

**Sri Aurobindo's Political Life, the Alipore Bomb Trial and His Uttarpara speech –  
A Centennial Perspective**

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**SECTION 1**

***A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF MATERIALISM***

Sri Aurobindo's vision as reflected in his philosophy, metaphysics, yoga, psychological thoughts and literature represents a unique synthesis of the East and the West. But even before he matured as a seer-visionary par excellence, his early political thought represented his knowledge of the style and rationale of Western Polity which complimented his growing enlightenment of the spirit and form of Indian polity. This is most aptly represented in his early political ideas on his arrival to India at the age of 21 years. His first considerations were

- (a) The proletariat
- (b) The new middle class or 'Indian burgess'
- (c) The emerging Indian Polity

**THE PROLETERIAT**

In consonance with the progressive Western mind-set, Sri Aurobindo realized that neither the upliftment of India as a nation, nor political freedom could be attempted without addressing the proletariat. It was after all, the age of the proletariat—'the age of the people, the millions, and the democracy'. He observed that the proletariat in India was characterized by two glaring issues:

- a. **IGNORANCE**
- b. **DISTRESS**

The IGNORANCE was all-encompassing. Unlike the West, neither the fruits of modern science, nor the socio-political concepts of liberty and equality had touched the Indian masses.

The ignorance of the masses was so abysmal that the British snatched power only from a small, selected, privileged class through a process where the proletariat had no role to play.

The DISTRESS and suffering of the proletariat was the direct result of being brutalized by the economic exploitation by the English tradesmen who were systematically plundering and looting the country. One of the important sequels of that phenomenon was the recurring episodes of famine.

Sri Aurobindo's views at the age of 21 were very practical. His concern for the proletariat was not merely for social reform or from a humanitarian angle though that was implicit. His prime concern was that no political program could succeed without the upliftment of the masses and without harnessing the hereto dormant potential of the proletariat. If the 'burgess' or the Indian middle class who represented the political face of the country thought otherwise, it would be a wrong step.

*'.....The proletariat is..... the real key of the situation .Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future.....The right and fruitful policy for the burgess, the only policy that has any choice of eventual success, IS TO BASE HIS CAUSE UPON AN ADROIT MANAGEMENT OF THE PROLETERIAT.'* ( New Lamps for the Old, 1893)

*(It is interesting to note that the term 'proletariat' was used in India for the first time by Sri Aurobindo in 1893 at the age of 21 and that too three decades before the Russian revolution)*

***The question now was – How to arouse the proletariat?***

True, the 'enlightenment' of the proletariat needed an inspiration from the West, but the proletariat needed to be aroused optimally so as to be capable of enlightenment. This 'arousal' had to be done in consonance with the cultural milieu -- it could not be 'imported'. He emphasized that 'our first and holiest duty' was the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat. He wrote this at the age of 21 (Ibid, 1893) and continued to work on this theme throughout his political career.

There is one interesting aspect of Sri Aurobindo's world-view. He never discarded any subject he initiated. The denouement changed, the perspective shifted, the vision enlarged, but the topic in its essence was never abandoned. The reason was that his password in yoga was 'transformation'. Thus, if at any point of time his concern about the collectivity focused on the proletariat, at another point of time his concern was the gnostic society. His view of spiritual progress never excluded the collectivity vis-à-vis the individual. Indeed, the psychological perspective of his Yoga viewed that as the dimension of 'inconscience' was actually merged with the collectivity; an individual,

however enlightened, could progress alone upto a certain point and had to wait for further progress until the consciousness of the collectivity as a whole got optimally elevated.

His concern with the 'collectivity' started on political lines and later shifted to a spiritual perspective. This 'shift' was already perceptible even in his early writings. In Feb, 18 1908, he explained in *Bande Mataram* how political freedom was a gateway to spiritual freedom. In fact, he succinctly differentiated between three types of freedom—spiritual, social and political:

- (a) **Spiritual freedom** was the freedom of the soul which the ancient rishis had revealed,
- (b) **Social freedom** was part of the message of Buddha, Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir and the saints of Maharashtra; it was not merely a result of social maneuverings but of the freedom of the human intellect and the nobility of the human soul,
- (c) **Political freedom** was the last word of the triune gospel without which the soul of man is crippled. There could neither be spiritual freedom, nor social freedom in a land of slaves. Both social freedom and spiritual freedom in political servitude were sheer impossibilities. When the sun of liberty withdrew its rays, the spiritual force in the Indian psyche had weakened. The spiritual resurrection could again be achieved en route political freedom. That journey could not exclude the proletariat as God was not only in enlightened individuals but equally in the teeming millions.

### **THE MIDDLE CLASS –THE BOURGEOIS**

Before he embarked on his political agenda, Sri Aurobindo attempted to understand along with the proletariat, the emerging 'middle class' or the 'BOURGEOIS'. It was important to do so as

- (a) The middle class or 'bourgeois' was a 'New' phenomenon in India, emerging from 'obscurity, perhaps from nothingness' (Ibid, 1893), 'he is the creation of British policy, English education, Western Civilization' (*The Bourgeois and the Samurai*, 1906-7).
- (b) The middle class could not be ignored. It strove for rank, consideration and power. At 21, he wrote that in spite of its limitations, denying the aspirations of the middle class was akin to denying the law of gravitation, and in 1906-7, at 35 yrs, he wrote 'For good or for evil the middle class now leads in India, and whatever saving impulse comes to the nation, must come from the middle class, whatever upward movement begins, it must initiate and lead'.

### **PROBLEMS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS.**

- (1) The bourgeois represented a middle class 'contented' citizen, the man of moderation, the man of peace and orderliness whose decency was implicit whether in the indulgence or concealment of vices and whose honesty was linked with self-interest. Its refinement was marked by ingredients like 'a little art, a little poetry, a little religion, a little scholarship, a little philosophy' in short a perfect philistine. The problem was that 'such a type may give stability to society; it cannot reform or revolutionize it. Such a type may make the politics of a nation

- safe, decorous and reputable. It cannot make that nation great or free' (Ibid, 1906-7).
- (2) The middle class in India had neither any experience of government nor any experience of resistance to government. In Europe the transition of power from the noble to the bourgeois was smooth due to 'a fluidity' (contributed by the Age of Reason and the subsequent Age of Individualism). In India, the administrative experience rested with the nobility which, during transition of power, was lethargic, effete and moribund and was as helpless from decay and dotage as was the middle class from inexperience. It was not the bourgeois but foreign power that finally threw the outworn machinery.
  - (3) The foreign power that ruled India had its own vested interests and preferred to have a middle class stable but without ideas, educated but without visionaries, clerks instead of scholars, -- a class marked by superficiality, shallowness, and a stability bereft of progress.

### **Arousing the Middle Class**

The problem with the proletariat was its abysmal ignorance and imposed suffering; the problem with the middle class was its abject hypocrisy. At the age of 21, Sri Aurobindo had written that the middle class could strive to be as little selfish as possible but by the age of 35 years, he admitted that something of a miracle was needed to transfigure and lift the middle class. *'It must cease in fact to be a middle class and turn itself into an aristocracy, an aristocracy not of birth or landed possessions, not of intellect, not of wealth and commercial enterprise, but of character and action'; through, 'self-sacrifice, courage and high aspiration'.....*

(The Bourgeois and the Samurai)

## **THE EMERGING INDIAN POLITY**

Sri Aurobindo examined the emerging Indian Polity along two different dimensions:

(a) The avant-garde politicians

And

(b) The new political institution shaping as the Congress.

### **The AVANT-GARDE POLITICIANS**

With nobility in decadence and a proletariat sunk in ignorance, the avant-garde politicians in India emerged from the new middle class or bourgeoisie. However, as the middle class was trained in British education, it was more at ease with servility and instead of political power, sought political patronage through prayers, petitions and posturing. The result was that the masses represented the 'blind, led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed.' (Ibid, 1893)

Moreover, as the middle class was a new creed, it did not represent the voxpopuli; it did not represent the masses, the proletariat. Sri Aurobindo severely castigated Pherozeshah Mehta and Monmohan Ghosh, avant-garde leaders, for commenting that the uneducated masses of India could be represented by the educated bourgeoisie. Sri Aurobindo described this attitude as 'obnoxious' and drew references from history to show that the educated, thinking bourgeoisie never led the 'unthinking' masses. He explained in the same article,

- (a) In France, the vast and ignorant proleteriate emerged from prolonged apathy and blotted out in 5 terrible years, the accumulated oppression of 13 centuries,
- (b) In Ireland, the principal force of protest vested with the Irish peasantry, and
- (c) In Athens and in Rome, the fist political quarrel was between the ordinary commoner and a limited, albeit, alien aristocracy.

We see the emergence of a 21 year old thinker who in 1893 had the boldness to declare that under no circumstance, the educated Middle class or the political 'thinkers' had the automatic right to represent the 'ignorant' masses.

### The new political institution shaping as the Congress

The Congress as a national political institution of India was floated in 1885. Arriving in India in 1893; Sri Aurobindo immediately started to study the importance of this institution in a critical way. This criticism was not merely for the sake of criticism but because he would need this institution as a platform for his work sometime in future. He made two general observations before his specific critical appraisals:

- (a) There is a difference between an individual and an institution. An individual can be revered and hero-worshipped for his uniqueness but *an institution should not be raised to the rank of the fetish*. After all, an institution is made for the use of man and claims respect as long as it is useful at the present moment-- it cannot thrive on past achievements.
- (b) Sri Aurobindo's next consideration was the characteristics of a 'national' party. The Congress party as it was in 1893 could not claim to be 'national' as it was yet composed of a selected middle class bourgeoisie. The House of Commons did not represent the English nation but was national in the sense it was legally empowered to speak and act for the nation while the Congress being 'self-created', and representing a single and limited class could not call itself 'national'.

Actually, Sri Aurobindo hinted that at that period (1890s), the achievements of the Congress were politically not that significant. It promoted a modicum of concord for various sections of the growing nation though the concord was only partial, skewed towards the middle class and except for the enlargements in the legislative council, had little success. Five years later, in 1898, Swami Vivekananda, in a conversation with Aswini Kumar Dutta, voiced similar concerns when he quipped, 'Can you tell me what the Congress is doing for the masses? Do you think merely passing a few resolutions will bring you freedom? I have no faith in that. The masses must be awakened first.' (Life of Swami Vivekananda, by his Eastern and Western Disciples)

Sri Aurobindo's critical appraisal at the age of 21 was only a precursor of his political acumen which went on developing for the next 2 decades, directly shaping the destiny of a growing nation.

It is also interesting to note that through the Congress was represented by differing sub- groups (a differentiation which Sri Aurobindo himself initiated), his intention was never to break the original platform.

### **Economic considerations**

The economic exploitation of India by the British was the main motivation of foreign domination. Naturally, this was a subject that justifiably caught the attention of awakened Indian individuals. Dadabhai Naoroji's drain theory (focusing on the economic drainage from India) was already presented around 1885. Around the same time Ramesh Chandra Dutt had written on famine and economic exploitation. (cf. Poverty and Un-British Rule in India by Naoroji and Economic History of India by R.C. Dutt ).

In 1837, F.J.Shore pointed out that India had been 'drained' of her wealth and in 1839, Montgomery Martin wrote that the annual drain of pound 3,000,000 on British India amounted in 30 yrs, at 12% compound interest, to the enormous sum of pound 723,997,917 sterling; or at a low rate, as pound 2,000,000 for 50 years to pound 8,400,000,000 sterling (quoted in Iyengar's Sri Aurobindo - A biography and a History).

That the economic drainage produced successive famines was voiced by Naoroji & Dutt and supported by Sri Aurobindo. Even though Sri Aurobindo differed from Naoroji in many respects, he nonetheless acknowledged him ( Bande Mataram, 26.12.1906) from highlighting 'the terrible poverty of India and its rapid increase under British rule' at a time when the emerging middle class citizens of India were 'destitute of political experience'.... and 'were obliged to accept Englishmen at their own valuation'.

However the successive spells of famine and draught that inflicted India served a purpose. Our inert masses were hereto satisfied with a simple and Spartan village-life and had no idea that unless the village sequentially linked up with the wider world, a nation could not be formed. It was the onslaught of famine and drought that forced people to sit up and realise that the country was being drained off its resources. It is this realization

that propelled Sri Aurobindo to point out that if British Rule and increasing poverty were related as 'cause' and 'effect', then the inevitable conclusion was that the 'effect' could only be cured by removing the 'cause' i.e. 'by the substitution of autonomy in place of a British or British-controlled government'(Ibid). It is with this economic logic that Sri Aurobindo 'manipulated' even a moderate like Dadabhai Naoroji who traditionally favoured 'Self-government within the British Rule' to declare publicly in an inspired moment; that 'swaraj' or 'complete freedom from British Rule' was the only governing idea of Indian Politics - a declaration in 1906 that later led to the Surat imbroglio in 1907. It is interesting that though Naoroji was a moderate, favouring self-government under British Rule, and was not expected to speak of 'full autonomy', he did so. Why?

This was due to the subtle manipulation used by Sri Aurobindo. While Sri Aurobindo used a spiritual perspective to rouse our masses for 'swaraj' and elevated Nationalism as a religion and invoked our country as the Mother, this approach did not cut ice with the classical Indian politician who either wanted good governance from the British or believed in independence but considered that the nation was too weak and disunited to claim full freedom. Pherojshah Mehta had declared that ' I accept British Rule.... as a dispensation so wonderful... that it could be folly not to accept it as a declaration of God's will'. Gokhale had said- 'for better, for worse, our destinies are now linked with those of England, and the Congress fully recognizes that whatever advances we seek must be within the Empire itself...' And to cap it all, Dadabhai Naoroji, in his presidential speech at the Lahore Congress, 1893, had declared... 'The British are justice-loving, fair-minded people. Go on with moderation, with loyalty to the British rule and patriotism towards our country'. However, it was the same Dadabhai who was one of the first Indians to write about economic exploitation of India by Britain – hence Sri Aurobindo used this economic logic to coax Dadabhai to declare 'swaraj' as a legitimate goal of the Nation in his presidential speech at the Calcutta Congress in 1906 - a logic that Dadabhai could not afford to neglect. And Sri Aurobindo's coaxing was done through an article he wrote before the Congress where he acknowledged the contribution of Dadabhai and craftily pointed out the latter's limitations - a superb piece of political journalism.

( Bande Mataram, 26.12.1906 )

## **'Swaraj' - introduction of the term and the vision of 'Industrial India'**

It is unfortunate that the usual Indian citizen today is unaware of how the term 'swaraj' was coined. Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar was a Maratha patriot settled in Bengal and was assistant editor of a Bengali newspaper 'Hitavdi'. He was a master of Bengali and wrote Shivaji's biography in Bengali. Sri Aurobindo requested him to write a book of India's economic servitude and exploitation by England. He wrote in response a famous book 'Desher Katha' which was a vivid presentation of realistic facts. He also distilled the essence of Naoroji's and R.C. Dutt's economic writings in lucid language. It was in this book that the word 'swaraj' -- the Indian equivalent of 'independence' was first introduced in the context of freedom from British rule (Deuskar also used the term 'Swaraj' in a biography of Shivaji which he wrote in Bengali and appeared before 'Desher Katha' but there it was obviously not used in reference to British rule). Sri Aurobindo was the first to pick up the word & reiterate it constantly in his political writings and speeches. The word was also popularized by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay in his paper Sandhya. The book 'Desher Katha' faced the wrath of the British government who banned it.

It is reported that Deuskar also used to take classes on economics for the budding revolutionaries in the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **'SWADESHI' \_ COMPLEMENTARY TO 'SWARAJ'.**

As the word 'swaraj' first appeared in the context of economic exploitation of India by England, it is only natural that its complementary term would be 'SWADESHI'-- the indigenous growth of industrial India. In fact the very utterance of the term 'SWARAJ' automatically tied up with its complementary term 'SWADESHI'. Sri Aurobindo included the shakings of the economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of his revolutionary endeavour. Sri Aurobindo explicitly uttered 'we read of and believed in English economy, while we lived under Indian conditions, and worshipped the free trade which was starving us to death as a



nation'. He added – Swadeshi is a direct attack on that exploitation of India by the British merchant which is the first and principal reason of the obstinate maintenance of bureaucratic control.

(Bande Mataram,18.3.1907)

His idea of the new industrial India had clarity of vision. As early as 2.11.1907, he wrote:

'..the industrial development of the country... will open to our present and coming generations a much more attractive and promising avenue of employment than the services..... The uprise of a numerous industrial class will thus spell a great and invaluable accension of strength to the political interest of the country. It is this that lends to the question of India's industrial development its main fascination and interest, and serves to remind us forcibly of the vital interaction that exists between the different branches of human activity....We must strain every nerve to fill the whole country with trained industrial ability, we must send our young men in hundreds and thousands all over the world to learn the scientific methods of production so that India may in a few years be covered with a network of industrial centres that will supply work to hundreds o thousands of our educated men and rescue them from the inanition of a living death in government service....'.

When he was formulating his case for an industrial India, the charkha was not in the political scene. Handlooms, spinning & weaving mills came into existence in Bengal Bombay & elsewhere. It led to the revival and promotion of rural and home industries.

It is also interesting that in 1907, while advocating Swadeshi, Sri Aurobindo did not consider the economic growth of India in isolation from that of the rest of Asia. He **SIMULTANEOUSLY ADVOCATED THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF ASIA** and as early as 1.4.1908, wrote how Japan and China would not only grow economically but would threaten the Western world --

'The awakening of Asia is the fact of the twentieth century and in that awakening the lead has been given to the Mongolian races..... In the genius, the patriotic spirit, the quick imitative faculty of Japan, - in the grand deliberation, the patient thoroughness, irresistible organisation of China.....The political instinct of the European races has enabled them to understand the purpose ....in the awakening of the Mongol...The vision

of a China organized,..preparing to surge forth westwards is the nightmare of their dreams. *And another terror of economic invasion, of the Mongol swamping Europe with cheap labour and stifling the industries of Europe adds a fresh poignancy to the apprehensions which convulse the West*'.

How his foresight is true today! However, he visioned India, in the middle of the Mongolian and the Mahomedan world, as the chief inheritress of the common Asian destiny upholding the harmony of an Asiatic civilization. The time-spirit is already pressing for that vision to materialize. 'The position of India makes her the key of Asia. She divides the Pagan Far East from the Mahomedan West, and is their meeting place. From her alone can proceed a force of union, a starting-point of comprehension, a reconciliation of Mahomedanism and Paganism. Her freedom is necessary to the unity of Asia.'(Ibid)

It is also interesting to note that while Sri Aurobindo was advocating the industrial growth of India, he did not neglect agriculture. In a Bengali article in Jugantar on 8.4.1906, he wrote, 'There are two ways to get rid of poverty: with regard to agriculture to enact a Permanent Settlement for the whole of India, and with regard to commerce to adopt a protective trade policy. Under these circumstances the first duty of the Congress should have been to pursue single-mindedly, before anything else, the fulfillment of these two demands. But our rulers will never listen to these demands. Therefore the alternative is self-reliance. Campaign all over the country for the boycott of British trade and explain to the crores of Indian farmers the reason for their sad plight and the way out of it.'

### ***Induction of Industrialists in the freedom movement***

Sri Aurobindo's vision of building India as a nation was all-inclusive and in consonance with the multidisciplinary approach to Truth that was breaking the rigid lines of thinking in the professional world, he also conceptualized that nation-building could not be the sole prerogative of politicians. He wanted to induct 'men of industrial and commercial ability and experience'(Autobiographical Notes) to participate actively in the Nationalist programme of Swadeshi and Boycott. He thus gave 'economy' its due place in his scheme of things but as it was ahead of its times, the proposal could not be materialized then. He later expressed his deep anguish when a section of Indian businessmen did not

give up their profession as brokers and continued to sell English goods at a time when the Swadeshi movement was gathering momentum and needed the loyalty of Indian businessmen (Lecture at Itwari Bazar, Nagpur on 1.2.1908)

### **The Village**

Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on industrialization ran parallel to the development of the village. He declared 'SWARAJ BEGINS FROM THE VILLAGE' (Lecture on 'Palli Samiti' on 20.4.1908 at Kishoregunj). The village was the cell of the National body, the foundation of Indian life, the secret of Indian vitality. *However, at the same breath, he also vehemently explained that unlike in the past, the village must not be self-sufficient in isolation; it must be bound up with neighbouring units, with the province, with the nation as a whole. If the village lived satisfied in isolation, it could not contribute to national unity.*

'the organization of our villages is an indispensable work to which we must immediately set our hands, but we must be careful so to organize them as to make them feel that they are imperfect parts of a single national unity, and dependent at every turn on the cooperation first of the district, secondly of the province, and finally of the nation.....'

(08/03/1908)

Thus Sri Aurobindo's economic considerations were linked up and coeval with the emerging Nation-Idea. In fact, the economic factor was the *raison-de-etre* for his advocating complete autonomy from foreign rule. **He stated boldly that the concept that economic progress must precede political freedom WAS A DANGEROUS LIE. Without liberty, economic growth was a chimera for no conqueror state would be so generous as to contribute to the prosperity of a subject state. 'The doctrine that social and commercial progress must precede or will of themselves bring about political strength and liberty is a..... very dangerous lie; for a nation is no aggregate of separable functions, but a harmony of functions, of which government and political arrangement is the oldest, most central and most vital and determines the others'.**

( The Bourgeois and the Samurai )

## **SECTION II**

### **SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL AGENDA**

#### ***PREPARATION***

When Sri Aurobindo came to India in 1893, he was already acquainted with the history and the contemporary socio-political climate of the West. He had followed and studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions in Europe, the struggle against the English by France, the revolts which liberated America and Italy. He was inspired by Jeanne d'Arc and Mazzini and appreciated Parnell. He had critically pursued the two distinct trends in European progress – political vis-à-vis social development. On one hand, the sound political machinery of England developed at the cost of social degradation and entire absence of the cohesive principle. On the other hand, the lucid social atmosphere and the refinement of French culture developed at the cost of political instability. Sri Aurobindo was aware of these limitations of European nations but for him the central interest was the creative truth in every country's nationalism. Each nation had its uniqueness and its own evolutionary curve that had to be worked out.

What was India's evolutionary curve? Sri Aurobindo was sensitive to the fact that he had been out of the country since his childhood and in his own words, he 'grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture'(Autobiographical Notes). He had thus to 'know' his country before his political agenda was chalked out. He embarked to prepare himself for his political agenda. And herein lays his uniqueness. In spite of his alienation from Indian culture, he started to be interested in Indian politics as a boy and developed the idea of liberating his country. As secretary of the Indian Majlis in Cambridge, he delivered revolutionary speeches which actually played a part in his exclusion from the Indian Civil Service; the failure to present himself at the horse riding

test was only an occasion and an alibi. His political writing in *New Lamps for Old* on his return to India show sufficient maturity and political foresight to plunge headlong with his political agenda. Yet he restrained himself and took sufficient time to prepare himself before he initiated his political agenda. He did not believe in any short cut to success.

Sri Aurobindo's Baroda period was in fact a preparation for his political vision. He set to prepare himself simultaneously along several directions:

(a) Learning vernaculars, like Bengali, Marathi, Gujrati, Sanskrit (he learnt Sanskrit by himself).

(b) Teaching students -- his involvement with the educational system in India preceded his seminal ideas on the subject of education itself.

(c) Understanding the psyche of Indian youth: Many of his students later became Tilak's accomplices. It is a fact that it was the students of Tilak and Sri Aurobindo who in a body began to openly oppose the begging policy of Congress.

(d) Creative work: He actively pursued multifarious literary activities – translating classical literature, writing poetry, composing dramas and romantic pieces. These activities pursued during his Baroda period and continued during his hectic political life should be judged in the context of his contribution to the Indian renaissance.

(e) Understanding Indian Culture: This quest led to his unique critical reappraisal of Indian art, literature, polity and application of spirituality to life.

(f) Secret revolutionary work: This was done through several ways:

1. Training youths in physical activities like games, wrestling, marching, drill etc for which he initiated a school, 'Bharati Vidyalaya' at Ganganath with his friend Deshpande, and took the help of Keshavananda Maharaj. This preceded his link-up with future groups pursuing physical culture in Bengal.

2. Connection with secret societies in Western India, notably through Thakur Ram Singh of Udaipur State and influencing rebel native officers of British regiments in Central India.

3. Public contact during his vacations 'to find out the general attitude of the country and the possibilities of the revolutionary movement'.

3. Admitting Jatindranath Banerjee around 1898/1899 to the Baroda army under a false name for military training to be used later for revolutionary work. He did this with the help of Khasirao and Madhavrao Jadhav. He later (in 1902) partly financed Madhavrao for military training in England, especially in arms and bomb manufacturing.

(g) Combative Journalism: Sri Aurobindo was the foremost political columnist who swayed the whole of the country into a nationalistic fervor. His series published in 1893 created a flutter after which there was a long gap of hibernation but since 1902 onwards, he burst upon the Indian press like a mighty volcano, igniting the psyche, imagination and emotional repertoire of Indian youth.

(h) Yoga: His spiritual pursuit itself followed several directions-

1. His metaphysical quest travelled from the poise of a pragmatic agnostic to that of an intuitive realist.

2. He got connected with a naga sannayasin who gave him a Kali mantra and conducted kriyas and a Vedic Yagna for success in his political work.

3. He had intermittent, spontaneous spiritual experiences which usually great yogis gain after a life-time of sadhana. What were culminating realizations for other yogis were initial experiences of Sri Aurobindo even before he earnestly began his exclusive spiritual pursuit. This spiritual trajectory ran *pari passu* with his political pursuit and culminated in his concept of nationalism progressing beyond internationalism to what has been described as 'spiritual universalism'.

### **The Building of the Nation**

Throughout his Baroda period, Sri Aurobindo geared himself for his future course of action which was primarily aimed to establish concretely in the minds and hearts of the masses the concept of total independence, *'to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it'* (his retrospection to Joseph Baptist on 5.1.1920)

There are two aspects of the above mentioned quote:

(a) He emphasizes the necessity for establishing 'a settled will for freedom'. This led him to construct the concept of India as a sovereign, independent and united 'nation' in

the psyche of the race.

- (b) He clarifies that there has to be a pro-active 'struggle to achieve' the freedom. This led to his simultaneous planning and pursuance of different and apparently contradictory strategies to liberation from foreign domination.

### ***EMERGENCE OF THE NATION AS A CONSTRUCT IN THE PSYCHE OF THE RACE***

To have a settled 'will' for freedom, the concept of the country as a single and united 'nation' in its own right must be stabilized in the psyche of the race, irrespective of all social distinctions. Sri Aurobindo conceptualized that the building up of a nation was a multi-leveled construct that needed to be effectuated through simultaneous movements at different levels:

#### **a) AT THE LEVEL OF ORGANISATION OF COLLECTIVE LIFE**

The old Indian polity allowed separate collectivities viz. village, province, state-unit to live themselves with an element of exclusivity and a modicum of self-sufficiency. Thus wars and revolutions which involved the ruling elite did not have any influence on the contented, self-sufficient village-life basking in the ignorance of fulfillment. This had to go – all quasi-independent collective units had to be integrated without losing their distinctive characters in a 'mighty, single and compact democratic nationality'.

#### **(b) AT THE LEVEL OF THE MASSES**

The emergence of a modern nation necessitated the awakening of the political sense of the masses steeped in ignorance and suffering. Unless the masses were awakened, they were not expected to jump to the concept of 'swaraj' in the nation – they had to be trained and prepared for it by bridging the gap between the educated elite and the 'ignorant' masses. This meant a strengthening and consolidation of the organizations representing the masses at the grass-root level.

#### **(c) AT THE LEVEL OF DIVERSITY IN THE RACE**

The principle of UNITY had to be synthesized within the diversity of the Indian tradition. This unity was not a unity of opinion, speech, intellectuality but a unity of soul-comradeship based on love. Sri Aurobindo explained that foreign rulers would never initiate this movement of love. In fact they could only rule effectively if this love was

absent – that is how the British could set Hindus and Muslims at variance. Sri Aurobindo also explained that at the nascent stage of nation-building, a divergence of approaches would prevent a ‘flawless’ unity but that was not an obstacle to liberty. ‘..when a nation is living at high pressure and feelings are at white-heat, opinions and actions are bound to diverge far more strongly than at other times’ (23.10.1907).He gave examples of the divergence of approaches during the American war of independence, Italian revolution and the conflict between Shogun and Mikado parties in Japan; none of which proved to be a deterrent to liberty. If the concept of unity was based on a deeper source, then all outer divergence could be worked through and surpassed.

#### **(d)AT THE LEVEL OF CULTURE**

To build up a nation, one most cardinal aspect that had to be brought forward was ‘culture’. India had an ancient culture that had lapsed into inadaptive torpor. It is surprising that even at the phase of stagnation the contact of Western culture could not sweep it away .Sri Aurobindo emphasized that that meant rejuvenation was still possible. Hence what was needed was a renaissance of Indian culture. But this renaissance would be different from what happened in Europe where a ‘Christianised, teutonised, feudalized Europe’ was seized by the ‘old Graeco-Latin’ Spirit and form.’That is certainly not a type of renaissance that is at all possible in India’. Rather it would be **‘the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding’** (Sri Aurobindo enumerated these ideas in ‘The Renaissance in India’ during August-November, 1918).

Sri Aurobindo’s comment on the Indian renaissance quoted above has two parts:

- 1.The rejuvenation of the Indian Spirit needed a ‘new’ body for self-expression—through ‘new’ philosophical, artistic, literary ,cultural, political, social forms—‘forms not contradictory of the truths of life which the old expressed, but rather expressive of those truths restated, cured of defect, completed’.

2. Indian culture needed a spiritual force to motivate it for ‘Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it’. Indeed, the two stalwarts at the vanguard of the Indian cultural renaissance at the period of transition were Bankim Chandra and Tagore – both had deep spiritual insights.



Sri Aurobindo himself experimented with literature as part of his contribution to the Indian renaissance through various modalities—patriotism, romance, poetry, drama.

### **(e) AT THE LEVEL OF DYNAMIC SPIRITUALITY**

One of the most important deterrents in building up the spirit of Nationalism was the absence of dynamism in both individual and collective life. Sri Aurobindo commented on this malady at the age of 21 when he wrote ‘Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism’. He later elaborated more forcefully in Bhawani Mandir – ‘We have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by the Shakti’. This energy, this Shakti, this dynamism could only be aroused most effectively and in the shortest possible time by tapping the inexhaustible source of spiritual energy. This is the real motivator, the *raison d’etre* why Sri Aurobindo, following Swami Vivekananda, infused ‘spirituality’ into the *elan vital* of Nationalism. There was no narrow, sectarian, communal or theocratic meaning in that dynamic spirituality.

There was another deeper reason for imbibing spirituality into the construct of Indian nationalism. Any country could effectively contribute to internationalism if its nationalism was based on its own, in-built creative truth rather than its collective ego or imported ideals. If India’s nationalism was based on its spirituality which was its *beau ideal* then it could effectively contribute as a nation to humanity as a whole. And what better contribution a nation could give to the world!

### **POLITICAL STRATEGIES -- PLANNING AND ACTION**

The first part of Sri Aurobindo’s mission, was, in his own words, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom. The second part was to establish ‘the necessity of a struggle to achieve it’. His long period of what outwardly appeared to be a period of hibernation in Baroda was actually a preparation to plan that ‘struggle’. He had first to theorize the concept of Nationalism and then to plan nationalistic strategies aimed at liberty. There were two perspectives in his strategy planning:

1. Political

## 2. Spiritual

**He never mixed up the two perspectives for that would have resulted in a theocratic paradigm.**

In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things the spiritual perspective at the background served two purposes:

- (a) He drew sustenance from India's age-old spiritual repertoire to energize the inertia of the masses, conceive the emerging nation not in terms of a piece of land but as the godhead at whose altar and for whose liberation life could be sacrificed, and to place before the race the ideals needed to reconstruct the nobility of character
- (b) He conceived a futuristic vision where India would surpass its own nationalism to sustain and rejuvenate the whole of humanity at the international level with the light and power of its spirituality.

The political perspective which was at the foreground was carefully crafted so that in spite of being inspired by spirituality, it did not get mixed up. In fact, Sri Aurobindo's political agenda was drawn up from his study of contemporary political, revolutionary and reactionary events in the Western world. His acquaintance with the British temperament also helped him. He knew that the classical British nature was snobbish, high-nosed and hypocritical and was yet democratic in temperament. Hence, if pressurized from all sides, they would preferably grant independence to save their prestige and salvage their honour rather than face the humiliation of having it 'forcefully wrested from their hands' (Autobiographical Notes).

To pressurize the British from all sides, Sri Aurobindo drew up a variety of political strategies that appeared often contradictory but served two purposes:

- (a) Any strategy could be used as per convenience or demands of the situation. If necessary, violent methods could be used to supplement or to replace passive methods. Strategies were selected on the basis of tact and not according to ethical standards. This implied a flexible, pragmatic approach that did not elevate any strategy to the level of a creed or dogma.

(b) Using diverse and multiple strategies would mount up pressure from all sides, and this would make it difficult for any foreign power to continue to govern an alien country indefinitely.

Let us have a look at the chief strategies he simultaneously pursued and advocated.

### **THE STRATEGY OF PUBLIC PROPOGANDA**

Sri Aurobindo used to often utilize the vacations of his Baroda service to feel the 'pulse' of the people. His experience convinced him that even secret action could not be effective 'if there were not also a wide public movement which would create a universal patriotic fervour and popularize the idea of independence as the ideal and aim of Indian politics'. He himself elaborated in his famous public speech 'The Right of Association' delivered on 27.6.1909 the three rights cherished by free nations whose infringement is vociferously resented: **The right of a free Press, the right of free public meeting and the right of association.** The right of free speech takes the form of a free Press which carries the 'Idea' on its wings linking the masses. The right of free public meeting brings men together and the 'Idea' circulates and inspires through the magnetism of the crowds. The right of association materializes the 'Idea' and that which was yesterday only a word of eloquence suddenly becomes a matter of practical politics.

Sri Aurobindo's political propaganda followed exactly the steps he elaborated in the speech (vide supra).

#### **Free Press**

Sri Aurobindo's brilliance as a political columnist was unsurpassed. After his first public political writings in 1893, there was a long gap of preparation. Then we suddenly find him like a volcano erupting in 1906. First he permitted, on his brother Barindra's suggestion, the starting of a Bengali weekly paper, Yugantar, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1906 to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of British Rule. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some lead articles in the early issues and also exercised a general control. Sri Aurobindo joined Bipin Pal who floated the English counterpart of Yugantar, Bande Mataram on

6.8.1906. This daily flowered in the hands of Sri Aurobindo and earned such high prestige that long extracts from it were quoted in the Times of London. The greatest service Sri Aurobindo did through its columns was to create a new spirit in the country. 'In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of Bande Mataram ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory' (Autobiographical Notes, 7.11.1946, revised in 1948).

Sri Aurobindo's political writings had two characteristics:

(a) It stimulated the readers according to each person's bent of mind, each individual's personality trait, each one's swadharma. Thus the individual who would subscribe to non-violent means of agitation got equally inspired as the individual who favoured a more direct assaultive action.

(b) The writings were carefully crafted and edited, albeit with what someone labeled as diabolical precision so that they were legally unassailable despite being crammed with sedition.

The Bande Mataram paper became the vehicle of the philosophy of the Nationalism preached by Sri Aurobindo that appealed for nothing less than a free and united India, for complete and international autonomy. Whether the British government was just or unjust did not matter at all. He pointed out that foreign domination led to disintegration and death. 'This is no new discovery, no recently invented theory of ours, but an ascertained truth of political science as taught in Europe by Europeans to Europeans' (26.4.1908).

Besides his Bande Mataram writings, two other articles around 1905 deserve mention as unique propaganda material:

(a) He wrote a pamphlet titled NO COMPROMISE during the anti-partition stir, which no printer was willing to handle. It had finally to be secretly printed at dead of night, that too amateurishly, and distributed before daybreak,

(b) He composed a fiery pamphlet, a dynamo of Shakti-BHAVANI MANDIR that inspired revolutionaries and frightened the government with equal intensity. Even in 1917, the Rowlatt Committee was searching for the germs of the revolutionary movement in this article.

It was difficult to take legal action against Sri Aurobindo's propaganda material. The government tried to indirectly corner him by charging Bande Mataram for publishing translations of Yugantar articles and for printing a certain 'letter to the editor'. Sri Aurobindo was arrested and released on bail. He was acquitted as it could not be proved that he was the editor. Bipin Chandra Pal refused to be a witness and was jailed for six months. It was on this occasion that Tagore wrote his famous salutation to Sri Aurobindo, hailing him as a prophet.

After his release from jail in 1909, Sri Aurobindo started two weekly papers, the Karmayogin in English (initiated on 19<sup>th</sup> June) and the Dharma in Bengali (initiated on 23<sup>rd</sup> August). The Karmayogin intended to be a weekly review of 'National Religion, Literature, Science, Philosophy etc' but Sri Aurobindo also used it for his public propaganda till he left Calcutta. In between his release from prison and his abrupt departure from Calcutta, he went on crusading for his nationalistic policies and wrote in the Karmayogin : ***'Just as "no representation, no taxation" was the watchword of American constitutional agitation in the eighteenth century, so "No control, no co-operation" should be the watchword of our lawful agitation - for constitution we have none, --in the twentieth'....'The essence of this policy is the refusal of co-operation so long as we are not admitted to a substantial share and an effective control in legislation, finance and administration'***.(31.7.1909)

The British were afraid of Sri Aurobindo because his writings changed the way of thinking of the people, changed the mind-set of the youth, and changed the consciousness of the masses. That was more dangerous than the bomb.

### **Free Public meeting**

Sri Aurobindo described the significance of the free public meeting which he himself lived through: 'The right of public meeting brings men together. That is another force. They meet together on a common ground, moved by a common impulse, and as they stand or sit together in their thousands, the force of the idea within moves them by the magnetism of the crowds. It moves from one to another till the hidden shakti, the mighty force within, stirred by the words thrown out from the platform travels from heart to heart and masses of men are not only moved by a common feeling and common aspiration, but by the force of that magnetism prepared to act and fulfill the idea'.

Sri Aurobindo was not accustomed to speak in Bengali and perhaps barring two of his published speeches, all were in English. Yet they raised the passions, aspirations and

imaginings of the crowds, touched their hearts, changed their thinking and taught them to dream.

Sri Aurobindo's involvement in the freedom of public meeting was not only confined to his own delivered speeches, it had other dimensions:

(a) He also at times tried to influence what other speakers would articulate in their public speeches. A classic example is his write-up on 26.12.1906 through which he coaxed Naoroji to pronounce the term 'swaraj' in the proper context in his presidential speech at the Calcutta Congress.

(b) He also at times used his 'will' to decide the fate of public meetings. Thus he gave the orders of breaking the Congress at the public meeting of the Surat Congress in 1907, even without consulting Tilak.

### **Free Association**

Ancient India had its own political, commercial, educational and religious associations. The organized single village life, the joint family and the Gurukul were also time-honoured associations. With the impact of Europe, all traditional associations began to break and nineteenth century Indians found that there were other centers of association in Europe which could be modeled. One such association that began to be initially replicated was the political association.

This association took the form of the Congress party. However, at the time of its inception, the middle class was just emerging in India, trained and educated in norms chartered by the British who promoted a philistine sub-culture to subserve their own interests. Naturally, the Congress in its initial phase was a conglomeration of narrow interests, limited visions, and immature political foresight. It was not surprising that the first few generations of Indians could not outgrow their English education : 'Destitute of political experience, they could not avoid basing their political creed on theories and ideals rather than upon facts; without any education but what the rulers chose to impart, they had no choice but to borrow their theories and ideas from their English teachers.....they were obliged to accept Englishmen at their own valuation.'(26.12.1906). Therefore the initial Congressmen did not have the conviction

that modern India could stand on its own without Western support. These politicians belonged to two groups :

(a) The first group believed that Indians were incapable of freedom and unity and, accepting their fate they should preferably allow the country to be a province of the British Empire. Indian natives should be satisfied with good British governance and a limited share in the administration. This group constituted the so called **Loyalists**.

(b) The second group also believed that the nation was weak and disunited and as such, even if independence was welcome, they were not sure if Indians had the means to win it or keep it if won. They would have been happy with some sort of self government within the British Empire—‘Colonial Self-Government’ for which they would wait indefinitely. This group constituted the **Moderates**.

In this background marked by fluidity, inconsistency and short-sightedness, Sri Aurobindo wanted to consolidate a strong conceptual formation of a fully independent and united nation together with the infusion of the strength needed in the race to achieve and sustain it. His thesis was that Indians were as capable of freedom as any subject nation could be and their defects were the result of servitude and could only be removed by the struggle for freedom. He opined that Indians had the strength but lacked will power. **He floated the third and new school in Congress politics which was satisfied with nothing less than independence for which the nation could not afford to wait indefinitely. This line of thinking was considered as a form of ‘extremism’ but was actually named as ‘democratic nationalism’.** As this concept strengthened into a gospel of faith and hope, Sri Aurobindo waited for opportune moment when the Nationalism could emerge from being a mere ‘idea’ into a strong association. He found this moment at the Surat congress when the line of distinction between the Moderates and Nationalists was drawn with a strong conviction. Sri Aurobindo could not compromise on the question of absolute Swaraj—complete independence, and therefore engineered the official split between the Moderates and Nationalists at Surat. Thereafter, crossing many hurdles, the nationalist stream surged forth towards the ultimate freedom while the moderate stream gradually dried up. Iyengar writes: The Surat split led to the Home rule movement during the first world war under the leadership of Tilak and Annie Besant, and

then to Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement in 1920, Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and 'Quit India' in 1942, and on to independence on 15 August 1947. The Moderates, on the other hand, became the Liberal Party, and they became fewer and fewer and more and more ineffective, and lost at last their group and individual identity alike'.

It is also interesting to note that by strengthening the Nationalist ideal into a separate association, *Sri Aurobindo did not break the original Congress platform*. He cautioned that though diversity was necessary for broadening horizons, it should not break the Congress into multiple disconnected units. Even after the Surat session where he was held responsible for splitting the Congress, he wrote on 22.4.1908 '...we are therefore anxious to save, if possible, the Congress from extinction, because the Congress at present is the only ground of unity in diversity, the only field where all can meet to diverge and again meet without loss of principle or violence to conscience. It is a centre into which the different streams of thought and activity in the country can flow and mix with each other, to again separate and work in their own channels till the time to meet and intercommunicate again arrives'. That's the spirit of 'association'!

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Aurobindo was invoking the spirit of 'association' in order 'that the Indian nation may be united and united not merely in the European way, not merely by the common self-interest, but united by love for the common country, united by the ideal of brotherhood, united by the feeling that we are all sons of one common Mother who is also the manifestation of God in a united humanity. That is the association which has been coming into being, and has not been destroyed, since the movement came into existence. This is the mighty association...For the fiat of God has gone out to the Indian nation, "Unite, be free, be one, be great"

### **THE STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE**

The final meltdown of Sri Aurobindo's political agenda was to render the continuance of British rule impossible in India. That meant designing resistance to British rule through a variety of strategies. Sri Aurobindo examined three strategies that would be relevant to make administration under existing conditions impossible:

(a) **PASSIVE RESISTANCE:** This is the strategy to abstain doing something that would help the administration. Such an organized passive resistance was initiated by Parnell in Ireland;



(b)**ACTIVE RESISTANCE:** This is the strategy by which positive harm could be inflicted on the administration. Such an organized aggressive resistance led to the first triumph of Russian liberty;

(c)**OPEN ARMED REVOLT:** This was the time-honoured and swiftest strategy available to an oppressed nation to sweep the administration bodily out of existence.

Sri Aurobindo actually pursued all the three strategies simultaneously in case circumstances demanded any one of them. However, for practical purpose, he gave more weightage to the doctrine of passive resistance. Why? He opined that the choice of the method of resistance was determined by circumstances. In Russia and in Ireland, the oppression was more brutal and vindictive and hence the answer of violence to violence was justified. However in India, the oppression was carried out in a more abjectly cunning way rather than frontal brutality – it was ‘legal and subtle’. The British camouflaged their oppressive measures with an apparent concern for ‘life, liberty and property’. They brought in modern educational facilities, established the judiciary, introduced modern forms of communication, abolished the practice of sati, and tried to act benevolently so that they could carry out their economic exploitation, cultural substitution, communal separation and social maneuverings smoothly. In this background, the strategy of passive resistance would be more suitable and effective as a political weapon. Moreover, there would be an added advantage. In aggressive forms of resistance, a selected group of patriots have to act while in passive resistance, the entire population has to be motivated, educated, stimulated and inspired to act. Thus the strategy of passive resistance offered the opportunity to gear up a whole nation so long demoralized in servility. Sri Aurobindo wanted to utilize this opportunity to the fullest extent.

### **PASSIVE RESISTANCE**

Before he embarked to present his famous series of articles titled ‘The Doctrine of Passive Resistance’ during 11<sup>th</sup> April and 23<sup>rd</sup> April.1907, Sri Aurobindo examined the forms of passive resistance pursued during the last part of nineteenth century through ‘prayer, petition and protest’ and concluded that both their goals and methods were marked by political inexperience. Thus the demand of replacing the oppressive land revenue system by a Permanent Settlement could fail as the government could subtly introduce local taxes. The demand of separating judicial and executive functions or the demand of employing more Indians in government service would have little value in the absence of a free popular government.

Sri Aurobindo kept himself abreast of contemporary political developments in the West and found that the most effective way of passive resistance was to boycott taxes and was just short of taking arms. This was successful in England, Ireland and America. However unlike most of the Western countries, boycott of taxes would be not feasible in India at that point in time for two reasons:

(a) The Western countries had the powerful weapon of the vote and could overthrow

- injustice at the polling booth; and
- (b) The success of a nation-wide no-taxes policy would need a vast network linking district to district and province to province mediated through a central authority – a process that could not be effectuated at that nascent stage of the pursuit of freedom.

Sri Aurobindo therefore zeroed in to the concept of political boycott that involved no direct breach of legal obligation or direct defiance of administrative authority and had its password as ‘No control, no assistance’.

As a concept, boycott was already known in India. In 1874 and during 1875-76 and again in 1878, boycott was preached to revive indigenous industries. It was also powerfully voiced during the Anti-Ilbert agitation and imprisonment of Surendra Nath Banerjee. It was actually practiced a little in 1891 during protest against the Consent Bill. Perhaps the real originator of the idea of boycott of British goods was an Arya Samaj activist from North West India, Tahal Ram Ganga Ram who visited Calcutta during February-March, 1905 and inflamed the youth to boycott British goods. This was followed by successive calls for boycott of British goods through Krishna Kumar Mitra’s weekly paper, Sanjivani on 13.7.1905 and an article in Amrita Bazar Patrika on 17.7.1905 by an unknown correspondent “G” (probably Sri Aurobindo or his brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh). To cap it all, it was adopted at the Calcutta Town Hall meeting on 7.8.1905 amidst the tempestuous rendering of the song Bandemataram. This was a special meeting summoned to protest against the partition of Bengal and pass resolutions on Swadeshi and Boycott where thousands of students of all communities marched from College Square to the venue.

**Sri Aurobindo worked on this concept of Boycott, enlarged its scope, widened its application and snowballed it forwards. He did this through two techniques:**

- (a) Widening the concept and scope of Boycott, and**  
**(b) Supplementing Boycott with the policy of self-development**

### ***WIDENING THE CONCEPT AND SCOPE OF BOYCOTT***

The initial concept of Boycott was restricted to British goods, stimulated by hostile attitude of Manchester to the newly started mills in Bombay. Sri Aurobindo expanded the notion of Boycott to a spectrum of interventions:

(a) ***Economic and Industrial Boycott***: On one hand the resources of the country were continually exploited resulting in chronic famine and rapid impoverishment. On the other hand, the Government failed to protect Indian industries. This led to the call for Boycott of British goods and to condone their purchase by others.

(b) ***Educational Boycott***: The education imparted by the British was insufficient, anti-national in character and subordinated to the government. Patriotism was discouraged. Hence he advocated the boycott of Government schools or schools aided or controlled by the Government.

(c) ***Judicial Boycott***: The administration of justice was skewed, the civil side was costly, the criminal penalties were brutal, the judgments served political interests and hence a organized judicial Boycott was called into action;

(d) **Boycott of Executive Functions:** The executive administration was marked by arbitrariness, inquisitive meddling, and misuse of the police for administration and needed a Boycott to ward off executive control and interference

### ***SUPPLEMENTING BOYCOTT WITH THE POLICY OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT***

Mere declaration of Boycott could not sustain the agitation; it had to be supplemented by positive measures of self-development at every level of the Boycott:

- (a) **Swadeshi :** The industrial Boycott was to be balanced by the growth and expansion of indigenous or Swadeshi industries.
- (b) **National Education :** The educational boycott had to be supplemented by the designing of National schools where knowledge of one's own country and development of role models were paramount
- (c) **Arbitration :** The rejection of British judiciary was to be supplemented by designing arbitration courts within the community to settle disputes and differences.
- (d) **Mutual defense :** The Boycott of executive protection had to be supplemented by a system of mutual defense.

(It would also be relevant here to recall that the Bande Mataram issue of 30.12.1906 had eulogized the suggestion of Hironmoyee Devi to spread the use of the spinning wheel – the charka as a vocational occupation for women during their leisure hours)

This course of passive resistance invited less frontal confrontation than a Boycott of taxes : 'No man can be legally punished for using none but swadeshi articles or persuading others to follow his example or for sending his boys to a National in preference to a government school, or for settling his differences with others out of court, or for defending his person and property or helping to defend the person and property of his neighbours against criminal attack.....But the refusal to pay taxes is a breach of legal obligation .....which the administration can least afford to neglect and must either conciliate or crush.'

In spite of having the label 'passive', such a resistance must be pro-active in three practical areas or else its whole objective will be diluted:

- (a) Individuals or groups must have the mind-set to break an unjust coercive law and bear the legal consequences thereof,
- (b) Individuals or groups must be prepared to disobey an unjust and coercive executive order,
- (c) people must be prepared to socially boycott persons deliberately disobeying the national will in vital manners.

Sri Aurobindo was emphatic too in his warning: '***There is a limit however to passive resistance...To submit to illegal or violent methods of coercion, to accept outrage and hooliganism as part of the legal procedure of the country is to be guilty of cowardice***

*and, by dwarfing national manhood , to sin against the divinity within ourselves and the divinity in our motherland. The moment coercion of this kind is attempted, passive resistance ceases and active resistance becomes a duty.'*

Sri Aurobindo's passive resistance predated Gandhiji's Manifestos of 1920-1921 and 1930-1932. Sri Aurobindo's stance of "NO CONTROL, NO ASSISTANCE" predated Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement. Sri Aurobindo's examination of tax boycott in the West which was not feasible in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was later advocated and executed by Gandhiji. Even the advocacy of the charka by Hiranmoyee Devi which was supported by Sri Aurobindo's paper, *Bande Mataram* was also to be a major Gandhian tool in later years. There was however one major difference between the Aurobindonian and Gandhian approaches. Sri Aurobindo did not make a creed or dogma of passive resistance. He clearly stated '**...we advocate passive resistance without wishing to make a dogma of it....even the greatest Rishis of old, could not, when the Rakshasas were fierce and determined, keep up the sacrifice without calling in the bow of the Kshatriya. We should have the bow of the Kshatriya ready for use, though in the background. Politics is specially the business of the Kshatriya, and without Kshatriya strength at its back, all political struggle is unavailing**'. (Ibid, The Doctrine of Passive Resistance)

### ACTIVE RESISTANCE

*Sri Aurobindo described active resistance as organized aggressive resistance designed to inflict 'positive harm to the government' through 'an untiring and implacable campaign of assassination and a confused welter of riots, strikes and agrarian risings all over the country'*. (Ibid) He was inspired by the happenings in Russia "...the series of strikes on a gigantic scale which figured so largely in the final stages of the struggle was only one feature of that widespread, desperate and unappeasable anarchy which led to the first triumph of Russian liberty. Against such an anarchy the mightiest and best-organised Government must necessarily feel helpless.."(Ibid)

The first time when such active resistance was carried out in British India was when in 1897, two British officers, Rand and Ayerst were assassinated in Poona for their high-handedness in connection with plague operations, resulting in death sentence for Damodar Chapekar. This triggered off a series of political assassinations in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo himself became seriously interested to develop pro-active groups who could be trained to serve any of the two purposes that the situation demanded:

- (a) Violent underground activity needed to support active resistance
- (b) Direct military action.

He had already sent Jatindranath Banerjee for military training in Baroda around 1898-99 and made him to agree to initiate revolutionary work in Bengal. Jatin was sent to Calcutta in 1900 for securing resources and enlisting youngsters. There he met barrister P. Mitter and Bibhuti Bhushan Bhattacharya and linked them with Sri Aurobindo. In 1901, Sri Aurobindo's youngest brother Barindra visited Baroda and was inducted in the revolutionary mind-set.

In 1902, several events occurred simultaneously:

(a) Sri Aurobindo went twice to Midnapore and met Hemchandra Kanungo twice. In the first visit, he was accompanied by Barin and Jatin and practiced rifle shooting. He went alone the next time and gave the revolutionary oath to Hemchandra holding the Gita and a sword. The oath had two aspects. Firstly, freedom had to be secured at any cost. Secondly, the confidentiality of the secret society had to be honoured. Hemchandra was later sent for military training to Europe.

(b) Jatin and Barin joined P. Mitter and in collaboration with Hemchandra, it was decided to start six centres of revolutionary activity in Bengal. Abinash Bhattacharya joined this group. Jatin worked with professionals while Barin and Abinash recruited students. Sarala Ghoshal, Tagore's niece, had already, on her own initiative, opened centres for physical culture. P. Mitter collaborated with her at the instance of Baron Okakura, a Japanese art connoisseur to organize Anushilan Samiti.

(c) Two other societies which later became associated with Sri Aurobindo were formed. Satish Chandra Mukherjee founded the Dawn Society. He later founded the National Council of Education in 1906 in which Sri Aurobindo played an important role. Satyen Bose started a society in Deoghar.

(d) Sri Aurobindo met the firebrand supporter of Indian revolution, Sister Nivedita for the first time in October, 1902 during the latter's visit to Baroda.

(e) Sri Aurobindo met Tilak at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress in December. Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked with him for a hour, expressing contempt for the reformist movement.

(f) Sri Aurobindo became the President of the Bombay council of the revolutionary party in Western India. He also sent Madhavrao for military training in Europe.

The movement of political assassinations continued for many years. Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki targeted the tyrant and sadistic police officer, Kingsford but by mistake shot two innocents on 30.4.1908 at Muzzafarpur in Bihar, an event that was the initiator of the chain of events that culminated in the famous Alipore Bomb Trial. This was not to be the end of active resistance but continued in some form or the other even after Sri Aurobindo left Bengal for Pondicherry in 1910. Thus, Bhagat Singh, Chandra Sekhar Azad and Rajguru wanted to kill Scott who was responsible for Lala Lajpat Rai's death (on 17.11.1928) but instead shot Saunders on 17.12.1928. Later, on 8.4.1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutta exploded bombs in the Legislative Assembly as a symbolic protest against the government's move to introduce a bill to curb Indian nationalism. The execution of revolutionaries like Khudiram and Bhagat Singh roused the passions of the entire nation to a pitch hereto unfathomed.

The history of the active resistance cannot be complete without reference to Bankimchandra's song, *Bande Mataram*, that became the mantra, the battle-cry of Indian Nationalism and the harbinger of unity in the matrix of the nation's cultural diversity. In a lecture at Amravati, Maharashtra on 29.1.1908, Sri Aurobindo had described how the mantra '*Bande Mataram*' was probably revealed to Bankim by a sannyasi and that it was a revivification of an old mantra that had become extinct due to the treachery of one Navakishan. The full song containing the mantra was originally composed in 1875 and later included in the novel, *Ananda Math* in 1882. It was first sung by Tagore in the Congress platform in 1896 but it actually became a battle cry in an inspired moment

when it was sung in the Town hall of Calcutta on 7.8.1905 in a famous protest meeting against the partition of Bengal. Bande Mataram became the password of the freedom movement and the nation became synonymous with the Divine Mother, the Mother of Dreams.

The other phenomenon which geared the whole nation for active resistance was the partition of Bengal in 1905. Sri Aurobindo considered it to be a blessing in disguise as it created patriotism, stirred nationalistic feelings, broke the lethargy of the masses and mobilized public opinion on the issue of complete national independence.

***Sri Aurobindo propagated passive and active resistance simultaneously. He clarified his stand on the metapsychology of human nature: "Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature, it cannot come with any finality. If attempted on any other basis like a mental principle or the gospel of Ahimsa, it will fail, and even may leave things worse than before". (Autobiographical Notes)***

In an unpublished article, 'The Morality of Boycott' written around May, 1908, he expanded this metapsychological perspective:

'A certain class of minds shrink from aggressiveness as if it were a sin... 'The love which drives out hate, is a divine quality of which only one man in a thousand is capable. A saint full of love for all mankind possesses it, a philanthropist consumed with the desire to heal the miseries of the race possesses it, but the mass of mankind do not and cannot rise to that height. Politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals. To ask masses of mankind to act as saints, to rise to the height of divine love and practice it in relation to their adversaries or oppressors is to ignore human nature. It is to set a premium on injustice and violence by paralyzing the hand of the deliverer when raised to strike...

'Love has a place in politics, but it is the love for one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race, the divine ananda of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their suffering, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with the fathers of the race... Other love than this is foreign to the motives of political action. Between nation and nation there is justice, partiality, chivalry, duty but not love. All love is either individual or for the self in the race or for the self in mankind. It may exist between individuals of different races, but the love of one race for another is a thing foreign to nature. When, therefore, the Boycott as declared by the Indian race against the British is stigmatized for want of love, the charge is bad psychology as well as bad morality. It is interest warring against interest, and hatred is directed not really against the race but against the adverse interest. If the British exploitation were to cease tomorrow, the hatred against the British race would disappear in a moment... 'If hatred is demoralizing, it is also stimulating. The web of life has been made a mingled strain of good and evil and God works His ends through the evil as well as through the good. Let us discharge our minds of hate, but let us not deprecate a great and necessary movement because, in the inevitable course of human nature, it has engendered feelings of hostility and hatred. If

hatred came, it was necessary that it should come as a stimulus, as a means of awakening...

'The argument that to use violence is to interfere with personal liberty involves a singular misunderstanding of the very nature of politics. The whole of politics is an interference with personal liberty. Law is such an interference, Protection is such an interference, the rule which makes the will of the majority prevail is such an interference. The right to prevent such use of personal liberty as will injure the interests of the race, is the fundamental law of society...

'Justice and righteousness are the atmosphere of political morality, but the justice and righteousness of the fighter, not of the priest. Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked, violence unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends. It is a barren philosophy which applies a mechanical rule to all actions, or takes a word and tries to fit all human life into it. The sword of the warrior is as necessary to the fulfillment of justice and righteousness as the holiness of the saint.'

## **OPEN ARMED REVOLT**

The last course available to an oppressed nation was that of armed revolt .Sri Aurobindo opined that a nation was entitled to attain freedom by violence under compelling circumstances and this had to be based on a matter of policy, not on ethical considerations. He declared that he himself was neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist and revealed in his note written on 7.11.1946 and revised and published in 1948 that he initiated a secret revolutionary propaganda and organization of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection.

The first attempt of an open revolt against the British was perhaps the lightning attacks by groups of sannyasis. In the latter half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, such attacks took place at Dacca, Coochbehar, Saran, Dinajpur, Rajsahi, Rangpur and even as early as 1773, Hastings acknowledged their capabilities. It seems that in 1768, there was a serious clash between sannyasis and British troops in Saran, Bihar. The Sannyasis inflicted serious casualties, killing Capt. Tomes in Rangpur and Capt. Edwards in Dinajpur (vide Dr. Jadugopal Mukhopadhyaya: Viplabi Jibaner Smriti, a Bengali publication). The insurgent sannyasis were well versed in guerilla warfare. The Sepoy mutiny of 1857 had a number of sadhus and Gurus as motivators too. This tradition of spiritual backing of armed conflict was always there in the Indian tradition. Shivaji had as his inspiration the great Yogi Ramdas. The Sikh militias were raised in the bosom of spiritual power. No wonder that Hem Chandra Kanungo, whom Sri Aurobindo initiated into revolutionary activities and was sent for training to Europe ,was told by Mironow, the Russian revolutionary in Paris "We learnt revolutionary methods from the Chinese, who clam they got them from India. How is it, then, that you now come to us for light?"(Apropos discussions during the Alipore bomb trial; this incident was narrated by Sri Aurobindo to fellow-accused, as reported in Iyengar's biography).

Sri Aurobindo himself initiated revolutionary activities in Bengal and also got connected with similar activities in Western India. In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Thakur Saheb, a noble of the Udaipur state started organizing secret societies in Western India and tried to motivate Indian soldiers in the British army so that they would rebel at the opportune time. In this way three or four regiments had been won over. Sisir Kumar Mitra, in his book, 'The Liberator' published by Jaico in 1954 informs that during 1890s Sri Aurobindo travelled to Central India to meet Indian sub-officers who were won over but other authors put this date later (1902). Mitra also informs that during that time Thakur Saheb set up a secret society in Poona and in 1896, Sri Aurobindo was elected its President. Chapekar, who murdered Rand and Ayerst in 1897, had already started an organization called Hindu Dharma Sangha. After Chapekar's execution, this Sangha, the Secret Society of Thakur Saheb (then absent in Japan for revolutionary work), and Tarun Sangha, a society of youths, organized under Sri Aurobindo's direction, were amalgamated and Sri Aurobindo took over the management. Later he became the President of the central organization for the whole of Gujarat (vide Mitra). From 1902 onwards, he started taking control of the revolutionary mind-set of Bengal and gave it a militant turn.

Sri Aurobindo's ideas were akin to the Irish Sinn Fein but had actually preceded it. In public, he advocated passive resistance and non-cooperation, but, he also craftily kept in reserve secret militant activity which could be utilized if all other maneuvers failed. He conceived two simultaneous militant strategies:

- (a) Guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt,
- (b) Revolt in the Indian army.

He also contemplated that this endeavor would need proper organization and foreign help. While Jatin Banerjee was sent to Baroda army for training, Madhavrao and later Hemchandra were sent to Europe for learning the mechanisms of bombs and fire-arms. Sri Aurobindo initially considered it would take 30 years for the revolutionary activities to come to fruition but it finally took 50 years for the movement of liberation to be successful.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 stimulated the revolutionary mind-set as never before. During this period Sri Aurobindo wrote a pamphlet entitled BHAVANI MANDIR which ranks among the foremost classics in the political literature of India. It is a very interesting piece of literature where he consecrates a temple to the Universal Mother-Principle at whose altar he invokes spiritual energy to lift up the country by excelling in military, economic and scientific spheres, calls for a spiritual brotherhood of nation-builders and at the same breath aspires for a regenerated, industrial India that will earn its place under the sun by its perennial philosophy or eternal religion (that he elsewhere refers to as the Sanatan Dharma) which would make a grand synthesis of all religions, science and philosophies. There was no conflict between a modern, techno-savvy, industrial India and an India that was to be the spiritual beacon-light to the world. He reminded how contemporary Japan had invoked her own spiritual resources 'to wield the stupendous weapons of Western knowledge and science as lightly and invincibly as Arjun wielded the Gandiv'.



Sri Aurobindo and Deshpande had already floated a school on the lines of Bhavani Mandir at Ganganath(vide supra) . Charuchandra Dutt has left a description of that school in his memoirs. It is said that Sri Aurobindo's brother Barin had even gone to search a place in the hills where the Bhavani Mandir project could be executed. Bhavani Mandir gave the impression that it was meant to train Karmayogis who would spread political awareness and revolutionary activities throughout the country. It seems that Bhavani Mandir was more of Barin's ideas and most probably Barin wrote the appendix that spelt in details the Rules and modus operandi of the new order of aspirants. However, nothing actually materialized but the administration was terrified. As Mr.Denham, the Superintendent of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, observed :

'Bhawani Mandir was nothing but a gigantic scheme for establishing a central religious Society, outwardly religious, but in spirit, energy and work political. From this centre, missionaries, well-versed in religious-political argument were to go their wanderings over India, to form fresh centres and gain fresh recruits. The argument in the pamphlet is ingenious ...'Iyengar commented that the very idea that India would no longer be a subject nation but a nation that would be the spiritual savior of the world came as a boost to revolutionaries and a warning to the alien rulers.

The Idea of the open armed revolt persisted as a separate dimension even after Sri Aurobindo left the political field. Jatin Mukherji or Bagha Jatin held a meeting in 1913 with Rashbehari Bose and Amarendranath Chatterjee to plan for an insurrection by importing arms from Germany, creating an uprising among Indian soldiers of the British army and inciting villagers to revolt. The plan fell through and he died a martyr on 9.9.1915 at the famous battle of Balasore. Surya Sen(Masterda) masterminded the Chittagong uprising on 18.4.1930 with the plan for occupying armouries, destroying telephone and railway links and taking British officers as hostages. The program of open confrontation was later replaced by guerrilla warfare for three years till they were arrested in phases. Masterda was executed on 12.1.1934.Finally we have the great saga of Subhas Bose who took the mantle from Rash Behari Bose and formed the Azad Hind Fauz (I.N.A) in March, 1942.

### **SECTION III**

#### **National Education**

The concept of National Education was formulated by Sri Aurobindo while He was drafting the policy of Boycott. He realized that one of the important ways by which the British were dominating the Indian Psyche was to control the developing Mind by an education that did not spring up organically. Therefore, a boycott of British Education was necessary and needed to be substituted by a "National Education" that could take full

control of the malleable mindset of the youth. National Education had to be on National lines and under National control. In fact National Schools were started in Bengal.

However, Sri Aurobindo was not sectarian in His approach to National Education. He cautioned “not to assert that whatever is ours, is always the best”. In fact the progress of Modern Europe had to be acknowledged though whatever was acceptable was to be suitably adapted to Indian conditions. Besides, the achievements of our forefathers should not be discarded while introducing completely new ideas and ideals.

In a lecture delivered in Bombay on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1908, He took pains to describe how different subjects could be taught so as to create a unique Indian Nation. For example, while teaching Geography, importance was to be given not only where the rivers like Ganga, Jamuna and Narmada physically flow but also the significance of these rivers in the Great Indian Heritage. Likewise, the Himalayas had to be extolled not only because of its physical parameters but also because it was a sanctuary of spirituality. And when the geography of other nations was taught, things had to be understood in the context of our country. The special emphasis in National Education was to create a future Indian Nation. Speaking on the occasion, he said,

‘This kind of national teaching is not provided in Government schools. In those schools the tender minds of our students are overburdened with the European way of thinking. But European thought and the European way of life are quite different from our thought and our way of life. It is true, of course, that when we speak of the development of our own country, we cannot ignore the progress of modern Europe. In our reforms we must certainly include it; whatever is acceptable must be adapted suitably by us. But we have to guard against damaging our foundation in the process. We must make use of Western science as Japan did, but in implementing its ideas we must not be blind to the achievements of our forefathers. For example, in Government medical colleges the students remain unaware of our Ayurvedic science, though there are many occult and valuable truths behind it, to which the Western system has no access. This is not to assert that whatever is ours is always the best.

In the field of politics we have a lot to learn from the West. The democratic system of government is one thing we must learn from the Europeans. In providing National Education, we do not isolate the students from the political field; in fact we give them first-hand experience of the democratic system of government by making them work alongside us. Simply concerning ourselves with industry or commerce is not enough, and that is exactly what we tell them. No country can rise to its height merely on the basis of trade and commerce. We learn from history that those nations which grew on the strength of trade alone, have perished. Europe pays special attention to formulating policies for the development and growth of its industry and commerce. Yet in our programme of National Education we do impart practical knowledge to our students.....

While imparting such a National Education in a national way, we place special emphasis on creating a future Indian nation.’

In His speech delivered at the Bengal National College, Calcutta on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1907, He appealed “There are times in a Nation’s history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be

sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may live for her sake. You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.”  
That was the spirit of National Education.

## **SECTION IV**

### **COMPOSITE NATIONALISM AND MINTO-MORLEY REFORMS**

#### Background

Lord Curzon’s ploy of partitioning Bengal drew such adverse reaction that he had to be replaced by Lord Minto as Viceroy in November, 1905 and Lord Morley became the Secretary of State to assist him. They colluded with each other to draw up a scheme which would marginalize the nationalist movement while hoodwinking the general public. The proposals were drawn up in 1906 and passed by the British Parliament as the Government of India Act 1909. The salient feature of the Act was to placate people by enlarging the legislative councils through the carrot-stick of ELECTIONS. However, this phenomenon of elections had a deceptive and a perverse element.

#### DECEPTIVE

The proposals were deceptive as the end result of the elections amounted to a minority of indirectly elected members in the Central Legislative Council and a majority of indirectly elected members in the Provincial Councils. These councils had no control over administration or finance, let alone defence or foreign policy. Yet the moderate elements in the Congress thought this was a big deal. In this context, it would be worthwhile to recollect that Sri Aurobindo’s slogan of ‘No control, no co-operation’, an adaptation of the American war-cry, ‘No representation, no taxation’ was actually a demand for Indians to be admitted to a substantial share and effective control in legislation, finance and administration. In absence of such an empowerment, the elections were meaningless.

#### PERVERSE

The elections were vested with a diabolical perversion as the provision of a separate electorate for the Muslims was introduced. This advocacy of having communal electorates was singularly directed to the weakening of Indian Nationalism. It was

intended to disrupt the national unity and composite nationalism that had started to evolve.

After his release from jail in May, 1909, Sri Aurobindo found that the Nationalist movement had weakened and its leaders were scattered by imprisonment or deportation or self-imposed exile. In this background, he pleaded for a wide-encompassing composite Nationalism. He wrote, apropos the communalization of electorate (6.11.09):

**We will not for a moment accept separate electorates or separate representation, not because we are opposed to a large Mahomedan influence in popular assemblies when they come but because we will be no party to a distinction which recognizes Hindu and Mahomedan as permanently separate political units and thus precludes the growth of a single and indivisible Indian nation. We oppose any such attempt at division whether it comes from an embarrassed Government seeking for political support or from an embittered Hindu community allowing the passions of the moment to obscure their vision of the future.**

In Aurobindonian parlance, Composite Nationalism was a vision of the future that could not be obscured by the passions of the moment

Sri Aurobindo has often been misinterpreted by historians who could not understand the basic difference between true spirituality and religious fundamentalism. He had the clarity and vision to state (6.11.1909) the reason why he 'distrusted' Hindu Nationalism:

**'But we do not understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions.** Hindu nationalism had a meaning in the times of Shivaji and Ramdas, when the object of national revival was to overthrow a Mahomedan domination which, once tending to Indian unity and toleration, had become oppressive and disruptive. It was possible because India was then a world to itself and the existence of two geographical units entirely Hindu, Maharashtra and Rajputna, provided it with a basis. It was necessary because the misuse of their domination by the Mahomedan element was fatal to India's future and had to be punished and corrected by the resurgence and domination of the Hindu. And because it was possible and necessary, it came into being. ***But under modern conditions India can only exist as a whole.*** A nation depends for its existence on geographical separateness and geographical compactness, on having a distinct and separate country. The existence of this geographical separateness is sure in the end to bear down all the differences of race, language, religion, history. It has done so in Great Britain, in Switzerland, in Germany. It will do so in India. But geographical compactness is also necessary. In other words, the *desa* or country must be so compact that mutual communication and the organization of a central government becomes easy or, at least, not prohibitively difficult. The absence of such compactness is the reason why great Empires are sure in the end to fall to pieces; they cannot get the support of that immortal and indestructible national self which can alone ensure permanence. The difficulty stands in the way of British Imperial Federation and is so great that any temporary success of that specious aspiration will surely result in the speedy disruption of the Empire. In addition, there must be an uniting force strong enough to take advantage of the geographical compactness and separateness, - either a wise and skilfully organized

government with a persistent tradition of beneficence, impartiality and oneness with the nation or else a living national sense insisting on its separate inviolability and self-realization. The secret of Roman success was in the organization of such a government; even so, it failed, for want of geographical compactness, to create a world-wide Roman nationality. The failure of the British rule to root itself lies in its inability to become one with the nation either by the effacement of our national individuality or by the renunciation of its own separate pride and self-interest. These things are therefore necessary to Indian nationality, geographical separateness, geographical compactness and a living national spirit. The first was always ours and made India a people apart from the earliest times. The second we have attained by British rule. The third has just sprung into existence.

But the country, the Swadesh, which must be the base and fundament of our nationality, is India, a country where Mahomedan and Hindu lived intermingled side by side. Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism ...wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions and absorb them into itself...*The Hindu, with what little Mahomedan help he may get, must win Swaraj both for himself and the Mahomedan..*It is to the creation of that unity, brotherhood and intensity that the Hindu Sabha should direct its whole efforts.'

## **SECTION V**

### **THE ALIPORE BOMB TRIAL – FACTS AND JUDGMENT**

Since 1906, Sri Aurobindo had started editing the Bande Mataram through which he consolidated the concept of India as a nation in the psyche of the race. He simultaneously exercised a general control over the Bengali paper Yugantar through which he galvanized the revolutionary mind-set of the youth. Both the papers became very popular. The Times in London carried extracts from Bande Mataram and even Theodore Roosevelt requested Lord Minto to let him see a copy. The circulation of Yugantar had crossed 50,000, a figure hereto unattained by any newspaper in India. The partition of Bengal stimulated the whole country to stand for itself and shake off foreign domination. His pamphlet Bhavani Mandir which spoke of revolutionary missionaries influenced his brother Barin to initiate group activities at their ancestral property – a garden house at Muraripukur, Maniktolla where youngsters read spiritual literature for inspiration and learnt to manufacture bombs and handle firearms for practical action. At this time D.H.Kingsford,

the District Magistrate of Calcutta achieved notoriety for dealing cruelly with protesters. He tried the case against the saintliest of Indian voices, the revered Brahmabandhyab Upadhyaya who died untimely during detention at Campbell Hospital, shocking the whole nation. He had a 15 years old boy, Sushil Sen, flogged to unconsciousness for merely shouting at an European sergeant for attacking students who were peacefully protesting against Sri Aurobindo's arrest in 1907 for publishing 'seditious' articles in Bande Mataram. This action drew such protest that he was transferred to Muzzafarpur in Bihar. In the dusk of 30.4.1908, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, two teenagers, attempted to shoot him but mistakenly killed two innocent ladies. The British found this occasion to be a golden opportunity to arrest Sri Aurobindo. On 1st May, 1908, they raided the Manicktolla garden house and arrested the group led by Barin. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, Sri Aurobindo was arrested. This was the initiation of the famous Alipore trial.

So long, it was difficult to do anything against Sri Aurobindo's writings for they were written very cleverly. Even after he was acquitted, Sir Edward Baker, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, was afraid that any further action in the form of appeal or deportation under Regulation 111 of 1818, would be counterproductive **for Sri Aurobindo's writings could be taken in many senses and even if the political overtones were clear, his references to killing could also be interpreted in spiritual terms making their application practically uncertain and legally untenable.** It was therefore very important for the British to implicate him in the present case which came to be variously known as the Muzzafarpur Bomb Outrage Case or the Manicktolla Bomb-Factory Case or Alipore Case.

The preliminary trial started in Alipore on 19.5.08 before L. Birley and he committed the accused to sessions on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1908. Sri Aurobindo and his accomplices, most of whom he had not known before, were charged under Sections 121-A, 122, 123 and 124 of the Indian Penal Code for 'organising a gang for the purpose of waging war against the Government by means of criminal force'. Birley examined 222 witnesses. By this time, one of the accused, Narendranath Gossain had turned approver. The case was then shifted to the Alipore sessions court under C.P. Beachcroft, the District and Sessions Judge. He had been earlier Sri Aurobindo's class-mate at Cambridge and stood second to him in Greek.

It would be interesting to note the deaths that happened during this period:

- (a) On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1908, the same day when Sri Aurobindo was arrested, Prafulla Chaki was arrested at Wanai, but heroically ended his own life by pushing the revolver muzzle inside his own mouth and pulling the trigger.
- (b) Khudiram was arrested, tried at Muzzafarpur and hanged on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1908, becoming one of the youngest martyrs at the age of 18.
- (c) Nandalal Banerjee, who arrested Prafulla Chaki was killed and the killer was never discovered.
- (d) Public prosecutor Biswas, who assisted Eadley Norton, the counsel for the Crown, was shot dead on the stairs of the court by a youngster who was later hanged.
- (e) The most dramatic killing took place inside the Jail where the approver, Narendranath Gossain was killed by Kanailal Dutta and Satyendra Bose on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1908, knowing very well they would be hanged.

Eadley Norton, counsel for the Crown was one of the most eminent criminal lawyers of the time and had to be matched.

It is interesting to note how Sri Krishna Kumar Mitra, Sri Aurobindo's maternal uncle, editor of Sanjibani and himself a great educationist and patriot organized the defence against all odds (he gives a full account in his biographical notes). Byomkesh Chakraborty was a reputed lawyer who was known to be sympathetic towards the revolutionaries. He promised that he would not charge fees but needed Rs.11,000 for his junior barristers till the case reached the high court. In fact, he engaged his own son-in-law B.K.Lahiri among four other juniors to assist him. The money was paid but neither Byomkesh nor his juniors attended court.

Mitra then approached Ashutosh Biswas, a reputed lawyer of Alipore Court, who initially consented to help but was appointed public prosecutor to assist Norton and could not refuse the lucrative offer. He was subsequently assassinated in the court premises for betraying the revolutionaries.

Left with no money, Mitra engaged a court clerk, Nilkantababu to look after the case at the rate of Rs.20 per day till a lawyer was engaged. He ran errands very dutifully.

Narendranath Gossain, who turned approver, was previously Mitra's student and his father, Debendranath Goswami was known to him. They used to meet in the court and Mitra would discuss the case with him. But Narendranath turned an approver and his father stopped meeting Mitra.

Mitra realized that in absence of a good lawyer, the case was not progressing at the desired pace. On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1908, Mitra met his ex-student Dhannulal Agarwal and told him to find out whether somebody like Chittaranjan Das could take up the case with a sense of dedication though only Rs 6000 was left with Sarojini, Sri Aurobindo's sister who had collected funds through public appeal. Dhannulal immediately contacted Chittaranjan who agreed to take up the case with Rs 6000 but also expressed that any further money, when collected, should be handed over to him as fees (it is not on record whether he subsequently took more fees). Mitra agreed and handed over Rs 6000 on that very day to Das. The next day, the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, Mitra himself was arrested and on 10<sup>th</sup> December, was 'deported' to Agra Jail.

Chittaranjan gave a titan's labour. Over 206 witnesses were examined, over 4000 documents were filed, and 300 to 400 exhibits were displayed that included bombs, revolvers, explosive materials, ammunitions, detonators, fuses, poisonous acids.

Das's defence was spread over 8 days and became a classic. He pointed out that the accused did never dispute that he educated the masses with the concept of a independent, sovereign nation and it was futile to bring witnesses to prove such a self-confessed 'guilt'. Some hallmarks of the defence were:

(a) The accused never castigated European civilization but held that European civilization was culture-friendly to Europeans. Each nation must grow from and in its own cultural milieu.

(b) The accused objected to the British government not because it was autocratic or democratic but because the government had not sprung up from the indigenous population as part of an organism.

(c)The accused did not per se attack other nations in his writings but emphasized that Indians should fall back on their own resources, cease to be cowards, stand on their own and work on their own salvation. No foreigner can give salvation. India has to find its salvation from within and not without.

(d) The concept of salvation in the Indian context could not be divorced from spirituality. Hence the accused taught the people that the ideals of democracy and national Independence could be translated in terms of Vedantic self-awakening, self-discipline, self-realisation. The accused was a Vedantic nationalist, not a bomb throwing terrorist.

(e)The accused had extolled people to reject and disobey any unjust, oppressive law but at the same breath he had also told the dissenters to undergo and suffer the consequences of breaking that law and hence he could not be legally framed.

(f)The accused was ready to suffer the consequences for preaching the message of liberty but could not be charged with things he had not done.

The defence concluded:

**My appeal to you therefore is that a man like this who is being charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this : That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil , this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History.**

**The time has come for you, to consider you're your judgment and for you, gentlemen, to consider your verdict. I appeal to you, sir, in the name of all the traditions of the English Bench that forms the most glorious chapter of English history. I appeal to you in the name of all that is noble, of all the thousand principles of law which have emanated from the English Bench, and I appeal to you in the name of the distinguished Judges who have administered the law in such a manner as to compel not only obedience, but the respect of all those in whose cases they had administered the law. I appeal to you in the name of the glorious chapter of English history and let it not be said that an English Judge forgets to vindicate justice. To you gentlemen I appeal in the name of the very ideal that Aurobindo preached and in the name of all the traditions of our country; and let it not be said that two of his own countrymen were overcome by passions and prejudices and yielded to the clamour of the moment.**

Beachcroft accepted Chittaranjan Das's arguments that the speeches and writings of the accused seemed to advocate nothing more than regeneration of the country and were insufficient to show that he was part of a conspiracy of waging war against the Crown. He added that the only passage which could be construed as at all inflammatory was the



concluding sentence of one of his speeches-‘live for your swadeshi or die for your swadeshi’ which could be excused as a mere piece of hyperbole.

The assessors returned a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’ on 14.4.1909 and accepting it, Beachcroft acquitted Sri Aurobindo on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

Barindra and Ullaskar received death sentences which were later commuted into transportation for life. Some others were sent to rigorous imprisonment or transportation for life. Some were acquitted along with Sri Aurobindo. The administration debated whether an appeal against the judgment or deportation of Sri Aurobindo would be undertaken but refrained from any action lest he became a more glorified leader.

## **SECTION VI**

### **Uttarpara Speech & Sanatan Dharma**

After His release from prison, Sri Aurobindo delivered a very significant speech at Uttarpara on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1909 where about 10000 people gathered and heard His revelations in pin-drop silence. This speech contained the spiritual essence of His prison experiences which formed a trajectory of His future work. The notable points of His speech are :

1. He started by describing the Existential Crisis faced by the Nationalist movement. Actually, the British Government had taken stern steps to curb the Nationalist movement by imprisoning and deporting the important leaders. Nationalism had now to be worked out in a different perspective.
2. To develop a new agenda for His future work, Sri Aurobindo realized the necessity of acknowledging Supra-rational methods of acquiring knowledge. In fact one of the greatest contributions of yoga psychology was the discovery that since Sensory Perception and Reason had their limitations, they need to be supplemented by Supra-rational techniques like Intuition, Revelation etc. What was unique was that these Supra-rational faculties manifested spontaneously during his jail-sabbatical.
3. It was revealed to Him that He had been brought in the jail for the purpose of introspection and preparation for a greater work. He was infused with the strength to identify with the spirit of the Gita.
4. He had the realization that the Divine was wholly and simultaneously present in the Transcendent, Universal and Individual poises. This is the genesis of His famous Vasudev Darshan and Vasudev Realization in both the Jail and the Courtroom.
5. He had the realization that He was not seeking for “Liberation” or “Mukti” but for strength to uplift the Nation. This was very important as Sri Aurobindo

subsequently changed the password of Indian Spirituality from “Liberation” to “Transformation”.

6. He had the revelation of two specific messages – The first message was to uplift the Nation. The second message was the revelation of the Sanatan Dharma or Perennial Philosophy.
7. Sri Aurobindo actually experienced the spiritual basis underlying all religions. This is what he named as the Sanatan Dharma or Eternal Religion (Perennial Philosophy). It has to be understood in terms of an all-encompassing Consciousness where Science and Metaphysics culminate to be transcended.
8. The concept of Sanatan Dharma does not merely denote the universality of religious experience but the creative essence that permits Truth to be experienced through religiosity – hence it is eternal Vis-a Vis the temporality of religions manifesting within the constraints of Space and Time.
9. The concept of Sanatan Dharma changes the perspective of Nationalism from a localized orientation to a Spiritual Universalism. Without sacrificing its uniqueness each Nation can contribute to the spirit of Internationalism.
10. India’s own unique contribution to Internationalism was to be the spiritual harbinger of the whole world. If India lost this opportunity then the entire world would suffer.