



NATIONALISM: A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF AUROBINDO GHOSH

Dharitri Mandal

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy

Rammohan College, Kolkata, India

Abstract: It is very important for us to find out what nationalism really means in today's society. Because, in Indian culture, the word nationalism has always been accepted from the spiritual point of view, but in the present time, people are misusing the word nationalism in a narrow sense rather than taking it in a broad sense. The result is that one country wants to destroy, consume, suppress another country, that is, an extreme violent situation is increasing gradually. This is in stark contrast to Sri Aurobindo's nationalist ideals. He has always valued Indian culture. Therefore, for Sri Aurobindo, nationalism is not just a special feeling for one's country. The specialty of his thoughts was the feeling of the Supreme Being in the entire human society. My aim in this essay is to highlight the nationalist spirit of Sri Aurobindo.

Keywords: *Nationalism, Spirituality, Human Society, Indian culture, Supreme Being*

Aurobindo Ghosh, one of the important leaders of India's freedom movement, had a deep philosophical insight that was inspired by the spiritualistic culture of India. He is also known as a yogi as he experienced the spiritualistic truth in his life following an intense sādhanā. This self-realized spiritualistic truth encouraged him to view things of practical life also from a different dimension. This truth is reflected in his entire perspective of life, even in his political attitude. He was the most important theoretical leader of radical nationalism in India. He expressed his thoughtful views on the necessity of independence, the significance and methods of self-rule. In this paper my aim is to discuss about his unique idea of nationalism that connects political awareness with spiritualistic flavour of sanātana dharma.

Aurobindo Ghosh, son of Dr. Krishnadhan Ghosh and Swarnalata Devi was born on 15 August 1872 in Calcutta. But he was sent to England for his studies at the age of seven. He learned different languages there like English, French, Latin, German, and especially Greek. Although he was brought up entirely in Western culture, he was aware about the socio-political condition of India and his deep feeling for his country insisted him to be actively involved in National movement of the country after returning back to India in 1893. At the time of his stay in England, Aurobindo Ghosh joined a secret society of Indian revolutionaries called 'Lotus and Daggers'. The members of the Association had to resolve that they would accept the freedom of India as their life's vow and each of them would undertake a task for this purpose.¹

From then on, the work of freeing the country from subjugation began. At first, he was appointed for the secretarial work under the Maharaja of Baroda. During this time, Aurobindo Ghosh studied Indian religion, philosophy, literature, etc., in depth. At the same time, he published some articles exposing the shortcomings of the Congress methodology, and gradually got involved in nationalist politics. (The Congress Party was born in 1885 as an all-India national institution; at that time, Aurobindo Ghosh was in England).²

He realized that to make our country free from the British rule is not sufficient, but we should try to solve the problem of suppression by the rich class to the deprived. In this context, it may be mentioned that the spirit of nationalism had flourished in India even before the advent of Aurobindo Ghosh. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first to be inspired by nationalism in this country. From Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the early nineteenth century to Aurobindo Ghosh, one of the main leaders of the national movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, the movement progressed in an uninterrupted manner. Within six months of his return, Aurobindo's first political essay, "New Lamps for Old", was published in Indu Prakash. Aurobindo Ghosh wrote this essay at the request of Keshavrao Deshpande, editor of Indu Prakash, and seven more articles by this name were also published in succession. Since Aurobindo Ghosh was then a civil servant of Baroda, it was not right to openly participate in political debates in his own name. In his essays, Aurobindo Ghosh criticised the aims, tactics and composition of the Congress, and asked the Congress to change its approach and work according to a new strategy.

Aurobindo's strategy for India's independence was completely different from that of the Congress. He believed that instead of a self-respecting appeal-submission policy, there is a need to adopt self-confidence. Leaders must be engaged in the welfare of the country fearlessly. He realized that the commoners, the farmers of India must know the causes of their distress and the means of their true liberation. Because he rightly pointed out that the future of the country depends on these poor, uneducated citizens; not on the handful English-educated, elite individual leaders. Aurobindo Ghosh expressed his apprehension that if the masses were forever neglected, it would not be strange that one day a revolution similar to the French Revolution would occur in this country. Just as within five years the uneducated people of France wiped out the tyranny of thirteen centuries, same could be happened in India too. Therefore, he suggested that the first and

foremost duty of the Congress is to build a connection with the poor people and to take an attempt to improve their condition. His political plans were clearly depicted in the book Aurobindo Ghosh on Himself. In July 1905, when the Government of England announced that the proposal to bifurcate Bangladesh was final, he understood that the proposal to bifurcate Bengal would unite the Bengalis and inspire them to revolt. As a result, many Bengalis would be interested to participate in the freedom movement actively. And Bengal will be the centre of the freedom movement.³

Now realising that his real place of work was Bengal, he decided to leave his job of Baroda estate and set up his workplace in Calcutta. He asked his Calcutta attendants like Hemchandra Kanungo, Debabrata Basu and others to resume their efforts with renewed vigour, and before leaving Baroda, he sent Barindra Kumar to Calcutta to re-establish the secret society and to publish newspapers to preach the message of independence to the countrymen. In August 1906, nationalist leader Bipin Chandra Pal published English weekly called Vande Mataram. Aurobindo Ghosh was given the responsibility of managing the magazine. The purpose with which Vande Mataram was published is known from an article of Aurobindo Ghosh published on the anniversary of the magazine. The essence of what Aurobindo Ghosh had said in that article was that this magazine was published to fulfil the needs of the country at a critical juncture. Vande Mataram was committed to show a new path to the countrymen and no obstacle could deter it from doing so. Vande Mataram claimed that it spoke to the real hopes and aspirations of the countrymen. The youth of Bengal enthusiastically accepted Aurobindo's Vande Mataram as their party's spokesperson. Aurobindo's first and foremost task at this time was to organise the youth and he openly declared that the aim of their political movement was complete and absolute independence. This demand was repeated in various articles in Vande Mataram. Aurobindo Ghosh was the first person to dare to make this announcement publicly. As a result, the popularity of Vande Mataram increased day by day. For this reason, the Board of Directors of the Patrika started publishing a weekly edition of Vande Mataram from 2nd June 1907. Gradually Vande Mataram became popular as a major nationalist newspaper. In this way, Aurobindo Ghosh contributed to the nationalist movement of India by instilling a clear sense of nationalism among the people of India, sometimes actively and sometimes passively. So now I will try to understand the meaning of nationalism following the view of Aurobindo Ghosh.⁴

Nationalism is a political ideology. In a national society, a deep sense of solidarity must exist as in a nation like India we find various kinds of race, religion, language, literature, history and traditional practices. On the basis of this solidarity, that national society highlights on the equal interests, equal traditions, equal pride and degradation. On the basis of this solidarity, the sense of nationalism develops. The psychological feeling that arises when it is combined with patriotism or deep attachment to one's country is the political ideology of nationalism. It means the political ideology of nationalism is being created when patriotism is combined with nationalism. Although modern nationalism as a political ideology was born in Europe, India has tried to awaken a sense of nationalism with a character completely different from the European. Aurobindo's thought expressed this multidimensionality of Indian nationalism to end the age-old disunity and isolation among people and to establish India in new glory. Such thought of Aurobindo Ghosh about nationalism is much more than that of the common man and a mere patriot. Aurobindo's call for nationalism appealed to the countrymen. And that nationalism was dedicated to the ideal of universal human unity. Aurobindo's patriotism was unparalleled. He believed that a country is not just a particular landmass or a group of people; it is a larger, awakened entity larger than any geographical area, which is beyond the imagination of man. A close review of Aurobindo's writings and lectures reveals that he intended to aware people about India's unique glorious heritage. To him, India is one of the oldest nations of the world with a high rich traditional culture that pay equal importance to both the value of life and the ideal of transcendental truth. He opined, "One of the oldest races and greatest civilizations on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality"⁵. For Aurobindo Ghosh his country is his mother, for whom he has deep respect and he worships the country as the Mother. He advised the young citizens of the country to work for the country. He believed that the most important task of the children of the country is to liberate the country from its enemies, who continuously torture the country. People should always be ready to provide service to their country; if necessary, they will not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the country. He himself said that patriotism is one of his three madresses. On August 30, 1905, Aurobindo Ghosh wrote to his wife Mrinalini Devi, " My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter—a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers—I look upon Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength—I am not going to fight with sword or gun—but it is the strength of knowledge. This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission. The seed began to sprout when I was fourteen; by the time I was eighteen the roots of the resolution had grown firm and unshakable. After listening to what my aunt said you formed the idea that some wicked people had dragged your simple and innocent husband on to the bad path. But it was this innocent husband of yours who brought those people and hundreds of others on to that path, be it bad or good, and will yet bring thousands of others on to that same path. I do not say that the work will be accomplished during my lifetime, but it certainly will be done."⁶ Aurobindo Ghosh got this inspiration about the country from the heart-stirring mantra of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the famous Bengali novelist. The way Bankim Chandra portrayed the country in the impeccable stanzas of Vande Mataram in the great story of Anandamath, Aurobindo Ghosh believes that this can be the essence of nationalism for the people of India. According to him, Bankim Chandra not only gave the message of inspiration to the countrymen through the mantra of Vande Mataram, but also established patriotism as a part of religion in his philosophical discussions.

Aurobindo's nationalism is spiritualistic. For him, nationalism is a spiritual force and ideal nationalism can never be divorced from this spiritual force which is at the core of India's education, civilization, glory, strength and greatness. Every time everyone thought that the destruction of the Indian nation was imminent, this spiritual force flowed from the hidden source and revived the dying India, and created all the useful forces. That spiritual power is still going on. The penance of great men, the suffering of the self-sacrificial, the self-sacrifice of the brave, the yogic power of the yogi, the enlightenment of the wise, and the purity of the saint are the sources of this spiritual power.⁷ D. P. Chattopadhyay said, "Sri Aurobindo affirms that every Nation has a soul of its own. The soul is spiritual, not metaphysical, and humanly

realizable."⁸ Aurobindo's discussion has given a special dimension to the nationalism of India, where nationalism is not just a specific political course of action, rather a very important thing. For him, nationalism is a religion, a code-determined course of action, directed by God. This nationalism is a religion that teaches people to work in philanthropy instead of self-interest, and to sacrifice their lives when necessary.⁹ After his release, Aurobindo re-introduced his nationalist ideas, based on 'broader Hinduism', in a lecture on Hinduism at Uttarpara on 30 May 1909, Aurobindo Ghosh said: 'I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith, I say that it is Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism'.¹⁰ For Aurobindo, nationalism is Sanatana Dharma. Vedas, Vedanta, Gita, Yoga, Tantra, Puranas etc. are the main scriptures of this religion. But Aurobindo Ghosh did not give any place to communal divisions in the sense of nationalism in his talks. Although he believed in the ideals of the ancient Aryan civilization, he did not approve of the idea of separate nationalities for Hindus or Muslims or other religious communities. In his view, if there is such a thing as Hindu nationalism, it is a thing of the past. This was true until the reigns of Shivaji and Ramdas, when the supremacy and oppression of the Muslim rulers was an object of resistance. But in the present situation India exists only as a whole. Therefore, this Sanatana Dharma is not the religion of any particular community, it is not expressed through any particular institution. This religion is not anti-science and modernism. Sanatana Dharma is the eternal value, Sanatana Dharma is the universal religion. The concept of this world religion is not unfamiliar to us. Vivekananda also sought a fundamental spiritual unity among all religions. This is his 'universal religion', the basis of which is, of course, Vedanta. Transcending the boundaries of time and country, Aurobindo Ghosh propagated the idea of the presence of the Supreme Soul among all and identified that concept as Sanatana Dharma or nationalism. For him, nationalism was a necessary stage, not an obstacle to human social and political evolution. Aurobindo's idea of Sanatana Dharma that is founded on human unity can be appreciated in the realm of international politics. From the above discussion, one thing can be inferred that Aurobindo Ghosh has tried to explain that the greatness of India cannot be established by material progress, but only by spiritual means. But as a humanist and worshipper of human unity, he has advised to focus on spiritual development. According to him, this spiritual development is necessary for the greater good of the world. According to him, the failure of modern civilization has become evident as the modern world has completely rejected moral and spiritual values in the pursuit of material development. Aurobindo Ghosh believed that only India, through its spiritual power and wealth, could show the path of real progress to the whole world.¹¹

Aurobindo Ghosh's nationalistic ideas are clearly expressed in his book *The Human Cycle*. There, he explained the psychological cause of social evolution and said that from ancient times to the symbolic stage, man has gradually passed through the Typal stage and the conventional stage and reached the subjective stage. He thinks that in this subjective age, the identity of human group life is 'nation'. Where man feels that he has not only body and soul, but also a mind and soul. That is, the characteristic of the subjective age is self-awareness, and the main goal is to reach the soul, to live in the soul, to see through the eyes of the spirit, to transform the truth of the soul into the inner and outer life. By Soul here, Aurobindo Ghosh means the Supreme Personality in a broader sense, who is our real Being, and who is one in all beings. In some places he also calls this being a Universal entity or Absolute Principle. A Universal entity who objectively regards everyone as the means of accomplishing his aims.¹²

Sri Aurobindo, in his book *The Life Divine*, discusses the nature of the Absolute Principle, the material theory of which is the main point of which is the Absolute Principle, as everything originates from matter, so everything ends in the material. The other stream is spiritualism. The statement of spiritualism is that consciousness is the absolute principle. Consciousness is the only truth, the rest of the world is false. He did not completely accept or reject either of these two extremes; Rather, he introduced Purnadvaita by reconciliation the two. There he says that just as consciousness is the ultimate truth, the world is also true and complementary to each other. By Consciousness, Sri Aurobindo here speaks of the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Being, the Self of Sat-chit-ananda, in addition to mental consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo, the two states of Brahman as Sat-chit-ananda are inactive or unchanging, and active or changing states. Just as Brahman is good and consciousness, so is bliss. By the word bliss, Sri Aurobindo refers to both these states of Brahman. According to Sri Aurobindo, Brahman is an independent or liberated being and possesses infinite power. Just as Brahman is one, the possibility of being many is also stored in Him. And when His potential of being many is realised, then the chita contracts itself and produces various things in this world. This state of creation or change of Brahman is called bliss. And when Brahman sits quietly with all his possibilities (witness consciousness), does not perform any action or remains unchanging, that state is called the state of inaction. In the Supreme Being, this state of joy and the state of inactivity can exist simultaneously. For when there is no creation, there is only an inactive state of Brahman and activity is then possible, but at the time of creation there is a state of bliss of Brahman as well as an inactive state. Since Brahman has the state of the Supreme Being, beyond the living entity and the world being, the state of immutability always exists in Brahman apart from this change. Sri Aurobindo thinks that the process of involution of Brahman is the manifestation of the blissful liberation, where from Sat-chit-ananda comes the level of super-mind, one who knows himself to be one with Brahman and at the same time has the knowledge that he can be many. In order to realise this possibility of being many, the supermind creates a barrier to itself and shrinks consciousness, so that it is not possible to see the One in one form and somehow to see in many forms, this is the first shrinking stage of blissful Brahman, Supermind. The next stage is the Supramental level, from this level the feelings change, then Sat-chit-ananda deliberately tries not to know the whole by shrinking consciousness. And in this way the contraction of consciousness leads to the gradual transfer of consciousness from the level of the Supramental to the level of the mind, beyond the level of the mind to the animal level, and finally the most compressed form of consciousness is the level of matter. This is Sat-chit-ananda's process of rotation, according to Sri Aurobindo, on the basis of this rotation process of Brahman, we can conclude that consciousness is the Supreme and the material world is the manifestation of consciousness. Everything originates from consciousness. Brahman is entangled in self-contraction, but He does not stop there, he is moving upward to return to the Self and becoming the Supreme Consciousness. Therefore, this world created by him is not only material, but also conscious. Since we first perceive the aspect of inertia, we think of his world as mechanical. And imagine ourselves as obstacles to spirituality. But this is not true because the chit energy that is behind this world is expressed through this being. The living entity makes this manifestation of Conscious Force truly worthwhile, sheltering this world. That is, this world is the field of sadhana of the living entity.¹³

According to Sri Aurobindo, the living entity and the world are inextricably linked to each other, because the Conscious Force that Brahman has contracted in order to see Himself in many forms in all things in this world, and has also transcended the Conscious Force for self-enlightenment. Just as Brahman is real, so is the living entity and the world. The living entity and the world are interdependent, and the refuge of these two is Brahman. The living entity is the main means of returning to the form of Brahman, the world progresses towards the fulfilment of its goal through the jiva. Sri Aurobindo called this process evolution. In the process of evolution, the dynamics of consciousness in organisms are manifested step by step. The first or the lowest level is the material world. From this physical level comes the vital level, in the first part of which is the plant, in the plant there is consciousness. In the second part is the animal, the manifestation of consciousness is half-bloomed there. After this, the mind entered the animal level, and then this level is called the mental level. That is, when the mind arrives, man appears in nature. It is at this level of mind that man becomes dependent on reason and intellect and gradually progresses on a spiritual path with self-awareness. Which Sri Aurobindo called the subjective stage. Since the two main characteristics of this mind level are, namely, first, this level always divides a subject into different parts first and then unites the parts fragmented by its own logic. Because of this attribute, it is not possible to know the Supreme Being by the mind. In order to realise the Supreme Being, one has to go beyond the level of the mind, to the Supramental level, from the Supramental level to the Supermind level and then to the level of Sat-chit-ananda.¹⁴

Since Sri Aurobindo did not believe in the liberation of the individual alone, he wanted to bring down the Supreme Brahman in the whole of human society, so he spoke of the progress or evolution of the outward form of society as well as transcending the level of the individual's mind. So he thinks that this subjective stage is not the final stage of social evolution; group life has to go further. For even if the nation, like the individual, has the right to be itself, it does not mean that the nation should shut itself up in one place, confine itself to its own blind doctrines, and refrain from dealing or associating with the rest of the world. If this is the case, then it will never be complete; in order to attain perfection, just as a person lives with the help of other people, the nation must accept the help of other nations, associate with others, help others, and the nation should always remember that just as it belongs to a nation on one hand, it belongs to humanity beyond this nation. Again, Sri Aurobindo, while discussing the role of the state in this age of subjectivism, shows that the state believes it is the best and the representative of God or the best instrument to work for the people, so the individual will obey it, serve it without question, and dedicate all their work for the state. And the ego of the individual will dissolve into the ego of the state. That is, the person has to become a part of the state. Sri Aurobindo felt that these demands of the State were an impediment to the development of society and to the innovative power of man. Therefore, in the present state of mankind, it is not possible to build a healthy and permanent unity with the help of state machinery. According to him, the task of the state should be to remove the obstacles that will come in the way of human development and ensure necessary facilities. Sri Aurobindo, while acknowledging the importance of the state to a certain extent, suggested building a world state beyond this state, though just as the state imposing the rule of law on the individual hinders the independent development of the individual, so will the states under the control of the world state in the same situation, so it will not be beneficial and sustainable for the whole of mankind. But by living in the world state, a mental desire will arise among the people that we have to build a universal human society in the mind, the structure of which is not of the world state, but of the 'independent world union'. Where states will build this unity independently with their diversity. Sri Aurobindo believes that we need the 'Religion of Humanity' to keep this independent world organization alive and active. This religion of humanity is not a god-centred religion, it is the realization that there is a divine being in every being, in which we are all one. Following this religion of humanity, Muslims are serving the needy Hindus; Hindus are extending a helping hand to Christians.

Therefore, Sri Aurobindo expressed the hope that one day man will become spiritual by practising this religion of humanity; Brotherhood will be awakened in him and this spiritual brotherhood will one day build a spiritual human society. But he thinks that in order to bring about spiritual change in society, it is first and foremost important for us to create a true, beautiful and conducive environment for the development and expression of the concept of the soul or the Supreme Being and its powers. Therefore, he has mentioned some favourable conditions for a person to become spiritual. They are namely-

First, Sri Aurobindo thinks that spiritual human society will begin with the three fundamental truths of existence, which nature has enveloped and which the masses have not yet grasped the true meaning of: God, freedom and oneness. According to him, these three are the same thing; freedom and oneness can only be attained when we can attain God. And God lives in the individual, so the first thing we need to do in order to gain God is to break free from the egoistic perspective of man, but eliminating the ego does not mean surrendering the ego of the individual to the collective ego. To remove the ego here means that the spiritual man wants to get rid of the ego and attain the Supreme Being or soul, which is one, integral and complete in all of us.¹⁵

Secondly, in society, the individual, whether a great man or a criminal cannot be regarded as part of the social problem. Rather, they should be regarded as developing souls, and encouraged to prosper.

Thirdly, in the economic field, instead of helping only a few people, every man should be given the opportunity to work according to his highest potential and nature and give free leisure for his inner development.¹⁶

Fourthly, in politics, the state should not act as a mere machine. The State shall remove the obstacles in the path of development of the individual and provide necessary facilities.

Fifthly, according to Sri Aurobindo, in order to build a spiritual human society, the individual must complete his own personality with independent development from within, but at the same time respect and help such independent development in others. And by balancing one's own life with the life of the community collective, he must dedicate oneself to mankind as a force for progress and fulfilment. In the same way, the principle of the group and the nation is to respect and help the development of other groups or nations, while helping one's own collective existence and the independent development of the individual, and to give oneself as the force for the progress and fulfilment

of the development of mankind. In the same way, the principle of the entire human community is to make the entire human society one divine family by assisting in the free development of all individuals, nations and diverse human alliances.¹⁷

Sixthly, there must be more than one person in society who can see, develop and reorganise themselves in the nature of the soul and who can transmit their ideas to the masses. At the same time, there must be a community, a society that will not retreat before the final change takes place. Sri Aurobindo believes that only in these circumstances can we build a spiritual human society. That every person in the spiritual society will have a divine life.¹⁸

What we understand from the above discussion is that Sri Aurobindo did not accept the present group condition of society in this subjective age as the final stage of social evolution, but accepted the spiritual age as the final stage of social evolution. And in doing so, he tried to achieve a fine reconciliation between individualism and totalitarianism, and suggested bringing about subjective unity by transforming our natural society into unions, where the relations of individuals, races, and human society as a whole would complement each other. If we think a little more deeply, we will find that social development is part of the process of evolution described by Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Life Divine* to return to the nature of the Supreme Consciousness or the Supreme Brahman. That is, in order to attain that Brahman, we have to go step by step through the evolution of this society. That is, he compared this society to the chariot of Jagannath. We will have to reach God on our own feet from the chariot society that will bring individuals, nations and entire mankind closer to God.

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