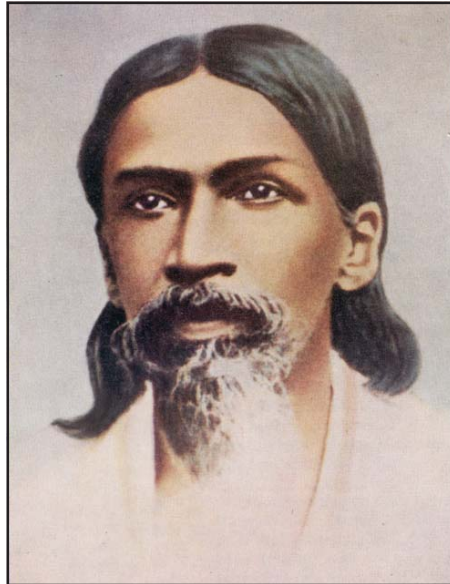


## Sri Aurobindo and Freedom of India

*Siddhartha Dash*

A prominent nationalist leader in the first decade of the last century Sri Aurobindo pioneered the revolutionary movement in Bengal. He was a versatile genius, a profound thinker, erudite scholar, flaming patriot and a pivotal force in awakening the country to the need for independence. Romain Rolland regarded him as "highest synthesis of the genius of the East and the West". Tagore painted him as the "Messiah of Indian Culture and Civilisation". CR Das called Aurobindo as the 'poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity.'

Aurobindo was born on 15th August 1872 at Calcutta in an established Bengali family. He was the third child of his parents. His father Krishnadhan Ghosh was a doctor by profession, who had great fascination for Europlan culture. On the contrary, his mother Swarnalata Devi was a staunch supporter and admirer of Indian tradition



and culture. In 1879, at the age of seven, Aurobindo was sent alongwith his two other brothers to England by his father to insulate him against any Indian influence. In England, he stayed at first in Manchester with Drewett family where he was perfectly trained in English and Latin. In 1884 Aurobindo was admitted into the famous St. Paul's school in London. Then, he joined King's College in Cambridge as a student in humanities stream.

After two years of study in King's College, he passed the first part of the Classics Tripos in first division. Even as a youth growing up in England, Aurobindo dreamed of liberating his motherland from British rule. During his stay at Cambridge, he delivered many revolutionary speeches. While in England, he came in contact with a revolutionary organization known as the 'Indian Majlis'. Later on, he joined another secret society called 'the Lotus and Dagger'.



In 1890 Aurobindo competed for the much coveted ICS examination, won position, but was disqualified in the riding test. In 1893, after a long gap of fourteen years Aurobindo came back to India. Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda persuaded him to join in his princely state. He joined in the Baroda state service first in the revenue department, then as a Professor of English and finally as the acting Principal of National College, Baroda. "These were, "Aurobindo writes", years of self-culture of literary activity and of preparation for future work". Towards the end of his stay at Baroda Aurobindo began revolutionary activities. In 1899 he arranged for a dynamic Bengali Youth Yatin Banerjee to receive military training in Baroda army. After two years of successful training, Yatin went to Bengal, which was the citadel of revolutionary activities, as Aurobindo's emissary to engage in revolutionary recruitment and organization. Yatin was later assisted by another patriotic Bengali youth Barindra, who afterwards formed his own revolutionary group. In 1902 Aurobindo joined a secret society of Western India headed by a Rajput noble called Thakur Saheb. He brought about a sort of liaison between the secret society of Thakur Saheb and a revolutionary group in Bengal led by P. Mitter. This bears ample testimony to the organizing skill of Aurobindo, who even before entering into active politics was accepted as the intellectual leader of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. It was Aurobindo's intention to build up a network of strong revolutionary centres all over the country to impart military training to the youth.

These revolutionary centres would eventually organize armed insurrection against the British Raj. Aurobindo was, however, convinced that this strategy would be successful only if it will be supported by a large public movement.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that Aurobindo emerged in the Indian political scene much earlier than Gandhi and MN Roy. His was the mastermind wherefrom emanated most of the governing ideas of Indian nationalist movement. In the beginning, Aurobindo was not a pacifist. He was convinced that a nation had the right to obtain its freedom from foreign rule by whatever means necessary. It was only after 1905 that Aurobindo directly entered into active politics. The decision of the then British government to divide Bengal province into two separate parts shocked the whole country. That was the time when the people of Bengal were thoroughly indignant and outraged. Aurobindo felt that the time for public propaganda had come. Immediately, he left Baroda service that fetched him 500 pound a year and gladly accepted the duties of the principal in the National College, Calcutta at a bare subsistence allowance of 10 pound a month. That was a time when the moderate politicians dominated Indian politics. Aurobindo ridiculed them and pleaded for extreme politics of Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal. Soon, he began writing editorials for 'Bande Mataram', an English daily, started by Bipin Chandra Pal. He contributed articles for other journals like 'Jugantara', 'Indu Prakash' and 'Karma Yogin'.

It would be most appropriate to mention here that Sri Aurobindo was first among Indian



political leaders to use the word 'Independence' instead of 'Swaraj'. He had the courage to declare openly for complete and absolute independence. He wrote "there are some who fear to use the word 'freedom' but I have always used the word because it has been the Mantra of my life to aspire towards the freedom of my nation". It was because of his boldness of speech and writing that he was made the target of British politics. No wonder, Viceroy Lord Minto described Aurobindo as the "most dangerous man in India".

In the hands of Aurobindo, the application of moral force took the shape of a full-scale non-violent non-cooperation and passive resistance movement on the occasion of the Bengal partition movement in 1906. What was at first a protest movement against the partition soon developed into a broader movement of 'Swadeshi and Swaraj' under his inspiration. The goal of this policy included the boycott of British products and institutions, the purchase of Swadeshi (indigenous) goods, the development of Swadeshi industries, arbitration courts, colleges and schools and the use of passive resistance. It was because of the growing Nationalist movement in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo was tried twice for sedition and was acquitted both the times. In May 1908 he was arrested in the famous Alipore bomb case. He was acquitted after spending one year in jail

as an undertrial prisoner. In 1910 he left active politics and stayed in Pondicherry as a 'Yogi' till his death on 5th December, 1950.

To Sri Aurobindo, India is not just a piece of land, not merely a collection of people. It is a conscious Spiritual Being, a Divine Power, a Shakti, Devi, Goddess. India is Mother India, a living form of the Divine Mother. India must be free from foreign control, for only then could she develop and manifest the greatness of her soul.

'Love India', Sri Aurobindo urged his countrymen, 'serve her, sacrifice all for her, so that she may be free.'

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