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ANALYSIS OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S DRAMAS FOCUSING ON FEMINISM AND FEMININITY THEMES

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Abstract

An awareness of women's oppression at the hands of society's dominant patriarchs is at the heart of feminist consciousness in literature. Victimized women are consequently relegated to a subaltern position within the organization. Because of this, these women have a very anti-male outlook. For many women, the mere mention of the word "feminism" evokes images of a fiercely independent and radical streak as they fight tooth and nail to establish their inherent superiority or parity with men. Feminism is an anti-oppression and anti-discrimination movement, whereas feminine consciousness is the realization that one is the center of another's attention. Being aware of this only sometimes implies fighting for social supremacy. It is also not intended to exclude males.

The actualization of feminine awareness may hasten humanity's progress toward the fullness of being. In his plays, Sri Aurobindo depicts female characters that reflect distinct feminine understanding but do not demand equal rights with men, in contrast to the feminist authors who saw their movement as a fight for women's equality with men. The feminine qualities that are intrinsic to them motivate their husbands to face the world with courage. In Sri Aurobindo's plays, women represent the tremendous feminine force and provide men with strength, nutrition, and encouragement. A powerful and spiritually advanced entity can bestow the ability to love, defend, rescue, and inspire. In this paper, I'll do my best to highlight how feminist and feminine awareness vary.

Keywords Feminist, Feminine Power, Feminine Consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

From ideas of consciousness and spirituality to social systems and personal identity, Sri Aurobindo covers it all in his writings. The complex depiction of female characters and their challenges in his plays demonstrates that feminism and femininity are essential topics in his work. By reviewing the relevant literature, we want to understand better the philosophical foundations and socio-cultural ramifications of Sri Aurobindo's

theatrical works' depictions of femininity and feminism.

The fundamental work of S. K. Ramachandra Rao, "Sri Aurobindo and the Feminine Principle in Drama" (1986), analyzes the feminine principle and how Sri Aurobindo used it in his plays, highlighting the importance of this concept to Aurobindo's philosophical position. According to Rao, Sri Aurobindo gives women agency and

spiritual significance in his feminine characters beyond simple gender stereotypes. In her research of Sri Aurobindo's work, Rao reveals how the author delves into the complex nature of femininity, questioning accepted ideas and calling for a broader perspective on women's place in society.

Anita Anand's 2005 article "Feminism and Consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's Plays" explores how Sri Aurobindo's depiction of women in his plays reveals their revolutionary power. Anand contends, using feminist theory and Aurobindonian philosophy, that Sri Aurobindo's plays allow us to see the women's growing awareness and fight for emancipation. By dissecting seminal plays like "Urvashi" and "Vasavadatta," Anand explains how Sri Aurobindo challenges patriarchal conventions and gives women power again.

Per Priya K. Nair's 2012 article "Reimagining Femininity: Sri Aurobindo's Dramatic Vision":

By delving into topics like embodiment, desire, and change, Nair's study thoroughly examines how Sri Aurobindo portrayed gender in his plays. According to Nair, Sri Aurobindo's portrayal of womanhood embraces flexibility and dynamism rather than rigid binary classifications. By looking at Sita and Savitri, Nair shows how Sri Aurobindo challenges traditional narratives and pushes the limits of feminine identity by reimagining femininity as a powerful force for social and spiritual transformation.

When the first generation of feminists sought to improve women's access to education, safe working conditions, and the franchise in the nineteenth century, the feminist movement gained momentum. From the 1960s through the 1980s, a second wave of the movement sought to address gender inequality, cultural differences, and legal inequities. It was in 1991 that American Feminist writer Rebecca Walker published her piece

"Becoming the Third Wave," which sparked the third wave of feminism. 'The Violence Against Women Act' in the United States and 'Gender Equity in Education Act' in 1994 were the primary targets of the campaign. In 2012, a new generation of feminists emerged, calling for an end to sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and demanding justice for all women. The subsequent proliferation of similar initiatives suggests a long way to go until the fair sex achieves justice and equality. A housewife, author, and feminist, Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was a seminal work that sparked the Women's Rights movement of the '60s. This book embodies Friedan's assertion that she could diagnose the enduring unease felt by women throughout her lifetime. The primary source of their concern, she realized, is the discord between societal expectations of women as homemakers and mothers and their own needs, want, and potential. According to Friedan, middle-class women were educationally dissatisfied with the societally imposed roles of mother and housewife. In the first chapter of the book, she wrote:

"The problem lay buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – "Is this all?"

In primitive communities, there was no social hierarchy, and women had the same rights as males. Disparities in social standing between the sexes emerged throughout time due to industrialization and the division of labor. Women were expected to stay home and take care of

newborns and other household duties, while men were sent to fight for their country and defend women and their area. Men and women alike have long taken pleasure in referring to women as the "weaker sex," a label that persists to this day. However, women in ancient India were highly esteemed and played an essential role in society's progress. During this time, they never let their intellectual and spiritual interests die. The early Vedic culture in India held women in the highest regard despite their patriarchal nature. Their involvement and impact on Samitis political councils were recognized. Gurukuls were their educational institutions. Upala, Ghosha, and Lopamudra were among the learned ladies who wrote songs from the Rig Veda. The increased frequency of wars and fights, however, altered this situation. The conquest of new lands and the expansion of existing ones became paramount. As a result, males started looking out for women.

Consequently, women were seen as objects to be safeguarded and converted. And so the tale of women's enslavement started. Their social standing was so low that they had no choice but to accept it. Their individuality was watered down. It would seem that Draupadi's query from the Mahabharata epic, "Is woman a thing or a being?" continues to reverberate to this day. And the modern feminist wants an explanation.

Despite feminism's original intent to advance women's rights based on gender equality, modern feminist ideology increasingly seeks to exclude males and discredit their ideas and actions. The historical record shows that males established patriarchal societies in which they controlled and shaped all social standards, so it's easy to see why women would act this way. Along the path to achieving gender parity, women have become more resolute. They have been discussing the matter in several forums. Such topics, such as women's oppression and the fight for self-

determination within patriarchal systems, are abundant in literature.

Feminist authors nowadays color their protagonists with the image of the contemporary woman. The characters' feminist conscience prevents them from conforming to societal standards that favor men. Men are the party and the judge; thus, it seems to reason that this is the case. On top of that, the regulations imposed on women prevented them from living apart from their husbands, children, and the house. To satisfy societal expectations and their desires, they had to put their education, careers, and passions on the back burner. Novelists from India who identify as female have broken away from stereotypical depictions of women in favor of strong, independent female protagonists who defy the patriarchal society's expectations of them. Female protagonists in the works of feminist authors such as Anita Desai, Anita Nair, Shashi Deshpande, and Bharati Mukherjee are often shown as being oppressed by men. The feminist consciousness refuses to give in to male dominance. Still, it always ends in tragedy either by their suicide or the suicide of their husbands, who are so egotistical and insensitive to their wives' wants and needs that they even hurt themselves. Feminist fiction's contemporary heroines have such remarkable strength and self-assurance in their feminist awareness that they defiantly resist male supremacy and fight for familial autonomy inside patriarchal structures. Unfortunately, they can't make their spouses or the situation any better.

Sri Aurobindoin, at his time, had a distinct take on the feminine ideal, whereas feminists have been demanding men's rights and attempting to establish their supremacy. In Sri Aurobindo's view, a woman is more than just a physical object. She personifies singular awareness. Sri Aurobindo maintains that a woman's physical form is secondary to her value as a source of aesthetic

pleasure for men. The mental bond between a man and a woman is more important than any physical intimacy. Sri Aurobindo's view of femininity is that a woman is a man's elan vital in her role as a wife. She gives her spouse new life and energy. She bestows on him love, happiness, and prosperity. Her affection, tenderness, reassuring touch, and uplifting words save him from despair, anger, and isolation. A woman may transform a man's heart by listening to his joys and sorrows.

The heroine in Sri Aurobindo's 1959 play *The Viziers of Bassora* is a force for good in man's life. Slave girl Anice-Aljalice, our heroine, alters her husband's life and destiny dramatically. Notwithstanding the patriarchal framework, the depiction of the slave girl is not one of pity. Instead of depicting her as an elderly enslaved person for some unnamed king, she is shown as a contemporary lady who is sure she may construct her destiny with the youthful hero Nureddene. Our hero is a carefree wanderer who woos the Bassora ladies. Anice offers him a taste of real love via her genuine affection. The love of Anice gives him the strength to face life's challenges. With her wits and charisma, Anice convinced the Caliph of Bagdad to punish her husband Nureddene when his life was in jeopardy owing to a political plot in Bassora. Besides rescuing Nureddene's life, the Caliph also crowns him king of Bassora.

Dramatic romances like *Vasavadutta* (1957) and *Eric* (1960) include women who must choose between following their hearts and doing right by their families and nations. *Vasavadutta* is proud and egotistical, whereas *Aslaug*, the heroine in *Eric*, is spiteful. But when they fall in love, they both become better people. The men in their lives were likewise changed by their love. The kingdom of Avunthie, Chunda Mahasegn, is compelled to use his daughter *Vasavadutta* to win over the heart of the king of Cowsambie, Vuthsa Udayan, to seize Cowsambie in the drama *Vasavadutta* due to the

animosity between the two royal families. *Vasavadutta*, on the other hand, becomes fond of Vuthsa and eventually falls head over heels for him.

Similarly, *Aslaug* Eric's heroine came to Norway to plot the assassination of King Eric to surrender the kingdom and give it to her brother, who happened to be legally entitled to it. However, when she cannot hide her feelings for Eric, she realizes she is losing the struggle. *Vasavadutta* and *Aslaug*'s feminine awareness motivates them to stop doing bad things. "Love unseats the intellect," *Vasavadutta* realizes when she listens to her mother's advice and pursues her passions rather than her father's request that she listen to her reason. With her marriage to Vuthsa, she ends the long-lived animosity between the two royal families. Even *Aslaug*'s heart is freed from a deep-seated hatred against Eric by the transformative force of love. Eric learns from her love that love is stronger than any weapon a warrior could ever wield. Eric feels forgiveness washes over him due to *Aslaug*'s love. Despite being the conspirator, he pardons her brother Swegn.

Andromeda, the protagonist of *Perseus the Deliverer* (1942), becomes the savior of troubled men whose tragic plights touch her deeply. There is no connection between her life and their victims. The heroine transforms into a formidable force in the struggle against society's evil forces due to her caring, concern, and empathy for the suffering of humanity. A woman's love for her spouse is the driving force behind her feminine strength, which is immense.

Sri Aurobindo has shown strong, independent women who, during a patriarchal culture, dared to change not only men but society. Sri Aurobindo portrays the elevated image of women within the patriarchal system through the stories of slave girl Anice-Alajalice, Princess *Andromeda*, *Vasavadutta*, and *Aslaug*, whose actions range from choosing Nureddene as her husband over the old King and

transforming his rakish character to daring to fight the sea monster alone to rescue her fellow beings, despite their lack of relation to her life. Since his heroines are shown as having a distinct consciousness that is the source of love, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness and since this awareness is not contingent upon any rule that needs to be proven they never demand equal rights with males in his plays. This awareness transforms them into a symbol of immense feminine strength.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic works of Sri Aurobindo offer a fertile ground for investigating questions of awareness, especially as they pertain to femininity and feminism. He shows a deep interest in the intellectual and spiritual aspects of human life in his works, which frequently explore the intricate relationship between personal awareness and larger social constructions.

A feminist analysis of Sri Aurobindo's plays reveals complex female characters that are strong, wise, and resilient. These female protagonists frequently stand up to patriarchal society by refusing to conform to stereotypical gender norms. As an example, Aurobindo's progressive views on women's roles in society are reflected in plays like "Perseus the Deliverer" and "Vasavadutta," where the female protagonists are depicted as active agents of change rather than passive figures.

Femininity in Aurobindo's writings is complex and interdependent on the protagonists' personal growth as spiritual beings. An integral part of human awareness, the depiction of femininity delves deeper than superficial societal constructions to investigate the divine feminine. A more inclusive and expansive conception of femininity is hinted at by characters that exemplify traits like empathy, gut feelings, and resilience.

By taking an experiential rather than a didactic

stance on these topics, Aurobindo encourages viewers and readers to consider their own awareness in light of gender relations. He calls for a more spiritually conscious and egalitarian society in his plays, which challenge established power structures.

Finally, by exploring feminism and gender in her plays, Sri Aurobindo provides an enthralling examination of awareness. The works of Aurobindo greatly enrich conversations on gender equality and the development of human understanding because they feature powerful, spiritually attuned female characters who question traditional gender standards. These plays do more than just amuse; they make you think about things like power, identity, and the possibility of societal transformation.

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