

CHAPTER - I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

C H A P T E R - I

INTRODUCTION

As a man of Twentieth century Shri Aurobindo Ghosh, was one of the most profound prophets of a spiritually unified and politically redeemed humanity. His life infact talks of political as well as the spiritual dimension of human life whereby he feels that the metaphysical and cosmic understanding is interrelated to the socio-political existence of humanity. Hence Shri.Aurobindo Ghosh's work and contribution is characterised by total resurgence of India and total tranformation of man. He lived his life as a political revolutionary of Bengal from 1905-1910 and was a mystical yogi of Pondicherry from 1910-1950. Shri Aurobindo's thought seems to be a combination of politics and yoga, a combination of Western and Indian values. He was the most creative and significant figure in the Indian renaissance movement as a militant nationalist and a great yogi - contributing to political as well as philosophical ideas. His political ideas can be visualised under the

following heads. Individual and community, state and Individual, Law and Liberty, Theory of Passive Resistance, Nationalism, World Government and War and peace.

Shri Aurobindo's ideas on Passive Resistance needs to be concentrated upon, this is so as, the ideas which sought to define a separate identity of India began with the war of independence, got a fresh impetus in the thought and writings of Dayananda and Vivekanand. The ideas received a further fillip by the nationalist upsurge in Italy, Germany and Japan; This was followed by romanticism and organicism of the ideas of Bakimchandra, Vivekanand and Bipin Chandra Pal, Balgangadhar Tilak and Bakimchandra's writings inspired people to nationalist ideology. The political thought of Sri. Aurobindo was the culmination of the process, his philosophy and political ideas was a synthesis of different strands in modern thought.

In fact the failure of constitutional agitation for the revoking of the partition of Bengal (1905) led to serious thinking on possibilities of resorting to direct action to achieve the purpose. Sri Aurobindo got actively involved in the Indian National struggle for freedom from British Imperialism and particularly his writings through

the daily 'Bande Matram' under the general title of 'New Thought' from April 11 to April 23, 1907 he put forth his doctrine of Passive Resistance as the method of agitation of achieve freedom from British Imperialism. It was these ideas of Passive Resistance that later on were developed and enriched by Tilak ad Gandhi for national liberation as well as to establish a democratic state. This points out the vitality and need to study the doctrine of Passive Resistance as put forth by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh. The methodology of this study would be basically Historical, while most of the data would be collected from the Library,literature. This requires us to examine how his personal history contributed to his search of political ideas particularly the doctrine of Passive Resistance.

Sri.Aurobindo Ghosh was born on 15th August 1872. His father Dr.Krishnavardhan, was very much influenced and committed to the western values. This was due to the fact that Dr.Krishnavardhan completed his medical education at England. On his return to India he was asked to purify himself by his orthodox community which he refused. In fact he left the village and decided to send his children to western schools.Aurobindo was sent to England at the age of seven, far from being influenced by Indian culture.

Aurobindo proved to be an outstanding student studying Shakespeare, Keats, Bible etc. After completing his education at Loreto University he joined St. Paul's school to study Greek and Latin. His brilliant and extraordinary talent, led him secure a senior classical scholarship at King's college, Cambridge. He won all the prizes for Greek and Latin verse. During his college life he also studied English, French literature, Italian and German languages, besides a thorough study of European history. In brief, Sri. Aurobindo devoted an important part of life in studying culture history and western languages.

In the opinion of Jawaharlal Nehru, "... a man who spent his life, from the age seven to twenty one in England and who was associated with England and the European nobility was dominating promoter of Indian nationalism which was based on Indian philosophy and spiritual thought... is very important." This points out that although Sri. Aurobindo was influenced by western culture, yet the western impact was not enough to keep him away from his love towards his motherland, which he inherited from his mother. He studied 'Vedanta' and 'Upanishad' due to the influence of his grandfather Rishi Narayan Bose who was then a popular leader of Brahma Samaj.

Although Sri.Aurobindo's father was influenced by the western culture, he never disowned his nation. In fact he was informed of British imperialism and the exploitation of India and their cruel administration regularly by sending him the 'Bengali' newspaper cuttings. It was through his father's communication that Aurobindo was getting his lessons of nationalism and Indian circumstances.

Aurobindo's thought on nationalism got the initial inspiration from Irish home rule movement, besides being influenced by Mazzini and Garibaldi. The ideas of Parnell also had an impact on his mind. As a President of Indian Majalis (the name of a student federation) in Cambridge he gave thought towards his nation. At seminars and discussions he outrightly put forth his views against the English and the exploitation, He also disapproved and was dissatisfied with the congress's non-aggressive policy. Aurobindo was actively involved in the revolutionary organisation named 'Lotar' and 'Dager' this was the first attempt of revolt by the Indian people living in England, taking an oath to make fullfledged efforts to free India from the clutches of the British rule. Although the organisation could not do much towards its goal, Aurobindo was definately being influenced and inspird to fight for his nation.

After returning to India in 1893 which he did so due to his affection towards his motherland India, its culture and life style. From 1893 to 1906 he was in service to Maharaja of Baroda, Raje Sayajirao Gaikwad. He was at first in the Revenue Department, then he joined the Baroda College as a lecturer of French. Further he became the Professor and Vice-Principal of the same college. While he was in service of the Baroda state he also studied Indian philosophy, culture, religion besides Sanskrit. In 1906 he left Baroda and joined the National college at Calcutta as a Principal.

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the Indian freedom struggle as a political revolutionary infact began since 1893 while he was at Baroda. It was since then Sri Aurobindo became one of the most popular leaders of the Indian nationalist movement. In the begining he wrote on politics anonymously as he was in the service of the Baroda state, He wrote articals in the daily newspaper 'Indu Prakash' published from Pune. He was rather critical about Indian National Congress's ploicy towards the British rule, which he put forth through his writings titled - 'New lamps for old' which appeared in 1893. He continued his attack on the policies and programs of the Indian National Congress through a series of articals in

Induprakash, and through out, right upto 1910 when he ended his political career he did not change his attitude and tone towards congress. His criticism would be dealt in a later chapter in detail. Here it would be suffice to say that his thought put forth through his writings created a sensational atmosphere and a innovation amongst the youth of India who lived in darkeness and ignorance for almost two decades. The articles written by Sri.Aruobindo in 'Induprakash' were considered to be 'explosives' due to which the publishers were afraid of shutting down the pres.. Aurobindo was asked to use a softer language, which he heavy heartedly accepted and stopped after writing 11 articles. Further he wrote seven articles on Bankim Chandra - anonymously published through 'Induprakash'. These articles mainly concentrate upon the analysis and review of congress policy, criticism on British rulers and about a constructive programme of political movement.

Sri.Aurobindo was not satisfied by just writing articles, he infact intended to actively participate in Indain politics. He visited Bengal to find out how he could make the struggle against Britishers a well organised attempt, but soon he returned to Baroda and joined the service as he was saddened to see the people of Bengal not yet ripe enough to his plans. From Baroda, he established

secret organisation to inspire people towards 'Nationalism', keeping before them the ideal of 'Freedom'. He also had a programme of tracing the youth in 'armed revolution' - which was a long term programme of 30 years - to which Aurobindo was closely associated. He made efforts to bring in coordination between Bengal and Maharashtra's revolutionary groups by keeping in contact with Tilak. He personally visited villages at Bengal, where rigorous training to youth in 'armed rebellion' was executed under his directions. He even intended establishing a 'Bhavani Mandir' where he planned to educate people about spiritualism and revolution. Thus his activities point out towards the fact that he chose the path of 'armed revolution'. But this was short lived as; after Sri Aurobindo joined into active politics he started realising that there were other useful and influential methods of revolution.

Congress was still in the hands of the Moderates, and Aurobindo was constantly making efforts to convince the Congress to accept 'Total Freedom' as the only ideal of our struggle. Slowly the extremists were growing strong, as they made the Congress accept 'Swarajya' (Self rule), National Education, Swadeshi and Boycott as the four point programme. Aurobindo continued writing through Barenders

Publications. Later he wrote articles for 'Bande Mataram' a English weekly - while he worked as English Lecturer at Bengal National college. The articles written in 'Bande Mataram' were infact explosives instigating nationalist feeling among people. The British government raised objections to Aurobindo's writings, but it could not prove that they were written by Sri Aurobindo and hence the case was taken back.

In 1907 the leader of the extremist was Sri Aurobindo. The extremist under his leadership vowed to sacrifice their lives and everything for total freedom and would continue till they achieved the goal. After this his leadership impressed not only the youth of Bengal but the whole country itself as he toured to different parts of India and delivered speeches inspiring the youth.

The British Government tried to take the advantage of the division within the congress pertaining to the means to achieve the end. It infact tried to conduct a trail on the extremist. The bomb factory located at Naniktala was traced out and Aurobindo as well as Barinder were arrested. The famous case is well known popularly as the 'Alipur Case'. The case was pleaded by Barr.Chittaranjan Dās for Sri. Aurobindo. Barr.Das very

intelligently fought the case and finally Sri.Aurobindo was released. The glowing tribute paid by C.R.Das is noteworthy. He said, "My appeal to you is this, that long after this turmoil and agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism as the prophet of nationalism and the saviour of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed, not only in India, but across distant seas and countries. Therefore, I say that the man in his position is not standing before the bar of this court but before the bar of the High Court of History."(1)

During the period of his jail sentence, Sri. Aurobindo seemed to be a calm person and the prison life life changed Sri.Aurobindo's life itself. Amongst politics and spiritualism, the latter seemed to dominate the mind of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual experience reached the peak. By the time he was out of jail, the extremist activities had declined due to the suppression from the Britishers. It was then that Sri.Aurobindo wrote on 'Karmayogi' in English and 'Dharma' in Bengali weekly. This continued for about ten months after which he retired himself from active politics. But then, it was during these after prison days that Sri.Aurobindo made important contribution to Indian cultural importance, Nationalism

and spritual way of life.

It was then that he put forth his ideas relating to the methods and means to achieve the end. He talked of self-development, peaceful passive Resistance non-cooperation, Swadeshi and effective boycott.

Sri Aurobindo, hence was a radical, right since his youth. His political writings, particularly the famous article 'New lamps for old' written in 1893, upto 1907 when he put forth his famous doctrine of 'Passive Resistance' and all his writings in 'Bande Matram' remain an ample testimony to his radicalist being. Involved deeply in the Indian Liberalism, he criticised not only the policy of mendicancy but also their emphasis on individualism, materialism and liberal democracy. He provided remarkable leadership along with Bipin Chandra Pal and Tilak against the partition of Bengal, and as pointed out earlier that if the 1905 - partition of Bengal agitation led Aurobindo to the serious thinking on the possibilities of resorting to direct action. The consequence of such effort was the doctrine of Passive Resistance which according to Aurobindo was most suitable under the then given circumstances of India to achieve complete swaraj as a neccessary condition of India's development. Thus the doctrine of Passive

Resistance as put forth by Aurobindo needs a detailed study and analysis as essentially Tilaks ideas were similar to those of Sri. Aurobindo pointing out the impact of Aurobindo's thought on other contemporaries.

Finally, Sri Aurobindo retired from active politics after 10 month of his release from the jail of the Alipore case. Even in Pondicherry, although he was far from politics, yet he was aware of the national and international developments and problems. Thus although Sri Aurobindo contributed very less time through active participation in politics as well as through his writings. Yet one cannot deny the importance of his contribution particularly the doctrine of Passive Resistance, a conception which was far removed from the 'Satyagraha' as conceptualised by Gandhi. The Chapter following would thus attempt to study the doctrine of Passive Resistance as put forth by Sri.Aurobindo.

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