



Nationalism as a Spiritual Path: Sri Aurobindo's Philosophical Interpretation Through *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine*

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The research paper explores the concept of nationalism as a spiritual path in Sri Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita and The Life Divine. Sri Aurobindo's vision of nationalism goes beyond the conventional idea of political and social organization, and acts as a means of spiritual transformation for individuals and society as a whole. The paper examines Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, and the ways in which it provides a framework for understanding nationalism in a spiritual context. The research also analyzes Sri Aurobindo's view of the individual's role in realizing the full potential of nationalist idealism, and how it aligns with his larger philosophy of integral inner growth. Ultimately, the paper suggests that Sri Aurobindo's vision of nationalism as a spiritual path offers a unique perspective on the relationship between politics, spirituality, and human transformation.

Keywords: Spirituality, nationalism, integration, transformation, self-determination, awakening, culture, heritage, moral values, idealism

Introduction:

Aurobindo Ghose was an Indian nationalist, philosopher, and yogi who lived during the British Raj in India. Aurobindo's nationalism was based on the idea of India's spiritual destiny, which he believed was expressed in ancient Indian texts like *the Bhagavad Gita* and *the Life Divine*.

Aurobindo believed that India's spiritual heritage was being suppressed by colonialism, and that India could only become great again by reclaiming its spiritual identity. In his *Essays on the Gita* and *the Life Divine*, Aurobindo examines these texts in order to articulate what he believes to be the spiritual essence of Indian nationalism. Before that these two texts are examined against the theme of nationalism, it would be worthwhile to find out how Sri Aurobindo used to define nationalism out of his own perspective and the way he treated it in his writings in general.

His Interpretation of Nationalism:

Aurobindo's interpretation of nationalism in the essays on the Gita and the Upanishads is based on the idea that India has a spiritual destiny which is expressed in these texts. Aurobindo believed that *the Gita* and *the Upanishads* are not just religious texts but are also political texts that contain a message of social and political liberation.

Aurobindo saw *the Gita* as a call to action for those who seek to liberate themselves from oppression and bondage. He believed that the message of *the Gita* is not limited to individual salvation but extends to the liberation of society as a whole. According to Aurobindo, *the Gita* teaches that the ultimate goal of human life is to attain spiritual enlightenment and that this enlightenment can only be achieved by performing one's social and political duties.

Similarly, Aurobindo saw *the Life Divine* as a call to transcend the limitations of the material world and realize the infinite potential of the human spirit. Aurobindo believed that this work would teach the ultimate goal of human life is to realize the divine within oneself and that this realization can only be achieved by breaking free from the bonds of limited material existence. Aurobindo's interpretation of nationalism is based on these ideas. He believed that India's spiritual heritage is its greatest asset, and that Indian nationalism should be based on a spiritual, rather than a material, vision of the future. In his view, India's spiritual destiny is to lead the world to a higher state of consciousness and enlightenment. Therefore, Aurobindo's interpretation of nationalism in the essays on *the Gita* and *the Life Divine* is based on the idea that India's spiritual heritage is the key to its future greatness, and that true liberation can only be achieved by breaking free from the bonds of limited material existence and realizing the infinite potential of the human spirit.

Impact of his Nationalism on Indian Writings in English:

Sri Aurobindo was an avid supporter of Indian nationalism and believed that India needed to be independent from colonial rule. In his essays such as "Bande Mataram" and "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance," he expressed his views on nationalism. In "Bande Mataram," Sri Aurobindo emphasized the importance of national unity and self-determination. He believed that Indians needed to come together and work towards their common goal of freedom. He also expressed his belief that India had a unique culture and heritage that needed to be preserved and celebrated. This essay became a rallying cry for the Indian independence movement and inspired many to join the cause.

Furthermore, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance," Sri Aurobindo argued that India should not passively accept British rule. Instead, he advocated for non-violent resistance, including civil disobedience, to bring about change. He believed that Indians needed to resist British oppression in all forms, including economic exploitation and cultural domination. He also stressed the necessity of building a strong national consciousness to support this resistance. This sheds light on how Sri Aurobindo's views on nationalism can be summed up as a call for India's independence and an assertion of India's cultural and national identity. Through his writings, he inspired many Indians to fight for their rights and to take pride in their heritage.

Sri Aurobindo's nationalist views had a significant impact on Indian writings in English, particularly those produced during the Indian Independence movement. Many Indian writers in English at the time, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mulk Raj Anand, were influenced by his ideas and incorporated them into their own works.

One of the key ways in which Sri Aurobindo's nationalism impacted Indian writing in English was through an increased emphasis on Indian themes, perspectives, and language in literature. Indian writers began to draw on their national identity and cultural heritage as a source of inspiration and subject matter for their works, and English language began to be infused with Indian words and phrases.

Another important impact was the role that literature played in the nationalist movement. Writers began to use their works as a way to express their own political and social views. The works of writers such as Sarojini Naidu and R.K. Narayan, for example, contained strong messages of Indian nationalism and cultural identity. By disseminating these ideas through their works, the writers were able to raise awareness about the need for Indian independence and to inspire others to join the movement. All things considered, the impact of Sri Aurobindo's nationalism on Indian writing in English was significant. It helped to shape the themes and directions of the literature produced during this period and played an important role in raising awareness about the need for Indian independence and the importance of Indian cultural and national identity.

Nationalism in a Different Perspective:

Sri Aurobindo's nationalist views were different from the conventional nationalist ideology of his time in several ways.

Firstly, conventional nationalist ideology at the time was generally focused on the idea of a nation-state, with a political emphasis on gaining independence and creating a separate country. However, Sri Aurobindo's nationalism was more focused on the idea of cultural and spiritual nationalism. He believed that India's unique cultural heritage was something to be celebrated and preserved. He advocated for a notion of Indian-ness that went beyond political independence and included a deep appreciation for India's cultural and spiritual traditions.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo's nationalism was not limited to any specific religion or ethnicity. He believed that India's nationalism should be inclusive of all its diverse communities, regardless of caste, creed, or religion. This differed from the narrow ethno-religious focus of some conventional nationalist ideologies at the time that promoted a specific religion or language as the basis of national identity.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo's nationalism emphasized the role of individual spiritual development in the pursuit of national liberation. He believed that individual self-transformation was necessary for the creation of a truly self-reliant and independent nation. This was in contrast to the conventional nationalist ideology at the time that placed more emphasis on collective action and political mobilization.

Finally, Sri Aurobindo's approach was characterized by a deep sense of idealism and optimism. He believed that India had a unique destiny and that its people could achieve great things if they worked together and

pursued a higher form of consciousness. This contrasted with the more pragmatic and realist approaches of many conventional nationalist leaders at the time.

This proves that Sri Aurobindo's nationalist views differed from conventional nationalist ideology of his time in their emphasis on cultural and spiritual nationalism, inclusivity, individual spiritual transformation, and idealism.

Resonance of his Art in Indian Writings:

Sri Aurobindo's nationalist ideas continue to resonate in contemporary Indian politics and society in several ways.

Firstly, his emphasis on cultural and spiritual nationalism has helped shape India's sense of national identity. Today, many Indians take pride in their diverse cultural heritage, and there is a growing appreciation for India's spiritual traditions such as yoga and meditation. Sri Aurobindo's ideas have played a role in promoting this sense of cultural and spiritual pride.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on inclusivity and the importance of individual spiritual development continue to influence contemporary Indian society. India's constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens regardless of their religion, caste, or gender. Moreover, many social and political movements in India today promote greater inclusivity and social justice. Sri Aurobindo's ideas have helped inspire such movements.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo's ideas continue to resonate with those who seek to bring about positive change in contemporary politics. Despite India's progress since independence, there are many challenges, including corruption, inequality, and communalism. People who are working towards addressing these issues draw inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's call for a higher form of consciousness and focus on individual spiritual transformation.

Finally, Sri Aurobindo's ideas about the need for India to be self-reliant have influenced contemporary Indian economic policy. India has made significant progress in recent years in areas such as infrastructure development and trade policy. Similarly, initiatives to promote indigenous industries and self-reliance, such as Make in India, resonate with Sri Aurobindo's vision of a self-reliant India. Having taken it into consideration, Sri Aurobindo's ideas continue to resonate in contemporary Indian politics and society in various ways. His focus on cultural and spiritual nationalism, inclusivity, individual spiritual development, self-reliance, and higher consciousness have all contributed to shaping modern India's national identity, politics, and economy.

Essays on the Gita:

Sri Aurobindo, in his book *Essays on the Gita*, discusses the concept of nationalism in the Indian context and its relationship with spiritualism. He emphasizes that nationalism is not just about political independence, but also about achieving spiritual liberation and developing a sense of cultural identity. Aurobindo believed that nationalism should be rooted in the culture and spiritual heritage of a people. He saw the role of nationalism as not just protecting national interests and fostering unity, but also as a means to discover and express the higher ideals of humanity. Aurobindo's concept of nationalism went beyond mere political boundaries. For

him, it was about identifying with an entire civilization and its core spiritual values. In his essays, he argues that India's spiritual past and its culture are inseparable from its national identity. He writes, "India of the ages is not dead, nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples." Aurobindo's nationalism also had a spiritual dimension. He believed that India's spiritual heritage should be used as a basis for national unity and progress. He argued that spiritual knowledge was an essential component of the Indian identity, and that nationalism was the natural outcome of the spiritual awakening of the Indian people. Certain key factors could be discussed in this way:

Significance of Spiritual Idealism: Sri Aurobindo's treatment of nationalism in *the Bhagavad Gita* is a complex and multi-layered subject. While he emphasized the spiritual ideals of *the Gita* and its relevance to the modern world, his interpretation of nationalism in the text has been the subject of criticism.

Promotion of Spirituality in Politics: One critical note on Aurobindo's treatment of nationalism in *the Gita* is that his interpretation tends to conflate spiritual and political realms. Aurobindo's emphasis on the spiritual aspects of nationalism, such as the idea of dharma, can be seen as a way to justify political action and promote his own political agenda. This can be problematic, as it blurs the distinction between spiritual and political pursuits and can lead to the misuse of spiritual principles for political ends.

Multi-layered Nuances: Aurobindo's interpretation of *the Gita* can be seen as supremely idealized and full of different nuances. While he emphasizes the importance of action and the fulfillment of one's duties, he does not fully engage with the complexities of political realities, such as the need for compromise and negotiation in the face of opposing viewpoints.

Overall, while Aurobindo's interpretation of nationalism in *the Gita* is influential and has contributed to the development of Indian nationalism, it has also been the subject of criticism for its potential to conflate spiritual and political realms and its lack of nuance in dealing with complex political realities.

This argument suggests that Sri Aurobindo's analysis of nationalism in his *Essays on the Gita* draws upon India's spiritual heritage to create a cultural and spiritual foundation for national unity. His analysis reflects the deep connections between spirituality, culture, and national identity, and the importance of integrating these elements into a holistic approach to nationalism.

The Life Divine:

Sri Aurobindo's philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, presents a nuanced exploration of nationalism that transcends conventional definitions. Aurobindo's perspective on nationalism is deeply rooted in his spiritual and evolutionary worldview, emphasizing the profound interconnectedness of individuals, nations, and the entire human race.

One of the fundamental elements of nationalism in Aurobindo's teachings is the recognition of cultural identity. He stresses the importance of preserving and honoring a nation's unique cultural heritage, traditions, and values. Aurobindo believes that a nation's identity is not merely superficial, but is a vital component of its spiritual and psychological well-being. Cultivating and nurturing cultural roots becomes an integral part of the nation's journey towards a higher consciousness. However, Aurobindo's nationalism extends beyond the boundaries of a single nation. He envisions a world where nations coexist in harmony, forming an integral human unity. In this vision, nationalism serves as a stepping stone towards a more inclusive and cooperative global community. Aurobindo emphasizes that nationalism should not become a source of division or conflict, but should be a catalyst for understanding and collaboration among nations.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophical and spiritual work, *The Life Divine*, there are elements that can be associated with nationalism. However, it is important to note that Aurobindo's concept of nationalism goes beyond conventional political or territorial nationalism. His understanding of nationalism is more closely tied to a spiritual and evolutionary perspective.

Cultural Identity: Aurobindo recognizes the importance of cultural identity and its preservation within the context of a nation. He emphasizes the need for a nation to be rooted in its cultural heritage, traditions, and values. **Integral Human Unity:** Aurobindo envisions a world where nations maintain their unique identities but are part of a larger human unity. He advocates for the idea that nationalism should not lead to conflicts or divisions but should serve as a stepping stone towards a more harmonious and cooperative global community.

Awakening and Aspiration: Aurobindo emphasizes the need for individuals and nations to awaken to their higher potential and aspire for spiritual and psychological growth. He believes that a nation's progress is not solely measured by material or political achievements but also by its spiritual and moral development.

Self-Determination: Aurobindo acknowledges the right of nations to determine their own destiny and govern themselves. He emphasizes the importance of self-rule and self-governance as a fundamental aspect of nationalism.

Transformation and Evolution: Aurobindo's concept of nationalism goes beyond static notions of identity and calls for a transformative process. He envisions a nation evolving spiritually and intellectually, striving for a higher consciousness and a deeper understanding of its purpose in the world.

It is important to note that Aurobindo's ideas on nationalism are not limited to any specific country or political context. His vision extends to a broader understanding of the human potential and the role of nations in the larger evolution of consciousness.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, nationalism is a concept that has been debated and analyzed for decades. It can be defined as a feeling of loyalty and devotion to one's nation and can take various forms, including cultural, political, and social. In his essays on *the Gita* and *the Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo explores the idea of nationalism from a spiritual perspective, presenting a vision of nationalism that goes beyond nation and a belief in its superiority. In *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine*, Aurobindo Ghosh explores the concept of spiritual nationalism, which promotes the idea of uniting people under a common spiritual consciousness rather than a nationalistic identity.

Aurobindo's concept of spiritual nationalism is rooted in the idea that the ultimate goal of humanity is spiritual evolution and self-realization. He believes that nationalism, when it is based on a materialistic outlook, is a hindrance to this spiritual evolution and that true progress can only be achieved through a spiritual consciousness that transcends nationalistic identities.

Through his two texts, *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine* Aurobindo calls for the Indian people to embrace a spiritual nationalism, which recognizes the spiritual heritage of India and unites the people based on their common spiritual striving. He argues that this spiritual nationalism can help India achieve its true potential and contribute to humanity's greater spiritual evolution. Summing up, Aurobindo's essays highlight the importance of moving away from a narrow, materialistic conception of nationalism and towards a more spiritual understanding of collective identity and unity. His call for spiritual nationalism provides a unique perspective on the idea of nationalism and emphasizes the importance of spiritual evolution in the progress of humanity.

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