



**SRI AUROBINDO'S POETIC DRAMAS AS NOTHING BUT
INSISTENCE ON BREATHING 'HUMAN SPIRITUALITY' AND
NOURISHING 'DIVINE SELF' IN MAN : AN APPRAISAL**

DR. S. CHELLIAH

M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt.,
Professor, Head & Chairperson,
School of English & Foreign Languages,
Dept. of English & Comparative Literature,
Madurai Kamaraj University,
Madurai – 625 021. (TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at projective Sri Aurobindo as essentially a product of Indian Renaissance, sincerely wishing India to shape for itself a new body of philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political and social forms and he wanted all these forms – all being rejuvenated by the informing spirit of the soul and examines how his poetic dramas as nothing but insistence on breathing 'human spirituality' and nourishing 'divine self' in Man

Keywords: *product, Indian Renaissance, spirit, soul, convictional, spirituality, poetic drama, human spirituality, divine self*

INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo is essentially a product of Indian Renaissance, that had its birth after the political outburst of 1905 – the partition of Bengal. Like all Renaissance cultural heroes, he wanted India to shape for itself a new body of philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political and social forms and he wanted all these forms to be rejuvenated by the informing spirit of the soul. Being a typically a product of Indian Renaissance, his writings bear the stamp of a cultural hero. He was of the conviction that spirituality can no longer flourish in a void. I should have for its sap, the life-giving powers of this earth. Supreme spirituality must have “the prolific abundance of the energy and joy of life and creation” (FIC 402). That is why he explored the myths and legends of India, the myths of

DR. S. CHELLIAH

1P a g e



Greece, Syria and Norway. *Persians the Deliverer* is a play located in Syria. *Vasavadutta* is an exploration of an Indian fable taken from *Somadeva's Katha Sarit Sagara*. Eric. Is a poetic insight into Nordic culture.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the work of Renaissance must be to make the higher view of life and the deeper potentiality of life, a dominant power in the world. It should be the bringing back to the Indian mind, its old unresting thirst for all kinds of knowledge. The opulent mind of Sri Aurobindo had gathered its ideas from the different parts of the globe, but the global comprehension of Sri Aurobindo is such that all the myths get reduced to the distinct philosophy he had formulated. The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is a passionate inquiry into the very truth of existence "through the intuitive mind and through an inner experience and interpretation both of the psychic and physical existence" (P 406). Art is truly a new creation, where there should be the delicately suggestive and the symbolic. With this overpowering idea on art, he has, in his poetic dramas, hinted at the regeneration of man whose spirit would touch the very essence of the sublime.

Quite popularly known as Sri Aurobindo, Aurobindo Ghose is a multifaceted genius – poet, patriot, philosopher, sage and yogi. His many-sided genius gets reflected in his voluminous writings and he is regarded as one of the master minds of the twentieth century. He has the credit of being the poet of a cosmic epic *Savitri* and a great master of style. He was deeply influenced by the ideas of synthesis presented by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. "The rare versatility of his genius, the rich exuberance of his creativity, the synthetic comprehensiveness of his outlook are simply astounding" (Chaudhari 1). The new living strands combined with the strong humanitarianism contained in the synthesis of Swami Vivekananda moved Sri Aurobindo to a strong revitalization of our literature. He is said to have given a thorough synthesis of the eastern and western thoughts in his writings. Romain Rollen described him "as the completes synthesis that has been realised to this day by the geniuses of Asia and geniuses of Europe" (Joshi 13). Rabindranath Tagore also influenced him greatly, whose writings, he says, show "an increasing return to the Indian spirit in fresh forms" (Seetaraman 39).

Sri Aurobindo's insists on the spiritual regeneration even in the fields of art and poetry for his spirituality is much wider than any particular religion. He firmly believed that there cannot be spirituality without the vigour, joy, power and perfection of human life. He calls it "human spirituality" (FIC 427). The poetic dramas of Sri Aurobindo breathes human spirituality as a means of developing the divine self in man. The characters in these poetic dramas give to the world not only a spiritual view point of the truth of existence but also an intimate sense, transforming and enlightening the basic values that uphold life. Sri Aurobindo is said to have made his poetic dramas not only as an utterance of poetic discovery but also as the utterance of a revelation conveying the very meaning of human existence. There is greater destiny of the spirit in man and therefore he turns his prophetic eye "on the movement of time and the actual life and destiny of man, largely present and futurist in its insistence" (FP 254).

Born in Calcutta on August 15, 1872, Sri Aurobindo was taken at the age of seven with his two elder brothers to England for education and lived there for fourteen years. Brought up at first in an English family at Manchester, he joined St.Paul's school in London in 1884 and in 1890 went from it with a



senior classical scholarship to king's college, Cambridge. Through the Gaekwar of Baroda, he obtained an appointment in the Baroda service in London and left England in February, 1893. Even while he was eleven years old, he had a sort of premonition that great revolutions were going to take place in the future and that he had a part to play in some of them. Not a mental idea, but a kind of inner feeling was found growing within him that he had some great work to do, a mission to fulfill. It was thus that although his mind was nourished and developed by the classical spirit in Western culture, his soul remained untouched, his heart's love flowed towards India and his will flamed to fight and suffer for her freedom. An exceptional mastery of Sanskrit did obviously open to him the "immense treasure – house of the Indian heritage" (Roshan XII). He read the Upanishads, the Gita, the Puranas, the Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the dramas of our Ancient India, the ageless India of spiritual culture and unwearied creative vitality, revealed herself to his wondering vision and he discovered the secret of her unparalleled greatness. In discovery the greatness of India, he discovered himself, the greatness of his own soul and realised the value of human spirituality and divinity of self in man in all respects. his spiritual vision embraced all mankind and his whole life was spent for a gradual unfolding of a single aim of purpose – the steady pursuit and accomplishment of a single mission that is the enliven the living embodiment of the highest spiritual knowledge and the repository of the sublimit spiritual achievements of the human race. Sri Aurobindo writes:

"The perfection of the body, as great a perfection as we bring about by the means at our disposal, must be the ultimate aim of physical culture. Perfection is the true aim of all culture, the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also. A total perfection is the ultimate aim we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine life which we wish to Create here, the life of the spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe" (P 5).

The attitude of a human spirituality that shunned or turned away from life in the world does involve certain divine enrichment and development with a profound spiritual inclination. As Sri Aurobindo himself puts it,

"A divine life in the world or an institution having that for its aim and purpose cannot be or cannot remain something outside or entirely shut away from the life of ordinary man in the world or unconnected with the mundane existence; it has to do the work of the Divine in the world and not a work outside or separate



from it... “ (P 8).

Almost all his writings do reflect his ideas on philosophy, divinity and spirituality. As a patriot and a lover of humanity, he combines in himself the role of a superman, the profounder of yoga, the prophet of Life Divine, a scholar, an interpreter of the Vedas and a literary genius. V.K.Gokak goes to the extent of describing him as “the seer of Before and After” (P 5).

Sri Aurobindo is first and foremost an excellent poet but he tried his hand, in other fields too. One such attempt is the creation of ‘poetic drama’. Prof. Anniah Gowda describes poetic drama as “a drama with roots firmly established in literature” (Gowda 3). Writers of all ages tried their hand in poetic drama, but a very few could succeed in this field. Among the poetic playwrights of the 1890’s Bridges and Philips drew their inspiration mainly from Greek, Spanish and Elizabethan playwrights. The Victorian dramatists, Browning, Tennyson and Swinburne have created some poetic dramas but with little success. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the poetic dramatist made an effort to keep poetic drama alive. Oscar Wilde brought a new effect in poetic drama by his creation of symbolic characters. His claim as a writer of poetic drama was recognised particularly because of his two plays *Salome* and *The Duchess of Padma*. The play *Salome* was considered by critics as a successful poetic play of the present age. Dramatists like Wilfred Wilson Gibson, Lancelotti Abercrombie and John Drinkwater introduced a new form in poetic drama. Gibson’s first dramatic experiment is *The Stonefolds*. Abercrombie made a rare combination of dramatic intensity and poetic skill and some considerable change took place in the creation of poetic drama, that too, because of the influence of the Noh plays. The most exemplified Noh play is *Nishikigi*, which is “a poetic drama in which gesture and verse unite to produce a single clarified impression” (Gowda 222). John Drinkwater’s great play *Abraham Lincoln* which made all possible ways for the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century.

The Irish movement is said to have made a significant contribution to the growth and development of poetic drama in our time. Dramatists like W.B.Yeats and S.M.Syngue sought to make poetic drama rich in its thought content and expression. Yeats’ major plays are *The Countess Cathleen*, *The Land of Heart’s Desire* and *Four Plays of Dancers*, in all which the emotions of his characters are presented in the lyrical verse form. Yeats, however, succeeded in imparting lyricism and symbolism to poetic drama. Another Irish playwright J.M.Syngue’s two plays *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Shadow of the Glen* are remarkable for their pathetic thoughts in poetic language. So, Yeats and Syngue have become names and remarkable for modern poetic drama, as Marlowe and Kyd being remarkable for the Elizabethan Stage.

Among the Indo-Anglian playwrights, Sri Aurobindo is considered to be one of the most distinguished playwrights with his persistent concern for religion humanitarian outlook, spiritual orientation and dramatic vision. His knowledge of Bengali and Sanskrit literatures have inspired him to write poetic plays. His main poetic plays are *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasuvadutta*, *Eric*, *Rodogane*, and *The Viziers of Bassara* which were written in blank verse. Sri Aurobindo’s plays are really dramas of life and love, of conflict and change. In the words of K.R.S.Iyengar, “Like the poems, the dramas too were a part of Sri Aurobindo’s life: the outer projections of the richer or quintessential part



of his life – the imponderables of his ‘inner’ life” (P 113). Sri Aurobindo’s first full – length verse play is *Perseus the Deliverer* written in blank verse. The play centres round a Greek myth in the language of modern thought. Perseus is the protagonist of this play. He is considered to be heroic hero of ancient Hellas. He is portrayed not only as a veritable hero but also as a hero who inaugurates a forward movement in the history of humanity, as a result of participating in a monumental clash of powerful opposites. In his character, one can see “the first promptings of the deeper and higher psychic and spiritual being which it is his (men’s) ultimate destiny to become” (Iyengar 113). *Perseus to Deliverer* is essentially a play of action and “all the major and minor types of characters of complex human nature are presented in the play and described first in their reactions to the old order, then in a state of gradual preparation and finally acclimatization of the new order” (Sectaraman 34). The conservative, transitional, revolutionary, skeptical, human and humorous characters with remarkable poetic skill. The final impression of the drama is nothing but the spectacle of humanity with its variety of personalities progressing through consciousness.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Heraclitean maxim in all is flux, nothing is stationary” – what Heraclitus, really tells us is just this: all indeed comes into being according to strife, but also all things come into being according to Reason; Kata erin but also Kata tan logon” (144). This expanded Heraclitean message finds eloquent expression in the last lines of Sri Aurobindo’s play *Perseus the Deliverer*:

*“But the blind nether forces still have power
And the ascent is slow and long is time.
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase;
The day shall come when man 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” (P 146).*

In these lines, one can see the germs of Aurobindo’s thought. Ultimate reality is both a fact of Being and the dynamics of Becoming. “All things may pass and change in the drama of Becoming, yet all things have their subsistence only in the truth of Being” (PP 114-15). In *Perseus the Deliverer*, there is a drama in the background as well as a drama in the foreground. Both of them have their own intimate filiations. Poseidon stands for power and Pallas Athene symbolizes Grace. Both of them decide to fight it out through their earthly representatives, the subhuman sea-monster and the superhuman Perseus. The human intermediaries are Andromeda, the Princess of Syria and Polydam, Priest in the temple of Poseidon. The former is the incarnate of compassion while the latter stands for Venugopal cruelty and spite. All the characters in the play are life-like and interesting. Pallas Athene, the Goddess of wisdom, is corresponding to Maheswari the Goddess of Wisdom, is corresponding to Maheswari of the Indian Tantra. She is made from God’s being to lead and discipline the people on a spiritual plane:

*“The immortal spirit of man, till it attain
To order and magnificent mastery*



Of all his outward world” (P 6).

She is the Virgin, divinely compassionate and very strong in her self-discipline. By the light of reason and wisdom, she works for the establishment of a life of love and divinity. Perseus, the Sun god who appears in the first Act of the play itself is the central character who is very perfect to receive and execute the divine will. “He is indeed the deliverer, not merely the savior of the lives of people from the jaws of Death, of the Babylonian merchants and Andromeda and the members of her family, but the real savior of the souls of a whole race committed to the crude religion of Poseidon-worship” (Dramatic Poems 39). Andromeda has a burning zeal for bringing about the established order by a revolutionary effort. She is the aspiring human soul. True aspiration is something full of courage and we see this quality in Andromeda’s heroic contempt of the fearful God Poseidon. She opposes the dreadful and stern priest Poly daon, disobeys her father and is finally ready to face Death in order to save the unfortunate, alien merchants. This aspiration is psychic in its nature, giving her the deep knowledge that all human beings live, move and have their being in one homogeneous consciousness. “She is Andromeda with a sunny smile. And the sun is the symbol of spiritual love, light and Beauty” (P 42).

Vasavadutta is a ‘Dramatic Romance’ depicting the supreme wisdom of making every contact of life and shock of circumstances a source of joy, by the renunciation of egoistic desire. This play is woven round the love story of Prince Udayan and Princess Vasavadutta. The love of the prince and princess becomes a unifying factor that unites the two families. The centre of interest is the ‘empire’ in the play. The play has concentration and purpose. The catastrophe is precipitated by events within the play and by chance. In the play, one can see the politics of empire and romantic love and how ultimately love proves the victor. Vasudevadutta in the play allows herself to be used by her father, Chunda Mahasegn of Arunthie, as a pawn in his imperial politics, but she succumbs to love, wins her own happiness and destroys her father’s plans. “The mind schemes, but the heart scores” (P 137). Sri Aurobindo’s *Eric* depicts on replifting and transforming of the Actual towards the Ideal by the education of the fundamental types of the human personality. The marriage of Eric and Aslang signifies the union of power and Grace, and so a new era dawns on strong united Norway. “Eric’s personality is surcharged with ... all the characters of the hero” (DP 68). Love begins with the discovery of beauty in the personality of the beloved:

*“If it were this girl with entelope eyes
And the high head so proudly lifted up
Upon a neck as white as any swan’s!” (P 7).*

In this contest, the wall between the two souls breaks and the communion of the hearts and souls begins. This leads to a condition of complete trust and surrender of all that one has in life. The life of the lover flows into the life of the beloved and sees his life’s goal and way reflected in her and so one finds Eric anxious to make her the queen of integrated Norway, Love comes to fulfill and not to destroy. “The beloved is not only his helpmate or companion in life but his Shakti” (DP 71). Eric goes to conquer Swegn with this newly learned art of love. Her recognizes with devotion and gratitude that this love is the gift of the grace of the Divine Mother of the gods, Freya. “The realise the All-Beautiful and the All-Loving Divine Mother who labours and loves, loves and labours for the perfection of the



universe” (P 74). Eric has achieved completeness and therefore becomes the conscious educator of the other persons in the play.

In all the poetic dramas of Sri Aurobindo, there is an ideal struggle between love and other negative forces. Writing to his brother Manmohan Ghose, Sri. Aurobindo observes; “the love pictured must be on the idea plan and touch, to touch the farthest limit of strength” (P 155). Sri Aurobindo conceives of three distinct elements of love – love as a sensual impulse, love as an emotional impulse and love play an important part in all the dramatic poems of Sri Aurobindo. His epic *Savitri* also sings of the glory of love as a ‘triune energy’:

*“Love that was once an animal’s desire
Then a sweet madness in the rapturous heart,
And ardent comradeship in the happy mind,
Becomes a wide spiritual yearnings space”*

(Book Ten – Canto III)

Thus, it is love, the wide spiritual yearning that gives the poetic dramas the force and power to heal the unhappiness and the negative forces of this world. Sri Aurobindo’s poetic dramas abound in myth, romance and realism. But all the plays mark the passage of the human mind to a new order of bright intellectualism and human spirituality. Aurobindo’s very scheme of evolution does obviously underscore the fact that ultimately, there will be the emergence of the light of reason, a wise tranquil order of life and a harmonious crystallization of thoughts.

To conclude, it may be said that Sri Aurobindo looked upon” philosophy not as an intellectual exercise but as the articulation of truths arrive at through inner experience” (Heehs 107). Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru remembered Sri Aurobindo as ‘one of the greatest minds of our generation’ and Sardar Patel spoke of his efforts in the mystic field of the struggle of the spirit and the flesh! In which he attained a rare triumph of mind over matter while never losing his absorbing interest in our problems and fortunes. While the philosopher and Statesman Dr.S.Radhakrishnan ‘lauded Sri Aurobindo as ‘the greatest intellectual of our age’ and as ‘a major force for the lift of spirit.’ In a word, he lived by the diction that “spiritual experiences are nothing but genuine experiences of actual realities.” He insisted on human unity and human spirituality. He himself stated thus: “The defence power that is needed is a new psychological element, which will bring about the necessary creation of a unified life for humanity. It will also bind it to welcome the principle of independence. This progressive power seems to be the religion of humanity, which bends towards it because a human makes unity meaningful” (Majumdaar 67). As a prophet of a new world, his integral vision is nothing but the answer to the modern man’s fragmented existence. There is no shadow of doubt that besides being a great poet and dramatist, he is “a great theorist, philosopher, visionary, seer and spiritualist ... in him, spirituality has come of age and found a new dimension” (Kalaamani 1). In brief, it has to be said that his ultimate goal was to bring about a spiritual regeneration and human unity in all respects.



WORKS CITED

1. Aurobindo, Sri. *The Supramental Manifestation and Other writings* Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Asharam, 1971.
2. ___ *The Foundations of Indian Culture* Pondicherry: SABCL, 1972.
3. ___ *The Future Poetry* Vol.IX Pondicherry: SABCL, 1972.
4. Chaudhari, Haridas. *Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Life Divine* Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Asharam, 1960.
5. Gokak, V.K. *Sri Aurobindo : Seer and Poet* New Delhi : Abhimav Publications, 1973.
6. Gouda, H.H. Anniah. *The Revival of English Poetic Drama* Bombay: Orient Longman Ltd., 1972.
7. Heehs Peter. *Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.
8. Iyengar, K.R.S. *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and History* Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1972.
9. Joshi. K.C. *Sri Aurobindo : An Interpretation* Delhi: Vikas Publishing House (Pvt), Ltd, 1973.
10. Kaleeman, *Sri Aurobindo : His Mind and Art* Trichy : Veena Publishers, 1996.
11. Majumdaar, Purnima. *Sri Aurobindo*. New Delhi : Diamond Books, 2004.
12. Rosan and Apurva, *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953.
13. Seetharaman, M.V. *Sri Aurobindo's Dramatic Poems* Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1964.