

# Philosophy Of Nationalism In Sri Aurobindo's Bande Mataram

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## Abstract

Sri Aurobindo is generally known as “Yogi” but beyond this legendary status he was a freedom fighter profound thinker, metaphysician, philosopher, social reformer, visionary and an ardent nationalist. Sri Aurobindo was indeed a versatile genius. Aurobindo is known as Sri Aurobindo in which ‘Sri’ means beauty of divinity. He had the divine qualities which are concerned for his name. We can consider him as a prophet of nationalism and lover of humanity. Dr. Radhakrishnan described Sri Aurobindo as 'the most accomplished of modern Indian thinkers'. Rabindranath Tagore painted him as the 'Messiah of Indian culture and civilization'.

## Introduction

Sri Aurobindo was born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta. The date has an even greater and deeper importance. After Seventy-five years, on August 15, 1947, India achieved her freedom. Sri Aurobindo's father was Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose and mother Swarnalata. Aurobindo's father was educated in England and even he wanted his children to have education from abroad only. Not only education but he wanted them to learn English customs, tradition and culture. He wanted his sons to be away from Indian customs, tradition and culture. Thus, Aurobindo grew up in a foreign surrounding totally.

At the age of five, he was sent to Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling. Aurobindo had completed his schooling from St. Paul's from London. In the year 1890, at the age of eighteen, Sri Aurobindo got admission into Cambridge. Sri Aurobindo Ghose had also applied for the ICS while at Cambridge. He had passed the Indian Civil Service Examination. In the year 1893, Aurobindo Ghose, returned to India and he became the Vice-

principal of the State college in Baroda. He achieved great respect by the Maharaja of Baroda. In the year 1893 Sri Aurobindo had worked for the next thirteen years in the State of Baroda in the service of the Maharaja and as a professor in Baroda College. He soon became proficient in English, Greek, Latin and French and well acquainted with German, Italian and Spanish.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose had an impressive visionary. He owes not only his rich spiritual nature, but even his super and eternal literary capacity for his motherland.

He was in opposing of British Empire who had put their legs in the Indian heritage. He gave guidance to the nationalists in planning their policy and organizing their work. He was the nationalist who came with his lofty ideas of love for the country, her freedom and to develop sincerity into the hearts of his countrymen.

In 1905, soon after the Partition of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo quit his post in Baroda and went to Calcutta to join freedom movement. He joined radical wing of nationalist movement. He was in the political ground from 1902 to 1910 only, the first half of which was spent on silent groundwork, the second half, from 1906 to 1910, on open activities. He did as much revolutionary activities that he became famous as an extremist nationalist.

It was a crucial time when the nation was looking for a new direction, a new light that would lead it to freedom and harmony. After centuries of foreign rule and repression, India was ready to be awakened for new life. The basic grounds had been prepared sufficiently by the early reformers. This was the memorable time when Sri Aurobindo whose **“genius shot up like a meteor and though on the high skies only for a time, who flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light,”** (PattabhiSitaramayya, as cited by Manoj Das in his Review of Record of Yoga, Vol. 1 & 2, <http://sabda.sriurobindoashram.org/catalog/bookinfo.php>) stepped into the forefront of Indian politics. Sri Aurobindo's vision was very clear and that was **“complete independence”**. As a result, his relationship with the Congress was not tuneful. As a part of the 'extremist' group, the 'moderates' ignored his ideas and activities.

The American philosopher Ken Wilber has called Sri Aurobindo “India’s greatest modern philosopher sage”. Much has been written about the philosophy of nationalism but Sri Aurobindo clarified philosophy of nationalism in brief:

**“Nationalism is an avatara and cannot be slain. Nationalism is a divinely appointed shakti of the Eternal and must do its God-given work before it returns to the bosom of the Universal Energy from which it came. (Bande Mataram p-748)”**

Sri Aurobindo’s action and direct participation in the freedom movement lasted for a very brief period from 1906 to 1910. His role in India’s freedom struggle is pivotal which lasted for a very brief period between 1906 to 1910. In April of 1910, Aurobindo took up permanent residence in Pondicherry where he had spent the rest of his life. Aurobindo devoted himself primarily to spiritual, philosophical, and literary endeavor. He was claimed by his contemporaries as the prophet of patriotism, lover of humanity and the leader of Indian Nationalism.

Political activities of Sri Aurobindo can be defined under various aspects like his concept of spiritual Nationalism, eternal divinity for Motherland, absolute freedom and theory of boycott and passive resistance. Sri Aurobindo played a leading role in India’s freedom struggle. He was one of the pioneers of political awakening in India. He began to write articles encouraging his countrymen to get rid of British canon.

For Aurobindo, India was not a piece of earth but a divine Mother. It clears when he writes,

**“The country, the land is only the outward body of the nation, its annamayakosh, or gross physical body; the mass of people, the life of millions who occupy and vivify the body of the nation with their presence, is the pranamayakosh, the life-body of the nation. These two are the gross body, the physical manifestation of the Mother. Within the gross body is a subtler body, the thoughts, the literature, the philosophy, the mental and emotional activities, the sum of hopes, pleasures, aspirations, fulfillments, the civilization and culture, which make up the sukshmayakosh of the nation. This is as much a part of the Mother’s life as the outward existence which is visible to the physical eyes. This subtle life of the nation again springs from a deeper existence in the causal body of the**

**nation, the peculiar temperament which it has developed out of its ages of experience and which makes it distinct from others.”(BandeMataram p-1115)**

Sri Aurobindo supplied a forceful command, new vision and the new energy which country needed at that time. He was the first Indian political leader who used the word **"Independence"** instead of **"Swaraj"**. Even he was the first fellow who demanded for **"PurnaSwaraj"** means **"Complete Independence"**, and made it as a national mission. He imposed to the people of time for do or die to achieve freedom from the fetish of British rule. His thoughts became clearer in his writing,

**“Swaraj is life, it is nectar and salvation. Swaraj in a nation is the breath of life. Without breath of life a man is dead. So also without Swaraj a nation is dead. Swaraj being the life of a nation it is essential for it. History shows the fate of nations without Swaraj”. (BandeMataram p-834)**

The political philosophy of Sri Aurobindo was his concept of spiritual nationalism and the divinity of the motherland. Sri Aurobindo provided an element of nationalism with the aspect of spiritualism. He had tried to explain that Nationalism is a creed that a person should live, understand and digest its value.

He started to edit the English daily BandeMataram and he wrote fearlessly as the words came from the depth of his heart about Indian freedom struggle. BandeMataram shown over the people as a source of inspiration and divinity for Motherland. It includes the political writings and speeches by Sri Aurobindo from the year 1890 to 1908. It is basically compilation of the articles which were published originally in the nationalist newspaper BandeMataram.

He was an advocator for the boycott of British goods and British courts. He asked and motivated the people to gear up for passive resistance. He joined a revolutionary society and also took a leading role for an uprising against the British Government in India.

He was the first political leader in India who had put forward idea of absolute freedom of country. He was prosecuted two

times for agitation and once for conspiracy but he was released each time due to the lack of evidence.

His thoughts were nationalist extremism in his articles and speeches. Before starting "Bande Mataram" Sri Aurobindo was the lover of humanity. He wanted a new society and a new civilization for his motherland. It clears from his speeches that India is designed to play a pivotal role in world affairs and her ideals of humanity. He was an advocator for the concept of human unity. He had pleaded for independence for India with wider interest of the humanity. He wanted to convey that for humanity people should have good coordination. Sri Aurobindo clarified the meaning of freedom profoundly as no one explained. He meant freedom as social, moral, spiritual freedom of a person not only political freedom.

In order to create awareness among the people regarding independence of India, Sri Aurobindo began holding public meetings in various parts of the country. He soon became one of the most popular leaders in the country and even one of the most wanted man by British.

Sri Aurobindo's writing gave the call of freedom as well as a new spirit of freedom to countrymen.

It was an independence struggle which culminated in 1947. Forty years earlier, in June 1907, Sri Aurobindo had written in BandeMataram:

**"The idea of a free and united India has been born and arrived at full stature in the land of Rishis, and the spiritual force of a great civilisation of which the world has need is gathering at its back. Will England crush these ideas with ukases and coercion laws? Will she even kill them with maxims and siege guns? But the eyes of the wise men have been sealed so that they should not see and their minds bewildered so that they should not understand. Destiny will take its appointed course until the fated end." (BandeMataram p-496)**

In the same speech, he also gave a comprehensive perspective of Hinduism,

**"But what is the Hindu religion ? What is this religion which we call Sanatan, eternal ? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in**

**this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world. That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy."**

At a time when confusing concepts of Nationalism were being expressed and the Extremist party were being denounced not only by British bureaucracy and sovereigns but even by the Moderates and editors of important journals, Sri Aurobindo rejected the theory that the fundamental conditions of nationality are unity of language, unity of religion and life, and unity of race. As he argued that British nation itself is built upon the variety of races. He argued that the idea that unity in race, religion or language is essential to nationality is an idea which will not bear examination. He referred to the example of the Roman Empire, which created a common language, a common religion and life, and tried its best to crush out racial diversities under the power of its standardized system. Sri Aurobindo asked where are the essential elements of Nationalism? And he answered:

**"We answer that there are certain essential conditions, geographical unity, a common past, a powerful common interest impelling towards unity and certain favourable 'political conditions which enable the impulse to realize itself in an organized government expressing the nationality and perpetuating its single and united existence. This may be provided by a part of the nation, a race or community, uniting the others under its leadership or domination, or by a united resistance to a common pressure from outside or within. A common enthusiasm coalescing with a common interest is the most powerful fosterer of nationality. We believe that the necessary elements are present in India, we believe that the time has come and that by a common resistance to a common pressure in the shape of the boycott, inspired by a common enthusiasm and ideal, that united nationality for which the whole history of India has been a preparation, will be speedily**

**and mightily accomplished.”( Sri Aurobindo, Birth Centenary Edition, Volume 1, p.507. Citation from BandeMataram, August 17, 1907.)**

Sri Aurobindo published a number of articles on passive resistance, developing political philosophy of revolution, such as the faith in British justice and benefits bestowed by a foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India, stagnation, poverty, exploitation, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial commotion and all other wicked results of a foreign government. The golden message after writing such article was that of Swaraj, not merely of home rule or any colonial Swaraj, but of complete independence.

Sri Aurobindo advised and awakened much importance for national education. As a Professor in the Baroda College, he had bursting experience of the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and in the universities. He had been shocked very much with it. It is to be noted that the movement of National Education had begun well and even many national schools were established in Bengal. Many capable men had become teachers. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and to strengthen the education system to aware the people.

But the idea and the perpetual continuity of the National Council of Education has lived on even today. Many other institutions which have been inspired by Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education can provide a powerful support and guidance to improve education system today even.

Sri Aurobindo measured that India has seen forever in the human being her soul, a divinity is wrapped in the brains and the body, alertness in Nature of the universal spirit. He also put forth in its aim the raising of both the individual soul and the national soul into the powers of life and ascending mind and soul of the humanity. He was the lover of humanity. He writes,

**“The country, the land is only the outward body of the nation, its annamayakosh, or gross physical body; the mass of people, the life of millions who occupy and vivify the body of the nation with their presence, is the pranamayakosh, the life-body of the nation. These two are the gross body, the physical**

**manifestation of the Mother. Within the gross body is a subtler body, the thoughts, the literature, the philosophy, the mental and emotional activities, the sum of hopes, pleasures, aspirations, fulfillments, the civilisation and culture, which make up the sukshmasharirof the nation. This is as much a part of the Mother's life as the outward existence which is visible to the physical eyes. This subtle life of the nation again springs from a deeper existence in the causal body of the nation, the peculiar temperament which it has developed out of its ages of experience and which makes it distinct from others. (Bandematram p-1115)**

We can feel that Sri Aurobindo was the Soul who belonged to Mother India and that his Spirit was a vast universality. His revolutionary spirit can visible with the fire of nationalism that was to turn into ashes the iron fetters of oppression and slavery in an expected future.

Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the philosophy of nationalism is not basically the philosophy of unreasoning spirit of violence and the preference of frantic methods. He argued that the nationalists did not love the philosophy of suffering for its own sake. For the same, Sri Aurobindo clarified that nationalism has deeper respect for the essence of law than other and the reason is that the building up of the nation is its object and because without a deep reverence for law the national life cannot sound, healthy and persist. He argued that the philosophy of nationalism has its own respect. The nationalist never loses sight of the truth. He further stated that nationalism refuses to accept law as a fetish or peace. The philosophy of nationalism, Sri Aurobindo elucidated, is to ask of the method whether it is worthy of a great people struggling to be, whether it is educative of national strength, unity and activity. He writes:

**"Nationalism cannot be so easily dismissed. A force which has shaken the whole of India, trampled the traditions of a century into a refuse of irrecoverable fragments and set the mightiest of modern Empires groping in a panic for weapons strong enough to meet a new and surprising danger, must have some secret of strength and therefore of truth in it which is worth knowing. To get at the heart of Nationalism we must first clear away some of the misconceptions with which its realities have been clouded. We must know what**

**Nationalism is not before we ask what it is. (BandeMatram p-1111)**

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