



A STUDY OF SRI AUROBINDO'S PLAY *THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA AS A MORALITY PLAY*

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ABSTRACT

*The Morality Play was very much popular during the 15th and 16th century in Europe. In the play the characters personify good and evil. Through the conflict between good and evil, the writer proves the victory of good over evil. The protagonist of the play is himself an embodiment of goodness. Sri Aurobindo, the learned and the spiritual writer of 20th century has written many plays, *The Viziers of Bassora* is one of them. The story of the play has been borrowed from *The Arabian Nights*. To some extent, this play can be read in the light of the Morality Play as all the major characteristics of a Morality Play are there in the play. This research paper is an attempt to analyze that not wholly but partially the play *The Viziers of Bassora* fulfills the requirements of being a Morality Play.*

Key-words: - Morality, good, evil, conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The Morality play also called Morality, an allegorical drama popular in Europe especially during the 15th and 16th centuries, in which the characters personify moral qualities (such as charity and vice) or abstractions (as death or youth) and in which moral lessons are taught. In the Morality play the protagonist represents humanity as a whole or as smaller social structures. They encourage men to live a righteous life. Morality play developed out of Miracle and Mystery plays and it flourished during the middle ages, the morality was one of the early forms of drama and attained much popularity in the First half of the Fifteenth century. Morality plays survived the disenchantment of the Church and the wrath of the Reformation, maintaining their popularity to near the end of the Sixteenth century, when the

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public interest turned in other directions. They are a representation of mankind's fascination with art and creativity and the desire to use those gifts to bring about positive ends.

Most often Morality plays were an externalized dramatization of a psychological or spiritual struggle, "The battle between the forces of good and evil in the human soul." Sri Aurobindo's play *The Viziers of Bassora* is his "youthful creation". The play was first published in "Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual", 1959, and then issued in book-form in the same year. The theme of this play has been drawn from "The Arabian Nights". The tales in "The Arabian Nights" appealed to Sri Aurobindo also on account of their being a record of the nature of the cultural life of the times of Haroun Al Rasheed, the most illustrious and upright of the Abbaside Caliphs of Baghdad, and 'a picture of Arab civilization as a whole'.

Nureddene, Ibn Sawy's son is wild and bold and is a true handsome roisterer. 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 is a romantic person who always dreams of being a noble chivalrous knight. 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 soaring. (The Viziers of Bassora 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." (The Viziers of Bassora 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. Sri Aurobindo says;

Plays oft have serious fruit,

'Tis seen; then why not this? (The Viziers of Bassora 616)

In view of what Sri Aurobindo says about the purpose in drama and even otherwise, if we look for 'serious fruit' or some meaning in his plays, they will not be altogether unjustified. S. S. Jaiswal is of the view that Sri Aurobindo has written this play without having any moral axe to grind. He has written it to give a religious message, the message of faith. (Jaiswal 35)

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Many arguments are given in the favour and against of *The Viziers of Bassora* as a Morality Play. This research paper is an attempt to analyze the play as a Morality Play. The first and the foremost characteristic of a Morality Play is that there must be a protagonist who represents either humanity as a whole or a smaller social structure. Nureddene is the protagonist of this play. At the very outset of the play we find Nureddene as in his father's words;

Why, my wild handsome roisterer, Nureddene.

My hunter of girls, my share of hearts of virgins. (The Viziers of Bassora 578)

And he believes that

The blood is good

And in the end will bear him through.

There's hope. (The Viziers of Bassore 579)

An important thing about Nureddene's goodness is his faith in man's essential goodness. He forgives all his friends who left him in his bad days; "God made them; what He made, is doubtless good." (The Viziers of Bassora 646) With the course of time he gains strength in his character and admits that he was wrong so far and he is determined to resolve himself. Love of Alice has worked as an alchemist for him that can turn dross into gold. "It brings about a progressive chastening of his temperament and releases the noble virtues and gives them their full play." (The Viziers of Bassora 566) M. V. Seetaraman observes, "This romantic comedy is the declaration of the soul of the creative artist of faith in the Supreme Architect of life and his master plan of ultimate victory and triumph over Matter." Through the play Sri Aurobindo proves his faith in virtue and that God's laws are there just to punish the bad and protect the good from danger and difficulties. In Bassora, Nureddene has to suffer a lot as Almuene conspires against him but his father asks him to bow to the will of God and says;

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 the justice still. (The Viziers of Bassora 728)

At the end of the play the evil has been sentenced to death and Nureddene ascends to the throne of Bassora.



The main objective of the Morality Plays provides the audience with moral guidance and encourages men to live a righteous life. Sri Aurobindo's *The Viziers of Bassora* fulfills the moral purpose of this play. The character of Nureddene signifies that despite the entire worse situation one has to keep full faith in God. In the words of S.S. Jaiswal, "Sri Aurobindo here suggests that cheers and tears are the wrap and woof of man's life. To be able to overcome the difficulties and sorrows punctuating his life, man must plead for God's fatherly love and kindness, for these, rather than justice, can bring him peace and harmony." (Jaiswal, 48)

Another characteristic of the Morality Play is that the supporting characters are personifications of good and evil. *The Viziers of Bassora* absolutely follows this characteristic of the Morality Play. Mr. Seetaraman observes, "The sets of opposite characters in the play radically opposite temperaments with basically different orientations of the energies of life." (Seetaraman 17) S.S. Jaiswal writes, "If one character stands for the type made in God's image and growing more and more in that image of Love, Light and Grace, the other is its exact opposite, as written in the play; "a brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape." (Jaiswal 39)

Ibn Sawy and Almuene are the first pair of contrast, whereas Ibn Sawy, as described in the play; "He has the serenity and brightness of nature that never willingly did hurt to any man or living thing." (The Viziers of Bassora 564) One thing that is noteworthy about him that is his abiding faith in God which saves him to be ruined and says; "God Thou art mighty and Thy will is just." (The Viziers of Bassora 727) On the other hand the character of Almuene is just opposite to the character of Ibn Sawy. He is a man of cunningness and revengefulness; even he has a sense of aversion for his wife too. See the lines said by Almuene;

I had been happier bedded with a slave,

Whom I could beat to sense when she was forward.

(The Viziers of Bassora 569)

Ibn Sawy's strong belief in God leads him to be happy at the end of the play and Almuene's hatred for virtue and his disbelief in God leads him to pay for his wrong doing and has been sentenced to death at the end of the play. Second pair of contrasting characters is Fareed and Nureddene. Nureddene, after facing all the traumas in life attains prosperity at the end of the play. At the very beginning, he was "a hunter of girls" but at the end of the play he becomes a firm believer in God. He sat on the throne of Bassora. The Caliph wants him to pronounce Almuene's death but he denies;

He has beguiled me, Caliph.

I cannot pronounce his doom.

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(The Viziers of Bassora 734)

Though Almuene was responsible for all his suffering throughout the play, despite he does not punish him.

On the other hand, Fareed is a devil in man. He is the son of Almuene who spoils him; Fareed needs no enemy to spoil him. Even his mother holds Almuene responsible for the brutal behaviour of Fareed. She says to her husband;

*You have indulged the boy till he has lost
The likeness even of manhood. God's great stamp
And heavenly image on his mint's defaced,
Rubbed out, and only the brute metal left
Which never shall find currency again
Among the angels.*

(The Viziers of Bassora 569)

He needs girls and money and for his pleasure he can stoop to anything for that. M. K. Mishra observes; "This brute, prosaic, anarchist, insolent, blasphemous and disloyal son of an equally savage father gets what he deserves....he lives an ignoble life and dies an ignoble death." (Mishra 108)

Third pair of contrast who contradicts each other's nature is king Alzayani and the Caliph. King Alzyani has no moral values. He fabricated his dangerous plotting against Haroun Al Rasheed, his own cousin and Caliph, in the words of S.S. Kulkarni; "is endowed with piety and righteousness and with the realisation that the welfare of his subjects is the only vocation as king. He stands for justice, fair play and benevolence." (Kulkarni 47)

Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar is of the view, "The story of the two Viziers, Ibn Sawy and Almuene, and of their sons, Nureddene and Fareed, can almost be read as a Morality Play; but no! the poetry of the play and the comic spirit that presides over it will permit no such critical excrescence." (Iyengar 125) But as this play has been written by Sri Aurobindo, a Yogi, a Philosopher and a Spiritualist, despite its comic spirit, one can not deny the deep purpose of this play. As in the words of A. Nicoll; "If a poet has high soul like Sophocles, his influence will always be moral, let him do what he will" (Nicoll 71) By depicting such type of contrasting characters, where one set of characters represents the goodness and the other set of characters shows the evil and by depicting their respective fates, where all the good characters lead a prosperous and happy life and all the devil characters suffer and doom to death, Sri Aurobindo affirms our faith in virtue and in man's essential goodness. In the

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conflict of good and evil, good inevitably emerges victorious. To sum up, it can be said that the conflict between good and evil and ultimately the triumph of good over evil makes the play *The Viziers of Bassora* to stand in the category of the Morality Play. The character of Nureddene, the protagonist of the play also represents humanity and gives a message to the society that have faith in God and God will do the justice and if one is right no body can harm permanently, though one has to pass through trauma and turmoils to prove him righteous. In the words of Nureddene, Sri Aurobindo conveys the message to the mankind is;

Man

Is not ignoble, but has angel soarings,

However the neither devil plucks him down.

Still we have souls nor is the mould quite broken

Of that original and faultless plan

Which Adam spoilt. (The Viziers of Bassora 643)

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