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Sri Aurobindo's Dreams On The Spiritual Freedom Of Man And Their Relevance In Modern Times

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Abstract:

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) was a great Indian nationalist, world visionary and one of the most profound prophets of a spiritually unified idea. He emerged as a powerful exponent of a consciousness of *human* unity. Aurobindo's concept of 'spiritual freedom' showed a new beam of light both at the level of individual upliftment and at the level of modern nation-states. He clearly talked about his five dreams like revolutionary movement, renaissance and liberation of the peoples of Asia, world union and spiritual gift of India to the world. It can be mentioned that the inner point in Aurobindo's philosophy is the concept of freedom. It has been divided from different perspectives into two parts - the first approach of freedom is internal emancipation of mind from the bondage of irrationality. The idealists and the spiritualists agree on the interpretation of freedom. The second approach to freedom is essential to the materialist and social political cum economic view point in its applicability. The present paper is a modest attempt at placing Aurobindo's ideas on 'freedom' in the context of modern thought and movement in order to come to the conclusion whether his ideas are relevant for the present generation. He was deeply concerned with the freedom and salvation of the whole humanity on earth.

Key-words: freedom, Aurobindo, human, spiritual, philosophy.

Introduction

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) was a great Indian nationalist, poet, philosopher, world thinker and one of the most profound prophets of a spiritually unified vision. He emerged as a powerful exponent of a consciousness of human unity. Sri Aurobindo's concept of 'spiritual freedom' showed a new beam of light both at the level of individual upliftment and at the level of contemporary nation-states. He believed that the best thing in man is his spirituality. His idealistic philosophy of life was based upon Vedanta philosophy of Upanishads. He started his journey as a political thinker and became a spiritual integrality. He clearly talked regarding his five dreams. The first dream was a revolutionary movement for a free and united India, and he laments the fact that although India is free, it is not united. The second dream was a resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and he says that this also was nearing completion since the colonial age had come to an end. The third was a world union for all mankind and that is what, in fact, we are all striving for now with a global society. The fourth was a spiritual gift of India to the world and he speaks about this, the spiritual gift, and finally, the evolution to a high and a larger consciousness.¹ It can be mentioned that the central point in Aurobindo's political philosophy is the concept of freedom. It has been divided from different perspectives into two parts-the first approach of freedom is internal emancipation of mind from the bondage of irrationality. The idealists and the spiritualists agree on the interpretation of freedom. The second approach to freedom is essential to the materialist and social political cum economic view point in its applicability. The present paper is a modest attempt at placing Aurobindo's ideas on 'freedom' in the context of modern thought and movement in order to come to the conclusion whether his ideas are relevant for the present generation. He was deeply concerned with the freedom and salvation of the entire humanity on earth.

His initial political activism involved emphasis on the urgency of demanding total freedom from the British government. In Bengal, he got in touch with revolutionaries and inspired young revolutionaries such as Jatin Banerjee and Bagha Jatin. He was instrument in the formation of several youth clubs including the Anushilan Samiti. He helped in building the four bold objectives of the national movement –Swaraj, Swadesh, Boycott and national education. He travelled across Bardda, Bombay and Pune to educate people and get support for national movement. But unfortunately, the British government arrested him in connection with the Alipore Bomb case in 1908. After one year he was subsequently released. After releasing, he moved to Pondicherry to start a new life. In Pondicherry, he set himself on a path of spiritual learning. He dedicated himself to his spiritual and Philosophical spiritualism. He secluded yoga continuously for four years which he termed as integral yoga. In this way, he proposed the importance of spiritual practices in human transformation into a divine entity.

His object was not to develop any religion or establish a new faith or an order but to attempt an inner self-development by which each human being can perceive the oneness in all and externalize the god-like attribute in man. He was not only satisfied with freedom of India because, “The unity of mankind is -----a part of Nature’s eventual scheme and must come about.”² Here Robert Mac Dermott points out that ‘The dual ideal of a total resurgence of India and the total transformation of man characterized the mature work of Aurobindo Ghosh, the political revolutionary of Bengal (1905-10), and Sri Aurobindo, the mystical yogi of Pondicherry (1910-50)-----he also combined western and Indian values. The conditions for this synthesizing ability were created by the highly diverse strains in his personal life.’³ In this respect, Sri Aurobindo has stated that “with us the freedom consists in freedom from the darkness. Limitation, error, suffering, transience are the ignorant lower nature, but also in a total surrender to the Divine. Free action is the action of the divine in us and through us; no other action can be free.”⁴ Sri Aurobindo thought that the internal structure of the world union-political, administrative, economic etc. can be securely founded only on an inner sense at human unity which go deeper than ever the psychological unity and discover its spiritual source. His philosophy was the awakening of the individual as a spiritual being.

The 18th century ideal of the religion at humanity will not suffer for the purpose because it is only an intellectual creed. When it turns into a spiritual aspiration and its spiritual become religion of humanity. There is no doubt that spiritualism reached a new height through Aurobindo. It is religious because it believed in the sacred divinity within the man that is the core of Hindu faith. Such a spiritual religion of humanity can be called “much more powerful explicit, self conscious, universal in its appeal than the nationalist religion of country-----sufficient means of expressing all the resultant complete life and growth in a flexible and progressive form of human society.”⁵

Aurobindo’s explanation on ‘evolution of man’ according to the will of the Absolute’-has created in us a new line of attention towards analyzing his ideas on human freedom. Karl Marx, who was the ardent advocate of Human freedom, has to my mind, failed to analyze the exact necessity of individuals. He believed that economic interpretation of history of Human being has failed to attain the real stage of freedom for the individuals. But Aurobindo observed that, “The psychology of man and his societies is too complex, too synthetically of many-----sided and intermixed tendencies to satisfy any such rigorous and formal analysis.”⁶ He will have to set up a firm foundation of “society, ethics, political institutions, his relation with his fellows, his striving for his own perfection and his labour for mankind.”⁷ In regard the last stage of social evolution is the subjective stage of stage ‘The human cycle beings at the fourth stage of evolution of nature when man becomes self conscious.’⁸

Now we can get an idea of freedom which was originated in the mind of man. According to Orlando Patterson “Freedom, was generated from the expression of slavery” and “concept of freedom came into the mind of slaves as they were tortured by their slave owners. They started thinking how to save themselves from inhuman torture, how to free themselves from the bond, out of his own innovative thinking, how they could live better lives.”⁹ In this aspects freedom is viewed both as –i) the primary (constitutive role) and the ii) Principal means (instrumental role). Amartya Sen has remarked that freedom is central to the process of development for two distinct reasons:

1) The evaluative reason: Assessment of Progress has to be done primarily in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced. 2) The effectiveness reason: Achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the agency of people.¹⁰ According to Amartya Sen, there are five particular types of instrumental freedom- i) economic facilities, ii) political freedom, iii) social opportunities, iv) transparency guarantees, v) protective security.

The nation or society like the individual has a soul. But Aurobindo stated that ‘The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind a life and a body but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfillment upon earth.’¹¹ In this perspective, Aurobindo pointed out that ‘a large liberty will be the land society and the increase of freedom is a sign of growth of human society towards-----true spiritualization’.¹² His philosophy was the awakening of the individual as a spiritual being. There is no doubt that Human cycle will begin at the end of the subjective stage in the evolution of society when man becomes self conscious.

Sri Aurobindo has specified for condition of a free world union-

- 1) The stopping of war as the instrument and mechanism of solving political problems.
- 2) The right of self-determination of all people has to be established.
- 3) The ordering after economic life of the people by mutual and common agreement.
- 4) The adherence to and propagation of a religion of humanity in the basic psychological foundation of a world union.

It can be mentioned that God is to be defined in human terms and categories. Rabindranath Tagore discussed on the aesthetic communion with God and nature as an expansion of consciousness through humanitarian love and social service. In this field Aurobindo has emphasized on a total surrender to the divine mother. From what has been discussed above, it has become crystal clear that Tagore and Aurobindo both believed in the divine essence of man. Rabindranath Tagore has explained the Religion of Mankind like Sri Aurobindo did in his Hebart lectures delivered in Oxford at Manchester College during the month of May 1930. In his lectures he remarked that ‘I have mentioned in connection with my personal experience some songs which I have often heard from Wandering village bingers,

belonging to a population sect of Bengal, called Bans----- For it suggests that these religious are never about a God of cosmic force, but rather about the God of human personality.¹³

It states that the idea of 'Spiritual Freedom' is the ultimate solution in our search for the concept of human freedom. Sri Aurobindo as a spiritualist leader has emphasized the necessity for spiritual pursuit of the individual. One can get rid of all material attachment to be able to free one's soul. His dream shows the light of hope to all the crisis-ridden human beings. He laid great stress on the spiritual penance and yoga practice as necessary for promotion of the principle of development of human soul. The social environment is not likely to improve unless and until man can live a life from fear, war, exploitation etc. He was born in a period during imperialism. He himself got naturally involved in the freedom struggle of India. His main goal was to set up united world. In the present time, the Philosophical and political thought of Sri Aurobindo, all modern states irrespective of they follow this on socialist ideology assert that they are democratic states and thus act as a protector of individual freedom. In this regard Aurobindo has remarked that "Democracy is by means a sure preservative of liberty, on the contrary, we see today the democratic system of government march steadily towards such an organized annihilation of individual liberty-----its method because it has a greater force at its back, but for that very reason more effective and pervading. The tyranny of the majority has become a familiar phase."¹⁴

In this connection, spiritual education showed teaches the learners to identify the connection of spirit and the matter so that they can see both material and spiritual life rationally. A spiritual education would prepare the student to face life armed with greater faith and face with an outlook which is integral. He likes the British education system a bit in India that he used to call it a mercenary and soulless system which is sufficient for making incapable the Indian brain. But he was a great supporter of national system of education, we can achieve national integrity, promote our culture and tradition. He involved all of uplift man from the present state to a brighter future. His view on education was to cover the whole aspects on education such as spiritual, physical, vital by cultivating the beauty, power and love.

The political vision of Sri Aurobindo was to establish the Human unity and freedom of entire humanity in the whole world. The central theme of his works are the evolution of human life into life divine. It is not only political freedom and economic freedom, he emphasized on spiritual freedom also. He thought that political and economic freedoms are the expression of outer form of freedom of individual life that is the spiritual freedom. He developed his own vision of human progress and spiritual evolution. As a spiritual man, Sir Aurobindo emphasizes the spiritual nature of nationalism. In the second volume of philosophical monthly *Arya* dated 15 August 1915, he wrote “unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests, the resurgence of man out of merely animal and economic life-----manhood into that true super-manhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have used to three are one: for man’s unity and man’s transcendence can come only by living in the spirit.”¹⁵

The Present paper presents some aspects of my search for human freedom in truest sense very much illuminated by Aurobindo’s ideas of ‘Spiritual Freedom’, and ‘Human Unity.’ We have observed that the world scenario is marching steadily towards the realization of Sri Aurobindo’s dream. He himself has recognized the inevitability of the centralizing tendency leading to the formation of a world state. For examples we can be mentioned the formation of the League of Nations, South East Asian Nations, UNESCO etc. In this perspective, Rabindranath Tagore has remarked, “My country-----transcended his physical boundaries-----revealed her being in a -----man her recognized as their own by those in alien shore were awakened into a surprise of life.”¹⁶ In the context of freedom Sri Aurobindo commented that ‘Spirituality respects the freedom of human soul, because it is itself fulfilled by freedom, and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law-----It will give freedom to philosophy and science-----freedom even today the spirit-----freedom to man’s seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and aspirations.’¹⁷

Conclusion

The above study undoubtedly indicates that Aurobindo Ghosh was a great philosopher and spiritual to the center. The aim of the religion of humanity was formulated with the image of three kindred ideas- Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Sir Aurobindo observed that Liberty, Equality and Fraternity could not be really achieved through the machinery of society. The above study clearly indicates that Aurobindo was a great philosopher and spiritual to the core. His desires free environment for student so that he can surface out his the hidden expertise and innovation. In this perspective, we can legitimately state that what he essentially communicates to us is a rare optimist view about the future destiny of man. He has got contemporary relevance for India and the world. He welcomed an age of super mind where the realization of good freedom and unity will predominate in all social groups. The youth of the East is disillusioned with the idea of old passivity, poverty and mere pretence of spirituality and is in a challenging mood. But the youth of the West is also beset with innumerable challenges-the challenge posed by materialism and affluent society.¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo was an Indian nationalist, philosopher, yogi, guru and poet. He wrote a large number of books viz., the Secret of the Vedas, Essays on the *Gita*, the Life Divine, the Synthesis of Yoga, the Foundations of Indian Culture, and the Psychology of social Development, the Future Poetry and the Savitri. He has set from his philosophy in the Life Divine. He bases his philosophy on the original Vedanta of the Upanishads. He believes that earlier Vedanta represent and integral or balance view of life. It implies healthy integration of God and man or world, renunciation and enjoyment, freedom of the soul and action of nature. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1943 and for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950. It may be said that Aurobindo's writings provide an answer to the present-day evolution crisis.¹⁹ These types of things represent the nature of the soul. In this perspective, few relevant lines from *Savitri* may be recalled:

“Awakened by the touch of the unseen,
Deserting the boundary of things achieved,
Aspired the strong discoverer, tireless Thought,
Revealing at each step a luminous world,
It left known summits for the unknown peaks,
Impassioned, it sought the lone unrealized Truth,
It longed for the light that knows not death and birth.”²⁰

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