

## Sri Aurobindo - the Prophet of Indian Nationalism and Renaissance

*Siddhartha Dash*

Sri Aurobindo was one of the most creative and significant 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 described Aurobindo as 'the most accomplished of modern Indian thinkers'. Tagore painted him as the 'Messiah of Indian culture and civilisation'. C.R. Das called Aurobindo as the 'poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity'. Aurobindo was indeed a versatile genius - a great poet, a profound thinker, a notable metaphysician, a great seer and an ardent patriot. His writings represent 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. In England he stayed for fourteen years till 1893 and was educated at Manchester, London and Cambridge. During his stay at Cambridge he joined Indian Majlis - a student's association. He organized a secret society called 'Lotus and Dagger' for the uplift of his motherland. In 1890 Aurobindo competed for I.C.S., won position but was disqualified in the riding fest. In 1893 he came back to India and joined Baroda state service as professor of English in Baroda College. In 1906 he joined as principal of National College,

Calcutta but resigned the post in 1907 to join the National Freedom Movement. He associated himself with Journals and periodicals like the 'Jugantar', 'the Bande Mataram' and 'the 'Karmayogi' through which he could make stern criticism of the British imperialism by preaching the gospel of militant nationalism. He proved himself one of those radical leaders of the early 20th century who transformed Indian Nationalism into a mighty mass movement and did not confine it to a few arm-chair politicians and amateur freedom fighters. In 1908 he was arrested on the charge of Alipore bomb conspiracy case but was acquitted in 1909 after a long trial. In 1910 he left active politics and stayed in Pondicherry as a Yogi till his death on 5th December, 1950. Some of his important writings are - The Life Divine, Savitri, Essay on the Gita, The Ideal of Human Unity, Defence of Indian Culture etc.

The contribution of Sri Aurobindo to modern Indian political thought may conveniently be summarized under four headings : 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 vision of the high role that India was destined to play in world affairs and his ideal of human unity.

The bedrock of political philosophy of Aurobindo was his concept of spiritual nationalism and the divinity of the motherland. Aurobindo provided an element of spiritualism to nationalism.

In 1908 he said in a public meeting in Bombay, "Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live ..... If you are going to be nationalist, if you are going to assent to this religion of nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit. You must remember that you are the instrument of God". He elevated the demand for national freedom to a religious faith so that the masses could be awakened.

Another contribution of Aurobindo was his ideal of complete freedom. Aurobindo was the first Indian political leader to use the word "Independence" instead of "Swaraj". He strongly believed that without political freedom, no real development is possible in India. Political freedom must precede socio-economic and administrative reforms. As he observed "Political freedom is the life-breath of a nation; to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion and moral improvement of the race without aiming first and foremost at political freedom is the very height of ignorance and futility".

Aurobindo made a great contribution to the theory of passive resistance and boycott. Aurobindo explained the aim of passive resistance as "to make British administration impossible by an organized refusal to do anything which shall help the growth of British trade and commerce resulting in the exploitation of the country". Aurobindo made it clear that the passive resistance may turn to be violent in case of ruthless suppression by the ruler. In this way it differed from Gandhiji's technique of non-violent resistance. Aurobindo realized that his idea of passive resistance would be successful if there was boycott of British in every field. Along with his theory of economic boycott, he put forward his views on national education. Along with his theory of economic boycott, he stressed the necessity of Swadeshi. Along with educational

boycott, he put forward his views on national education. Along with judicial boycott, he emphasized the necessity of setting up national arbitration courts. He also asked for social boycott of those Indians who did not support the cause of non-cooperation with the British.

The final contribution of Aurobindo was his vision of the high role that India was destined to play in world affairs and his ideal of human unity. At a time when British rule in India was firmly and securely established, Aurobindo had the breadth of vision to foresee India as a free nation and her contribution to the world community. He felt that India had a spiritual message which was urgently needed by the people of the world. He was convinced that a free India was to fulfil her true destiny in the international community. He advocated the concept of human unity. He pleaded for independence for India in the wider interest of the humanity. He said "Our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind..... it is a unity of brothers, equal and free men that we seek, not the unity of master and serf, of devourer and devoured".

In the midst of the darkness and distress of today's world, Aurobindo provides a ray of hope to mankind. He envisaged a new man, a new society and a new civilization. To conclude with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. "Aurobindo was the greatest intellectual of our age and major force for the life of the spirit. India will not forget his services to politics and philosophy and the world will remember with gratitude, his invaluable work in the realm of philosophy and religion".

---

Siddhartha Dash lives at N4-205, IRC Village, Bhubaneswar-751015