



SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM IN LIGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO

Satabdi Mukherjee

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of Philosophy,
Diamond Harbour Women's
University, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:

Satabdi Mukherjee

Abstract

Aurobindo Ghosh is the creator of a new trend of Indian nationalism. He started a new trend in modern thought and philosophy in the whole world. Rishi Aurobindo was a patriot, a nationalist revolutionary against British imperialism, a philosopher who believed in the unity of humanity. This uniqueness of his thought also established the concept of nationalism in the arena of a new spiritualism. He did not accept the concept of nationalism in the conventional sense. According to him, a nation becomes real only when the spirit of the nation is awakened in it. The ideal of nationalism developed by rishi Aurobindo is equally applicable not only to India but to all countries of the world.

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Introduction

Coincidentally, India's independence and Sri Aurobindo's birth date coincided. That is August 15th. Although apparently there is no significance in this analogy, the analogy can be found in a spiritual and philosophical context. Sri Aurobindo did not value political freedom very much. Rather, he emphasized on the improvement of the human soul or liberation. He wanted to build India as a nation by establishing the spiritual path of freedom. At present there is a tendency to use nationalism as mechanical, economic and necessity. But rishi Aurobindo's nationalism was of a different nature. Spirituality was the main basis of his nationalism. Because he believed that the progress of civilization would be possible through the spiritualization of human nature. And so his nationalist thinking is seen to be the influence of vedantic ideology.

The Beginning of Nationalism

In 1813 AD, Rishi Aurobindo returned from foreign and joined in administrative work at Baroda and later he joined as a principal of Baroda. From this time nationalism emerged in the life of Sri Aurobindo. From 1893 AD to 1910 AD, he was directly involved in the Indian freedom movement. After that when he was in Kolkata, he joined the Indian national congress and from that time his ideas about nationalism became clear.

Transition from Direct Nationalism to Spiritual Nationalism

It is true that more than half of rishi Aurobindo's life was spent in humanistic thought and spiritualism. However, his political ideology was not reality neutral. He had clear and practical ideas about the state. He thought deeply about contemporary political issues. Rishi Aurobindo played a leading role in Indian nationalism early in life and he did not accept what we mean by nationalism in the conventional sense. He explained nationalism in spiritual terms and realized that the restoration of the entire human race is possible only when unity is established among the entire human race. And for this reason, he said that to build an ideal social system, these three things, unity, mutuality, and harmony are very important, because without them the society will be crippled. It is undeniable that in any age, the ideal that people have found necessary in building their social life is the unity of man with man, one race with another race, one country with another country. However, it can be said by reconsidering that over the ages people have taken various means to establish this unity but the history of human civilization says that people have failed in this task for various reasons. In establishing unity among the entire human race, Sri Aurobindo has tried to show why man has repeatedly failed to establish unity in social life despite his best efforts. In this case, he mentioned the state, which creates obstacles in the path of unity.

State

While discussing about the state, rishi Aurobindo said, in most of the state systems, the life of an individual can be fulfilled only through the fulfillment of the interests of the state or group or community, that is, the fulfillment of individual interests will be possible only through the fulfillment of the interests of the state. A person's intellect, power, thought and his life have no value apart from the state. Thus, the state suppresses the life and interests of the individual and does not fully respect individual rights and therefore, the individual cannot reach his goal of unity. Hence Sri Aurobindo felt that the state is not indispensable for realizing the unity of mankind. Explaining what he means by state in this context, he says, "Theoretically, it is the subordination of the individual to the good of all that is demanded; Practically, it is his subordination to a collective egoism, political, military, economic, which seeks to satisfy certain collective aims and ambitions shaped and imposed on the great mass of the individuals by a smaller or larger number of ruling persons who are supposed in some way to represent the community."¹

According to Sri Aurobindo state was run by some self-interested, immoral, political personality. In fact the rulers of the state never give the individual the position he deserves. An individual can govern the society by his intelligence, thought and moral sense but the state is like a machine, which has no power to apply its own moral sense or intelligence to life. His main objective is only to fulfill political and economic needs and therefore he uses the person as a means to that end. According to Sri Aurobindo, this is the reason why the state can never achieve the overall welfare of the individual and mankind. The demand of the state from the individual is that the individual surrender himself to the state. But Sri Aurobindo says that the individual must sacrifice his own interests for the good of the collective but that does not mean that he should allow himself to be completely oppressed by the state. For the overall welfare of mankind, there is a need to balance the welfare of the individual with the welfare of the collective. But the individual should never exhaust himself in the interest of the state. Sri Aurobindo thinks that, "The state idea that this supremacy and universal activity of the organised State machine is the best means of human progress; is also an exaggeration and a fiction."² Sri Aurobindo said that the natural tendency of the state is to interfere with the freedom of the individual as well as of the community. An independent and harmonious environment is necessary for the transition of the individual and his social life. But the state hinders the development of independent thinking of people. The main aim of the individual should be to judge everything from his spiritual point of view, because the state cannot properly develop this inner being of the individual through its educational policies or religious policies. The real role of the state should be to resolve the conflicts or obstacles that arise in the individual's personal and social life so that the entire human race can live in harmony with each other and maintain equality. But instead of fulfilling this role, if the state obstructs the individual's independent development, then the human community will never be able to achieve its desired unity. For this reason Sri Aurobindo repeatedly emphasized the spiritual development of the individual. According to him, the individual makes social progress possible through his own progress. If the individual is not given complete freedom to develop himself, then the progress of the society as a whole will be disrupted. Thus, the state has no role in establishing human unity. If in the future all the states try to unite and form a world-union, Sri Aurobindo felt that even by that, permanent unity in the world may not be realized because the real unity is that which cannot be realized by external or mechanical principles. Only when the true spiritual oneness of the entire human society is realized, will mankind be able to attain its desired unity and harmonious life. And so he thinks that the real unity is reflected only in the nation. Sri Aurobindo believes that true unity can be achieved only within the nation and only through mental change can one achieve true unity. Therefore, he said, unless there is a mental change, it is never possible to establish unity in the state.

Nation

The concept of nation occupies a special place in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Sri Aurobindo says that man is forever striving to know his own nature, to find himself, to discover his inner strength, and this tendency of the individual is not unusual. According to Sri Aurobindo, "... this (society or community or nation) too is a being, a living power of the eternal truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic spirit, and it is there to express and fulfill in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and powers and meaning of the cosmic spirit that is within it."³ When faced with such a situation, the self-exploration of nation is strong and a new type of national movement is created within some of them. According to Sri Aurobindo state is, "Which has once risen, once has been called up by the voice of God to rise."⁴

Spiritual Nationalism

Sri Aurobindo says that the concept of nationalism is particularly related to the concept of the nation-soul. His concept of nationalism is further clarified by the movement in Bengal- which he termed as new-nationalism. Called new because it differs from previous political ideas. The earlier national congress could not see the condition of the crying, poor, downtrodden people of India. Their main objective was to gain the independence of the country through the policy of petitioning with the British government. That is, they did not want to engage in any conflict with the British government, rather they had strong faith in the British government that the British government would fulfill the just demands of the Indians. This is why he strongly criticized the national congress and started writing in various journals for the awakening the hearts of all Indians. Sri Aurobindo said, our enemy is not the foreigner but we have to give up internal weakness because this will not be done by moderates. And so it is necessary to search for new ways. Later he formed a new party in congress known as nationalist. The main goal of this nationalist group was to be free from British rule and the approach they adopted for this was known as *chatusutri* - *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, *boycott*, and *national education*. The demand of this nationalist party was to achieve complete independence or *purnswaraj* and to achieve this *swaraj* it adopted *swadeshi*, *boycott*, *national education* as its main strategy. Sri Aurobindo was the first to present the theory of full freedom to the consciousness of the people of India. He did not use the word *swaraj* in any narrow sense but

he gave a broad meaning of swaraj. He said: swaraj is the direct revelation of God to this people, – not mere political freedom but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of individual, freedom of the community, freedom of the nation; spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom. That is, he emphasized on freedom of individual, collective, nation, social, political, spiritual. According to him this type of freedom can only be achieved through nation, because they have been able to realize their inner freedom. Hence, he always emphasized on the freedom of the human soul as he believed that inner swaraj was necessary before conquering external swaraj. That is, he encouraged all Indians to realize themselves and he believed that nationalism is the spiritual method by which each individual finds his inner self and this idea of nationalism is advanced through the nation.

Sri Aurobindo therefore said that the concept of nationalism is very important for the social and political evolution of man. For him nationalism was not only a political ideology, but he also gave a spiritual interpretation of nationalism. According to him, “Nationalism is a religion that has come from God, Nationalism is a creed which will shall have to live.”⁵ That is, for Sri Aurobindo, nationalism is through which he wanted to realize unity among the freedom fighters. That is indeed the religion sent by god. Sri Aurobindo said, to develop the spirit of the nation only by properly serving the freedom, culture and all potential of all the people of the country. Later, when Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual experience began to deepen, some changes were noticed in his concept of nationalism. He said, sanatana dharma, that is nationalism and the concept of this sanatana dharma comes from Hindu Philosophy. But in this case, the question may naturally arise, is there no other religion in the world, only Hinduism should be considered as traditional religion speaking about this Hindu religion? Speaking about this Hindu religion, Sri Aurobindo said, sanatana dharma is the only eternal religion. He said there is no such eternal religion in the world. Each religion follows its own customs, principles, culture, only sanatana dharma or nationalism can reconcile the differences among all people and establish unity among all. Because the main mantra of this religion be situated in the source of vedanta, where it is said that brahma or god exists in all living beings. Vedanta philosophy states that brahman is present in all living beings and man’s goal is to realize unity with this brahman. Influenced by this philosophy of, Sri Aurobindo says that within the entire human race, the manifestation of the brahman in each person is what he calls the human-soul. The ultimate goal of human life in this larger society is to realize and manifest this human-soul. According to Sri Aurobindo sanatana dharma or nationalism is an important step towards internationalism and rishi Aurobindo, to follow and propagate the religion of humanity which is the primary basis for realizing world-oneness.

Religion of Humanity

The main aim of this religion of humanity is to develop the human body, mind and heart properly. To humanize man’s dealings with man, to show man new directions, to inspire man in the service of mankind, and above all to eradicate man’s cruelty to man. Sri Aurobindo realized that liberty, equality, fraternity are the methods by which we can express the religion of humanity and reshape the social and political life of people. He said, liberty, equality, and fraternity are the attribute of the soul and cannot be achieved by any mechanical or external control. Only through inner transformation one can realize these. According to rishi Aurobindo only through fraternity can liberty and equality be reconciled. Sri Aurobindo says, religion of humanity means realizing that the same brahma resides in each of us and that he is the only eternal truth. “A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.”⁶ We can gain this kind of understanding through fraternity. Sri Aurobindo said that fraternity is the means by which we can realize oneness among all mankind.

Thus, it can be seen that Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to the history of Indian nationalist movement is undeniable. He freed Indian nationalism from economic and political constraints and linked it with spiritual consciousness. And in this aspect he is much ahead of other thinkers.

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