



# Sri Aurobindo: Reviewing His Political Journey From Revolutionary Activism To Thought Of Passive Resistance

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## ABSTRACT

Aurobindo Ghosh was a Yogi, a freedom fighter, a master educator, a deep and creative thinker. He started off as a political thinker before turning into a spiritual integralist. Shri Aurobindo also played a major role in enacting reforms so that the following generation might benefit from his educational concepts and procedures. I talked about his involvement as a politician, his method of passive resistance and relevance of his thought in Indian political scenario, in this paper.

**Keywords:** - Eternal spirit, spiritual integralist, Politics to Spiritualism, passive resistance

## Introduction

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was a famous Indian patriot, a great leader, a philosopher, a yogi, and an educator. He became a member of the Indian national movement, which sought to end British rule over the nation. He developed his own idea of human progress and spiritual growth. The central focus of Aurobindo's writings is the conversion of human existence into divine life. V.P. Verma in his book "Modern Indian Political Thought" said that "Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was one of the major figures in the history of the Indian Renaissance and Indian nationalism" [1]. Shri Aurobindo went to Cambridge University to obtain specialized studies. His birthplace was Kolkata. He had studied human and social evolution. He was an idealistic person who patterned his life on the Vedas and Upanishads [2]. He was deeply influenced by spiritual nationalism of Bankimchandra and Swami Vivekananda.

Aurobindo Akroyd Ghosh was his given name at birth. His parents wish to raise him in a European manner. In this context M.P. Pandit said "Dr Ghosh was a great admirer of Western Values, in fact an Anglophile who had turned his back on all that stood for Indian tradition' Thus, they registered him at Darjeeling's Loreto Convent School [3]. He was moved to England to finish his education when he was seven years old. He received his education at Cambridge's King's College. In addition, he had studied a number of foreign languages, including Spanish, Latin, French, Italian, German, and Greek. He returned to India in 1892 [4]. The Indian Civil Service exam was cleared by him. However, he chose not to join since he does not want to work for the British Government. However, he agreed to join the Baroda state service in 1893. After 13 years of service, he became the principal of Baroda State College. He read the Vedas, the Upanishads, the epics, Marathi, Gujarati, and Bengali, his native tongue, and he even learnt Sanskrit. He wed Mrinalini Basu in 1901. He led the group of nationalists during Bengal's partition (1905-1912). He then rose to the position of editor of "Bande Mataram", a Bengali nationalist journal. After being imprisoned in 1908, he left British India two years later and sought safety in the French Colony of Pondicherry (Puducherry). He spent the remaining of his life working on the creation of "integral yoga" there. His goal was to change life on Earth on a spiritual level [5].

Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo

In 1893 he returned to his motherland with above contact of European Nationalism. He had sympathy for the independence war of Italy and United Nations, the Home rule movement of Ireland and the Sinn Fein movement. He was the first one to follow Sinn Fein system in the Liberation struggle of India. From the very beginning he disliked the activities of the National Congress. He considered them as *Political Mendicancy or un-national congress*. In his opinion, "--- a body like the Congress, which represent not the mass of the population, but a single and very limited class, could not honestly be called national". The countrymen lacked

emotion and enthusiasm for the Swadeshi and Boycott movement which in turn faded the motivation of Aurobindo gradually. This is how his political life ended. In 1914 he published a magazine name *Arjya*. Some of his famous books are *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Life Divine*, *The synthesis of Yoga*. In the *Bande mataram* news paper he says, "Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realization of the Divine Unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however varies and apparently unequal their function as political, social or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal. In the ideal of Nationalism which India will set before the world, there will be an essential equality between man and man, between caste and caste, between class and class..."

### **The association of Aurobindo with the revolutionary movement**

Aurobindo holds a significant position in the history of Indian political philosophy as a forerunner of Indian nationalism [6]. The early Aurobindo is remembered as a fierce, combative, and unyielding revolutionary spirit who had staked his claim to the greater good of India and her people. Aurobindo never openly supported revolutionary action during his political career for apparent reasons. However, some quotes from his works from that era demonstrate that he was not opposed to using force to further political objectives. "The work done by revolutionaries in France in 'five short years' had more lasting effects on 'the political and social exterior' of 'that fortunate country' than seven centuries of parliamentary development in England," he wrote in a September 1893 article in a Bombay newspaper [7]. Before he was appointed as the editor of "*Bande Mataram*" in 1906, he published nothing else about Indian politics, and the series of articles in which he made this statement, were hidden. He published his well-known series of articles on "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance" in this journal. He made it apparent in the third volume of the series that he did not always believe that using aggressive methods was immoral. "The circumstances of its servitude best determine the means by which a subject nation will exercise its right to liberty," he stated. Passive resistance appears to be our most appropriate and natural weapon in the current Indian situation. We would never be persuaded to draw this judgement on any criticism of alternative approaches, which are always unlawful and unethical [8]. In a message from the 1940s that was included posthumously in the anthology *On Himself*, Aurobindo further clarified his position on this matter. Aurobindo emphasized that he had always held the view "that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence" in response to a suggestion that he had been a forerunner of Gandhi in the area of non-violence. The choice to employ violent methods or refrain from using them was made out of convenience rather than morality. Aurobindo stated that there were "three sides to his political ideas and activities" in the same note from the 1940s [9]. A secret revolutionary propaganda and organization of which the major purpose was the planning of an armed revolt' was the first in importance and sequence.

'A public propaganda meant to convert the whole nation to the idea of independence' and 'the organization of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and weakening of the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance' were the second and third aspects [10]. Aurobindo only expressed the first of these three 'sides' between 1900 and 1906. Although he didn't talk much about his relationship to the revolutionary organization that emerged during these years in his later years, he did confirm that he started and assisted in maintaining a "revolutionary movement" in two interviews from 1918 and 1926 as well as in private letters from the 1930s and 1940s [11]. The following is the most direct of these affirmations: "I have engaged in politics, including ghoram karma, the bloodiest form of revolutionary politics." The term 'revolutionary movement' is unfortunately a bit vague [12]. His personal goal was to get ready for a militant insurrection that would be bolstered by "outside [i.e., foreign] help" and involve "guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt". [13] But in reality, throughout the period, he was involved with them, the groups he helped to form only engaged in small-scale terrorism rather than guerrilla warfare.

### **Aurobindo as a politician and a revolutionary**

Among the three political 'sides' of Aurobindo, he focused solely on the first aspect from 1900 until 1906 [14]. However, after moving to Bengal in August of that year, he focused most of his efforts on the second and third. The main cause of this shift in strategy was Bengal's altered environment following the division in 1905. Aurobindo observed fervent involvement in the anti-partition campaign, whereas previously he had encountered "apathy and despair" everywhere he looked: "men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope" [15]. Even the Indian National Congress, which Aurobindo had consistently disregarded as a do-nothing organization, had been energized by the partition problem. The idea, that it would now be useful to strive to organize individuals of advanced thinking into a party that could eventually take control of the Congress 'and make it an instrument for revolutionary action' was proved by the boycott resolution voted at the Benares Congress (December 1905) [16]. The *Bande Mataram* journal served as the medium for Aurobindo's public campaign. As the organ of the as-yet-unnamed party that would soon be known as the Extremists, Bipin Chandra Pal and others founded this. Shortly after *Bande Mataram* was established on August 6, 1906, Aurobindo started writing for it. He constructed what some have referred to as his "political philosophy" in its columns, a collection of concepts that he viewed as a practical agenda rather than a philosophy. A boycott of British goods (to be used as a political weapon), the use of indigenous products, swaraj, or total independence (not colonial self-government on the Australian or Canadian model), and national education were its four key objectives [17]. Two other aspects of the concept that were addressed less

frequently were "the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt" and using panchayat-style arbitration to sidestep British courts [18]. Needless to say, Aurobindo did not openly support revolution or discuss the role he envisioned for the volunteers. His later statement that he joined *Bande Mataram* because "he saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose" made his own priorities obvious [19]. Aurobindo started to establish himself as one of the main leaders of the Extremist party in October and November of 1906 after taking over as controlling editor of *Bande Mataram*. Since then, he has been too busy to actively participate in the activities of the revolutionary societies, which at the same time started to arm themselves and plot terrorist attacks. However, as we've shown, Aurobindo did discuss the terrorist organization's operations with his brother Barin in the year and a half before his arrest in May 1908. So, all three 'sides' of his political revolutionary life were concurrently functioning during this time. Aurobindo wrote about terrorism in unfavourable terms following his acquittal from the Alipore Bomb Trial in 1909: Regardless of who is to blame—us or the government—the presence of an organized party or an armed revolution in Indian politics is now acknowledged as a contributing element. There has been a massive breakdown, and we are in awe of the remains of the work that our sacrifice and labor have built. And on those ruins, grim, wild-eyed, and ruthless towards itself and others, Revolution emerges, repeating the language of the old-world insurgents, holding onto the weapons that the Slav and the Celt [i.e., the Russians and the Irish] have brought into political warfare, and cherishing a desperate hope that modern conditions deny [20].

This passage's categorical denunciation of terrorism need not be interpreted literally. It was composed following the assassination of CID inspector Shamsul Alam, whose accomplice informed Aurobindo of its success the night of the incident [21]. Clearly, Aurobindo was not yet at the stage where he felt compelled to 'check' terrorism. However, he appears to have been more conscious of the fact that 'modern conditions'—such as improvements in weapons—were rendering terrorism an unfeasible alternative. "[Mazzini's] plan of a series of petty, local, and necessarily abortive insurrections strikes the ordinary practical man as the very negation of common sense and political wisdom," he had stated a few months prior in relation to the Italian national movement. It appears, he continued, "almost as futile as the idea of some wild brains... that the freedom of this country can be vindicated by random assassinations." It would seem that Aurobindo's resolutely ambivalent stance on terrorism at this point was equally split between denunciation and acceptance. Condemnation prevailed as he departed Bengal. He declared that terrorism was "our only enemy" in a 1911 letter to a friend who was a Tamil nationalist. He also mocked "these childish conspiracies, these idiotic schemes for facing a modern army with half a dozen guns and some hundred lathis." Aurobindo was in touch with active terrorists like Motilal Roy after leaving politics, and for a few years he made no effort to stop them. However, there was a noticeable shift in his attitude. In his diary, Aurobindo frequently expressed sympathy for the injured Viceroy after Motilal-affiliated terrorists nearly killed Lord Hardinge in 1912. "I call a halt," Aurobindo finally wrote to Motilal in 1914. Naturally, it was too late, and Bengali terrorism continued to accomplish its goals in places like Chittagong and Midnapore.

### **Aurobindo's connection with the passive resistance**

Aurobindo Ghosh was the first to methodically establish the concept of resistance method, which is known as "Passive Resistance." He expanded on the concepts presented by Gokhale. He clarified that the fight for independence is a heroic endeavor and that moral bravery, selflessness, and perseverance are necessary for its success. No heroic deeds for the country can be carried out without the spirit of unselfish action. The foundation of Aurobindo's notion of passive resistance is "Karma-Yoga." Aurobindo shared Vivekananda's belief that 'Karma Yoga' constituted the core of the Vedanta philosophy. He went on to say that serving God means serving Mother India, and that service had to be done with selflessness. Individual salvation is national salvation; God's work is national work. He argued that politics and religion are the same. We must engage in political resistance in order to free Mother India, also known as Bhawani Bharati, and God created political resistance to foreign rule. Ghosh therefore made an effort to reorient the conventional Vedanta, making it more grounded and connecting it to the activities of the national liberation movement and everyday life" [22]. Parnell's theories and the strategies of the Irish home-rule movement impacted Ghosh's theory of political resistance.

According to him, three factors were necessary for the successful completion of passive resistance with its various phases, such as disobedience, the no-tax-pay movement, and aggressive resistance: the people's strong resolve and willingness to oppose the government; the need for a single national political party to lead and guide the movement; and the concurrent pursuit of the Swadeshi, national education, and boycott programs [23]. This does not imply that he was completely against armed insurrection; rather, he believed that the only viable course of action was a boycott carried out peacefully and through a broad national movement.

Aurobindo was in favour of changing the authority, whilst Gokhale was against it. This was the primary divide between the two men. The effectiveness of political opposition is determined by the people's ability to alter the national will in their daily lives. Aurobindo believed that as the passive resistance movement grew, so would the people's political ambitions, and he did not want it to be stopped. following Aurobindo's exit from politics in 1910. Returning to the stage, Tilak expanded on Aurobindo's passive resistance theory. He based his home rule movement at that point on Aurobindo's passive resistance doctrine. He thought, "The only

progress that has to be made in the preparation for liberty is progress in the awakening of national spirit and the creation of the will to be free and the will to adopt the necessary means and bear the necessary sacrifices for liberty" [24] Gandhi introduced his idea of 'Satyagraha' and expanded on Aurobindo Ghosh's doctrine of passive resistance. Tilak and Gandhi in particular developed and enhanced the theory of political disobedience by connecting the philosophy of Karma-Yoga, the ideal of national liberation, and the establishment of a democratic state in India. Gandhi put into practice the concepts of passive resistance and self-government that Aurobindo had expanded in 1907-03 [25]. Thus, we may say that Tilak and Gandhi's beliefs were greatly influenced by Aurobindo Ghosh's doctrine of passive resistance. To put it another way, Aurobindo's concept of passive resistance is expanded upon by Tilak and Gandhi. Aurobindo Ghosh's notion of passive resistance had a significant influence on Tilak. Tilak's passive resistance theory fell somewhere between Gokhale and Aurobindo's viewpoints.

He claimed in his talks that everyone had the right to change the law or the political system if a certain law was unfair or if the majority of its political provisions were unfair. It couldn't be classified as sedition because, if it were, we would have to assume that the government didn't value morality and justice, didn't enjoy people standing up to injustice, and didn't want to grant everyone equal rights [26]. "According to Tilak, when a government refused to give up the rights of the people because it was afraid that doing so would hurt the interests of the ruling classes in society. However, the government could be pressured to amend the specific law by using the various forms of resistance, such as obstruction of government operations [27]. Tilak commended Gandhi for using satyagraha as a political tool, saying it helped fight injustice. He went on to say that while there is a need for a very high degree of morality and care for the truth, it also resolves a lot of moral issues that arise from breaking the law. He thought that for this, a special moral character, integrity, and trust in truth were essential. Any individual who had made the decision to develop these traits and abilities might carry out such an activity, which required the assistance of soul-force" [28]. Here, we might conclude that Tilak was aware of the fundamentals of satyagraha. Tilak made significant theoretical and practical revisions to Aurobindo's notion of passive resistance. He clarified issues for the public and inspired them to take action [29]. He and Aurobindo significantly foresaw Gandhi's politics in 1906 and 1907 and established the groundwork for his agitational politics. Accordingly, Tilak's philosophy of passive resistance combines Gokhale's constitutional agitation with Aurobindo's passive resistance. Tilak's passive resistance theory was developed in large part because to Aurobindo's theory [30].

### **Contribution in the Indian freedom Struggle**

In his early political engagement, he emphasized how urgent it was to demand complete independence from the British government. He secretly contacted resistance organizations in Bengal and Madhya Pradesh while working for the Baroda administration and wrote articles for "Indu Prakash." After Bengal's division was announced in 1906, he eventually relocated to Kolkata [31]. In private, Aurobindo engaged in covert revolutionary actions and contributed to the development of the revolutionary climate in the nation, notwithstanding his public support for non-cooperation and passive resistance to British control. He met revolutionaries in Bengal and influenced future revolutionaries like Surendranath Tagore, Jatin Banerjee, and Bagha Jatin.

Additionally, he played a key role in the establishment of the Anushilan Samiti and other youth groups. He attended the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1906, which was presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji [32]. He contributed to the development of the national movement's four main goals: national education, boycott, Swaraj, and Swadesh. In 1907, he founded *Bande Mataram*, a daily newspaper. The congress broke in 1907 as a result of a confrontation between radicals and moderates. Aurobindo backed Bal Gangadhar Tilak and aligned himself with fanatics [33]. He then made a lot of trips to Bombay, Baroda, and Pune to spread knowledge and rally support for the national movement. He was taken into custody by the British in May 1908 in relation to the Alipore Bomb Case [34]. After a year in solitary confinement, he was later released. Following his release in 1909, he launched two new publications: *Dharma* (Bengali) and *Karmayogin* (English). He began this new path of spiritual awakening while incarcerated in Alipore after progressively realizing that he was not meant to be the leader of the freedom movement and switched to a mystical and philosophical style of living [35]. To begin a new life, Aurobindo Ghosh fled in secret to Pondicherry, a French colony at the time, in April 1910.

Sri Aurobindo embarked on a journey of spiritual growth and development in Pondicherry by engaging in four years of solitary yoga, which he called "Integral Yoga." He suggested that spiritual practices are crucial to a person's development into a divine being.

### **Politics to Spiritualism**

He was detained at Alipore Jail during the Alipore Bomb Case. During this time, he had spiritual awakenings and experiences that fundamentally altered his perspective on life. For about two weeks while incarcerated, Aurobindo claimed to have heard Vivekananda's voice speaking to him nonstop. From that point on, he embarked on a new spiritual path. He committed himself to his spiritual and philosophical endeavors after relocating to Pondicherry [36]. He founded the monthly philosophical publication "Arya" in 1914. Sri Aurobindo started to gain followers gradually, and as the number continued to rise, Sri Aurobindo Ashram was established in 1926.



In addition to yoga and spirituality, he wrote books including *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Secret of the Veda*, and *The Human Cycle* that discussed Indian culture, the Vedas, and society. Even when Sri Aurobindo first settled in England, he had a talent for poetry. His creative tendencies reappeared in the 1930s and manifested as the masterpiece *Savitri*, a 24,000-line poem that solely relies on spirituality. Because of his numerous contributions to poetry, spiritualism, and philosophical literature, he was nominated for both the Nobel Prize in Literature (1943) and the Nobel Prize for Peace (1950) [37].

### Conclusion

Aurobindo Ghosh thought that the greatest way for India to gain independence at the turn of the century was through a bloody revolution. Other, peaceful means might also be employed, he believed, but 'the action with which he started' was 'a secret revolutionary propaganda and organization'. He contributed to the start of Bengal's revolutionary movement in 1902. We may also draw the conclusion that his educational ideas are thorough, highly pertinent, contemporary, and psychological in character, and that his spiritual practices are essential to a person's transformation into a divine being. He also made a substantial contribution to the growth of the national movement.

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- [11] *Sri Aurobindo, On Himself*, pp. 49, 357; Talk of 28 June 1926, in A. B. Purani (ed.), *Evening Talks* (Pondicherry, 1982), p. 378. The transcripts of these talks, which I will cite frequently, seem to capture the substance of what Aurobindo said, but they are not verbatim reports.
- [12] *Sri Aurobindo, On Himself*, p. 129. The Sanskrit phrase means 'a dreadful work' and is an allusion to a sloka of the *Bhagavad Gita* (3.1).
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 21. Downloaded by [La Trobe University] at 11:05 19 June 2016
- [14] *Sri Aurobindo, On Himself*, p. 1.
- [15] *Sri Aurobindo, Bande Mataram*, 658; *Sri Aurobindo, On Himself*, p. 32.
- [16] *Sri Aurobindo, On Himself*, p. 26.
- [17] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1. The most complete surviving statement of Aurobindo's 'political philosophy' is the series of articles called 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', published in April 1907. As mentioned above (see note 12), while he stated in these articles that he considered passive resistance to be India's 'most natural and suitable weapon', he did not condemn 'other [i. e. violent] methods as in all circumstances criminal and unjustifiable.
- [18] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- [19] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- [20] *Karmayogin*, 5 Feb. 1910, published in *Sri Aurobindo, Karmayogin* (Pondicherry, 1972), p. 383.
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