

A STUDY OF SRI AUROBINDO'S
PROSE WRITINGS AND SPEECHES
AS ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE: A
STRATEGY FOR OPPOSITIONAL
DISCOURSE

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The present Major Research Project is a multi-disciplinary study that comprises disciplines such as English Studies, History, Political Science, Biography, Culture, and Journalism. It seeks to analyse the rise of Nationalism in the last decade of nineteenth and the first decade of twentieth century during the struggle for liberation of India from colonial rule. The publication of the copies of the journal, the *Bande Mataram*, from Calcutta in the form of a book that was the mouthpiece of Sri Aurobindo's intellectual resistance to British bureaucracy and a platform for mounting counter attack on the moribund Indian National Congress, has greatly facilitated my research study. Obviously, one suspects an undercurrent of surreptitious efforts by the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy to cripple the journal, to silence its voice of protest and opposition as it was preaching with extra-ordinary success Sri Aurobindo's anti-colonial resistance which was dangerous to the continuance of bureaucratic absolutism. Moreover, the journal was menacingly becoming rallying point for many Nationalists. The concerted efforts of the journal were directed at mounting attack fearlessly, without any pretention and ambiguity, on the tyrannical repressive measures of the Anglo-Saxon bureaucracy, and it advocated radical and revolutionary changes based on the historical experience for national preservation.

Sri Aurobindo at the age of 23 launched vitriolic attack on our national body, Indian National Congress, through a series of pungent articles written

under the title of “New Lamps for the Old” which were published in the *Indu Prakash* from 1893 to 1894 in Bombay at the behest of his Cambridge friend, K.G. Despande. These articles catapulted the image of Sri Aurobindo in the then political firmament as an astute political thinker, a conscientious analyst, and a fearless critic. Owing to his activities and that of his compatriots Bepin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Lala Lajpat Rai the moribund Congress was rejuvenated to effect drastic changes in its course of action and programmes, lending psychological impetus and a new direction to India’s national liberation.

With a view to exploring Sri Aurobindo’s political creed as well as revolutionary ideas and practices that are deeply embedded in his early political writings and speeches, the project is designed to consist of eight chapters with an Introduction. Each chapter maps out the contours of Sri Aurobindo’s anti-colonial resistance from a unique angle of view. Naturally, some of the recurrent views and excerpts from the *Bande Mataram* become repetitious in some chapters to justify the thematic urgency of the ongoing discussion. Since the project is a literature of resistance, it encapsulates Sri Aurobindo’s anger, protest, disapproval, sarcasm, counsel, and ideals. In the preparation of the project report the **literary merits**, aesthetic or emotional appeals have been sacrificed as the researchers have astutely endeavoured to tease out a political reading and implication.

The germination subsequently blossoming of patriotism has been traced out in the first chapter titled “Patriotic Love and Decisive Action.” From his childhood days Sri Aurobindo was brought up with Anglicised habits, with the ideals of an Anglophile as desired by his father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, who was himself an Anglophile, a Medical Officer trained in England. Dr. Ghose took all possible care and precaution to insulate the minds of his children from active Indian influences. While a student in England, young Aurobindo used to receive often from his father news paper cuttings of the *Bengalee* marked with passages pertaining to the cases of ill-treatment of Indians at the hands of Englishmen. Moreover, his young mind was imbued with revolutionary ideas and inspiration from his study of the history of Ireland and America.

After shifting from St. Paul’s School to Cambridge Sri Aurobindo joined a secret society, romantically called the “Lotus and Dagger,” where each member was required to take oath for liberation of India. His fourteen years’ study career in England gave him an insight into the English character and British politics. He could effortlessly detect the nefarious intentions of the Anglo-Saxon bureaucrats and their repressive designs behind colonial rules and policies which his contemporary politicians failed to grasp at times.

The series of nine fiery articles written by Sri Aurobindo at the age of 23 under the caption “New Lamps for Old” published in the *Indu Prakash*, Bombay, during 1893 - 94 broke a new ground in Indian politics by severely

criticising the servile policy of prayer and petition adopted by the Indian National Congress. Subsequently, his editorials writings in the *Bande Mataram* (henceforth to be referred to as *B.M.*) brought the “art of safe slander” to utmost fruition. With Sri Aurobindo in the editorial board the journal started preaching with extraordinary success “a political creed that was dangerous to the continuance of bureaucratic absolutism.” Out of vengeance, the Imperial Government modified the Press Act on June 8, 1908 making it more stringent and brutal than ever before. Under the aegis of Sri Aurobindo, a strong popular movement started in the West Bengal vehemently opposing the Bengal Partition Act prepared by Lord Curzon and Bamfylde Fuller in 1905 that aimed at undermining Bengali nationalism by dividing the people along communal lines into two separate political units with separate administrative staff. To awaken nationalism in Bengal, he left his lucrative post of the Vice-Principal of Baroda College that fetched then a salary of Rs. 750/- per month. He took up instead the role of the Principal for a paltry amount of Rs.120/- per month at Bengal National College in Calcutta. He could detect the political strategy of the Moderates which was not to offend the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy out of fear and selfishness. The Moderates basically differed from the Nationalists in their inability to grasp the imperative need for mass support in the country’s struggle for freedom. Instead of putting their trust in the nation, they relied much on the charity of the colonial lords and vaguely hoped for the liberation of their motherland through the generosity of the alien bureaucrats.

The top brass of Government on priority basis convicted and punished Sri Aurobindo by fabricating a serious case against him, to strike terror in the hearts of the Nationalists. So the police falsely implicated him in the Alipore Bomb case (a serious crime) and kept him as an under-trial prisoner; but from want of sufficient evidences the Magistrate subsequently acquitted him of the charges. The Anglo-Indian journals gnashed their teeth at his honourable acquittal.

During his incarceration in Alipore prison, he came to realise that all revolutionary activities were governed by the unseen hand of the Divine. He perceived his forcible detention as a distinct sign of God with a particular divine purpose. His “Uttarpara Speech” of 30 May, 1909, marked a turning point in his political activities and heralded the beginning of his spiritual life. He came to revere India not as a big land mass, a geographical entity but as a living being, as our Mother, as the *Shakti* of millions of people. It amounted to realise divinity in the nation, God in the multitude of people.

A probing account of the defects in the working of Indian National Congress is presented in the chapter III under the title “A Critique of Congress and Its Demi-gods”. After his return from England, Sri Aurobindo started taking active interest in Indian politics and held the elite in the National Congress responsible for their lack of political maturity in steering the movement for liberation of India. He censured the Congress as the elite’s club

engaged only in the deliberation of political situation with no decisive action to push forward the movement. All that this national body could achieve till then were a few paltry administrative reforms. The irony being our country had been fondly looking upon the Congress from its inception as a fresh fund of hope and vigour. Nine trenchant articles penned by him were published in the *Indu Prakash*, offer new interpretation of and insight into the obsolete methods pursued by the leaders of the Congress over a decade to regulate its activities. These articles criticised the Congress for not being **national** enough. In reality, the members of the Congress belonged to a limited, a newly formed middle class only. Hence, how could it be designated as truly national? He drew the attention of his readers to the historical example of the protracted Irish resistance to England's rule. The Irish leaders did not annually assemble to wax eloquent on the virtues of British rule. Obviously, this was an oblique remark on the working of the Indian National Congress. The Irish revolutionaries were men who preferred action to mere making of speeches and appeals to higher authority. Not being prudent enough to make any historical analysis, the leaders of the Congress ignored the fact that in order to secure their own liberties, the Englishmen have resorted to no less than three times the method of open struggle and rebellion. The pity was that the Congress leaders, Sri Aurobindo felt, were recoiling in terror from an open struggle with British bureaucracy. A few lucrative offers of jobs dangled by the colonial bureaucracy before the Congress for expansion of the elected members of the

Vice regal Council could detract our top leaders from their political objectives. But these sham offers came under sharp scythe of Sri Aurobindo. He repeatedly reminded the Congress that any hope for an achievement of the Congress from Anglo-Indian bureaucracy was futile and impractical. He expressed his own conviction that out of a total number of twenty-five only ten members would be Indians. Even if these Indian members voted together, they would be a permanent and absolute minority.

As Sri Aurobindo noticed, the leaders belonging to the Moderate Group in Indian National Congress were more interested in self-promotion and gaining access to power and privileges within the colonial system than arousing political aspiration of the people for freedom from colonial rule. In the programme of G.K. Gokhale, who was the President of Indian National Congress, only some representative would get the scope to push up their friends, relatives, and protégés for various offices under colonial government. Sri Aurobindo detected the lacunae in Gokhale's reform programme in which there was no scope for political education of the people of India. On these grounds he debunked the Moderate Group in the Congress as an ineffective force in the freedom struggle of our motherland. He exposed the strategies designed by the Moderate leaders to serve their selfish motives in perpetually remaining at the helm of affairs of the Congress. These were the glaring defects

of the Congress in not being able to turn India's freedom movement into a popular and mass struggle.

An elaborate analysis of the concept of Nationalism as a political programme and Sri Aurobindo's unique contributions to spread it among the people of India has been made in the third chapter titled "Indian Nationalism and Sri Aurobindo." Theorists have explored various dimensions of the existence of nations and the growth of nationalism in Europe. Among others, Eric J. Hobsbawm holds the influential view in *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1999) that nations are not of divine origin and a natural way of classifying men to decide their destiny. Nations can be on the basis of pre-existing cultures, and almost always ideologically expressed in terms of some myths.

J. G. Herder professes that a nation is the natural basis of a state; so he supports the political right of any people for self-determination. A nation provides the people with a positive sense of association. Herder further concedes that the cultural diversity is natural and the best state of affairs. Modern European exponents of the theory of Nationalism posit that nations must have a past and a future too. Elie Kerdourie in *Nationalism* (1960) views history as a distinct mode of thought in which a nation can be represented. Ernest Renan in *Nation and Narrations* (1990) defines a nation as a soul, a spiritual entity. The various considerations of race, language, material interest,

religious affinities, geography and military strength are inadequate for the creation of such a spiritual entity. In fact, Renan's spiritual aspect of nationalism is corroborated by Sri Aurobindo when he declared that nationalism is a profound spiritual principle, although it was implicated in anti-colonial politics. He prophesied the people to become the instrument of God who will inevitably spread nationalism to every nook and corner of India.

Indian people speak diverse languages, profess different creeds, and practise sundry religions. The Hindu religious community is a conglomeration of various sects and creeds that prohibits the unitary growth of Indian nationalism. Even then he assured the people that inspired by a common enthusiasm and ideal, the whole history of India with her rich legacy has been a preparation for the formation of a united nationality. In his considered view, a nation cannot be 'made' because it is an organism. He observed the national leaders embodying a national force that expresses itself in an opportune moment. He laughed at the folly of the colonial bureaucracy in India for crushing the Nationalist aspiration of Indian masses by deporting nationalist leaders like Bal Gangdhar Tilak and Lajpat Rai. Sri Aurobindo believed that the repressive measures adopted by the British Government for intimidation to strike terror at the root of Nationalism would only facilitate all the more the growth and spread of Nationalism in India. To the surprise of many, he

insightfully said that national regeneration of India could just not have been possible had the colonial rulers been merciful towards the masses.

A study of Sri Aurobindo's concept nationalism entails similarities and contrast between his ideas and those of the prominent Indian nationalist thinkers. Chapter four under the title "Indian Nationalism: Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Tilak, Tagore and Gandhi" is such a study in a comparative perspective. The comparative assessment focuses on how Sri Aurobindo's ideas about nationalism deserve a unique place among Indian theorists. The burgeoning national imaginary in colonial Bengal in the second half of nineteenth century developed the iconography of the mother to represent the nation. Bankim glorifies the motherhood of India in his novel *Anandamath*, a concept that continues in the domain of ideological nationalist discourse.

Bankim, like Vivekananda, Tilak and Sri Aurobindo, upholds Hinduism in its own right as the greatest of all religions. He stresses the need for a national religion based on new moral ideals that would lead to the establishment of a new national character. Since neither language nor racial difference is a suitable device for the creation of national solidarity, Bankim argues that in the context of India the spread of Hinduism alone will be an effective cultural foundation of Indian nationhood. Sri Aurobindo and Bankim posit faith in the divinity of the motherland. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo's

political pamphlet, *The Bhavani Mandir* written in 1905 emulates Bankim's scheme of militant spiritualism to liberate India from alien domination.

Tilak often uses Indian Nationality, Hindu Nationality, Hindutva, and *Varnāshrama Dharma* as interchangeable terms. He opposes British colonial rule and its modernism as exotic forces contradictory to Hindu ethos and clash with the hegemonic control of the landed gentry over the society. His nationalism refuses to treat all Hindus as equal members of the Hindu nation. Hindutva and the concept of Hindu nation advocated by him contain an inherent defect of perpetuating master-servant relationship within Hindu society. Domination over women and non-Brahmins forms a powerful strand of Tilak's view of nationalism. He seeks to awaken the soul and political consciousness of the people of India by organising Shivaji and Ganapati festivals to forge a union of political aspiration and spirit with the tradition and culture of India's historic past. Tilak, a fire-brand speaker, shows complete dedication in infusing Indian politics with religious fervour to create a nationalistic bond among people. Sri Aurobindo does not concede to political configuration of the nation on the basis of caste along the lines suggested by Tilak, although he has tremendous admiration for him. The former designs a programme of national education to a strict exclusion of the "enforcement of religious teachings and practices." But aligned with Sri Aurobindo's efforts, Tilak joins his hands with him in awakening the spirit of the masses by

vehemently antagonising the elitist politics of the Congress. They succeed in forging a union of all classes of people under one umbrella for India's struggle for freedom.

Rabindra Nath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate, Knighted by the British Government, like Sri Aurobindo exhorts the West to eschew the path of materialism and learn spirituality from the East. Both condemn in strong terms the rise of "bellicose and rapacious imperialism of Europe." But Tagore's views contradict the non-cooperation and passive resistance doctrine of Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo in the struggle for *Swaraj*. He apprehends an element of violence involved in the organisation of *Swaraj* that may go against the spirit of freedom of the soul as it excites passion and egotism. He dismisses *Swaraj* as *maya* in a letter to C. F. Andrews. Pinning hope on his philosophy of cultural universalism, he invites all races of the world to cohabit in India. Unlike Sri Aurobindo, he does not arouse a belligerent patriotism and nationalism.

For Tagore, a nation is a mental construct as well as an organic entity comprising two essential features: first, a historical memory of people, and the second, a consensus among the natives to live together in a specific geographical location. He finds fault with the Western Nationalism as it is *sans* social cooperation and spiritual idealism. Colonial rivalry demonstrates that the

concept of nation is a much contested field of competition for political and economic hegemony.

Both Gandhi and Tagore could visualise the inevitable need for a national ideology of India as a means of survival. Both agree that the concept of nation has historically emerged through revolutions, wars, conflict and struggle. But the society in the East has evolved through civilisation, culture, religion, and spirituality. Whereas the West has laid its foundation of nation on the state as the centre of social and political organisation, life in India is rooted in village community. These communities in our country had their relative autonomy under royal control. In his culturalist discourse, Tagore speaks of imaginary cultures in which the best of each culture could compensate for the inadequacy of the other cultures.

Sri Aurobindo's concerted efforts in spreading the passive resistance to the unjust colonial rule herald Gandhian programme of *Satyagrah* carried out nationwide in India that ultimately triumphs over British colonial power. Both philosophise mass resistance to oppressive state authority. Gandhi's strenuous efforts to obliterate the division of caste and the "deadly sins of untouchability" from Indian society were a radical step that facilitated the growth and rapid spread of Indian nationalism. In their struggle to achieve political and economic independence both strove hard to make India free from British

capitalistic exploitation. Both made intervention in the then hegemonic elitist politics assiduously pursued by Indian National Congress.

Sri Aurobindo foregrounds various devices to mount resistance to colonial rule in India that forms the main theme of the fifth chapter under the title “Strategy for Anti-Colonial Resistance.” His main contention is that self-development of a nation under foreign servitude is impractical and remains a far-fetched dream. All attempts at social transformation, educational reforms, industrial expansion, and ethical improvement of the nation are foredoomed without political freedom. So the strategies he devises to counteract British colonial rule can be analysed as: Self-help, Passive Resistance, *Swaraj*, and *Swadeshi*.

To set right the impoverished and oppressive financial system, Sri Aurobindo demands the control over taxation by the people whose hard-earned money is utilised in meeting the expenditure and needs of the colonial government. Once the people of a country become “the controller and the paymaster of both the wings of executive and judiciary of Government, executive tyranny comes to an end.” In addition to this, the new system will stop the drain of peoples’ resources that can otherwise be utilised in protection of Indian commerce, industry and trade by employing Indian indigenous labour force. The rising tide of popular opinion, Sri Aurobindo pins hope, can alone save India from the state of “bleeding to death by foreign exploitation.” He

justifies the need for a civil struggle as “a reality and morality in war” for an oppressed nation.

To appropriate the means of passive resistance, collective action, struggle and suffering are inevitable. In this matter any sign of timidity and selfishness in people will disrupt the hard earned unity and weaken the force of resistance. The method of active resistance is opted to cause positive harm to the existing government machinery; but that of the passive resistance is directed to abstain from doing anything that would help the colonial government in its governance. It is an apt method of resistance as the foreign government banks upon the help, cooperation, and acquiescence of the subject people for continuance of its administration. The principle of passive resistance is to show apathy and refusal by the people to do anything that will help British trade and commerce either in the exploitation of the country or running its administrative machinery of the Anglo-Indian officialdom.

The European system of education teaches subordination and loyalty to the colonial government and discourages patriotism in students at large. It is antagonistic to Indian culture and tradition. To counteract these evils, Sri Aurobindo stresses the need for “Educational Boycott” to render the well-organised educational administration of India impossible in a bid to snatch away the control of the minds of youth from the hands of the alien rulers.

British law courts and administration of justice have inherent tendencies to enforce subordination of the colonial subjects to fulfil their political objectives. As a counter-measure to this unjust system, Sri Aurobindo proposes “Judicial Boycott” in order to paralyse British judicial administration. He rejects British justice for its “ruinous costliness of civil code, the brutal vigour of its criminal penalties and procedure.”

As a strategic step our refusal to work in Government schools, colleges, offices, courts or serve in the departments and police, Sri Aurobindo believes, will sabotage British administrative machinery. To make this procedure of resistance more effective, he proscribes social excommunication for those of our countrymen who work against passive resistance. He considers *Swaraj* for a nation as the breath of life.

The Doctrine of Passive Resistance enunciated by Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi’s movement of *Satyagraha* both derive their germinal ideas essentially from Thoreau’s concept of “Civil Disobedience.” Sri Aurobindo prescribes for a Nationalist to show deep concern in four areas: first *Swadeshi*, second Boycott, third *Swaraj* and the last one is National Education. *Swadeshi* means the preference of the natives for articles produced by Indian labour in India itself. Boycott is people’s determination not to use and exclude foreign products manufactured by foreigners.

Sri Aurobindo explains that the idea of total *Swaraj* does not limit itself to mere political freedom; rather it embraces social and spiritual emancipation. He declares assertively that God has set apart India as the “eternal fountain of holy spirituality, so He will never allow that holy fountain to run dry.” Resistance, a lesson he learns from Thoreau, true patriotism in the highest form.

The revolutionary booklet called *Bhavani Mandir* was impounded by the British police and was considered as spiritual dynamite to blow off the colonial rule over India. It caused endless nightmares to British administration; but on the contrary, it proved to be a mighty inspiration and supreme driving force to countless revolutionaries. Of course, the scheme remained at the level of ideas and was never carried out in reality. The booklet maps out India’s all-round development to stand as an independent nation; and to wrest sovereign power from the colonial master.

The chapter VI under the caption “A Journalistic Crusade against Colonial Domination” focuses how Sri Aurobindo uses writing as a potent weapon to mount journalistic onslaughts on the tyrannous administration of the Anglo-Indian government. He undauntedly censures through the columns of the journal *Bande Mataram* the policies, strategies, rules and hollow prospects of administrative reforms framed by the astute British administrators to perpetuate the colonial domination over India. In fact, as a matter of strategy

the colonial government relentlessly pursues a dual policy of granting meagre political concession to lure the Moderate leaders of the Congress on the one hand; and ruthlessly adopts repressive measures on the other, to suppress the growth of nationalistic spirit in India. For making persistent demand for self-government as the first step to complete autonomy by Sri Aurobindo's party, the Anglo-Indian press branded the nationalists with the sobriquet "seditionists" or "Extremists." Some of the Anglo-Indian news papers such as – *The Statesman*, the *Englishman*, the *Indian Mirror*, the *Times*, and the *Pioneer* seemed to be in league with one another to crush the "Extremists out of existence." The Nationalists were doubly cursed for facing stringent criticism at home front; also from their political adversaries on their own soil.

The colonial government receives from Sri Aurobindo journalistic whips for giving blind encouragement in allowing "the Magistracy to a phenomenally oppressive police." He reveals the secret unholy nexus between Mahomedan hooligans and Anglo-Indian administrators as they have become eventually good allies, "brothers-in-arms to fight against *Swadeshi*." He analyses Lord Curzon's clever policy of stifling the voice of patriotism through the instrumentality of the University and condemns the sinister intention behind the issue of the Rislely Circular: "This ukase out-Rusias Russia. Not even in Russia have such systematically drastic measures been taken to discourage political life and patriotic activity among the young. Not even the omnipotent

Tsar has debarred to issue a ukase so arbitrary, oppressive and inquisitorial” (B. M., 330). While trying to convince his political opponents, he drives home the fact that the constitutional reforms expected of as British gift to Indian politicians, in reality, turns out “to be a sheer mockery and heartless farce.” The idea floated by the Congress leaders of holding a Congress session in London to beg for rights by sending sumptuous sums of money is vehemently opposed by him. In the last resort, he warns them that any attempt to shift the field of the battle to London will be impractical and harmful.

Sri Aurobindo treats it below the dignity of a patriot or revolutionary to beg favour from the “alien exploiter”. In view of the immense plight of the Rawalpindi sufferers, he disapproves the idea of appealing to the mercy of Lord Minto, the Viceroy of India. In his politico-philosophical assumption suffering for the cause of our motherland in Rawalpindi will not go waste; the patriots must suffer so that their martyrdom should inspire our countrymen instantly.

Lord Morley was inimical both to the Moderates’ ideal of self-government on colonial lines and the demand of Nationalists for *Swaraj*. He was stubborn in his belief that educated Indians were not fit to be entrusted even by gradual stages with the supreme governance of Indian affairs. He goes to the extent of declaring in the British Parliament that his Government in India is carrying on the most difficult experiment in human history on personal

government along with free speech and free right of public meeting. Sri Aurobindo passed a scathing criticism on Lord Morley's diplomatic declaration about a subject nation: "The freedom of a subject race is only the freedom to starve and die, all the rest of its existence being on sufferance from those who govern" (*B.M*, 459).

Under British rule in some cases it is quite difficult to distinguish a judge from a medieval executioner. Sri Aurobindo reveals how state terrorism by the colonial administration perpetuates in the name of administering justice to people of India. The one man who could oppose this is Keir Hardie. Praising Hadie for his outright sense of courage, Sri Aurobindo proclaims that very few English men have the courage to tell the world "the most elementary facts about the wrong England is doing us." A voice of opposition raised by an Englishman is drowned "in the roar of the ruling nation whose aim is mercilessly to exploit India."

Chapter VII under the title "Decolonising Indian Mind" contains an explication of Sri Aurobindo's radical concept of National Scheme of Education framed in 1910; the chapter also attempts at a comparative study with educational ideas of the great Indian philosophical thinkers, such as - Tilak, Swami Vivekanand, R. N. Tagore, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Mahatma Gandhi in decolonising Indian mind. The National Scheme of Education of Sri Aurobindo is not to be confused with the Integral Education system.

The objectives of education framed by the British authorities are limited to meet the needs of the services and professions to administer this vast subcontinent. Sri Aurobindo attributes it as the great flaw in the British system of education. Moreover, the colonial government is not the 'fit' body to formulate the necessary modifications as per India's need. The real source of evil in the British education is our confused perception of education with the stress on the acquisition of knowledge. European education has confined the mind of students to train the "storing faculty of memory and the storage of facts." It essentially neglects the training of the three great manipulative faculties - such as the power of reasoning, the power of comparison and differentiation and the power of expression. The inherent defect of the system of education is the failure of students to make the best use of what they know and the failure in training of the three mental faculties can best be expressed in the words of Sri Aurobindo (2003:360):

The easy assumption of our educationists that we have only to apply the mind with a smattering of facts in each department of knowledge & the mind can be trusted to develop itself and take its own suitable road is contrary to science, contrary to human experience, and contrary to the universal opinion of civilised countries. Indeed the history of intellectual degeneration in gifted

paces always begins with the arrest of these three mental powers by the excessive cultivation of mere knowledge at their expense.

It excessively insists on students to pass through a rigid and “cast-iron course of knowledge” in everything, so they are not given real knowledge in anything.

Presenting the case of Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the great sage of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo shows how direct knowledge latent in humanity is above reason and imagination, and how Sri Ramakrishna having no formal education possessed it. This faculty can be made a recognised habitual agent by the discipline of Yoga. The secret of success in the incomparable public works, engineering achievements, and the great triumphs of science, scholarship, jurisprudence, logic, and metaphysics of ancient India are based on a profound knowledge of human psychology and forms the basis of the old Aryan system, the all-powerful discipline of *Brahmacharya*. The Aryans know that an infinite energy, *Prakriti*, *Māyā* or *Shakti*, pervades the world. All creatures are the efficient *Ādhāra* of this Energy. Human beings are the dynamos in whom the waves of that Energy is generated, stored, perpetually conserved, used up and replenished. The secret source of energy is spiritual, but the basis, the foundation of life and energy is physical. With the help of the ancient Hindu theory Sri Aurobindo explains elaborately the way energy in Indian terminology called as *tapas*, *tejas*, *vidyut* and *ojas* can be created, stored and replenished in human body. The more we can store these through the

discipline of *brahmacharya*, the more we shall fill within us abundant energy for the works of the body, mind, and spirit. As the ancient Hindu sages have believed, all knowledge is within and has to be aroused through right education.

The first principle of teaching is that nothing can be taught. A teacher is a helper and guide; he should not behave like an instructor or taskmaster. He is not to impart knowledge but to show him the process to acquire it for oneself. The mind of the child cannot be hammered into a desired shape as desired irrationally by parents. The teacher has to supervise that the senses of the child are properly trained under his/her guidance for perfect accuracy. Sri Aurobindo disapproves imposition of strict discipline on children to teach moral habits because such forceful imposition cannot persuade the child's heart to yield to the parents' side. But to neglect moral and religious education altogether is to corrupt the race.

A glaring defect in the European system of education, Sri Aurobindo brings to our attention, is the practice of teaching by snippets. He favours the old system of teaching one or two subjects well and thoroughly, and then proceeds to others. Under the title "The Training of the Senses" published in the *Karmayogin* in 1910, he makes a strong plea to revert to our old Indian system of education. He prescribes regulation of breathing to restore the perfect and an unobstructed activity of nerve channels. This Yogic discipline

nāḍī - *udhi* or nerve purification leads to high degree of perfect sensitiveness. More important powers of the mind need be developed in future: telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, presentiment, thought-reading, and character reading. The central aim of education, he contends, is building of the power of the “Indian mind and spirit” for use in knowledge, character, and culture.

Sri Aurobindo’s concept on National Education and decolonisation of the Indian mind can be hailed as a unique system when compared with the views of the educational thinkers of India such as - Vivekananda, Tilak, Tagore, Dayananda Saraswati and Gandhi. Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo both propound the theory that all knowledge is within oneself, and the function of education is to uncover the hidden knowledge. So he supports education for self-development (*svadharma*) and character building. Tilak and Sri Aurobindo consider the European system of education essential for material prosperity but they insist on students having strong moorings in Hindu religion. They are in favour of imparting instruction in regional language, so that true patriotism and a love for old tradition and culture can be inculcated in the young mind at a tender age.

The educational ideas of Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi synchronise to certain extent for the need of a special education in India. They hold *brahmacharya* essential for students. They support the ancient ideals of education aiming at

salvation. They emphasise the need of all types of education: physical, mental, moral aesthetic and religious. The ultimate goal of education is spiritual, and spiritual growth includes physical and mental, individual and social development. Gandhi's plan of education from the modernist's point of view seems somewhat unsuitable to the needs of modern technological society of India. But Sri Aurobindo welcomes the ancient Indian system of education along with learning of modern science and technology for India's rapid progress. Toeing the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda, Tagore synthesises the ancient Vedantic traditions with the modern Western scientific attitude in formulating the goal of education. The views of the Nobel laureate are similar to Sri Aurobindo's when they emphasise spiritual and scientific knowledge. They frame the objectives of a national system of education in a bid to promote creativity, freedom, joy and an awareness of the country's cultural heritage. They consider education an intellectual development and enhancement of the students' aesthetic sense and creativity. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, on the lines of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, believes the mind can be controlled through *Yoga*. Both contend *Yoga* to form an integral part of education and a high priority for observation of celibacy, *brahmacharya*.

Thus, the great educational thinkers of India - Gandhi, Vivekananda, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Dayananda Saraswati staunchly censure the British system of education as it lays more stress on the exercise of intellect and memory, but grossly neglects the body and India's culture. All of them suggest

that physical, intellectual and moral fitness cannot be ignored in the development of a child.

An analysis of the early political writings and speeches of Sri Aurobindo, as a separate domain of “oppositional discourse” that effectively geared his anti-colonial resistance is elaborated in chapter VIII under the caption “Oppositional Discourse: A Strategy for Anti-colonial Resistance.” Instead of viewing language as transparent, expressive, a vehicle of communication, a form of representation, the champions of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism regard language as a system with its own rules and constraints, with its own determining effect on the way individuals think and express themselves. It is natural to view discourse as a general domain of the production and circulation of rule-governed statements. In the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Ronald Barthes discourse is viewed to represent a voice within a text or a speech position.

In this regard, we shall treat Sri Aurobindo’s early political writings and speeches written as a reaction to certain political, economic and social conditions in which the narrative voice is dominant. In an anti-colonial discourse the creativity of the writer or speaker, personal views, comments, observations, reactions, and the attitude of a single author are held to be paramount. In these texts the narrative voice, the colonised treated as the *other* is in constant opposition to the coloniser who devises all types of ways and

means to keep the other in subjugation, under perpetual subordination. To such a discourse that purports to resist, we can preferably designate the terms “**Oppositional Discourse.**” Motivated by the desire to dominate and perpetuate its unjustified hegemonic control over India, the colonial government takes a confrontational stand against the native nationalists. The attitude of recalcitrance, objection and refusal of the natives enacted in resistance movements get expressed in *oppositional discourse*. In a way we can say that the oppositional discourse is a form of defensive warfare.

The Orient is presented in terms of the way it differs from the West. Colonised people are represented in negative terms. To the trend of negative representation of India, Sri Aurobindo vehemently counteracts in a bid to valorise Indian culture, tradition, art, social practices, heritage, religion and spirituality. The racist practices of Europeans are subverted by him in his political and cultural writings. Michel Foucault presents a new concept of discourse in his “Introduction” to *History of Sexuality* to demonstrate how a discourse transmits and produces power; it undermines and exposes power too. Through their oppositional writings, activities or speeches the freedom fighters of a country assert recognition from their colonisers. The colonisers are eventually forced to recognise the voice of opposition and protest. Colonial discourse pertains to texts which refer to imperial and colonial context. Whereas oppositional discourse pertains to those type of texts that show anti-colonial resistance. Benita Parry makes use of Michel Pêcheux’s terminology

“oppositional discursive practices” in her scholarly article “Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism”. Pêcheux designs oppositional practices to dispense with the terms of the colonisers’ definition. The process of patriots’ recognition simultaneously becomes a process of misrecognition of the authoritarian misrule of the alien government as the former are now ready to shake off absolute dominance or subordination of the alien power.

The anti-colonial resistance embodied in Sri Aurobindo’s writings and speeches takes a satiric turn. While registering his resistance and protest, he uses various techniques of satire, such as the process of diminution by wittily juxtaposing and establishing unequal equation of dignified with admittedly trivial or undignified. His intention is to condemn the stalwarts of the colonial government, to demean their personalities as they ruthlessly devise repressive measures to stifle Indian voice of opposition. Not only the top executives, but also the leaders of Moderate group in the Congress Party do come under the scythe of Sri Aurobindo’s trenchant satire for their servile attitude to the government and disagreement with the Extremists.

On a religious note the *Bande Mataram* (*B.M.*) begins with biblical language, drawing out the drawbacks of the Congress with a warning: “Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting” (*B.M.*, 15). The narrator assumes the persona of a self-appointed conscience-keeper. He insists on the

imperative need of someone to speak bitterly against the Congress as a first step to set our house in proper order. He epigrammatically censures: “that we are at present the blind- led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one eyed” (*B.M.*, 15). He digs at its crippling defects with a rhetorical question: “How long will the Congress sit like careless Belshazzar, at the feast of mutual admiration? (*B.M.*, 19)

As a party man, Sri Aurobindo does not like S. N. Banerji to be publicly ridiculed by his act of organising a meeting of the *Pandits* and calling it a “*Shanti-Sechan*’ or homage of hearts from Bengal’s assembled *Pandits*.” The whole affair seems to Sri Aurobindo as “a piece of childishness which could have no object but to minister to personal vanity.” Sri Aurobindo takes a fancy at the particular incidence in which Banerji is presented with chaplet flowers. The former likens the chaplet flowers to the laurel crown of the ancient Roman, but he trivialises the silly incident and hyperbolically compares the incident in a grotesque and sublime way. The satiric sting is more painful when he mockingly designates Banerji as ‘our Surendra Caesar’. The pronoun “our” indicates his love for Banerji who hails from Bengal. But in an undertone of satire to give vent to his strong dislike for Banerji’s self-adulation, he likens the chaplet flowers to a diadem, the laurel crown of gems that was offered to Caesar thrice by his murderous Senators. A similar fate awaits Sir Phirozshah Mehta, a political adversary, who is stripped of his

name and fame by the verbal irony of Sri Aurobindo, particularly on 29 October 1906, when he draws his readers' attention in the *Bande Mataram* to Mehta's autocratic behaviour in expelling "any uncomfortable and undesirable delegates" from the Congress. Through a series of understatement Sri Aurobindo hints at the implicit meaning intended by him that differs from what he ostensibly asserts. He scorns at the delusion created by 'petitionary politics' which is premised on the belief in the spiritual superiority of British people. The apostles of this procedure presume that "God answers prayers and the British people are god-like in their nature; so why should we (the petitioners) despair?" (*B.M.*, 234). Subjection is such an ingrained habit of the public that Sri Aurobindo chastises the tendency of people to shrink from open rebellion and to hunt for roundabout, safe and peaceful paths to national regeneration. He lambasts the moral lassitude of politicians who accept servitude and recoil from any struggle for liberty. A nation of slaves, he preaches, which acquiesces in subjection cannot become fit for freedom. Even a day's slavery robs a man half of his manhood while the yoke remains; so he cannot compass a perfect moral development.

As N. N. Ghose chivalrously defends S. N. Banerji against the onslaughts of the Extremists, Ghose becomes a victim of Sri Aurobindo's scornful whip with the remark - "Adversity brings us strange bedfellows" when it brings Banerji and Ghose under the same political counterpane. Sri

Aurobindo's use of animal imagery equates Ghose with a mouse and denigrates him to a subhuman level almost in a Swiftian vein.

Sri Aurobindo writes in a tone of mingled pathos and disgust about the so-called shrewd politicians who continue to worship reverentially the Viceroy of God on British India. He censures "the singular spectacle of a Hindu society professing to restore the purity of the old religion bowing down at the throne of Lord Minto". Ramesh Chandra Dutt is one among the devout disciples of the then demi-gods of the National Congress in British India. He unabashedly once declared: "Minto is an archangel of peace....Morley an archangel of benevolence". Sri Aurobindo downplays Dutt's eulogisation - "with so many archangels to look after us, we are unfortunate indeed if we cannot be happy. Poor India!" He does not spare to chastise our leaders for licking the boots of British rulers: "Ramesh Chandra with his large-hearted appreciation of the ruling qualities of the British race, Surendranath with his unswerving loyalty, Narendranath with his gratitude are, one would imagine so many pillars of British rule" (*B.M.*, 706).

Along with the colonial administration and Indian politicians, the press - an intransigent opponent becomes the target of Sri Aurobindo's journalistic onslaughts. He derides the antagonistic stand of the Anglo-Indian press towards the Nationalists in many of his columns of the *Bande Mataram*, published on 17 September 1906. As usual, press rivalry rocked the boat of Indian politics in those days to an extent that the *Statesman* and the *Mirror* in

their attempts would have abolished, expunged, and even blotted the Extremists out of existence in no time.

The *Indu Praksah* of Bombay, an avowedly pro-Moderate journal, discovers that Lord Kitchner was an unworthy general incapable of “nothing more heroic than digging up dead Mahadis.” With full of ‘impotent wrath’ it objects with impunity to Lord Morley for prolonging Lord Kitchner’s term because the paper is extremely anxious of the safety of the British possessions in India. In its acute anxiety to defend the British Empire, the paper clamours for a better general. But Sri Aurobindo deprecates the impudent demand of the *Indu Prakash* for recall of Lord Kitchner in a satiric tone:

But what is the use of the *Indu*’s shaking its moony fist in Mr. Morley’s face and calling the darling of Moderatism bad name? Much better were it done to send a petition with two lakhs signatures for Lord Kitchner’s recall, and, having done that, - sit content (*B.M.*, 284).

Sri Aurobindo ridicules the inordinate self-conceit of Englishmen which very often betrays them into ludicrous absurdities. One glaring example of it is the proclamation of the British rulers themselves as appointed by the Heaven to rule the universe. Whoever ventures to resist their rule is branded as a nuisance, a rebel or a traitor.

In an item of news Sri Aurobindo fearlessly criticises lack of concern of British administration for Hindus and its refusal to protect the harassed Hindus from the hands of the Mahomedan Goondas at the Mela of Jamalpur. He condemns the hollowness of British sense of justice of which they are so very proud of in the world.

The doctrine on which British Imperialism in India rests is based on arbitrary assumptions and a sense of racial superiority. Because ancient and mediaeval imperialism underscored the principle of might is right; the conquering nation forced the subject nation to obey; liberty being denied by the Providence to the subject nation. The proverbial benign picture of Britain is contradicted by Sri Aurobindo. The real face of England is laid bare in incidents of oppression at Rawalpindi, Jamalpur and the Punjab. The water tax, the land laws, the Colonisation Act legalising oppression and illegalities under the weight of which the Punjab landholders and peasantry groan reflects the pseudo-image of the angelic face of Britain. The ancient land of India is ruled by malevolent Britain, where: “a city of unarmed men terrorised by the military, the leaders of the people hurried from their daily avocations to prison, siege-guns pointed at the town, police rifles ready to fire men or more to be seen in the streets, bail refused to respectable pleaders and barristers from sheer terror of their influence” (*B.M.*, 326). He demolishes the myths of a just benevolent and freedom-loving Britain, which the Anglophiles have

created, through the use of a verbal irony in which a bland compliment is converted to an insult:

Britain, the benevolent, Britain, the mother of Parliaments, Britain, the champion of liberty, Britain, the deliverer of the slave, - such was the sanctified and legendary figure which we have been trained to keep before our eyes from the earliest years of our childhood. Our minds imbued through and through with the colours of the legend, we cherished a faith, in the justice and benevolence of Britain more profound, more implicit, more a very part of our beings than the faith of the Christian in Christ or of the Mahomedan in his prophet (*B.M.*, 323).

‘Morleyism’ a derogatory coinage Sri Aurobindo frames to unmask the dubious policies of Lord Morley. Morley’s statement made in the Parliament guarantees the continuance of “a personal and absolute British control pervading the administration of affairs in every department.” It further underlines a “bureaucratic despotism strongly favoured by the independent personal omnipotence of local government and local officials.” All reforms Morley wishes to undertake have a single object, “one governing idea, - an absolute personal despotic British control *in touch with the people.*” It is the implication of ‘Morleyism’ in vogue in the then politics. His utterances imply that orders of the Government shall have authority and force, irrespective of

Indian public opinions and sentiments. He has craftily devised to assess public opinion through the Council of Notables, the Legislative Councils, and the Indian Members of the India Council. In a nutshell, Morleyism means maintenance of absolute rule as rigid as any Czar's in India. Expressing his irksome reaction, Sri Aurobindo criticises the demonic policy of British Government in pouring undeserved honour on Morley whose life is a "mass of contradictions, the profession of liberalism running hand in hand with the practice of a bastard Imperialism which did the work of Satan while it mouthed liberal Scriptures to justify his sins" (*B.M.*, 863).

Sri Aurobindo reads the exact import of the Risleys Circular, a potent weapon of repression that has been deliberately framed to strike at the very root of *Swadeshi* movement and to stem the spirit of patriotism in the young. So he denounces the political motive of the Risleys Circular purported to stunt the growth of patriotism in future.

While critiquing British rule, he uses various instruments of satire for different purposes: to resist misrule, injustice, register people's grievances, oppose repressive rules, oppressive measures, and deny the Government's priority to snatch away people's democratic rights and human values. In many ways Sri Aurobindo avails himself of a variety of satiric techniques to diversify his pattern of inverted eulogy. His use of irony is directed to condemn what appears to be praise mostly. Through irony he exposes the real contradiction in

Englishmen's character and their professed ideals with which they beat their own drum in the world. Sri Aurobindo's satiric mode, which is Juvenalian in nature, decries elements of vice and error, ridiculously dangerous as they are; they evoke contempt, moral indignation or disillusioned sadness at the aberrations of the Anglo-Indian bureaucrats. His journalistic writings in *Bande Mataram* take the readers into confidence and share with them the important hidden secrets and intrigues practised by British administrators to extirpate the voice of opposition. His journalistic writings project a satiric and critical outlook that has topical and polemical resonance at the time of their publication. He digs at the hypocritical behaviour, contradictions, inconsistent British character, dubious attitude, and political ideologies at home and abroad. At home Englishmen are champions of democratic rights and human values, but in the colonies, they are the perpetrators of injustice and violence.

