



Character of Aurobindo Ghosh in Indian National Movement

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Abstract: In these articles, Aurobindo stated that the people do not have to depend upon the charity of the British and that the actual enemy of the nation is not the external force, but our internal forces, viz., own weakness, cowardice, selfishness, hypocrisy and sentimentalism. He, therefore, called for a new generation of manliness and revolution. Aurobindo was critical of the Congress at that time, and stated that the aims of Indian National Congress (INC) are faulty; the spirit in which it proceeded towards accomplishing goals was not with a spirit of sincerity and wholeheartedness. Further, the methods adopted were also not appropriate, and that the leaders in whom people had trust were not the right men.

Key words: education, democracy, Indian philosophy

Narration

Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872, and his father being an admirer of English language named him Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh. But when Aurobindo grew up he dropped his middle name. At the age of 5, Aurobindo was sent to a convent school run by Europeans, and at age 7 he was sent to England and was put under the care of a British family. His father instructed him not to mingle with Indians or come under their influence. Thus, Aurobindo remained in England for more than 14 years receiving education from Manchester, London and Cambridge. He learnt French, Latin and Greek. Being away from the motherland made him more anglicized and he could hardly speak Hindi or Bengali.

Despite receiving highly Westernized education, and strict instructions from his father, Aurobindo became a member of a secret society of Indian

revolutionaries called 'Lotus and Daggers'. Over a period of time, Aurobindo became the chief exponent of militant nationalism.

Though Aurobindo lived in England for more than 14 years, he was emotionally attached to the French. He was greatly impressed by the way the French established democracy through revolution that took just five short-years than the British who took more than 12 years. It is not that he was awestruck by French revolution; in fact, any movement of revolution attracted him.

Aurobindo was greatly inspired by Cleisthenes for introducing an Athenian social and political organization. Similarly, Gracchi who brought changes in Roman Constitution and Joan of Arc who freed France from Britain's occupation. Further, Aurobindo was of the opinion that Indians were more like the French and the Athenians, who cared for



ideas and culture, than the practical-minded Englishmen.

Indian National Movement:

Aurobindo returned to India after completing his education in 1892. His mother, who was the daughter of a vedantic scholar, introduced Aurobindo to Indian philosophy despite his father's highly Westernized outlook. Soon Aurobindo learnt Bengali language and began to read Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's, Anandmath, Dharma Tatva and Krishna Charitha. These writings imbibed a sense of patriotism and spiritual fervour in him.

In 1893, he got employment in Baroda at the survey settlement department. In 1900, he was appointed as English Professor at a Baroda college and after four years of service he became the principal of the college. During his stay in Baroda, Aurobindo used to write speeches for the king. It was during that time that Aurobindo used to send a series of articles entitled New Lamps for Old to an Anglo-Marathi paper, Indu Prakash.

As the first few articles were a sensation, Ranade asked Aurobindo to stop such writing and take up a constructive writing on issues such as jail reforms. After this suggestion from Ranade, Aurobindo toned down the language but the articles were still radical in nature.

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He also criticized the Congress for training people to speak in one voice, but not act or work together. He called the Congress as a middle class party that sought the blessings of the British rule and that the party failed to organize the proletariat.

In 1903, Aurobindo published another article titled No Compromise that was circulated secretly. Between 1904 and 1905, he attended Congress sessions but opined that they were too timid and uninspiring. The moderates, according to him, could never rise beyond their servitude and that their thoughts crawl and crept. When Bengal was partitioned in 1905, Aurobindo considered this event as a blessing as it would arouse the national sentiments of the people who were leading lethargic lives all these years.

From Baroda, he conveyed to his secret society members that this was the time to move forward. In March 1906, in a Bengali newspaper Yugantar, he preached open revolt and complete independence. This article gained widespread popularity and instantly



aroused national sentiments, leading to protests across the country.

In 1906, Bipin Chandra Pal started a newspaper title *Bande Mataram*, and asked for Aurobindo's assistance in editing the paper. Aurobindo began to write articles for the paper that endeared him to the people but also the wrath of the British government. This wrath was mainly because apart from highlighting the political domination of the country, he also spoke about the entire process of Westernization.

Though his writings were widely condemned by the British government, no legal action could be taken on Aurobindo for he had the ability to put across his points in a skillful manner. In 1907, Aurobindo attended the Surat Congress, where owing to the differences between Bipin Chandra Pal and Gokhale, or in other words between the moderates and the extremists, eventually led to the breakdown of the Congress. This break-up of Congress was regarded as God's will by Aurobindo.

In 1908, Aurobindo stated that nationalism was immortal because it was a religion that had come to India from the God. As God could not be slain, nationalism could not be destroyed. According to him, *Swaraj* can be attained only when there is faith in God.

In 1908, Aurobindo was arrested on the charges of manufacturing weapons that had killed two English ladies. It was in prison that he realized that nationalism had a spiritual purpose. After his release in 1909, Aurobindo started two weeklies namely *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali, and through these

weeklies he began to propagate that nationalism is a creed, religion or faith; and that he began to consider nationalism as *Sanatana Dharma*.

Aurobindo advocated passive resistance and not violence, he, however, did not opine that to attain freedom it is wrong to resort to violence. According to him, politics is the realm of *Kshatriyas* and the moral duty of a *Kshatriya* is to govern the political action. To impose politics, the Brahmanical duty of sanity sacrifice is to preach *Varanasankara*.

In his *Essays on the Gita*, he stated that to kill the national enemies in a *dharma yudha* is *dharma* and *Gita* is the best answer to those who shrank the battle. In fact, *Gita* is a bible for revolutionaries. He further stated that life and death were nothing but parts of cosmic dance of Goddess *Kali*, the Mother, who creates as well as destroys.

Aurobindo in his work *Dharma and Jatiyata*, explained three factors that contributed to the success of British during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He did not accept three hypotheses that were widely held by the people: firstly, the excellence of the British and the inferiority of the Indians. This he rejected because there were men like *Nana Phadnavis*, *Mahadaji Scindhia*, *Hyder Ali*, etc.

Secondly, the virtues of the British and the sins of the Indians. To this, Aurobindo expressed the view that men like *Clive* were more immoral than the Indians. Thirdly, it was the absence of unity among the Indians. For this, Aurobindo could not give any concrete reply, but only stated that both Indians



and the Britishers manifested the characteristics of Asuras or demons and that even in ancient times, there was no unity.

In the context of modern Indian political theory and practice, Aurobindo presented an exalted, purified and sanctified nationalism. He was bold and had a straight vision and that was to achieve absolute Swaraj. He never interpreted nationalism as a narrow creed. He believed that five Indian values, namely, Dharma, Tapasya, Jnanam, Bhramacharya and Shakti as dynamic galvanizing forces that rejuvenate the entire movement as well as the leaders and their followers.

He was one of the earliest prophets of human unity. He believed that all types of separations and dividing lines would crumble if man is united in one fraternity. He believed that lives of men are moulded by certain key factors, such as cooperation, mutuality, forbearance and love.

Aurobindo believed that there have been five forces that have transformed the entire European continent from medieval scholastic Christian commonwealth into a strong political body of nation-states, which believed in the economic and military roots of power: Renaissance, Reformation, Industrial Revolution, French Revolution and Socialism. These movements that took place in Europe extended over five centuries.

This gave the people time for changing and adjusting and adapting their value patterns to the changing social, political and economic situations. But in India all these major forces that drove Europe

took place within a span of one century leaving no scope for secularization and mechanization.

According to Aurobindo, one option available to an oppressed nation is an armed revolt. In his opinion, such armed revolt is the easily available and swiftest action, the most thorough in its results, and demands least power of endurance and suffering and the smallest and briefest sacrifices.

He also stated that it is natural to state that all violent methods are wicked and criminal by any established government, especially the oppressive ones. But no nation can ignore oppressive regimes, as liberty is the life breath of a nation and when this life and liberty are attacked then any and every means must be adopted to preserve the right, and all such measures are justifiable.

According to Aurobindo, law imposed by the people on themselves had a binding force, but a law imposed by the outsiders had a moral sanction, and if the law was unjust or oppressive, it becomes a duty to disobey the same. He further coined the slogan 'no control, no cooperation.

He stated that once Indians stop teaching in schools, work in government offices or serve in police force, the British administration cannot continue even for a day. He called for not only boycotting the British goods, but also the entire British government. The work of national emancipation, according to Aurobindo, was a holy Yagna where boycott, Swadeshi, national education and every other activity were only parts.



He further opined that a purely political movement without any religious appeal would not arouse the people. He, in fact, asked people to bear in mind that by participating in a movement of spiritual nationalism they would be helping in creating a nation.

Though Aurobindo was critical about Westernization, he was not against the idea of adopting what is best in Western culture, history and tradition. He strongly believed that even by imitating them India could never become like the Europeans for simple reason that the histories are completely different and so their futures can never be the same.

Further, Aurobindo was of the opinion that Europeans ignored the importance of character and instead set greater importance to egoism and individual competitive selfishness as the foundations of the society. He sought to evolve a spiritual type of nationalism that is different from that of the political nationalism of the Western variety. According to Aurobindo, a nation must develop not on the basis of territorial unity or common interests, but on the basis of the religious feelings.

In the year 1910, Aurobindo reached the French settlement of Pondicherry and began to actively participate in the anti-partition agitations, but still had a very strong religious instinct and it is this instinct that eventually made him leave his family in Bengal and settle in

Pondicherry in search of a new life, the Life Divine.

It was with this self-revelation that Aurobindo wrote some books like The Life Divine, Essays on Gita, The Ideals of Human Unity, The Synthesis of Yoga and many others that gained world recognition. After years of spiritual life revolved around discussions and lectures, in the year 1926, Aurobindo attained Siddhi or enlightenment and spent more than two decades in meditation and spiritual realization.

He completely withdrew himself from all political activities during this period that caused a great amount of resentment among a great number of freedom fighters. He rejected a number of requests by a number of freedom fighters for various positions including that of an editor; he was also asked to chair the sessions of Congress meetings, but he out-rightly rejected all of them. So, his active political life was only for a short period of time. He died on 5 December 1950.