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SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM AND POLITICAL AWAKENING IN SRI AUROBINDO'S *BANDE MATARAM*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intersection of spiritual nationalism and political awakening in early 20th-century India through the political writings and speeches of Sri Aurobindo, as compiled in Bande Mataram. Analyzing the socio-political context following the 1905 Partition of Bengal, this study demonstrates how Sri Aurobindo combined Vedic spiritual philosophy with anti-colonial activism to redefine Indian nationalism as a divine imperative—Sanatan Dharma—rather than a mere secular political campaign. Through an examination of key essays such as "New Lamps for Old" and "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance," the research evaluates Aurobindo's critique of the Indian National Congress's moderate tactics and highlights his advocacy for

complete self-rule (Swaraj), passive resistance, and economic boycotts (Swadeshi). The paper contextualizes Aurobindo's thought alongside contemporary leaders like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, and M.K. Gandhi. Ultimately, the study illustrates how Aurobindo's conceptualization of the motherland as a living deity transformed the freedom struggle, mobilizing public consciousness and establishing a foundation for modern democratic nationalism.

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, Bande Mataram, Spiritual Nationalism, Political Awakening, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Passive Resistance, Indian Freedom Struggle.

The National Political consciousness was founded as an organized national awakening movement in India in the middle of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. This period witnessed the birth and development of modern India's intelligentsia, which created most of the country's political organizations and associations based on new political, social, cultural, and ideological perspectives. The main aims and objectives of spiritual nationalism and political awakening were to struggle for independence, resist British colonialism, and establish leadership and organizations. The representation of both spiritual nationalism and political awakening are to reshape and rebuild the nation based on new spiritual, political, social, economic, and cultural objectives, and an intellectual perception of young forces of the freedom struggle.

Birth and development of Spiritual Nationalism and Political Awakening:

This article throws light on the politics of Indian nationalism and its involvement in Independence movement. The growth and development of spiritual nationalism and political awakening began to sprout vigorously with a common foreground knowledge, political ideas, and values in the works of Sri Aurobindo. The Political Awakening and spiritual nationalism were a newborn idea which flourished in the soul of modern India. These movements were commenced after the partition of Bengal in 1905.

The period from 1890 to 1917 was led by many Extremists and revolutionary leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Pherozeshah Mehta. The period from 1917 to 1947 is called as 'Gandhian Era' in the history of India witnessed many revolutionary activities like political involvements, establishing new political strategies and M. K. Gandhi's leadership has shown the powerful current of fresh air in the society.

Sri Aurobindo hailed from an orthodox Brahmin family of Bengal Presidency. He contributed largely to the fields of spiritual nationalism and political awakening in national movement. He has paid major role in the freedom struggle with his powerful weapon of writing. His book *Bande Mataram* enlarges completely about political awakening and its significance to nationalism.

Life and Works:

Aurobindo Ghosh famously known as Sri Aurobindo for his yogin and spiritual ideologies. He was a poet, saint, patriot, mystic, and philosopher. He was born on August 15th, 1872, in Calcutta of Bengal Presidency. He was elder son of Krishna Dhan Ghosh and Swarnalata Devi and elder brother of well-known poet Manmohan Ghosh. His father was very much eager to British education system and an admirer of Western culture. Sri Aurobindo was sent to Loretto Convent in Darjeeling later shifted to Manchester for his studies, where he stayed with an English family. Aurobindo completed his higher studies at King's College, Cambridge. He was a brilliant pupil and learnt different European languages. His father dreamed him to join Indian Civil Services, but he was very reluctant to join Civil Services. After completing his studies in England, Aurobindo returned to India in 1893 entered the service of Baroda state, a princely state in British India. During these years, he acquired knowledge of religion, ancient scripture, and Indian philosophy. He married to Mrinalini Devi in 1901.

Sri Aurobindo transitioned from state services to work as a lecturer, was soon promoted as the Principal of Baroda College. He served there nearly twelve years before moving to Calcutta. The partition of Bengal in 1905 provided him with a new political platform to participate actively in the freedom struggle. He wrote many articles on spiritual nationalism and political awakening to uplift the people and to foster intellectual discussion, describing 'nationalism as an avatar or an incarnation of God.' (Paranjape 344) At that time the National Congress was the main political forum to voice public grievances against the British Raj. However, the Indian National Congress leaders focused primarily on their liberal demands and moderate status of sovereignty. Aurobindo suggested that the Congress organization should engage more effectively and adopt revolutionary measures to achieve a free India. Through his spiritual nationalism and political awakening writings which served as a mouthpiece for both the Congress and extremist leaders, he helped ignite new revolutionary activities.

This paper focuses on the significance Spiritual Nationalism and Political Awakening in the works of Sri Aurobindo. He established and organized several youth forums to impart national and political training. As a prominent hardliner within INC (Indian National Congress), he continued his writings to arouse public awareness throughout the freedom struggle. During this time, he met the Maharashtrian saint Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, whom

Aurobindo acknowledge as his spiritual guru. As a rationalist Aurobindo's concept of utopia has been enthusiastically appreciated and written about by his followers, devotees, and scholars alike.

A Frontline Leader of Freedom Movement:

As Sri Aurobindo understood, national awakening is truly fundamental despite obstacles. Every country has its own distinct scope and character above and beyond the common nature of humanity extending past a mere shared human impulse. In the pre-independence era, undivided India experienced a revolutionary situation that prompted most communities to unite against the British for freedom. Eventually, internal differences gradually intensified leading to partition and separation of Pakistan around the time of independence. The politicization of the Indian people aimed to break their consolidation and unity, thereby disrupting the formation of the Indian nation in the making. Furthermore, the social background, the acceptance of the political doctrine and economic philosophy of the British rule, class interests and the perception of the social realities by religious reformers and the liberal leader often turned them into great defenders of colonial rule.

Cultural nationalism was upheld through socio-religious reformations and movements designed to strengthen the political nationalism and awakening. This integration is evident in distinguished leaders and writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo who attempted to spiritualize politics with revolutionary ideas that inspired many young, dynamic personalities. They drew inspiration from Vedic ideologies and the spirit of ancient Indian traditions and customs. Bengal produced a prominent patriotism in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a versatile Bengali poet, novelist, journalist, and composer of the national song 'Bande Mataram' which appeared in his novel *Anandamath*. He was a pioneer of political awakening, portraying India as Goddess Kali; black because of intense misery, naked because she was denuded of wealth, and adorned with human skulls around her neck because the country had become a vast burial ground. As the well known critic Nirad Chaudhuri explains:

To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred subjecthood on us but withheld citizenship; to which yet every one of us threw out the challenge: 'Civics Britannicus Sum' because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British Rule. (Chaudhuri i)

A Preacher and Orator of Nationalism:

Sri Aurobindo gave a new orientation to the concept of nationalism; for him India's political and religious entity was intertwined with spirituality. He believed that the youth of nation would surrender their mind and body for the liberation of India. Explaining his concept of nationalism he states:

Nationalism is not a mere political program; nationalism is a religion that has come from God. Nationalism is a creed in which you shall have to live. Nationalism is not going to be crushed. Nationalism is immortal: Nationalism cannot die, I say no longer that Nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is Nationalism. (Aurobindo- Praba Dixit-123)

He propounded the theory of spiritual nationalism, which was an integral part of political awakening, and shared these ideas with intellectuals to transform the mindset of broader citizens. The process of political awakening was driven by many leaders who invigorated activist strength for political upliftment fostering a profound sense of nationalism. They succeeded in refining political messaging and stimulating the noblest principles of the freedom movements. Indeed, the canon of political nationalism united the essential elements of other reform movements and guaranteed to the growth of Indian society.

How nation restoration and development achieved fulfillment, culminating in the political movement, has been evaluated by Sri Aurobindo in the following steps. This political movement associated with the great leaders like M. K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore combined political ideology and patriotic experience culminating in re-examination of the political agenda.

Aurobindo's ideas on nationalism and political awakening were threefold; first, Swaraj and passive resistance are two wheels of the same vehicle; secondly, the idea of independence rallied the people around political propaganda and finally, the people had to organize to carry on this movement through civil disobedience and passive resistance. As Hans Kohn pointed out regarding 'nationalism' in his book:

Nationalism is a state of mind permeating much of a people and claiming to permeate all its members; it recognizes the nation-state as the ideal form of

political organization and the nationality as the source of all creative cultural energy and economic well-being. The supreme loyalty of man is therefore to his own nationality as his own life supposedly rooted in and made possible by its welfare. (9)

Sri Aurobindo is known for his spiritual and yogin writings, but he was also a frontline leader of the Indian national movement. He published many political writings including a series of articles on the freedom struggle that criticized the decisions of the INC. As an English and western educated individual, who had faith in the efficacy of passive resistance. He stated:

That is certainly not a type of renaissance that is at all possible in India. There is a closer resemblance to the recent Celtic movement in Ireland, the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force a great reshaping and re-building. (Aurobindo, 3)

The Theme of Spiritual Nationalism and Political Awakening in *Bande Mataram*:

Aurobindo joined the swadeshi movement in Calcutta in 1906. This movement boycotted British manufactures and vowed to purchase only swadeshi materials. Aurobindo fully involved in this movement particularly where the resolution of a boycott was passed at the 1905 Benares Congress Session. Bipin Chandra Pal and his supporters started a new English newspaper, and they named the journal *Bande Mataram*, a slogan already used by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his *Anandamath*. This title was symbolic of devotion to the mother India. Bipin Pal invited Aurobindo to contribute as an editor of this voice of extremism and swadeshi movement. The publication resonated with the educated and middle classes of Bengal. Extremists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Lala Lajpat Rai demanded the aim of the national movement, and the National Congress should be to achieve complete independence from British Empire. Aurobindo observed that:

Political freedom is the life-breath of a nation; to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion, the moral improvement of the race without aiming first and foremost at political freedom, is the very height of ignorance and futility.... The primary requisite for national progress, national reform, is the free habit of free and healthy national thought and action which is impossible in a state of servitude. (Aurobindo 112)

Later, he published a nine-part series of articles between August 1893 and March 1894 known as 'New Lamps for Old'. This series of articles commented on and criticized the aims and methods of INC. After 1902, Aurobindo grew disinterested and did not actively participate in INC, and he focused more on political substance. The major themes of nationalism and national awakening in Aurobindo's writings include 'A country free from control, Self-governing, Humanity of countrymen, and Serve nation and sacrifice all for the nation'.

Sri Aurobindo's writings inspired his countrymen and other leaders of the freedom movement. His contribution to national awakening was characterized by his role as a secret revolutionary writer and orator. He primarily edited two newspapers: *Bande Mataram* and *Karmayogin*. In these papers, he penned ideas regarding Swaraj, the swadeshi movement, self-government, and complete political independence.

In his essay called 'A Great Light is Dawning' he argued that Mother Goddess, Adya Shakti, come to protect the nation, after its destiny, and shape India into a new country. Another essay entitled 'India, the Motherland' paints a vivid picture of Mother India, viewing her not merely as a piece of earth, but as a divine power supported by the Goddess. Aurobindo intertwined religious ideology with political awakening centered around the national movement. He consistently emphasized the divinity of motherland and worship of God through service to the country. This approach fostered national progress and awakening toward national emancipation. His vision of free India differed significantly from the other leaders of his time. In his essay 'A Free and United India'; he explored the concept of a nation, that must transform and free itself from British rule, demanding that Swaraj be true self rule rather than a colonial form of government.

According to Aurobindo, the concept of new nationalism served as an instrument to emancipate the country beyond narrow political ideologies and to achieve complete independence. The *Bande Mataram* consists of his speeches and political writings from the period between 1890 and 1908. It includes both originally written and published articles, such as the essay entitled 'New Lamps for Old' which appeared in the Bombay newspaper called *Indu Prakash*. It contains nine articles published from August 1893 to March 1894.

In another essay, 'Unity: An Open Letter' Mother Bharat Mata tells her sons that the most significant and vital duty is to serve our country selflessly, bearing strong nationalistic overtones. Aurobindo observes:

To those who impugning the holiness of their mother refuse to lift out of danger lest they defile own spotless hands, to those who call on her to purify herself before they will save her from the imminent and already descending sword of Death, greet. (Aurobindo, Bande Mataram, 68)

Explaining nationalism in his article, Aurobindo addressed the people of India as his kith and kin, continuing, 'Siren song does you slay the hearts of those who have still force and courage to strive against Fate and would rescue our mother out of the hands of destruction'. (Aurobindo, 69) In 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', Aurobindo' views on the Congress sought to advance the idea of Swaraj, or self-rule, which the Congress had already adopted and for which resolution was passed at the Calcutta session. He maintained self-development is the keynote for independence, supported by the people and organized through political strength and obedience. He argued:

We have fumbled through the nineteenth century prattling of enlightenment and national regeneration, and the result has been not national progress, but national confusion and weakness. Individuals here and there might emancipate themselves and come to greatness; communities might show a partial and one-sided development, for a time only; but the nation instead of progressing sank into a very slough of weakness, helplessness, and despondency. (Aurobindo, 266)

Nation-building in India and unity of nation depend on the awakening of the political wisdom of the people. The people's aim will consequently be to assist in building up India for the sake of humankind, and this is the strength of nationalism. Nationalism is not only a political doctrine but a religious desire and moral thought.

Organized resistance to an existing form of government may undertake either the vindication of national liberty, or in order to substitute one form of government for another or to remove particular objectionable features in the existing system without any entire or radical alteration of the whole, or simply

for the readers of particular grievances. Our political agitation in the nineteenth century was entirely confined to the smaller and narrower objects. (Aurobindo, 270)

The people assert the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own personality and principles. People discard the argument of aliens attempting to impose upon us a society' inferior to our own, or to keep us away from our heritage under the flawed pretext of superiority. The Swadeshi movement was successful in gathering the masses against the British rule. This national movement would use the weapons of Satyagraha, civil disobedience, and swadeshi struggle against British Empire.

To persuade an intending purchaser not to buy British cloth is no offense; but if between a police employed to put down Swadeshi and a shopkeeper injured by it, enough evidence can be concocted to twist persuasion into compulsion, the boycotter can easily be punished without having committed any offense. (Aurobindo, 290)

Political freedom is the life-breath of a nation; to attempt social improvement, educational modification, economic development, and moral enhancement of the masses without aiming first and foremost at political freedom is the awful height of unawareness and vainness. 'Passive resistance may be the final method of salvation in our case, or it may be only the preparation for the final *sadhana*. In either case, the sooner we put it into full and perfect practice, the nearer we shall be to national liberty.' (Aurobindo, 303) Passive resistance directly issued from its acute sense of political and moral responsibility for day-to-day actions. Meanwhile, its nature and scope broadly impacted all of humanity, involving a pure heart and soul with the complete dedication to the nation.

It is a young and new humanity which is currently undergoing progress, and it is the youth who have to build it. The ethos and action of new movements in India accurately traced in this manner, although the nationalistic texture is exemplified by the major leaders of political movement. 'The new movement is not primarily against bad Government, - it is a protest against the continuance of British control; whether that control is used well or ill, justly or unjustly, is a minor and unessential consideration.' (Aurobindo, 354)

Every act of the new nationalism has been described in terms of anguish and self-sacrifice. An enormous and untold upheaval is at hand and its methods ought to be massive in their desire for self-immolation. According to Sri Aurobindo, the political movement could be traced from the beginning to the end of the freedom struggle through the cultural as well as political aspects and factors of colonial India. 'The object of all our political movements and therefore the sole object with which we advocate passive resistance is Swaraj or national freedom.' (Aurobindo, 298)

Aurobindo sought to integrate the realistic strength of mind of contemporary society into Indian's primeval ideals. He had the opportunity to take on responsibility about nationalism. He stood as the foremost figure in the freedom struggle and in writings on political awakening. He broadly believed that renaissance movement affected all fields of public life, and the outcome of this political awakening was marked by tremendous changes in national life.

Liberty is the first requisite for the sound health and vigorous life of a nation. A foreign domination is in itself an unnatural condition, and if permitted, must bring about other unhealthy and unnatural conditions in the subject people which will lead to fatal decay and disorganization. Foreign rule cannot build up a nation; - only the resistance to foreign rule can weld the discordant elements of a people into an indivisible unity. (Aurobindo, 357)

In *Shall India be Free?* his argument is that the British could not build a good and safe nation for Indians because foreign rule is an unnatural process, a gift of mother earth and the fulfillment of our national life. A liberated and integrated India would emerge, where the mother brings her sons together connecting them into a single national force within the life of an immense and united people.

The contention is that a healthy development is possible under foreign domination. In this view national independence is a thing of no moment or at least its importance has been grossly exaggerated. Nations can very well do without it; provided they have a good government which keeps the people happy and contented and allows them to develop their economic activities and moral virtues, they need not repine at being ruled by others. (Aurobindo, 361)

Aurobindo's expression of nationalism is an evolving an action to provide self-expression and it must consist united action. His perseverance and actions toward political re-organization must be fulfilled by the other freedom fighters as well as contemporary writers. His intention within the nationalist movement was to connect the phenomena of personal liberty and national liberty. 'Individual liberty is necessary to national development, because, if the individual is unduly hampered, the richness of national life suffers and is impoverished.' (Aurobindo, 364)

Aurobindo outlines his views on three kinds of national movement, which are Extremists, Moderates, and Nationalists:

The new movement is not primarily a protest against bad Government, it is a protest against the continuance of British control; whether that control is used well or ill, justly or unjustly, is a minor and unessential consideration. It is not born of a disappointed expectation to British citizenship...It is not a negative current of destruction, but a positive, constructive impulse towards the making of modern India. It is not a cry of revolt and despair, but a gospel of national faith and hope. Its true discrimination is not Extremism, but Democratic Nationalism. (Aurobindo, 355)

He discusses national development through national independence. The concept of national independence depended on heavily the political factors of the nation, becoming a renowned ideal of non-violent path where people must organize and protest against British rule on an international level. These political and national principles and ideologies can be found in Aurobindo's *Bande Mataram*. He argues that:

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To some extent, Aurobindo's views focused on nation-building which was a primary and fundamental approach for the makers of modern India. Meanwhile, this attitude prevailed

and shaped the idea of national awakening and nation building. 'We speak indeed of nation-building and of the makers of a nation, but these are only convenient metaphors. The nation-builder, Cavour, or Bismarck, is merely the incarnation of a national force.' (Aurobindo, 367)

Aurobindo expands on the image and prosperity of India, which inspired daily pride; when the nation is reawakened, the unity of the country demonstrates the physical and moral re-generation of its people. Additionally, in this context, national awakening is recognized through both political and socio-cultural movements of pre-independence India. Aurobindo observes:

No material ideal of riches and prosperity has ever made a nation. But when the sense of honor has been touched, when the consciousness of greatness has been reawakened, then and then only have the scattered units of a fallen nation clustered around one mighty moral force. (Aurobindo, 512)

India is among the foremost countries, in the world that respects its own ancient past, tradition, culture and language. This unity in diversity makes the nation proud on the global level. It implies the vision and mission for spiritual and patriotic feelings and human attitude. Aurobindo points out that:

India can once more be made conscious of her greatness by an overmastering sense of the greatness of her spirituality. This sense of greatness is the main feeder of all patriotism. This only can put an end to all self-depreciation and generate a burning desire to recover the lost ground. (Aurobindo, 513)

Sri Aurobindo greatly admired and followed Dadabhai Naoroji, who was his strength in all the aspects. Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand old man of India, stated in his presidential remarks at Indian National Congress Session held in Calcutta; 'We must have Swaraj on the lines granted to Canada and Australia, which is our sole aim.' (Aurobindo, 833)

Indian Awakening in the political sphere, accompanying the process of nation-formation, was crucial condition of pre-independence India. This political vision served as way of resisting power and ensuring plurality of both nation and humanity. Perhaps the war through non-violence needs further explanation. The purpose and aim of Aurobindo are fulfilled through his masterly work, *Bande Mataram*. He acknowledges that:

When a great people rise from the dust, what *mantra* is the *sanjivini mantra* or what power is the resurrecting force of its resurgence? In India there are two great *mantras*, the *mantra* of 'Bande Mataram' which is the public and universal cry of awakened love of Motherland, and there is another more secret and mystic which is not yet revealed. The *mantra* of 'Bande Mataram' is a *mantra* once before given to the world by the Sannyasins of the Vindhya hills. (Aurobindo, 877)

The *Bande Mataram* is almost unique in Indian English Literature, particularly written in the genre of prose; it exercises a powerful influence on the minds of the people and organizes them for national movement. 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.' (Aurobindo, 834)

Conclusion: Sri Aurobindo's contributions to the Indian national movement through *Bande Mataram* marked a pivotal paradigm shift in the conceptualization of Indian anti-colonial struggle. By fusing Vedic spiritual philosophy with radical political action, Aurobindo transcended the conventional boundaries of political agitation, elevating nationalism from a pragmatic program of administrative reform into a sacred duty—Sanatan Dharma. This ideological synthesis transformed the motherland into a living divine entity, instilling a profound sense of self-sacrifice, moral duty, and cultural self-respect among the masses, particularly the Indian youth.

Through his trenchant editorials and series like "New Lamps for Old" and "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance," Aurobindo systematically dismantled the moderate tactics of petitioning and conditional liberalism, advancing instead a uncompromising call for complete self-rule (Swaraj). His framework of passive resistance, non-cooperation, economic boycotts (Swadeshi), and civil disobedience laid the critical strategic groundwork that would later characterize the mass movements of the 20th century. By asserting that political freedom is the essential prerequisite for all social, moral, and economic regeneration, Aurobindo established that true national unity could not be granted by foreign rulers but had to be forged through collective resistance and national awakening.

Ultimately, Aurobindo's political journalism in *Bande Mataram* bridged the gap between early socio-religious reformations and modern democratic nationalism. His legacy demonstrates that Indian nationalism was not merely a reactive response to British colonialism, but a positive, constructive impulse grounded in India's spiritual heritage. By spiritualizing politics and awakening the collective consciousness of the nation, Sri Aurobindo left an indelible mark on the trajectory of India's freedom movement, offering a vision of national independence rooted in both spiritual liberty and political sovereignty.

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