

National Integration through Spiritual Nationalism: An analytical study of Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo was indeed a versatile genius - a great poet, a profound thinker, a notable metaphysician, and an ardent patriot. His writings represented the crystallization of the new and rising soul of India and have a spiritual message for humanity. Aurobindo Ghosh was born on 15th August 1872 at Calcutta. At the age of seven, Aurobindo was sent to England by his father to insulate him against any Indian influence. He presented the most elaborate concept on the nation. While, on the one hand, Aurobindo was a staunch advocate of human unity, on the other hand, he adopted nationalism as a help and not a hindrance to it. Through the medium of the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo introduced the youth of the country to nationalism based on spiritualism. His political thought has several parts like Swaraj, boycott, resistance, national education as a necessary ingredient of Indian political agitation started from 1905. But it has inherent expertise in developing human life into life Divine. The way towards Life Divine is the way towards universal brotherhood or human unity among all individuals of the entire universe irrespective of his nationality. The paper has made an effort to analyze the role of Sri Aurobindo in his spiritual nationalism in India. Sri Aurobindo was one of the most creative and significant figures in the history of the Indian renaissance and Indian nationalism.

Keywords: Spirituality, Life Divine, nation, Human Unity, Political Agitation, Nationalism, Internationalism, Hindu revivalism.

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I. INTRODUCTION: (THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION)

As a politician, Sri Aurobindo tried to reformulate the idea of national harmony which is the urgent requirement for the unification of a nation with others. A nation must have national integration to display before the world. But what distinctiveness the national unity advocated by Sri Aurobindo has? Sri Aurobindo is considered a nation in the sense of nation-state. But according to Karl Popper, a nation-state has some amount of political unity to bind it together with all odds of religious, customary, caste, and sect-related differences of a nation. However, due to the external political domination of people residing in a nation the concept of nation-state stands as a utopia to Popper.⁽¹⁾ This theory is the opposite of Sri Aurobindo. If we evaluate Sri Aurobindo's thought, then we will discover two different types of unity advocated by him – centripetal or inner unity and loose external kind of political unity named centrifugal unity. A state has loose political unity externally imposed upon a state; while, according to Sri Aurobindo, a nation has a certain amount of inner unity hidden within.⁽²⁾ For him, political unity is never the main characteristic feature of a nation. Hence Sri Aurobindo's national unity can never be compared with political unity.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- a) To understand Aurobindo's concept of Human Unity.
- b) To know the role of Aurobindo for Spiritual Nationalism.
- c) To understand the techniques for spiritual nationalism by Sri Aurobindo.
- d) To know the significance of Human unity in the world.

III. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

This study has been done on the primary and secondary data mostly on the books, journals, and articles related to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's writings were a very important source of this study. An attempt has been done to evaluate and analyze his thought about the awakening the nationalism based on spirituality among Indians irrespective of socio-religious creeds.

IV. SRI AUROBINDO'S NATIONAL UNITY AND RELIGIOUS UNITY:

Then can we consider it as a religious unity? While going through Sri Aurobindo's theory of Sanatana dharma, we can evaluate it as the eternal religion where he wants to combine the best of all religions under one head. ⁽³⁾ It is somewhat similar to Swami Vivekananda's theory of universal religion. This eternal religion is neither completely Hinduism nor Islam or Judaism. Hinduism is the paradigm of this eternal religion but it surely supersedes Hinduism. The devotional feature of Islam and Judaism also seemed appealing to him but he was not in favor of giving them the equivalent position with eternal religion. On the contrary, his main emphasis was to unite all of these religions under the head of eternal religion. Briefly speaking his eternal religion is the attempt to universalize all religions under one roof. The national unity, advocated by Sri Aurobindo, for a nation thus could be considered as an example of religious or cultural unity. But is this theory acceptable? For understanding the concept of his national unity we have to comprehend the notion of religion in his view. His religion is not the common religious beliefs advocated by diverse religious heads in the name of Christian, Jain, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism. According to Aurobindo, religion is that dharma that has to bear the individual. Therefore it would not be impractical to proclaim that his religion is none but the religion of humanity. He preached national unity is nothing else but human unity itself. ⁽⁴⁾

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL UNITY:

When we are talking about psychological unity in the context of Sri Aurobindo, we must be careful not to take 'psychological' in the sense of common psychology. His theory of psychological unity is conceived as the human unity or the 'unity of hearts' of all residents of the nation. ⁽⁵⁾ Political, cultural, or religious unity is not to be preached as the national unity in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo. He advocated that mere political or cultural unity is not an adequate cause of evoking the psychological unity of a nation. A nation that has to be based upon political creeds, religious or cultural similarities can only give birth to a false nationalistic approach like that of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. If it ever happens then the dream of human unity, in the sense of political or cultural unity, has to be based upon the thirst for power. So Sri Aurobindo sufficiently considered that the concept of national unity of a nation should tend towards nonetheless but the human unity.

VI. CONCEPT OF HUMAN UNITY:

But even though Sri Aurobindo considered Indian nationalism as the paradigm for effecting human unity he did not accept it as the final limit. What is the role of Indian people in achieving this human unity? Uniformity between several nations and individuals cannot be considered as actual unity. The uniformity of nations has to be loosely forced from outside depending on economic or political creeds. The unity of a nation with others, on the contrary, has to be based on the inner psychological bonding of its citizens. When you force uniformity between nations then it will give birth to the hegemony of one over others. But if we preach for unity between nations then the inner psychological bonding among individuals has to be cultivated. Man is essentially spiritual. Human unity among individuals could be achieved only when we can discover our true selves. This true self of the individual is, as following Sri Aurobindo, neither his body, nor his ego, nor his reasoning power. The true self of an individual resides in identifying his and other individuals' union with the Divine. According to Sri Aurobindo, an individual cannot realize his true self separately. Here we need to speak for human unity and his human unity has to be based upon the spiritual realization of unity among men. In this context, according to Sri Aurobindo, Indian people have to provide us a spiritual guide due to their pre-achieved spiritual brilliance. ⁽⁶⁾ For gaining human unity, in his view, Indian nationality thus works as a perfect example. ⁽⁷⁾

VII. FIVE SOCIAL STAGES OF HUMAN HARMONY:

Sri Aurobindo's theory of national unity, in the sense of human unity, has to be established through five different social stages. These five social stages represent the psychology of an individual mind. For understanding the growth of human rationality and positivity we have to comprehend these five social stages. This dependency over human psychology helps Sri Aurobindo to call them psychological stages of the human cycle. In common sense, the reason is the ultimate goal of human life while Sri Aurobindo never considered it as the regulator of the human mind. He considered it as a first step to achieving supra-rationality. If a human being is controlled exclusively by his reasoning power then the voice of the super-ego or Viveka remains unheard. Western science stops the kingdom of reason while the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo is that it supersedes the realm of reason for a better realm. An individual has to seek the subjective secret or true identity of one's being and the entire world. Then he will understand that the reasoning faculty of his mind has some ultimate limitation which he has to get rid of for identifying himself. That is the reason why Sri Aurobindo never stopped within the arena of reason while discussing the five social stages of human society. His theory of national unity supersedes the criteria of nationalism and enters into the arena of internationalism. However, the most astonishing fact of his thought is that he never became stuck within this concept of internationalism as inter-nationalistic approach also can give birth towards false subjective attitude along with the true one. Aurobindo's Life Divine is the

ultimate limit of internationalism where men have to reside with each other without any preconceived bias or prejudice regarding sect, class, group, custom, religion, or national difference. This was propounded by him as the Kingdom of Heaven ⁽⁸⁾ closely connected with the Gandhian thesis of the Kingdom of God. ⁽⁹⁾

VIII. THE MEANS TOWARDS HUMAN UNITY:

What is the method to attain this human unity? In its answer, we have to start with the notion of freedom. Every individual has an inner seeking for freedom. Freedom and unity are two important basic desires of every individual being. Individual freedom is the way of achieving unity with others residing in the same group, society, nation, or even universe. Human harmony cannot be obtained if we do not get enough freedom. An individual needs to reside in a society with all other members. Man, as a social being, cannot live apart from his society; e.g. the family, or clan, or village, or nation. Individual freedom is necessary but on that ground, it is not permissible for one individual's freedom to block the freedom of others living in the same society. Sri Aurobindo proposed to think about collective freedom. Individual freedom would thus work as the doorway for achieving collective freedom of the society, of the nation, and also of the entire world.

IX. SRI AUROBINDIAN NATIONALISM AND HINDU REVIVALISM:

There arises controversy regarding the characteristic feature of Sri Aurobindo's thesis of nationalism. Is it just Hindu revivalism or something more than that? Romila Thapar mentioned that Sri Aurobindo, being influenced by Bankim, was attempting the regeneration of India based on reviving the ancient glory of Hinduism. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Hence, according to her, the characteristic feature of Sri Aurobindo's nationalism is based upon Hindu revivalism. It is often believed that the tenets of Hindu revivalism had their origin in the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda. Bankim's depiction that the political regeneration of India has to be dependent upon its cultural tradition is viewed as one of the sources of Hindu revivalist attitude. In his Dharmatattva he measured patriotism as equal to pure self-surrender to God. ⁽¹¹⁾ Sri Aurobindo's notion of self-surrender to the national agitation as a plan made by the Almighty was influenced by Bankim. ⁽¹²⁾ In Bankim's "Anandamath" he worshipped motherland as a goddess and created a group of sannyasins who are prepared to die for the sake of gaining their freedom from foreign hands. Most critics discover the influence of Bankim's Anandamath upon Sri Aurobindo's secret revolutionary activities. Sri Aurobindo was tremendously fascinated by the political works of Bankim as in his view Bankim, through his political writings, influenced the national mind of Indians. ⁽¹³⁾ The Chicago conference lectures of Swami Vivekananda were reflections of his discovery of Hinduism as the best religion of the entire world. Vivekananda mentioned clearly that every improvement in India requires an upheaval in religion. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Vedanta is the perfect example of universal religion to him and hence his theory of nationalism is considered as the concept of Hindu revivalism based on Vedanta Philosophy.

But if we go in-depth into Sri Aurobindo's theory of nationalism then we will discover that even being influenced by Bankim and Vivekananda Sri Aurobindo never took nationalism in the sense of Hindu revivalism. Some historians like Amallesh Tripathi conceived that in the theory of Sri Aurobindo religion stands as the means of fulfilling nationalism. ⁽¹⁵⁾ But the truth is just the opposite of that. Hindu revivalism is dependent upon religion as its base. Sri Aurobindo's nationalism certainly has a spiritual overtone but to him, spirituality is never similar to religion. Spirituality stood for him as true religion which has a somewhat superior position than that of religion. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Religion, to him, is the starting-point of spirituality but never equal to it. While discussing Sanatana dharma Sri Aurobindo mentioned that nationalism stands for Sanatana dharma to him and this eternal religion is not Hinduism. Hinduism is the paradigm of eternal religion as it is free from religious bias and prejudice unlike Islam and it has no church-like controlling authority, unlike Christianity. But Aurobindo clearly said that Hinduism is just an archetype of eternal religion but not equal to it. ⁽¹⁷⁾ The wider sense of Hinduism which can incorporate all the goodness of Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism is considered a universal religion by him. Therefore nationalism in the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo never stood in equal position as with Hindu revivalism.

However, according to Sri Aurobindo, like Tilak, the national unity of India was not imposed by the Western culture. B.G. Tilak in his books *The Orion*, 1893 and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, 1903 gave arguments to establish that the origin of the Aryan race was from the Arctic region. In support of his claim, he cited some hymns from the Vedas. He tried to prove the self-sufficiency of Indian culture by citing that before 800 BCE the Aryan civilization was far better than that of the Stone Age of West. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Western influence is unnecessary to him for proving the supremacy of Indian culture. In Maharashtra, the organization of Ganapati Utsav and Sivaji Utsav were also cited as prominent examples supporting Tilak's claim for the prevalence of national consciousness depending on the Indian culture. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Sri Aurobindo's line of thought was somewhat similar to that of Tilak. He also conceived that Indian nationalism was already present in Indian history even before the British invasion. Indian history, in his view, was dominated by the Rajputs, the Sheiks, and the Maratha uprisings in India. It was thought by him a misleading concept that the Indian national uprising

happened only after the coming of the British merchants in India. Hence we cannot say that Indian nationalism was incomplete before the renaissance of the West touching Indian soil. Western impact over Indian education certainly makes Indian citizens comprehend the value of our culture but no more contribution of Western culture was accepted by Sri Aurobindo. He accepted the positive feature of Western culture as the West owes its centuries of vigor, light, progress, irresistible expansion.⁽²⁰⁾ But, according to him, the way of achieving human unity would be ultimately reachable through the progression of the Eastern culture. India is, according to him, actually spiritually far more cultivated than the West. Hence the discovery of Indian spiritual excellence advocated by him is the rediscovery of it.

The theory of Aurobindian nationalism has been nicknamed religious nationalism by Peter Heehs.⁽²¹⁾ However, the question remains whether such characterization would be adequate or not. In the light of the present discussions, it seemed quite adequate to call his kind of nationalism spiritual nationalism. According to Heehs, Sri Aurobindo, influenced by Vivekananda, tried to format the thesis of nationalism based on religion. Hence the nationalism preached by Sri Aurobindo, as argued by Heehs, stands for religious nationalism. The reasoning provided by Peter Heehs is quite absurd as, according to him, the use of Hindu religious terms and symbols by Sri Aurobindo transforms it into a kind of religious nationalism. However, a contradictory view can also be drawn from his writings. He's in his book *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism* wrote that according to Sri Aurobindo, the Indian soul was preeminently spiritual.⁽²²⁾ My observation and understanding of his writings suggest that we can derive a sort of spiritual nationalism. I am in the favor of using Sri Aurobindo's nationalism in the sense of spiritual nationalism. The nationalism preached by Sri Aurobindo was indeed called by him as a creed or dharma but this dharma is completely different from religion.⁽²³⁾ Sri Aurobindo's nationalism is universal religion or Sanatana dharma which is not limited within the narrow boundary of any religion. Spiritual goals hidden behind his social-political thought gave it a spiritual color hence it will not be irrelevant to call his nationalism spiritual nationalism. Hence I cannot override the possibility of looking towards Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought from the spiritual perspective.

X. AUROBINDO'S NATIONALISM AS SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM:

The reason behind describing Aurobindian nationalism as spiritual nationalism is that, in his view, spirituality holds a higher position than that of religion. If we go through the views of Sri Aurobindo then we will discover that religion, in his view, has two forms – religionism and spiritualism, of the two, the latter was conceived as 'true religion' by him.⁽²⁴⁾ Spirituality, in his view, deals with the ultimate union of the Jivatman (jīvātman) and Paramatman (Paramātmān) via evoking our inner being or Psychic being (Chaitya Purusha). Religionism, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the way towards spiritualism. His ultimate goal is to reach towards the Life Divine or the Kingdom of Heaven which religions fail to achieve.⁽²⁵⁾ Hence it is not inappropriate to call Aurobindian nationalism spiritual nationalism instead of religious nationalism.

XI. CONCLUSION:

The contribution of Sri Aurobindo to modern Indian political thought may conveniently be summarized under four points: His concept of spiritual nationalism and divinity of motherland; his exposition of the ideal of complete freedom from foreign rule; his contribution to the theory of boycott and passive resistance and finally his dream of the high role that India was destined to play in world affairs and his ideal of human unity.⁽²⁶⁾ Critics often raise the question regarding the impracticability of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought as it has a hidden spiritual connotation. Rationalist thinkers will always inquire a question about the procedure of how Supermind will come to the earth or how can we call him forth. Till now there is no strong example of such happening in real life so they are free to have a query about its possibility or duration. In its reply, as following D.P. Chattopadhyaya, I can say that even though Sri Aurobindo was criticized as a day-dreamer but his social-political thought with spirituality hidden within helps us a lot to be spiritually elevated.⁽²⁷⁾ But how to achieve this and how to make our life a perfect example of Life Divine is solely dependent on our inner exploration. The bedrock of the political philosophy of Sri Aurobindo was his philosophy of spiritual nationalism and the divinity of the motherland. Sri Aurobindo diagnosed an element of spiritualism to nationalism. R. N. Tagore highlighted him as the Messiah of Indian culture and civilization. C.R. Das called Aurobindo the "poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity".⁽²⁸⁾

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