora love Ibn Sawy because of his kindness, noble dealings, gentle speech, and his faith in the justice of God. The merchants of Bassora believe:

Noble Alfazzal! There will be
Good sales today in the market, since his feet
Have trod here (577).

His considerateness and his love for people around as well as his family members are worth noting. But he never indulges and encourages his son Nureddene in wrong matters. Every time Ibn Sawy checks and scolds his son. He even forbids Nureddene to cast his eyes on Anice, because he desires no sinful or ill-influence of a woman on his vagabond son. But unfortunately his bold son is enchanted by the charming beauty of the Persian slave girl Anice-Aljalice and with the help of Doonya, both Nureddene and Anice fall in love. Initially Ibn Sawy does not accept this between his son and the slave-girl. But when he comes to know that it is not mere attraction of lust and passion but the light of pure love, Ibn Sawy approves his son’s love on the condition:

You are my son, generous and true and bold
Though faulty. Take the slave-girl then, but swear
Never hereafter mistress, slave or wife
Lies in your arms but only she; neither;
Until herself desire it, mayest thou sell her,
Swear this and keep thy love (619-20).

Ibn Sawy’s each decision follows justice and the will of God. He permits pure love of Nureddene and Anice, and accepts the slave girl as his daughter-in-law. This acceptance justifies one slave girl. His rejection of Almune’s proposal for marriage between Fareed and Doonya is justification for his own niece. Then he decides, “he will give his niece in marriage to the Turk because there is no stock in Islam except
When question arises on superiority of race and rank, he expresses:

These are maxims, brother,

Unsuited to our Moslem polity

They savoir of barbarous Europe. But in Islam

All men are equal underneath the king (567).

Ibn Sawy is happy with his king’s justice and he respects the king and even goes to buy a slave for the king’s pleasure. He also expresses his kindness and fairness towards his worst enemy Almuene at the end. All goodness and kindness is to be found in Ibn Sawy. He possesses a noble soul and a good heart. His virtues are reflected in his behavior towards the king, the slave girl, merchants, enemy and his family members. Sri Aurobindo focuses on the good virtues of Islam through Ibn Sawy.

On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo brings up Almuene, as a dark and dangerous person. Ibn Sawy introduces, “A dark and dangerous mind is Almuene’s” (565). The playwright presents Almuene as an epitome of arrogance, malice, jealousy, revenge, tyranny and hatred. He is a storehouse of all vices. He has been called, “a Satan or Iblis out of hell” (Jaiswal 40). Sunjar, the chamberlain of the palace introduces him:

There goest thou, Almuene, the son of Khakan,

Dog’s son, dog’s father, and thyself a dog.

Thy birth was where thy end shall be, a dunghill (568).

Alumene is infamous for his tyrannies. Every one in Bassora considers that Almuene is not a human being but a brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape. He has no meaning for Islamic values and culture. He is void of morality and justice. He misuses
power and force and carries slave girls from the market. Even his wife is not happy with him. She replies:

Oh, you’d have done no less by me, I know,
Although my rank’s as far above your birth
As some white star in heaven o’er peers the muck
Of foulest stables, had I not great kin
And swords in the background to avenge me (569).

Almuene hates his wife because she is good and desires her son to become good and virtuous. But Almuene prompts his son for evil deeds and lust and passion. He says:

Be lusty, son,
And breed me grandsons like you for my stock (573).

Almuene is a very selfish person who has his own view of life and values. He says:

I do not value at a brazen coin
The man who has no vices in his blood,
Never took toll of women’s lips in youth
Nor warmed his nights with wine (572-73).

But such lusty views lead Almuene to doom and darkness in his life. He hates love and affection, and gets pleasure in trapping his enemies. He feels happiness in suffering, tyranny, jealousy and all vices. His son inherits lust, malice and evil. And Almuene gets the price of his indulgence when his son tries to poison him. This is how through the second set of contrasting characters, Sri Aurobindo shows that evil leads to doom and destruction.

Sri Aurobindo presents Caliph Haroun and King Alzayani as controversial characters. Caliph Haroun is a demi-god who always punishes wicked and rewards good. With his watchful eyes, he suspects mischief and appreciates fine sense. The young lovers
Nureddene and Anice desire to meet him. But Haroun appears in disguise and on realizing the goodness of the lovers justifies them:

Thou art bewildered. Rise! I am the Caliph
Men call the just. Thou art as safe with me
As my own daughter. I have sent thy lord
To be a king in Bassora, and thee
I will send after him with precious robes
Fair slave-girl, noble gifts possess thy heart
Once more be glad (704-05).

The Caliph recognizes the virtues of the lovers and advises them that virtue demands salvation, life demands hard work and love demands worthiness:

Fair children worthy of each other’s love
And beauty! Till the Surrender comes who parts
All wedded hands, take your delights on earth,
And after words in heaven. Meanwhile remember
That life is grave and earnest under its smiles,
And we too with a wary gaiety
Should walk its roads, praying that if we stumble,
The all merciful may bear our footing up
In His strong hand, showing the Father’s face
And not the stern and dreadful Judge (735).

From the watchful eyes of Caliph the mistake of Ibrahim can’t escape and Ibrahim is punished. Sri Aurobindo presents similarity between Caliph and Ibn Sawy. Both believe in Allah’s justice and Islamic culture. M. V. Seetaraman points out, “Both are
persons of considerable mental maturity with a profound sense of vocation and religious faith in the will of God and the principles of Islam” (25-26).

The second wicked character Alzayni is a tyrannical and malicious king. He spends his life in indulgence and profligacy. He promotes tyranny in his country with the help of villainous persons. He does not show any sympathy for the sufferings of his subjects and has no plan for their welfare. Such a wicked ruler has to lose his empire and the virtuous Nureddene is crowned the king of the state of Bassora. Thus, Sri Aurobindo suggests that virtue always gains victory over vice. The virtuous world is governed by the Justice of God. Life becomes bright when one has faith in the justice of God.

Sri Aurobindo also deals with the theme of love. According to him pure love increases consciousness and establishes harmony and peace in human life. Love has the power to transform wicked into good. To show this Sri Aurobindo unites pure love between Nureddene, the son of Vizier and Anic-Aljalice, a slave-girl. Through their love, the playwright conveys that all are equal and there is no one rich or poor by money or race in pure love.

Before falling in love with Anice, Nureddene was a wild, romantic, carefree wandering vagabond. His cousin Donya comments on his traits:

True, true, and of the taste
Of different wines and qualities of girls (596).

His mother, Ameena is very anxious about her son’s misbehavior. She desires her son to become conscious and virtuous. Many a times she calls and enquires:

Heed her not, Nureddene. But tell me child,
Is this well done to wander vagrant like
Leaving your mother to anxieties
And such lamas? Oh, we will have to take

Some measure with you! (596).

His father, Ibn Sawy also does not like his son wandering like a vagrant. Often times he admonishes his son:

Rogue! Scamp! What do you mean?
Knave, is my house a caravanserai
For you to lodge in when it is your pleasure? (601).

When Ibn Sawy brings the slave girl for the pleasure of his king, he orders his wife:

Keep her from your son,
Your scapegrace son (587).

He tries to hide the slave girl to save her from the lust of his romantic son. This is how before Anice came in his life, Nureddene was not a virtuous youth.

On the other hand, Anice-Aljalice, the slave-girl, is charming, sober and a beautiful virtuous girl. When Ibn Sawy goes to buy the slave-girl for the pleasure of his king, he is impressed by charmmfullness and soberness of Anice-Aljlice. He asks:

What, is your mould indeed a thing of earth?
Peri; have you not come disguised from heaven
To snare us with your lovely smiles, you marvel? (584-85).

Naturally Nureddene falls in love with such a charming and beautiful girl. Nureddene and Anice get attracted towards each-other and fall in love. Even Doonya is influenced by the imperial and sweet temper of Anice. She rightly points:

Anice,

There is a sea of laughter in your body;
I find it billowing there beneath the calm
And rippling sweetly out in smiles, you beauty!
And I love laughers. Wherefore for the king?

Why not for me? Does the king ever laugh,

I wonder? (590).

Along with the physical beauty Anice has possessed sweet voice. She is a beautiful singing Nightingle. So, Nureddene loves her and desires, “A singing lover ever had” (605). And Doonya plays a vital role in feeding the love sentiments between Nureddene and Anice. She hides the fact from Nureddene that Anice has been purchased for the pleasure of the king. On the contrary, she tells, “The Persian’s bought for you” (605). Doonya supports the cause of Nureddene and arranges meetings between them. This support unites the two hearts and builds a concrete bond of love between Nureddene and Anice. The playwright focuses on love and its purity. Love between the Vizier’s son and the slave girl crosses the boundaries of race, caste, creed, dignity and economical status. It gives a message of equality, which is always desired by God.

The love of Nureddene and Anice for each other is genuine. At one point, Nureddene expresses:

You, my surpassing jewel, on my neck
Closer to me than my own heartbeats (609).

Anice too expresses similar deep feelings:

Yes,

Closer than kisses, closer than delight,
Close only as love whom sorrow and delight
Can not diminish, nor long absence change
Nor daily prodigality of joy
Expend immortal love (609).
The love experience transforms the life of Nureddene completely. He has no hatred for mankind and “his one desire is to be more and more godlike” (Seetaraman 18). So, he forgives his chief architect Ajebe for his ruinous attempt. This is how love transforms Nurredene and he realizes the real purpose of life. He feels, “the presiding force of the universe is Allah, the supreme whose mercy alone can pardon the sins of man” (Seetaraman 18).

When Caliph disguises as a Fisherman and asks his lover as a gift, Nureddene keeps his oath and is ready to give Anice as a gift to the Fisherman:

Another time
I would have slain thee. But now I feel ’tis God
Has snared my feet with dire calamities,
And have no courage.

Take her, if Heaven will let thee, Angel of God,
Avenging angel, wert thou lying in wait for me
In Bagdad? (702).

Nureddene’s worthiness, religious consciousness and faith in God’s justice deeply influence the Caliph. The Caliph is deeply moved by the devotion and sacrifice of Nureddene and he blesses Nureddene and makes him the King of Bassora. This is how the dream of Nureddene comes true. He had dreamt:

I shall go forth, a daring errant-knight,
To my true country out in Faeryland (597).

Thus, the power of love transforms Nureddene from a rascal rogue and a scamp boy to a worthy, civilized and pious king of Bassora. Sri Aurobindo has very effectively
introduced the theme of evolution of the mind. Because of the divinity of love Nureddene achieves higher consciousness and becomes the King of Bassora.  

Along with the theme of love and faith in God, Sri Aurobindo also focuses on the theme of captivity. In this romantic play, Anice-Aljalice is a beautiful heroine, but she is a captive maiden. She is purchased by Ibn Sawy, honourable Vizier of Bassora, for the pleasure of the King of Bassora. His romantic son, Nureddene falls in love with Anice and saves her life from the devilish passions of the King. Both, Nureddene and Anice-Aljalice flee Bassora and reach Bagdad, where they receive kindness of the Caliph of Bagdad. The Caliph assures Nureddene to make him prosperous and returns him with a letter to Bassora. But the King of Bassora spends his life in indulgence and profligacy. He becomes blind due to misuse of power. The King is misled because of his villainous nature and he neglects the message of Caliph and imprisons Nureddene. The King condemns him to death. The play reaches its climax when captive Nureddene stands on the scaffold with faith in the justice of God:

Justice

Of God, thou spar’st me nothing (728).

At the very moment of execution, the soldiers of Caliph enter and save Nurredene from execution. Thus the playwright shows that truth lives with true love and faith. Good is always rewarded and evil is always punished. Thus, the playwright interweaves the theme of faith in God, theme of love and theme of captivity in this romantic play. Through these various themes, he gives the message that true love and faith in God help one to transcend one’s ego. He also emphasizes the importance of surrender, which leads to divinity. At last, the play also focuses on the victory of good over evil.
3.6 Theme in *Eric*

*Eric*, the dramatic romance shows Sri Aurobindo’s attitude towards the culture of Scandinavia. For this purpose, Sri Aurobindo spent several years and took much pains to write this play. The bibliographical note points out:

*Eric* was begun shortly after Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry in 1910. He worked on the play for a number of years, making several different drafts, each of which was separately revised... these readings that seemed best to express the author’s intentions... *Eric* was first published in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual in 1960, and issued in book form the same year (Sri Aurobindo ‘Bibliographical Note’).

To deal with the theme of love’s victory over hate and theme of evolution, Sri Aurobindo selected the Swedish and Norwegian legend. The main characters in this play belong to the history of Norway. “Olaf, Swegan and Eric are common names in the history of Norway” (Jaiswal 138). The source of this legendry play can be traced in Scandinavia of Medieval times.

Sri Aurobindo confidently interweaves the theme of love’s victory over hate. To present his object of writing clearly, Sri Aurobindo wrote several drafts, revised them and binded them separately. But he did not add or reduce any character or sub-plot to the main plot, as he did in other plays. He develops the same historical story with great effort. The historical tale of King Eric and Swegan contains all necessary elements to reveal the victory of love over hate. The purpose of the play is not merely to present the historical vision, but to present an interpretative vision. Sri Aurobindo comments that, “It must have an interpretative vision; the vision must have an explicit or implicit idea of life and the human being; the interpretative vision and the idea
must appear to arise out of the inner life of characters through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action” (Jaiswal 140).

Eric is the King of northern Norway, who is elected to help the northern people. But Swegn who is the son of late king Olaf Thorleikson has hereditary right to become the king of Norway. So Swegn rejects Eric’s Kingdom and desires to unite south and north Norway. Hertha is the wife of Swegn and Aslaug is his sister. Aslaug is a proud egoistic and adventurous girl. In order to kill Eric and to fulfill the desire of her brother, Aslaug comes with Hertha to the court of Eric under the guise of dancing girls.

On the other hand, Eric decides to unite together all the different parts of Norway by using the power of sword. “I have found the way to join / The Warrior’s sword, builder of unity” (477). But King Eric realizes the limits of sword’s power. He thinks, “The sword which can only keep together but not unify men” (Seetaraman 89). So, he desires national integration without hate, conspiracy and violence. He deeply thinks of the way of getting harmony and at the same time listens to the song of the dancing girl, who sings outside the court:

Love is the hoop of the gods
Heart to combine
Iron is broken, the sword
Sleep in the grave of its lord;
Love is divine
Love is the hoop of the gods
Hearts to combine (477-78).

After listening to such a beautiful song of the dancing girls from outside the court, Eric immediately finds the solution for national integration. He realizes:
The heart! The seat is there;
For unity is substance of the heart
And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold (478).

Eric feels that a beautiful stag-eyed woman shows him the way to unify the men’s hearts. The song from the light lips is the answer for Eric’s problem. With her beautiful song, her beauty, her light lips and music, Eric gets attracted towards the dancing girl. He seems to fall in love with Aslaug at the first sight:

Love! If it were this girl with antelope eyes
And the high head so proudly lifted up
Upon a neck as white as any swan’s! (482).

But, what was the aim of Aslaug to come to the court of Eric? She had come not for love making but to enchant Eric and trap him in her beauty and music, and kill him as early as possible. But Fate had something different and Aslaug also feels attracted towards the charming personality of Eric and falls in love at the first sight:

A mighty man!
He has the face and figure of a god;
A marble emperor with brilliant eyes
How came the usurper by a face like that? (483-84).

Aslaug is attracted by the charming personality of Eric. But she is reminded by Hertha about the purpose of their visit. Then again Aslaug is full of hatred for Eric. Her pride and her ego bloom. When Hertha notices Eric glancing towards Aslaug, she hatefully replies:

I am fair
Men look upon me (486).
Aslaug’s pride of being the child of Olaf and sister of Swegn manifests in her every sentence:

I am not of the earth
To bound my actions by the common rule
I claim my kin with those whom Heaven’s gaze
Moulded supreme—Swegn’s sister, Olaf’s child,

Aslaug of Norway (486).

M. V. Seetaraman comments on her proud nature, “She is the lioness of Norway with her loud roar and leap, gigantic violent pride and loftiness intolerable” (91). She is fully determined to avenge her brother by killing Eric and is full of hatred and violence for him. Prema Nandakumar points out, “But her heart carries only hate, for she has come to wreak vengeance on Eric for making her brother Swegn a fugitive warrior” (Nandakumar Litterit).

Hertha, wife of Swegn, knows very well that not hate but love brings peace and harmony in Norway. Simple and sober Hertha asks:

Rather than by our blood to call for his
Is not a gentle peace still possible?
Swegn might have Trondhjem, Eric all the north
The suzerainty? It is his. We fought for it
We have lost it. Think of this before we strike (485).

But Aslaug is no mood to heed this advice or go for compromise. She answers:

Better our barren empire of the snows!
Nobler with reindeer herding to survive
Or else a free and miserable death
Together (485-86).

But this pride and hatred was not deeply rooted in the heart of Aslaug. Definitely, Eric’s love weeds out hate and sows love in her heart. The love of Eric makes him contemplate on Aslaug’s beauty:

I am enamoured of thy golden hair,
Thy body likes the snow, thy antelope eyes,
Thy neck that seems to know it carries heaven
Upon it easily. Thy song, thy speech,
The rhythmic motion of thy gracious limbs
Walking or dancing, and the careless pride
That undulates in every gesture and tone
Have seized upon me smiling sweet control (492).

The love of Eric and sincere advice of Hertha result into conflict between hate and love in Aslaug’s mind. Aslaug presses for hate but Eric pleads for love. Aslaug feels the force of true love:

A marble statue gloriously designed.

………………………………
…this marble statue holds a heart,
The heart holds love, to break it all to lay
This glory of God’s making in the dust (503).

The new dawn of love rises in the eyes of Aslaug. Hertha finds this new delightness and hopes, “She may agree to play a dubious role towards Eric” (Iyengar 143). But Aslaug does not completely accept the love of Eric. So Hertha organizes more and more meetings between Aslaug and Eric swiftly. Eric and Aslaug play the game of
love and hate. K. R. S. Iyenger writes, “They play cat and mouse as it were” (143). Eric takes her suddenly into his arms and kisses her. He advises:

Think not! Only feel,

Love only! (507).

The wild kisses of Eric arouse feelings of love in Aslaug. Nandakumar Prama notes: “Eric has to contend against the passionate hatred in Aslaug’s heart and make her respond to the liberating force of love” (*Banasthali Patrika* 171). The wild seizing of Eric creates inner confusion in her heart. She feels:

How did it come? What was it leaped on me
And overpowered? O torn distracted heart,
Wilt thou not pause a moment and give leave
To the more godlike brain to do its work?
Can the world change within a moment? can
Hate suddenly be love? …

.........................

What is there in a kiss the touch of lips.
That it can change creation? There’s a wine
That turns men mad; have I not drunk of it
To be his slave, know nothing but his will!
Aslaug and Eric!...

.........................

What was it seized on me, o heavenly powers?
I have given myself, my brother’s throne and life,
My pride, ambition, hope and grasp, and keep
Shame only. Tonight! what happens then tonight?
It was his fraudulent and furious siege,
And something in me proved a traitor, Fraud?
O beauty of the godlike brilliant eyes!
O face expressing heaven’s supremacy!
No, I will put it down, I put down.
Help me, you gods, help me against my heart.
I will strike suddenly… (511-12).

The battle between love and hate continues through the tense moments. Eric wants to conquer hatred and get the love of Aslaug. Eric tries to control the external situation whereas Aslaug loses her inner control. S. S. Jaiswal comments on this battle, “The fact that she is getting less and less sure of herself, itself shows that she is fighting a losing battle against Eric and her love” (148). Eric is sure of himself. He grips her and feels amused to watch her hesitancy and the conflict between her heart’s desire and mind’s purpose. Her hate insists to move forward to kill Eric, but love holds her back. Aslaug muses:

Might I not touch him only once in love
And none know of it but death and I –
Whom I must slay like one who hates? Not hate,
O Eric, but the hard necessity
The gods have sent upon our lives-

Myself I am doomed a concubine and slave!
I must not think of him! close, o mind, close, o eyes!(529-30).
Aslaug realizes the real value and importance of love. The love of Eric rules over her mind, her soul and her body. Seetaraman points out, “She is well on the road of complete surrender and consecration” (93). She is ready to surrender her soul, heart and body to Eric. She says:

   Eric of Norway, live and do thy will
   With Aslaug, sister of Swegn and Olaf’s child (530).

Aslaug finally surrenders to the love of Eric. His love brings them together. This is how Eric’s love plucks hatred from Aslaug’s heart. Eric also accepts Aslaug not as a concubine but as the Queen of Norway:

   Sister of Swegn, thou knowest that I love
   Daughter of Olaf, shouldest thou not aspire
   To sit by me on Norway throne? (530-31).

After submitting to the love of Eric, Aslaug’s inner struggle comes to end. Aslaug and Eric exchange rings and love conquers hatred. She feels satisfied for, “…she has saved Swegn and saved Norway, and has shown how the world could be saved from death by love” (Iyengar 145).

Along with the theme of love’s victory over hate, Sri Aurobindo deals with the theme of evolution. In this play, all main characters like Eric, Aslaug and Swegn are transformed from disillusionment to conscious human beings. In the beginning of the play, Sri Aurobindo presents Eric as iron mind, “The monarch of a thousand Vikings!” (477). He desires to unite the whole nation by the power of sword. But the beautiful love song of the dancing girl transmutes his iron mind and he feels that only love can unite the nation. He says:

   The heart! The seat is there;
   For unity is substance of the heart
And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold (478).

Eric comes to know that sword only carries together, not unites. But love unites and binds together. Such a great evolutionary change takes place in Eric because of love.

The second character is Aslaug, who is heroine of the play *Eric*. Initially the playwright presents her as a proud, ambitious, hopeful and hateful girl. Her violent nature carries her into the fire of conflict. She feels great pride of her own family:

I claim my kin with those whom Heaven’s gaze
Moulded supreme Swegn’s sister, Olaf’s child,
Aslaug of Norway (486).

But these weeds of hate, ambition, pride are removed by the love of Eric. Basically Aslaug’s heart is filled with hatred for Eric. But Eric decides that he should change the mind of Aslaug and arouse love in her heart. He meets her again and again, and tempts her for love. It is after long that the dawn of love rises in her heart. It is then her heart takes possession over her. She feels, “O gods! I love! O loose me!”(506). She realizes that hate or pride always defeat in life. Hate cannot unite human beings but love is able to unite and establish peace, harmony and humanity in the world. S. S. Jaiswal notes, “Aslaug now is happy that God has trapped her in the snare of Eric’s delight” (165).

Sri Aurobindo presents third conscious transformation of Swegn. He is son of late King Olaf Thorleikson. He is the true heir of Norway. He has been bred up under the culture and tradition of Scandinavia. He is ready at every moment to sacrifice for honour and pride. He rejects the kingship of Eric and is ready to fight against him, and unite the nation. “Fight on, fight always, till the gods are tired” (538). But his pride and honour are too narrow. He is among those whose hearts are hard and ruthless. Eric addresses him:
O narrow obstinate heart!
Had this been but thy country or a cause
Men worship, then it would indeed have been
A noble blindness, but thou serv’st thy pride (549).

Swegn dooms in blindness of pride. When a messenger brings him the message of peace and harmony from Norway’s King, Swegn flings insult after insult on Eric:

Go, tell thy king,
Swegn of the ancient house rejects his boons.

By force and not by bribes and managements
Empires are founded! But your chief was born
Of huckstering earls who lived by prudent gains
How should he imitate a royal flight
Or learn the leap of Kings upon their prey? (542).

Swegn’s speech is full of pride of his royal race. Like his sister, Swegn is also a proud, violent and ambitious person. Initially he is not ready to accept the kingship of Eric. The conciliatory words of Hertha and Aslaug have no effect on Swegn. Then Eric reminds Swegn that his royal race had come as dancing girls:

As dancing girls the women came to me,

Aslaug of Norway at her trade- to dance
Before me and my courtiers (553).

Swegn cannot bear this humiliation of the royal women. They had danced before Eric and the courtiers. For the honour of the women of the royal family, Swegn accepts Kingship and mercy of Eric:
In dealing with Swegn, Eric uses force and deceitful decision, but does not cheat him. At the end, Eric turns and reveals that Aslaug has become his wife and Queen of Norway. No doubt, Eric’s love transmutes the proud and violent nature of Aslaug as well as Swegn. The playwright explores how love elevates consciousness and harmony. With the help of love, Eric wins peace and unites the nation. Prema Nandakumar writes, “Love is definitely the divine hoop that has combined the several hearts at last” (Littcrit 24).

*Eric* is a dramatic romance that is brightly painted with the colours of love between Eric and Aslaug. Eric is presented as a lover of beauty, song, wisdom and peace. He realizes the power of love which wins God as well as others. When Eric listens to the beautiful song of the dancing girl, he feels:

> From light lips and casual thoughts
> The Gods speak best (478).

Eric learns this lesson of love from the child of Olaf and sister of Swegn. He utters:

> Love! If it were this girl with antelope eyes
> And the high head so proudly lifted up
> Upon a neck as white as any Swegn!

> ………………………

> Perhaps this stag-eyed woman comes for that
> To teach me (482).

Aslaug turns from her wicked aim and surrenders herself to Eric:
Eric of Norway, love and do thy will

With Aslaug, sister of Swegn and Olaf’s child (530).

But Eric does not like her surrender with frustration. So he asks her either to kill him or to accept as gift both his life and kingdom:

My life and Kingdom twice are in thy hand

And I will keep them only as thy gift (532).

The power of love has the cleansing effect on Aslaug and she accepts his love. She surrenders herself to Eric by saying:

O Eric, is not my heart already thine,

My body thine, my soul into thy grasp

Delivered? I rejoice that God has played

The grand comedian with my tragedy

And trapped me in the snare of thy delight (534).

Thus, Sri Aurobindo depicts the theme of love and gives the message that love is God and God rules men. Aslaug also accepts, “Thou for me! Not other gods” (535).

Through his five complete plays, Sri Aurobindo expresses his theory of evolution. He believes that pure love changes the world and establishes new world, which is beautiful and peaceful. “Sri Aurobindo discovered another world not found on any map, which he called the Super mind and which he wanted to draw down to the earth” (Mathur 4). He desires evolutionary change in the world. Today’s world is filled with malice and materialistic ideas and things. Every one follows power, conspiracy and materialistic views. But Sri Aurobindo wants to transform this materialistic world through the evolution of the mind.
Works Cited


