

# Role of Fate in Sri Aurobindo's Play *Perseus the Deliverer*

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**Abstract:** - Sri Aurobindo, a philosopher and yogi has also written eleven plays, out of which five are complete and six are incomplete. *Perseus the Deliverer* is the only complete play written by him published in his life time. Sri Aurobindo is better known for his spiritual thoughts and philosophy in his magnum opus, *Savitri*. At the starting of his writing he has written these plays. All his plays have been analysed in the light of Elizabethan model but deep studies of all his plays depict that his spiritual thoughts are present there too, though in germinal form. As it is a known fact that Sri Aurobindo was very much influenced by the Hindi Scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, Upanishads and so on. This research paper is an attempt to analyse the role of fate in his complete play *Perseus the Deliverer*. According to Sri Aurobindo fate is nothing but the result of our previous action and also that with the help of Yoga and meditation even fate can also be changed.

**Key-words:-** Fate, karma, cause, effect, spirituality.

Fate is another name for universal law which holds together all the things in a state of harmony.

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo is better known as a journalist, freedom fighter, yogi, philosopher, critic, poet and what not? His dramatic genius failed to achieve much recognition. He has written eleven plays out of which five are complete and six are incomplete. Sri Aurobindo's career as a dramatist spans about twenty-six years. Jesse Roarke says, "Sri Aurobindo was not exactly a dedicated dramatist...but his interest was persistent and strong enough that he did contribute something respectable to dramatic literature." (Roarke 121)

This research paper is an attempt to analyse the theme of fate in *Perseus the Deliverer*, one of his five complete plays, which are;

1. The Viziers of Bossora
2. Eric
3. Rodogune
4. Perseus the Deliverer
- &
5. Vasavadutta

Sri Aurobindo is known for his theme of evolution and his philosophical and spiritual moorings. His plays are required to analyse in the light of his philosophical and spiritual thoughts. Much work has been done on his plays but only the dramatic art of his plays has been analysed, if his plays would have been analysed in term of his spiritual philosophy, they would definitely be proved precious possession for any scholar. Before analysing thematically, specifically the theme of fate in his five complete plays, it is essential to understand his spiritual philosophy as well as his life also.

At the age of five Sri Aurobindo was sent to the English-speaking Loreto House boarding school in Darjeeling. Darjeeling was a centre of British life in India and the school was run by the Irish nuns, through which Sri Aurobindo was exposed to Christian religious teachings and symbolism. In 1879, his entire family

moved to England where he was taught Latin, French, Geography, History and Arithmetic. After five years of rigorous learning Sri Aurobindo learned Greek and started reading literature and English poetry. In 1893 he left England for India and arrived in February, 1893. In his autobiographical notes, Aurobindo said that he felt a vast sense of calmness when he first came back to India. He could not explain this and continued to have various such experiences from time to time. He worked at Baroda College as a French teacher. At Baroda Sri Aurobindo self-studied Sanskrit and Bengali. He started taking an active interest in the politics of India's independence struggle against the British Rule and in this period he wrote two plays *Perseus the Deliverer* and *The Viziers of Bossora* and the theme of both the plays are deliverance from captivity and later on, *Rodogune* was written. In 1906 he moved to Calcutta. In 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested in connection of the Alipore Bomb Case and imprisoned in solitary confinement in Alipore Jail. The trial of the Alipore Bomb Case lasted for a year. During this period in the jail, his view of life was radically changed due to spiritual experiences and realizations. Consequently, his aim went far beyond the service and liberation of the country. In 1910, Aurobindo withdrew himself from all political activities and went to Pondicherry. In Pondicherry, Aurobindo dedicated himself to his spiritual and philosophical pursuits. In this period he has written two more complete plays, they are *Eric* and *Vasavadutta*. This period was very productive period in the life of Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *The Upanishads*, *The Renaissance in India*, *War and Self-determination*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *the Future Poetry* were published in this period. In the late 1930's his greatest literary achievement, a spiritual poem *Savitri*, his magnum opus, published. Deep studies of his plays depict that his plays contain his spiritual philosophy in germinal form.

In his *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo writes; "Dramatic poetry cannot live by the mere presentation of life and action and the passion.... It must have, to begin with, as the fount of its creation or in its heart an interpretative vision and in that vision an explicit or implicit idea of life and the human being." (Aurobindo: *The Future Poetry* 67). Sri Aurobindo has great knowledge of the art of drama, he was influenced by Shakespeare and followed the Elizabethan model of drama but apart from all these he had deep knowledge and learning of Hindu scriptures like the works of Kalidasa, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads Vedas and so on and he was firmly grounded in the Indian tradition. Jesses Roarke is of the opinion, "He was influenced primarily and largely by the Indian classical literature." (Roarke 121) Hence, his view of fate is the Indian concept that explains Fate as Karma and his views on Fate may serve as a background to the study of the theme of Fate in *Perseus the Deliverer*.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "All is a continuous chain in which everyone link is bound indissolubly to the past infinity of numberless links, and the whole governed by fixed relations, by a fixed association of cause and effect, present action the result of action as future action will be the result of present action, all cause a working of energy and all effect to a working of energy." (Aurobindo: *The Supramental Manifestation* 126)

*Perseus the Deliverer* is the only play of Sri Aurobindo which published in 1942, when he was alive. The story of the play has been influenced by the Greek mythology but Sri Aurobindo has brought many changes in the play to suit the purpose of writing this play, which was to inculcate in the heart of people of India love for Mother India and to make them participate in the freedom struggle. Though, the first and foremost theme of the play is deliverance from captivity and secondly, his philosophy of man's evolutionary destiny but Fate also plays important role in the lives of the characters of the play. Sri Aurobindo was not of the opinion like Shakespeare that we are mere puppets in the hands of God rather he believed in the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita that what we are only the result of our karma or karmaphal, as we sow, so shall we reap. M. V. Seetaraman rightly observed, "Sri Aurobindo's fate is not a blind fate but is another name for Universal Law which holds together all the things in a state of harmony." (Seetaraman 9) There are two things in this world one is good and another is evil. As he said in his play *Rodogune*, "Do right, And leave the rest to the God above." (Aurobindo: *Rodogune* 481) A man should always do what is right, no matter how difficult the path is, it always leads to something good. In the play *Perseus the Deliverer*, Andromeda commits crime in the eyes of Syrian people as she is moved by pity for Smerdes and frees him and thus incurs the wrath of the sea-god and said;

I'll not be older!  
 I will not understand; I only know  
 That men are heartless and your gods most cruel.  
 I hate them. (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 33)

Andromeda helps the victims of the sea-wreck only out of her feelings of pity and love for them; she feels that she will be at peace if she saves the lives of those people. She does not even bother about the consequences because she knows that to be doing good deeds is man's most glorious task. She challenges even the gods to punish her because she is going to help the weak and sufferer;

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.  
 (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 78)

Sri Aurobindo in his *Essays Divine and Human: Karma*, writes;  
 God guides best when he tempts worst,  
 Loves entirely when He punishes cruelly,  
 Helps perfectly when violently He opposes.  
 (Aurobindo: *The Hour of God* 108)

Suffering should not be viewed as the consequences of evil actions in some past life, but rather as a prod to progress, a reward for virtue, and a reminder that we are not yet reached the goal. Andromeda is chained to the rock to be devoured by the sea-monster, Polydaon, feels helpless and says;

I have failed  
 In all I did and die accursed and hated  
 I die alone and miserably, no heart  
 To pity me. (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 33)

Out of frustration and misery, she cries for help;  
 Alas! Is there no pity for me? Is there  
 No kind bright sword to save me in all this world?  
 (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 157)

Sri Aurobindo writes in *Letters on Yoga*; "All who enter the spiritual path have to face the difficulties and ordeals of the path...they must be faced with strength and patience."  
 (Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga* 468) Sri Aurobindo rules out Hardy's role of chance in our life rather believes that the whole governed by fixed relations, by a fixed association of cause and effect. All that Nature and Fate do is done powerfully and persistently, with a tenacity of purpose. In case of Andromeda too the divine intervenes and Cydone appears as a relief to her and says;

The gods are with him, sister. In a few hours  
 We shall be all together and released  
 From these swift perils.  
 (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 159)

Then, Perseus comes and frees Andromeda from the sea-monster. Despite all the sufferings and grim resistance, at the end of the play she attains victory and the dark days of Syria come to an end that is what we can say Andromeda's good karmaphal is the result of her good deeds or karma. She proves Sri Aurobindo's philosophy that man is the maker of his own destiny; fate is nothing but the result of his past action. According to him, "All that happens in the world is the fulfilment of the Divine Will that is worked out in

Nature. Nature is guided by Law which has been described as causality. The whole causality may be defined as previous action leading to subsequent action, karma and karmaphala.” (Aurobindo: *The Harmony of Virtue* 380)

In the play, Pallas Athene, daughter of Zeus, says;  
For through the shocks of difficulty and death  
Man shall attain his godhead.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 8)

On the other hand, Polydaon, an embodiment of evil, a wicked character in the play suffers at the end. As Iolaus says, “his own evil has destroyed him.” (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 179) In the beginning of the play, Polydaon is depicted as all powerful and mighty, who wants to gain power by shedding innocent blood and wants to become the god of Syria. When his soldiers surround the Syrian King and Queen, he exults in his victory;

The drama’s nearly over. Now to ring out  
The royal characters amid fierce howling  
And splendid, pitiless, crimson massacre –  
A great finale! Then, then I shall be king.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 150)

He further roars;  
Cepheus and Cassiopea, man and woman,  
Not sovereigns now, you see what end they have  
Who war upon the gods.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 166)

Again, what Sri Aurobindo has written in his *Letters on Yoga*; “It is possible even to modify Fate to some extent, even to rise above it, through one’s endeavour.” (Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga* 469) Of, course this philosophy of Sri Aurobindo subsides our pessimistic feeling and gives us hope, he further says, but in order to feel its mastery of Nature the human soul must put itself in communion with the Infinite the Universal Spirit.” (Aurobindo: *The Harmony of Virtue* 382) Andromeda’s mother Cassiopea has full belief in that Universal Spirit that without any fear, she says;

There are other gods  
Than thy Poseidon, they shall punish thee.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 165)

The Divine Will is behind Fate that which works through Nature for man’s progress. Perseus kills the sea-monster and lifts Andromeda, “mightily from the cliff to heaven.” (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 166) With the death of Polydaon, darkness of Syria withers away and people start welcoming Perseus with full heart. Again, Cassiopea and Cepheus show their full faith in Fate and Cepheus, the king of Syria, says;

O Welcome, brilliant victor, mighty Perseus’  
Saviour of Syria, angel of the gods,  
Kind was fate that led thee to our shores.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 183)

If we go in detail in the Cause and Effect philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in the play *Perseus the Deliverer*, the very Cause in the play is the shipwreck ‘The Ocean in tumult, and the sky in storm:’ (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 5) that has been brought by Poseidon, the sea-monster. This happening, we happen to know through the conversation of Athene and Poseidon in the Prologue of the play. Athene says;

Errors of waters rustling through the world.  
Vast Ocean, call thy ravenous waves that march

With blue fierce nostrils quivering for prey  
 Back to thy feet. Hush thy impatient surges  
 At my divine command and do my will.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 5)

Poseidon denies the order of Athene and says;  
 The anarchy of the enormous seas  
 Is mine. O terrible Athene:

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 ----- Man's feeble feet  
 Leave there no traces, nor his destiny  
 Has any hold upon the shifting waves.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 7)

It is in the power of Athene to control the storm but she decides to send Perseus 'But I will lead him, Over thy waters.' (Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 10) According to Sri Aurobindo, "Nature and Fate have been working up to a secret Purpose powerfully, persistently, through the ages, and ourselves are a part of it and fellow workers in the fulfilment of that invisible Purpose." (Aurobindo: *The Harmony of Virtue* 470) Here, the question arises if it is in the power of Athene to control the storm, which becomes the cause for all the happenings in the life of the people of Syria, then why she does not stop it. We get the answer in Athene's own words;

For through the shocks of difficulty and death  
 Man shall attain his godhead.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 165)

A Force is working in the Universe and through sufferings and difficulties; man recognizes the existence of such a Force that leads him to his perfection, his evolution from mortality to immortality, to divinity, the evolution from 'a semi-primitive temperament to a brighter intellectualism and humanism.' Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is worth quoting here; "The ascent of the divine life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect..." (Aurobindo: *The Life Divine* 42)

When Cepheus asks Perseus;  
 Then man too arise to greater heights,  
 His being draw nearer to the gods?

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 165)

Sri Aurobindo speaks in the words of Perseus;

Perhaps.  
 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 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.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 201)

Through the above said words of Perseus, Sri Aurobindo hopes that one day the mankind would definitely progress on the path of divinity and this can only be possible through the divine descent to earth to save the forces of good.

*Perseus the Deliverer* is merely a dramatic creation to show the world the divine descent like Perseus, who has been sent to Syria by goddess Athene, to save the people of Syria. But in real life how can it be possible. Sri Aurobindo says, “Yoga gives us a means to escape from the dangerous doctrines of materialism which tend to subvert man’s future and hamper his evolution.” (Aurobindo: *The Harmony of Virtue* 376) He further appeals to the people of India; “The time has almost come when India can no longer keep her light to herself but must pour it out upon the world. Yoga must be revealed to mankind because without it mankind cannot take the next step in the human evolution.” (Aurobindo: *The Harmony of Virtue* 375)

Hence, through the play Sri Aurobindo wants to clear the concept of Fate and the role of Fate in our life. The world is governed by the Divine Will. The working of the Divine Will is not arbitrary; it is guided by Law which is causality, Karma and Karmaphal. Fate is nothing but Karmaphal. The need of the hour is to recognize those invisible forces at work unknown to the outer mind of man. This ability can only be attained with the help of Yoga (by going inwards and establishing a conscious connection with the Cosmic Self and the Force.) Then only, in the words of Perseus;

..... the earth is calm, the heavens smile,  
A mighty silence listens on the sea.

(Aurobindo: *Perseus the Deliverer* 174)

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