

## Sri Aurobindo Ghosh As The Guiding Star For Our People And Nation

<sup>1</sup>**Dr. Sarika Sircar**

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, History, NSCB Govt. Girls' P.G. College, Aliganj, Lucknow, India

Received: 07 July 2021, Accepted: 15 July 2021, Published with Peer Review on line: 10 Sep 2021

### Abstract

“We may divide thinkers into those who think for themselves and those who think through others – The latter are the rule, and the former, the exception.” – Schopenhauer.

“.....We are trying to live not for our interests but to work and die for others.....” – Aurobindo.

Aurobindo was born on 15 August, 1872 at Calcutta. His father Dr. Krishandhan Ghosh was a renowned medical man of Calcutta and had sought his medical education from Aberdeen University, England. He came of the well-known Ghosh family of Konnagar, a township in the district of Hooghly, West Bengal, the historic birthplace of quite a few leaders of Indian Renaissance. He married Swarnalata, the eldest daughter of Rajnarayan Bose, a pioneer of Indian Nationalism and the influence of such parents was on Aurobindo. The westernized influence of his father induced him to educate his children in western style. Thus Aurobindo has been one of the one of the most systematic and learned

1.

of all modern Indian thinkers.

**Keywords-** Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, The Guiding Star, Our People And Nation.

### Introduction

He is described as one of the most dominant figures in the History of the Indian Renaissance and Indian Nationalism. Romain Rolland regarded him as the highest synthesis of the genius of the East and the West and the ‘prince among the Indian Thinkers.’ Dr. Radhakrishnan regarded him as the ‘most accomplished of all modern Indian Political Thinkers’. Tagore also was impressed by his genius to such an extent that he prophesied that through him Indians should express her message to the world. He described him as the ‘messiah of Indian Culture’. Fredrics, an American educationist portrays him as the ‘guiding star of this our earth and prophet of our age’. In his address on Aligarh

Conspiracy Case of 1909, Deshbandhu Chitranjan Das rightly opined : “Long after he is dead and gone Aurobindo will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. His words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands”. This in a nutshell were the grand achievements and accolades given to this great thinker, freedom fighter, unprecedented patriot and nationalist thinker and fighter of India whose thoughts and views motivated everyone to fight for an independent India and to lead a highly developed and elevated personal spiritual life and all these are all the more relevant now in this strife-torn India and world.

There is no denying the fact that Aurobindo was a great poet, a profound thinker, a notable metaphysician, a great seer and an ardent patriot. He was indeed an amazingly creative personality, with a deep insight into the hoary past, a tight grip on the present and prophetic vision of the future.

In his early age he was sent to England by his father to insulate him against any Indian influence. For fourteen years, he remained in England almost

## 2.

cut off from the Indian environments but here too he studied Greek and Latin Classics, and some of the great European thinkers like Homer and Goethe. During his stay at Cambridge he joined Indian Majlis – revolutionary organization for the liberation of his motherland. He organized a secret society called ‘Lotus and Dagger’ for the upliftment of his motherland. He became a nationalist, while in England and along with other Indian friends took a vow of liberating India from the shackles of slavery. He competed for I.C.S., won position but was disqualified in the riding test. Already he was not in favour of government service. Such a frivolous excuse to disqualify him further accentuated hatred in his mind against the British. His father himself getting disgusted with the brutal behavior of many Englishmen towards innocent Indians, began to infect his son with nationalist ideas. In his letters to Aurobindo, he related the incidents of unwarranted humiliation of Indians by arrogant Englishmen and thus inculcated nationalism in Aurobindo.

Aurobindo’s participation in Indian Politics lasted for six years that is from 1905 to 1910. During this short period, his influence on the Indian Politics was decisive. He proved one of those radical leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who transformed Indian nationalism into a mighty mass movement much before Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhiji and did not confine it to a few arm-chair politicians and amateur freedom fighters. He condemned the moderates for their policy of

petition and prayers. He became editor of a daily-Bande Mataram, started by B.C.Paul. Through this daily, he aroused the educated masses of India. He was charged of criminal conspiracy but was released after a year's confinement in Alipur jail. At the age of thirty eight he withdrew from politics and took to

### 3.

meditation and yoga. In the words of J.K.Ray, "This withdrawal although sudden and almost inexplicable to none but a mystic saw him developing into one of the greatest yogis and philosophers of the world".

In fact, no other Indian nationalist presents so marvelous a blend of profound philosophical speculation and direct revolutionary actions of spiritual exercise and political theorization as is the case with Aurobindo. While at Pondicherry, he was engrossed in spiritual 'Sadhana'. He was also engaged in literary pursuits. He produced great works viz. 'The Life Divine', 'Essays on Gita', 'Synthesis of Yoga', 'Ideal of Human Unity', 'Defence of Indian Culture', 'Renaissance of India', 'Basis of Yoga', 'Riddles of the World'. The sage of Pondicherry breathed his last in 1950. Aurobindo was a harbinger of **SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM**. He was a pioneer of neo-nationalism in India. He did not consider moderates and liberals as nationalists. He considered them more patriotic than nationalist. They loved India but could not get her soul. They did not believe in spiritual greatness and basic genius of India. They aimed at the reproduction of Europe in India.

In a lecture published in 1908, he argues that nationalism is not a mere political programme. It is a religion through which we strive to recognise the presence of God in the nation and in our fellow countrymen. He said, "We are trying to realize him in the three hundred million of our people – We are trying to live not for our interests, but to work and die for others. When a young worker in Bengal has to go to jail, when he is asked to suffer, he does not feel any pang in that suffering, he does not fear suffering."1 This happens because of the

### 4.

absolute denial of the idea of one's separate self and discerning of one's higher eternal in the 300 millions of people in whom God himself lives. Thus Aurobindo believed in the divinity of the Motherland. India is a divine power and a spiritual and not geographical entity. In his words nation is "not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech nor a fiction of mind. It is a might composed of all the Shakties of all of all millions of units that make up the nation just as Bhawani Mahishasur Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods

assembled and in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Indian nation signifies a power that welds the powers of all Indians into a living unity. Love for the Mother, joy of self-forgetfulness, and pride of self-immolation in service to Her can prove miraculous for the country groaning under the heels of the foreign rulers. To Aurobindo, fight for national liberation can be equated to a holy sacrifice (Yajna).

According to Aurobindo **PURNA SWARAJ** was the objective of Indian Nationalism. A national government alone can restore capacity and energy of a nation which was fast decaying under foreign domination. Hence Aurobindo did not appreciate the misguided attempts of Moderate Nationalists to achieve limited objective viz., reforms in the legislative councils, separation of judiciary from the executive, Indianisation of the civil services etc. Moderates believed in the policy of sending petitions to the British Government and praying for constitutional reforms. Aurobindo felt that such measures were partial and thus ineffective. These could not create a responsible constitutional government. Only unqualified national freedom could establish such a government. With the establishment of such a government in a free India, executive tyranny could end. Social, economic

## 5.

and educational reforms as emphasized by the then moderates of those times were urgent and fairly significant but they could be realized only when Purna Swaraj was first attained. Purna Swaraj was as such the crying need of the hour.

Aurobindo felt the necessity and justification of **VIOLENT RESISTANCE** for the sake of national liberation. The subject masses could legitimately resort to armed revolts if they could gain their objective quickly. However, they must properly judge the feasibility and practical utility of a violent rebellion in a particular situation. The tyrannical foreign government is apt to condemn violent methods as criminal and immoral but the conscience of mankind can never reject the just right of the oppressed to try to oust the oppressors violently. He was of the view that 'the armed revolt was the readiest and the swiftest, most thorough in results and demands the least powers of endurance and suffering and the smallest and briefest sacrifices'. As far as **PASSIVE RESISTANCE** was concerned, he laid down certain canons for it like a passive resister is to disobey unjust coercive laws, then he is to defy unjust executive orders and quietly endure the penalty prescribed for their violation. Then the refusal to pay taxes is the final and strongest form of passive resistance and finally, social

excommunication can be resorted to against those who act treacherously and impede the activities of freedom fighters. However such passive resistance may assume violent form in case despotic rulers go to the extreme in crushing the passive resistance. In his words, “So long as the action of the executive is peaceful and within the rules of the fight the passive resister scrupulously maintains his attitude of passivity, but he is not bound to do so

6.

a moment beyond. To submit to illegal or violent methods of coercion, to accept outrage and hooliganism as part of the legal procedure of the country is to be guilty of cowardice and dwarfing national manhood, to sin against the divinity within ourselves and the divinity in our motherland....”<sup>2</sup> Mahatma Gandhi also believed in passive resistance but his passive resistance was based on non-violence whereas that of Aurobindo on expediency since the latter allowed the passive resister to resort to violence also in case expediency so necessitated. According to Aurobindo, passive resistance could build a strong nation only when it was masculine, bold and ardent in spirit and was in a position to supplement itself with active resistance at a moment’s notice. He was confident that passive resistance if applied to different departments of Administration, will cut the ground from under the feet of foreign bureaucrats, render their existence anachronistic and useless and pave the way to national emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

Aurobindo’s **VIEWS ON WAR** or the relations between the individual and the wider society are said to be the most balanced and integrated among Indian thinkers of the period. He is of the view that the phenomenon of war can disappear only when man develops a sense of unity with his fellowmen and when he learns to live in greater consciousness of universal values. He feels that at least half the wars were due to extension of commerce, the lust for the increased production and interchange, the desire for adding to markets and glutting them with commodities and the piling up of a huge burden of unnecessary necessities. The end of monarchical regimes and the emergence of democracy were considered as the harbinger of peace but it has proved an illusion. Likewise the

7.

establishment of the court of International Arbitration could not eradicate wars and usher in peace though the world had fondled a hope for such a possibility. Hence Aurobindo concludes that so long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or even if banished for a while, will return. Only when man becomes aware of other men not merely as

brothers but as parts of himself and when he has learnt to live in greater consciousness of universal values, war will come to an end.<sup>4</sup>

Aurobindo's views on **WORLD UNITY AND WORLD GOVERNMENT** were that he was a visionary and thus saw the vision of a world government. Though he was quite conscious of the disparaging features and dangerous possibilities existing in the world viz. ideological divisions and the cold war, the arms race and nuclear rivalry, yet he thought that some kind of world union was inevitable. He attributed this to, "the drive of nature, the compulsion of circumstance and the present and future needs of mankind".<sup>5</sup>

His views on **CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM** were that he was critical of modern capitalism. Like Dadabhai Naoroji, he spoke of the imperialistic drain on Indian financial resources. He was critical of the tendencies towards centralization, concentration, trusts in the modern Capitalism. He was critical of socialism also as it resulted in the growth of an omnipotent authoritarian state. But he accepted the socialistic ideal in its initial phase and the idea that it sought to guarantee equality in social and economic spheres and also equality of opportunity.

But the most important was his ideal of **INNER SPIRITUAL**

## 8.

**FREEDOM.** He recognized that India had learnt the idea of social and political freedom from the West. But he felt that if a man attained spiritual freedom he could gain social and political freedom as well. His conception of freedom represents a fusion of ideas of Rousseau and Bhagwad Gita. According to Rousseau, moral liberty meant 'obedience to a law which we prescribe for ourselves'. Aurobindo's defining of freedom as obedience to laws of one's being thus bears western influence. However he used the western idea in the framework of the concept of 'Savadharma', self-law of Bhagwad Gita. Gita exhorts a man to confine himself to the duties and tasks of his own social and psychological being and perform the task and the duties in a spirit of disinterestedness. That enables a man to attain divine consciousness.

Thus Aurobindo, a political lieutenant of Tilak, was one of the early architects of the Indian nation. Besides being an arch patriot, he was a lover of humanity which ideal has to be emulated by us in the current scenario. He not only championed the cause of India's independence during 1907-1909, but also stood for world unity through a world federation. In

the words of Haridas Chaudhary, Aurobindo was an ‘amazingly creative personality’. He wanted India to provide spiritual light to the West which faced agony and exhaustion due to materialism and was on the way to extinction. This could be possible if India enjoyed freedom. His main contribution lay in the fact that he attempted to bring together eastern and western political ideas. Dr. Verma has rightly remarked, “.....for the empirical political scientist he provided at least a framework for harmonizing the spiritual insights of the East with the theoretical generalizations of the West

9.

and hence at the present hour, when thinking both in the West and the East are visualizing a greater harmony and reconciliation of the intellectual traditions of the two worlds, Aurobindo stands as a great intellectual and spiritual force”.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Radhakrishnan described Aurobindo as “the most accomplished of modern Indian thinkers”. Tagore painted him as the ‘Messiah of Indian Culture and Civilisation’. An analysis of his views enables us to agree with the top luminaries referred above. Thus the political thought of Sri Aurobindo covered in its sweep not only the doctrine of passive resistance but also the cult of revolution.<sup>7</sup> He has been rightly described as a “perfect blend of the National and the Universal”.<sup>8</sup>

Footnotes:

1. Ray, Jayanta Kumar : ‘Studies in Political Thought’ (1963 ed.), p.94.
2. Appadorai, A.: Op. cit., p.52.
3. Ibid, pp.52-53.
4. Ray, J.K.: Op. cit., p.100.
5. Extract from Aurobindo’s essay – ‘The Ideal of World Unity’ (1915-18, 1950).
6. Verma, V.P.: Op. cit., p.237.
7. Mukherjee Haridas, Uma Mukherjee: ‘Shri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics’, p.xxxi.
8. Ibid, p.xxxiii.

10.

**Books Referred:**

1. A. B. Purani, 'Life of Sri Aurobindo'(Barnes and Noble).
2. Sisirkumar Mitra, 'Resurgent India'(Allied Publishers Private Limited 1<sup>st</sup> Indian Edition 1963).
3. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar : 'Sri Aurobindo'(Arya Publishing House).
4. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, 'Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History' (Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1972).
5. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee : 'Bande Mataram and Indian Nationalism'(Majestic Books, London, U.K.).
6. Karan Singh: 'The Prophet of Indian Nationalism'(Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1991).
7. Sri Aurobindo: 'Sri Aurobindo on Himself and the Mother'(Abe Books and Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo International University Centre, Pondicherry).