



## NAVIGATING DIVERSITY: SRI AUROBINDO'S FEDERAL MODEL FOR INDIAN GOVERNANCE AND NATIONAL UNITY

**Dr. Neeraj Kumar**

PGT History, Kendriya Vidyalaya, NTPC, Badarpur, New Delhi

**Cite This Article:** Dr. Neeraj Kumar, "Navigating Diversity: Sri Aurobindo's Federal Model for Indian Governance and National Unity", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education*, Volume 10, Issue 2, July - December, Page Number 69-71, 2024.

**Copy Right:** © R&D Modern Research Publication, 2024 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

### **Abstract:**

This paper critically examines Sri Aurobindo's contributions to Indian nationalism, focusing on his ideas of national reconstruction, which were deeply rooted in spiritual, cultural, and political thought. Sri Aurobindo's political philosophy developed during a time of significant anti-colonial activity, particularly the Swadeshi and anti-partition movements. His distinctive nationalist ideology emphasized complete independence (Swaraj) as a multidimensional goal that encompassed political, spiritual, and social freedoms. Furthermore, his thoughts on passive resistance, armed struggle, Hindu-Muslim unity, and Sanatana Dharma influenced the broader national movement. This paper explores how Sri Aurobindo's conception of nationalism and resistance compares with contemporaries like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Mahatma Gandhi, and evaluates its relevance in the context of India's struggle for independence from 1885 to 1947.

### **Introduction:**

The Indian freedom movement, a complex confluence of ideologies and strategies, witnessed the contributions of various leaders who redefined nationalism and resistance. Among them, Sri Aurobindo stands out not only as a political figure but also as a philosopher whose nationalist ideology evolved into a vision for the spiritual and cultural reconstruction of India.<sup>1</sup> His ideas on Swaraj (self-rule), passive resistance, and Indian unity were shaped by his engagement with the anti-partition movement and the broader Swadeshi movement that gained momentum in the early 20th century. Unlike other leaders, Sri Aurobindo's nationalism was rooted in the revival of India's ancient spiritual ethos, which he believed was essential for the nation's political emancipation. Sri Aurobindo's entry into the nationalist movement came at a time when leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were already shaping the direction of the struggle against British colonialism.<sup>2</sup> While there were differences in their political ideologies, these leaders shared a common goal—complete independence for India. Sri Aurobindo's ideas went beyond mere political freedom; for him, Swaraj was an expression of divine will, encompassing spiritual, social, and political liberation.<sup>3</sup> His philosophy reflected a broader vision for India's future, rooted in the principles of Vedanta and the concept of Sanatana Dharma (eternal religion), which he saw as a unifying force for all religions and communities in India. This paper aims to critically assess Sri Aurobindo's contributions to Indian nationalism, focusing on his unique interpretation of Swaraj, his stance on passive and armed resistance, and his efforts to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. Additionally, the paper will explore how his nationalist philosophy, infused with spiritual and philosophical elements, differed from other contemporary leaders like Tilak and Gandhi.<sup>4</sup> Through this exploration, we seek to understand the enduring impact of Sri Aurobindo's ideas on India's struggle for independence.

### **Review of Research:**

Sri Aurobindo's contributions to Indian nationalism have been extensively studied by scholars, yet his unique blend of political, spiritual, and philosophical thought often positions him as an outlier compared to other nationalist leaders.<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Peter Heehs have highlighted how Aurobindo's early political activism, particularly during the Swadeshi movement (1905-1910), laid the foundation for his broader philosophical explorations. His writings in *Bande Mataram*, particularly his essays on passive resistance, played a crucial role in articulating a more radical form of nationalism that emphasized complete independence (Swaraj) from British rule.<sup>6</sup>

One of Sri Aurobindo's distinctive contributions to the nationalist discourse was his clear articulation of the need for complete political independence, a notion that was not universally accepted at the time.<sup>7</sup> The moderate faction of the Indian National Congress, led by leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, advocated for dominion status under British rule. In contrast, Aurobindo, along with other extremists like Tilak, demanded absolute freedom. Aurobindo's interpretation of Swaraj extended beyond political autonomy to include spiritual and individual liberation, which he believed was essential for true national reconstruction.

Scholars have also examined Sri Aurobindo's views on resistance, comparing his stance with that of Mahatma Gandhi. While both leaders advocated passive resistance, Aurobindo's approach was more pragmatic. He saw passive resistance as a strategic tool, not an ideological commitment. Unlike Gandhi, who viewed non-violence (Ahimsa) as a fundamental principle, Aurobindo believed that armed struggle could be justified if passive resistance failed to achieve its goals.<sup>8</sup> This pragmatic view of resistance distinguished him from Gandhi and placed him closer to leaders like Tilak, who also saw passive resistance as a means to an end. In terms of religious and communal harmony, Sri Aurobindo's views on Hindu-Muslim unity were progressive for his time. He recognized the divisive potential of communal politics, particularly in the wake of the Morley-Minto reforms and the emergence of the Muslim League.<sup>9</sup> Aurobindo believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was crucial for India's independence and argued for a deeper mutual understanding between the two communities. His vision of nationalism, rooted in Sanatana Dharma, sought to transcend religious differences and unite all Indians under a common spiritual and cultural heritage.

Sri Aurobindo's vision for India was deeply rooted in universalism, emphasizing a Vedantic civilization where science and politics would lead humanity to higher levels of self-expression.<sup>10</sup> He believed India should uphold the ideals of universalism in religion, politics, science, and literature, aspiring to a future beyond democracy towards a spiritually conscious society. He articulated a "triple message" for India: the physical (material basis of existence), the spiritual (oneness of all souls and the law of

love), and the moral (self-sacrifice for a higher good).<sup>11</sup> Aurobindo's ultimate goal was to create a society where individuals transcended their egos, discovering their larger self in the nation, humanity, and God, all through the principles of Vedanta. After withdrawing from active nationalist politics, he focused on yoga and spiritual development. His vision included reinterpreting Sanatana Dharma, preparing for a perfect humanity, restoring India's global role, and reshaping society to accommodate spiritual progress.<sup>12</sup> He emphasized that political action, as traditionally understood, was secondary to spiritual preparation and self-training to bring about a "new birth of humanity." His form of nationalism was spiritually charged, viewing India's freedom as essential for humanity's spiritual evolution. Though not directly involved in politics, Aurobindo influenced nationalist movements, advocating self-help, passive resistance, and a reconstituted Congress as practical means of action. He inspired later leaders like Gandhi, contributing to the broader nationalist movement and laying the groundwork for India's quest for independence.<sup>13</sup>

Aurobindo's vision for India's post-independence reconstruction included spiritual education, unity over division, individual freedom alongside collective responsibility, and an economy built on indigenous principles. His ideas on nationalism, spiritual upliftment, and societal reconstruction contributed to the ideological foundation of India's nation-building efforts.<sup>14</sup> Sri Aurobindo envisioned an ideal form of government for India as a federal structure that integrated linguistic provinces under a powerful Rashtrapati and a representative assembly. He advocated for decentralized governance, emphasizing the importance of local bodies, particularly autonomous rural organizations. Aurobindo opposed Western-style parliamentary democracy, proposing a political system rooted in India's diverse traditions and contemporary needs.<sup>15</sup> His approach aimed for a decentralized social democracy, aware that a modern political structure should evolve from the past rather than simply replicate it. Aurobindo emphasized education as a transformative force for India, proposing a blend of Western models and revived ancient traditions suited to contemporary issues. He believed in the importance of political education for the masses to achieve swaraj (self-rule), insisting that true national unity could only emerge when all citizens felt connected to their nation.<sup>16</sup>

He introduced the concept of the "nation soul," advocating for a national identity that transcended egoism and emphasized collective consciousness.<sup>17</sup> Aurobindo believed that a nation's strength lay in the awakening of its people and their active participation in national life. He stressed the importance of inclusivity, urging the involvement of politically marginalized groups to build a unified nation. Aurobindo's vision extended to economic regeneration through indigenous industry and commerce, supporting cooperative farming and local empowerment as vital to national development.<sup>18</sup> He underscored that India's freedom must benefit all classes and communities, promoting harmony among diverse groups. In terms of spirituality, Aurobindo envisioned a society that prioritized spiritual growth and collective well-being over materialism.<sup>19</sup> He argued for a synthesis of religious aspiration and scientific inquiry, advocating for a spiritualized society that fosters ethical values and unity. Aurobindo's idea of nationalism was interwoven with a broader vision of human unity, transcending narrow chauvinism and emphasizing the interconnectedness of all humanity.

His ultimate goal was the realization of a spiritualized society, where individuals and the nation recognize their collective existence and purpose.<sup>20</sup> Aurobindo's integral philosophy sought to unite diverse cultural and spiritual traditions, advocating for a harmonious coexistence that could lead to national and global unity. He believed that spiritual awakening is essential for true national greatness, envisioning a future where liberty, equality, and brotherhood are realized through deeper connections among all people.

Sri Aurobindo's nationalism, while deeply embedded in the political realities of his time, was distinct in its emphasis on the spiritual and cultural revival of India. His contributions to the nationalist movement can be summarized under the following key themes:

- **Swaraj as Complete Independence:** Aurobindo was the first Indian leader to articulate Swaraj as complete independence from British rule. For him, Swaraj was not limited to political freedom but encompassed social, spiritual, and individual liberation. This holistic vision of independence set him apart from other leaders who viewed Swaraj primarily in political terms.
- **Passive Resistance as a Strategy:** Unlike Gandhi, who viewed non-violence as a moral principle, Aurobindo saw passive resistance as a pragmatic strategy. He believed that if passive resistance failed, armed struggle could be a legitimate means of achieving independence. This approach reflected his belief in the necessity of strength-physical, mental, and spiritual-in the struggle for freedom.
- **Hindu-Muslim Unity:** Aurobindo's emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity was a crucial aspect of his nationalist philosophy. He rejected the communal politics of both the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha, advocating for a unified national identity that transcended religious divisions. His concept of Sanatana Dharma, which included all religions, was a reflection of his inclusive vision of Indian nationalism.
- **Spiritual Foundations of Nationalism:** Aurobindo's nationalism was deeply influenced by his spiritual philosophy. He believed that India's independence was not just a political necessity but a divine mission. His writings often invoked the imagery of India as a mother goddess, and he saw the nationalist movement as part of a larger spiritual awakening that would benefit not only India but all of humanity.

## **Conclusion:**

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to Indian nationalism remains unique in its integration of political, spiritual, and cultural elements. His vision of Swaraj as complete independence, his pragmatic approach to passive resistance, and his advocacy for Hindu-Muslim unity were all critical components of his nationalist ideology. While his views on armed resistance and the use of force diverged from Gandhi's commitment to non-violence, Aurobindo's emphasis on the spiritual and moral dimensions of the freedom struggle offered a broader framework for understanding the meaning of Swaraj. His vision for India's future extended beyond independence, aiming for a national and global awakening that would lead humanity towards higher consciousness and unity. Sri Aurobindo's nationalist philosophy, grounded in Vedanta and Sanatana Dharma, provided a unique perspective within

the broader Indian freedom movement. His ideas continue to resonate as a vision of not only political freedom but also spiritual and cultural renewal.

**References:**

1. Sunera Kapoor , Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, N. Del., Deep & Deep Publication, 1991 , p. 126
2. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, Bipin Chandra Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj Cal. 1958 , p. 49, 75
3. Amalendu De , Sri Aurobindo O Bharater Jatiyatabadi Biplabi Andolan (1876-1947), Cal., Raktakarabi,2005, p.16,
4. Peter Heehs , Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo , Del., Oxford University Press, 1998, Introduction , p.XIV
5. Swarnamala Das, Sri Aurobindo A Political Thinker, Del, Ajanta Publications ,1993,p.175
6. Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkarand Bob Zwicker (comp. & ed) Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, Pond., Sri Aurobindo Ashram pp.17
7. SABL Vol -1 ,Pond., Sri Aurobindo Ashram , 1972 , p. 61-5
8. Amartya Sen ,On Interpreting India's Past in Nationalism , Democracy and development eds. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal , Del. , Oxford University Press , 1997, p.20
9. Peter Heehs, Nationalism Religion and Beyond,Writings on Politics , Society and Culture, Del., p.180
10. SABL Vol-2, Pond., Sri Aurobindo Ashram , 1972 , p.19
11. Complete Works (CW) Vol-13 , Pond., Sri Aurobindo Ashram , p.102
12. SABL Vol-2, op cit.,p. 29-30
13. CW Vol-13,op cit., p.509
14. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, Sri Aurobindo and New Thought In Indian Politics, Cal, Firma K. L. Mukhapadhyay,1964, p. xxxii
15. Karan Singh, Prophet of Indian Nationalism , Bomb., Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963 , p.87
16. CW Vol-13, op cit ., p. 511
17. Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkarand Bob Zwicker comp. & ed .,Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, op cit ., p.17
18. Mital Dr. Shiv Kumar, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Thought to Political Thought, Metropolitan Book Co., 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1981, N.Del., pp.249-50
19. G.P. Gupta, Designing A New Social Order, Pond.,Sri Aurobindo Institutes of Research In Social Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Society, 2000 p.10
20. CW Vol 13,op cit ., p.146