



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Divine Core of Nationalism: Exploring Insights from Sri Aurobindo

 Dr. Digambar Shamrao Kulkarni

 Assistant Professor, Vai. Dhunda Maharaj Deglurkar College, Degloor, MS, India;
digambarkulkarni149@gmail.com

 Accepted version published on 5 September 2025

 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17099181>

ABSTRACT

When we think of nationalism, it often brings to mind images of flags, armies, or heated political debates. However, for Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), one of India’s most original thinkers, nationalism was far more than that. This study aims to meditate upon not only political independence or economic progress, but also the awakening of the eternal law of truth. The transformation of a nation’s soul is the essence of this paper. Those were days when India was still under British colonial rule; Aurobindo redefined nationalism as a spiritual force that went hand in hand with India’s timeless heritage, offered to the world.

Keywords: Sanatana Dharma; spiritual awakening; swaraj; destiny

FULL PAPER

Nationalism is the concept that unites the interests of the people towards the nation. Which gratifies and gathers the interest of the particular country or its only nation. In every sense, there is fascinating loyalty and devotion towards the nation. Nationalism draws on common language, cultures, customs, religions, regions, and historical events that awaken nationalism and people's interest in their nationality, among the common people. The rise of the national spirit, peace, and prosperity towards nationalism, all those ideas in the light of Sri Aurobindo. He has written 36 volumes throughout his life. We can understand his views on nationalism when he entered politics in 1906. India was under British rule at that time, and the thought of an independent nation was indigestible to the ruler of the country. His works play a vital role in changing the minds of common people and in rethinking an independent nation, which was a tough and challenging task he undertook till the last breath of his life through writing as well as direct involvement in the free nation movements. On nationalism, we have to try to understand that if you look at social and political science, two terms are fundamental: the individual and the group. Now, our development of human history over thousands of years has been a story of successively growing together. We start with tribes, clans, and small kingdoms, which grow into empires, and at a certain stage, these empires turn into nations. Every bigger unit that is formed does not dissolve the smaller ones. Even today, we recognize India as our nation, but our family unit has not dissolved our provincial state.

This essay explores Aurobindo's vision of nationalism in four stages: his early belief in nationalism as a divine force, the transformation of his ideas after his spiritual awakening, his attempt to reconcile nationalism with internationalism, and his conviction that India's destiny lay in reviving and sharing Sanatana Dharma. In doing so, it will show that Aurobindo's thought remains not only central to India's past but also deeply relevant to our present global moment.

Nationalism as a Divine Force

In his early political writings, especially in *Bande Mataram*, Aurobindo presented nationalism as a power beyond human invention. To him, it was "an avatar" and a divinely appointed Shakti—a spiritual energy moving through history (Ganguli). This idea gave the Indian freedom struggle a sacred dimension. It was not just about opposing colonial rule but about fulfilling God's work on earth. He made this point forcefully in a speech delivered after his colleague Bipin Chandra Pal was imprisoned. "Nationalism is not going to be crushed," he declared. "It is God who is

working in Bengal, and God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail” (qtd. in Ganguli). Such words carried immense power at a time when the British Empire appeared unshakable. By framing nationalism as divine will, Aurobindo gave people a reason to endure hardship and even sacrifice their lives for freedom. In a personal letter, he deepened this idea by describing India not as a mere piece of land but as the *Matrubhumi* (Motherland) herself: “I know my country as the Mother. I worship her and adore her accordingly” (qtd. in Ganguli). Here, patriotism becomes devotion; the love of country becomes a form of worship.

From Revolutionary Zeal to Spiritual Nationalism

Aurobindo’s early involvement in politics was not limited to speeches and articles. Between 1905 and 1908, during the *Swadeshi* movement, he supported boycotts of British goods and even justified armed resistance when necessary. However, his life took a dramatic turn after his arrest in 1908. During his imprisonment days in Alipore Jail, he underwent profound spiritual experiences that reshaped his perception of nationalism. In his famous *Uttarpara* Speech after his release, Aurobindo explained this shift: “I say no longer that nationalism is a religion; I say that it is *Sanatana Dharma* which for us is nationalism” (Aurobindo, *Speeches and Writings* 31). In other words, nationalism was no longer just about political freedom. It was about preserving and reviving India’s eternal spiritual tradition. Without *Sanatana Dharma*, he believed, the nation itself would wither. Eventually, he began to distance himself from violent methods. In a 1910 letter, he warned against “wild pamphleteering” and “frenzied appeals to national hatred,” arguing that such approaches led only to chaos (qtd. in Ganguli). For him, true nationalism could not be built on anger or destruction. It had to be built on spiritual regeneration.

Nationalism and Internationalism

What makes Aurobindo especially relevant today is his refusal to pit nationalism against internationalism. To him, they were not contradictory but stages in a larger process. In *The Model of Human Unity*, he traced human history as a chain of expanding circles—from tribes to kingdoms, from kingdoms to nations, and eventually, toward a global unity (Aurobindo, *Ideal* 14–15). Nationalism was therefore a stepping stone, not the final destination. He also saw the limitations of Western political ideals. Liberty and equality, the rallying cries of the French Revolution, often pulled in opposite directions. Too much liberty created inequality; too much equality destroyed liberty. The missing element, he argued, was fraternity—true brotherhood. Moreover, for Aurobindo, fraternity was not just a slogan but a spiritual truth: “The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved

by the power of human brotherhood.... These three things are, in fact, the nature of the soul. For freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the spirit” (Ideal 492). In other words, only by recognizing the same spirit in all human beings could liberty and equality truly coexist. This was India’s potential gift to the world: a spiritual basis for unity that did not erase its variety.

Soul of India ‘Sanatana Dharma’

Aurobindo’s central vision was the firm belief that Indian nationalism was inseparable from Sanatana Dharma. One cannot think of separating them. Unlike religions based on a single scripture or prophet, Sanatana Dharma affirmed that truth is infinite and can be realized in countless ways. It embraced both unity and diversity, the one and the many. By rooting nationalism in Sanatana Dharma, Aurobindo gave it a universal and inclusive character. India’s mission, he argued, was not to dominate but to guide. In his 1947 message to All India Radio, delivered on the day of independence, he declared: “India was arising not to serve her own material interests only... but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race” (Speeches and Writings 153). This vision reframed swaraj (self-rule). Independence was necessary, but it was only the first step. The deeper goal was for India to become a spiritual leader, showing how humanity could balance unity with diversity.

Relevance in Today’s World

In today’s globalized era, nationalism often swings between extremes—either aggressive exclusivity or empty symbolism. Aurobindo’s vision offers a middle path. He did not reject the notion of national identity and warned against reducing it to violence or pride. He also did not accept globalization in its market-driven form, which tends to flatten cultural differences. Instead, he envisaged internationalism based on harmony among distinct cultures, each contributing its own strengths. His approach was so all-encompassing that there would be no harm to any small nation. If we apply this approach, the representation of small nations will not be in danger. The present approach is so important that political systems alone cannot solve the contradictions of liberty and equality. The intervention of spirituality in this discourse is essential in this case. Without a spiritual sense of fraternity, democracies risk falling into polarization and inequality. Aurobindo’s emphasis on inner transformation remains a challenge to modern societies: true unity must be rooted in consciousness, not just in laws or institutions.

Conclusion

This epic vision of Sri Aurobindo's nationalism was both deeply rooted in the Indian ethos and profoundly universal. As a revolutionary leader, he declared that nationalism was a divine force, a sacred duty of devotion to the Mother. After his spiritual awakening, he redefined nationalism as Sanatana Dharma, the eternal truth that had sustained India for millennia. In this contemporary scenario, if nations, once awakened to their duties as human beings, lead the world toward a greater face of humanity, then they can reconcile nationalism with internationalism. In an age where nationalism often divides rather than unites, Aurobindo's thought is strikingly relevant. He reminds us that true nationalism is not about domination or exclusion but about service and awakening. India's freedom, in his vision, was never meant to stop at political sovereignty. It was a call to revive the spirit of Sanatana Dharma and to share it with the world. His words challenge us even today: to imagine a nationalism that is spiritual, inclusive, and oriented toward the highest destiny of humanity.

Works cited

- Aurobindo, Sri. *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1949.
- . *Speeches and Writings*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1950.
- ___. *The Life Divine*. 2nd ed. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2005.
- Ganguli, Devdip. *Sri Aurobindo's Vision of India and the World*. Transcript, Rishihood University, 2022.