CHAPTER - IV
SRI AUROBINDO AS A PROPHET OF NATIONALISM

Sri. Aurobindo is considered as a prophet of Nationalism. His opinion about a Nation and its constituents especially of India is unique. He speaks as a Rishi. His adoration of this ancient land is highly inspiring. His speeches and writings about this unique kind of Nationalism has inspired millions of Indians and has played its role in the struggle for India's freedom by inculcating a strong and formidable patriotism in their minds and hearts. Even these opinions of his about Nationalism are not formed merely out of his intellect but forms part of his spiritual experiences as revealed to him through his intense mediation. Therefore he speaks not merely as an intellectual patriot but as a prophet. His writings in the Arya, Bande Mantharam, Karmayogin, and some letters to his wife Mrinalini and some disciples and his innumerable speeches especially the one from Uttarapara are just a few examples quoted here.

Sri Aurobindo had written a booklet ‘Bhavani Mandir’ and along with his brother Barin had intended to construct a temple consecrated to the Divine Mother, through invoking Mother India as Bhavani Bharathi (Bharath Shakti) and through that it would be extremely effective for propagation of the new revolutionary gospel.

In Bhavani Bharathi he wrote, “A temple is to be erected and consecrated to ‘Bhavani’ the Mother among the hills. Bhavani is the Mother, the Infinite Energy that looms up in the vision of man in various aspects and infinite forms. Each aspect creates and marks an age. In our age the Mother’s characteristic aspect is shakti or masterful strength, in this aspect her name is Bhavani. Everywhere
the Mother is at work, remoulding and creating. She is pouring Her spirit into the old. She is whirling into life the new.

But in India Tamas has taken possession of the people. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakthi. The Mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.”

So Sri Aurobindo gives the call; India must shake off her lethargy and rise to her full stature. And what is India, our mother-country, Sri Aurobindo is very clear in his opinion. “It is not a piece of earth nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shakti of all the million units that make up the nation, just as Bhavani Mahisha Mardhini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhavani Bharathi is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas, the self indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons”.

For whatever achievement in the individual, collective, national, international, cosmic level worship of Mother or Shakthi is invariable. Shakti is not an inert force as conceived by scientist, but it is a force always backed up by consciousness. The advaithins view that consciousness is passive and the scientist’s view that the active force is inert, are both unacceptable to Sri Aurobindo. Mother is not a name of a person or a human being but it is a conscious dynamic Force.

AT that time Sri Aurobindo thought that Three things were necessary, first a temple for the Mother, second a new order of Karma Yogis, men in whom the Shakti is developed to the uttermost extent and thirdly the message of So-Hum, the mighty formula of Vedanta, the knowledge which when verified by Karma and Bhakti
delivers men out of all fear and all weakness and India must be reborn because her rebirth is demanded for the future of the world. Then comes Sri Aurobindo's final call: "Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshiped - inactive because the God in us is concealed by Tamas, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. You who feel Her stirring within you, fling off the black veil of self, break down the imprisoning walls of indolence, help Her each as you feel impelled with your bodies or with your intellect or with your speech or with your wealth or with your prayers and worship, each man according to his capacity. Draw not back, for against those who were called and heard Her not, She may well be wroth in the day of Her coming, but to those who help Her advent even a little, how radiant with beauty and kindness will be the face of their Mother."3

It is simply astonishing to any one, that Sri Aurobindo even amidst his intense or deep involvement in politics and struggle for India's freedom in 1905 to 1906 in Baroda, how many things he had simultaneously taken up, revolutionary work, politics, teaching, besides, his own literary works and yoga. We can get a glimpse of his main pre-occupation from the letter wrote in Bengali to his wife Mrinalini in which he writes of his famous three madnesses. The first: I firmly believe that the accomplishments, talent, education and means that God has given me are all His. Whatever is essential and needed for the maintenance of the family has alone a claim upon me. The rest must be returned to God. If I spend every thing for comfort or luxury then I am a thief. The second madness, which has recently seized hold of me, is: I should some how see God. If He exists there must be ways to perceive His presence, to meet Him. However arduous the way, I am determined to follow the path: In one month I have felt the Hindu religion has not told lies, - the signs and hints it has given
as a part of my experience. Now I want to take you along with me. My third madness is that other people look upon the country as an inert piece of matter, a stretch of fields as meadows, forests and rivers. To me She is the Mother. I adore her, worship her. What will the son do when he sees a rakshasa sitting on the breast of his Mother and sucking her blood? Will he quietly have his meal or will he rush to deliver his mother from that grasp? I know I have the strength to redeem this fallen race. It is not physical strength. It is the strength of knowledge. The power of Kshatriya is not the only power. There is also the power of Brahmin, the power founded upon knowledge. This feeling is not new, I was born with it and it is in my very marrow. God has sent me to this world to accomplish this great mission. When I was fourteen, the seed began to sprout; at eighteen the foundation became firm and unshakable. In another letter he wrote “In these dark days, the entire country is seeking refuge at my door. Among the thirty crores of my brothers and sisters many are dying from hunger and starvation. They must be helped.”

Sri Aurobindo wrote in ‘Bande Mataram’ on February 18, 1908 “Swaraj is the direct revelation of God to this people, - not mere political freedom but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of the individual, freedom of the community, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom. Spiritual freedom the ancient Rishis had already declared to us; social freedom was part of the message of Buddha, Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir and the saints of Maharashtra; political freedom is the last work of the triune gospel. God has set apart India as the eternal fountain head of holy spirituality, and He will never suffer that fountain to run dry. Therefore Swaraj has been revealed to us. By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom. Once more in the land of Saints and sages will burn the fire of the ancient yoga and the
hearts of her people will be lifted up in to the neighbourhood of the Eternal”.6

While initiating young patriots in to revolutionary movement Sri Aurobindo would say “If we want India’s independence, we have to offer every thing. We should be ready to give up even our life for it and conquer the fear of death. Surrender yourself to God and take the plunge in the name of the Mother. This is my ‘Diksha’ to you”.7 This shows how Sri Aurobindo effected miraculous changes in the minds of young men through his presence and the power of his words which acted as ‘Mantra’.

After a series of formidable spiritual experiences in Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech at Uttarapara on 30th May 1909, which was totally different from his earlier speeches. The earlier speeches had political character and the present one had a spiritual taint in it. This was the first speech delivered by Sri. Aurobindo after he had undergone the spiritual experience in Alipore jail. Just as his personality underwent a radical transformation, his speech too acquired a distinct spiritual note. In this lengthy speech he narrates in detail how the Divine revealed to him through his deep and intense mediation, the secretes and meaning and the truth and significance of the Hindu Religion – the Sanatana Dharma and also as to how it was to influence his future course of actions.

A few excerpts from Uttarapara Speech

“It was more than a year ago that I came here last. When I came I was not alone; one of the mightiest prophets of Nationalism sat by my side (refering to Sri Lokamanya Balagangadhara Tilak). Now he is far away, separated from us by thousands of miles. Others whom I was accustomed to find working beside me are absent. The storm that swept over the country has scattered them far and wide. When I
went to Jail the whole country was alive with cry of Bande Mataram, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had risen out of degradation. When I came out of Jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country and men seemed bewildered; for instead of God’s bright heaven full of vision of the future that had been before us, there seemed to be overhead a leaden sky from which human thunders and lightening rained. No man seemed to know which way to move and from all sides came the question, “What shall we do next? What is there that we can do?” I too did not know which way to move, I too did not know what was next to be done. But one thing I knew that, as it was the Almighty Power of God which had raised that cry, that hope, so it was the same Power which had sent down that silence. He who was in the shouting and the movements was also in the pause and the hush. He has sent it upon us, so that the nation might draw back for a moment and look into itself and know His Will. I have not been disheartened by that silence, because I have been made familiar with silence in my prison and because I knew it was in the pause and the hush that I had myself learnt this lesson through the long year of my detention.8

Then Sri Aurobindo related the experiences, which were vouchsafed to him in the jail and said that they had revealed to him the truth of the Hindu religion. He said: “I realized what the Hindu religion meant. We speak often of the Hindu religion of the Sanatana Dharma, but few of us really know what the religion is. - - - Day after day, He showed me his wonders and made me realize the utter truths of the Hindu religion. I had many doubts before. I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas and an atmosphere entirely foreign. About many things in Hinduism I had once been inclined to believe that they were imaginations, that there was much dream in it, much that was delusion and Maya. But now day after day I realized in the
mind. I realized in the heart I realized in the body the truths of the Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me and things were opened to me which no material science could explain; when I first approached Him, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Jnani. I came to Him long ago in Baroda some years before the swadeshi began and I was drawn into the public field. When I approached God at that time I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the skeptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence, yet something drew me to the truth of the Vedas, the truth of the Gita, the truth of the Hindu religion. I felt, there must be a mighty truth somewhere in this Yoga, a mighty truth in this religion based on the Vedanta. So when I turned to the Yoga and resolved to practice it and find out if my idea was right, I did it in this spirit and with this prayer to Him, “If Thou art, then Thou knowest my heart. Thou knowest that I do not ask for Mukti, I do not ask for anything, which others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love and to whom I pray that I may devote my life”. I strove long for the realisation of Yoga and at least to some extent I had it, but in what I most desired, I was not satisfied. Then in the seclusion of the jail of solitary cell I asked for it again. “I said give me Thy Adesh. I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message.” In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, “I have given you a work and it is to help to uplift this nation. Before long, the time will come, when you will have to go out of jail; for it is not my will that this time either you could be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country. I have called you to work, and this is the Adesh for which you have asked. I give you the Adesh to go forth and do my work”. The Second message came and it said, “Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which
you had your doubts and it is this religion that I am raising up before
the world, it is this that I have perfected and developed through the
Rishis, saints and Avataras and now it is going forth to do my work
among the nations. I am rising up this nation to send forth my word.
This is the Sanathana Dharma, this is the eternal religion which you
did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you. The
agnostic and skeptic in you have been answered, for I have given you
proofs within and without you, physical and subjective, which have
satisfied you. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this
word that is for the Sanathana Dharma that they arise, it is for the
world and not for themselves that they arise”. --- “But what is this
Hindu religion? What is this religion, which we call Sanathana,
eternal? It is the Hindu religion, only because the Hindu nation has
kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the
seas and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it
was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages.
But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does
not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world.
That which we call Hindu religion is really the eternal religion,
because it is the universal religion, which embraces all others. If a
religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a
sectarian religion an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time
and a limited Purpose”. These words of Sri Aurobindo help us to
understand the inspiration behind his activities at this time and his
perceptions regarding the true meaning of nationalism and religion.
From now on he relied entirely on the inner voice – the Adesh or divine
command from within to regulate his actions and at any moment of
crisis. He instantly obeyed its dictates and so when he speaks of
Sanatana Dharma, it is not of creed and dogmas, rites and rituals that
he speaks. As he has further explained in Karmayogin: “There is a
mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of
spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be a guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.\textsuperscript{10}

According to Sri Aurobindo the essence of Hindu religion is sacrifice, to the extent of giving one’s personal liberation, up to the liberation of the whole world. Personal Moksha is not the sole end of the life. It is the Moksha of the entire world, that is the end, that should be the end of the man’s life. Sri Aurobindo aimed at this goal but at the expense of his own personal, spiritual happiness. If the essence of Hinduism according to Sri Aurobindo is sacrifice, then Sri Aurobindo himself was an epitome of this sacrifice.

Greatness of Hinduism is universality. It includes the spirit of other religions and does not exclude any other religion. When Sri Aurobindo says that Hinduism is universal, he is not imposing the greatness of Hindus, on other countries, he is simply highlighting the fact that it includes the merit of all religions of the world. It does not reject any other religion.

In defense of Indian culture he is extremely rational and progressive in his opinion. It appears that his strong views on Indian system of democracy and decentralization of powers in democratic administration are now finding ample appreciation and application.

He notes: “Its first period was that of a great spiritual out flowering in which the forms were supple, flexible and freely responsive to its essential spirit. That fluid movement passed away into an age of strong intellectuality in which all was fixed into distinct, sufficiently complex, but largely treated and still supple forms and rhythms. There came as a consequence a period of richly crystallized fixity shanken by crises which were partly met by a
change of ideas and a medication of forms. But the hard binding of set forms triumphed at last, there was a decline of the inspiring spirit, a stagnation of living force, a progressive decay of the outward structure. The decay was accompanied and at once arrested for a moment and hastened in the end by the impact of other cultures. Today we are in the midst of a violent and decisive crisis brought about by the inflooding of the West and of all for which it stands. An upheaval resulted that began with the threat of a total death and irretrievable destruction of the culture; but its course is now uplifted on the contrary by the strong hope of a great revival, transmutation and renaissance.11

Sri Aurobindo refutes the ill-informed criticism that the Indian mind is prone to fatalism due to too much of other worldly religion and there is a pronounced lack of vigour of life. He notes “When we look at the past of India, what strikes us is her stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginable prolific creativeness. For three thousand years at least, - it is indeed much longer, - she has been creating abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness, republics and kingdoms and empires, philosophies and cosmogonies and sciences and creeds and arts and poems and all kinds of monuments, palaces and temples and public works, communities and societies and religious orders, laws and codes and rituals, physical sciences, phychic sciences, systems of Yoga, systems of politics and administration, arts spiritual, arts worldly, trades, industries, fine crafts, - the list is endless and in each item there is almost a plethora of activity. She creates and creates and is not satisfied and is not tired; she will not have an end of it, seems hardly to need a space for rest....”12
He points out that Indian spirituality is affirmative of life; only it looks at life in a broader setting and invests it with values that are long ranged and eternal. Not only does it give a Law of life, Dharma, generally but also a law for each type of temperament. It regards a developing evolution in humanity and holds up the truth of both being terms of one Divine manifestation. Karma, Rebirth, do not enervate the Indian as alleged; they give him fortitude and self-reliance. He moulds his fate. In no other approach is man given so much freedom to think, to function, as in the Indian way of life. The spiritual has been the dominant motif of Indian life and that shall be the key to her future. “India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light illumine; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight; she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge.”

In this analysis of the principles and forms of Indian Polity Sri Aurobindo notes that the Indian system was totally different in spirit from the western. He deplores that “Indian scholars have attempted to read the modern ideas and types of democracy and even a parliamentary system into the past of India”, and calls for an objective study of the political evolution of the Indian society in order to discover the nation’s own genius which combined the social mores, spiritual ideas and individual needs for progress in the development of a form or forms of political governance that have been remarkably resilient and living.
He comes to the question again later in the course of his conversations, when he observes that "It is the European idea that makes you think that the parliamentary form or constitution is the best. We had great communal liberty and the communities were the centers of power and of national life. The king had a continuity of policy from father to son and he could not infringe the rights of the communes; and if their rights were interfered with, the people at once made themselves felt. That was the form which the genius of the race had involved. You think that this parliamentary government is the best form of government. In fact, that form has been a success nowhere except in England. In France it is worse. In America in spite of their being an Anglo-Saxon race, it has not succeeded... I don't understand why everything should be centralized as in the parliamentary constitution, we must have different, numerous centers of culture and power, full of national life, spread all over the country and they must have political freedom to develop themselves."  

Answering a question on the difference between European and Indian politics, he says: "The Indian system grew out of Life. It had room for everything and every interest. There were monarchy, aristocracy, democracy. Every interest was represented in the Government, while the Western system grew out of Mind. In Europe they are led by reason and want to make everything cut and dried without any chance of freedom or variation. If it is democracy, then democracy only; and no room for anything else. They can't be plastic...... There is much that he has said by way of warning and in giving firm direction in that field of religion, social living, literature, arts, polity, that can form the blueprint for a restructuring of the national life. India can prosper only if she pursues the line of her innate genius. What precisely is that priceless heritage of her innate genius. What precisely is that priceless heritage of her peoples and
how it is to be reshaped and developed in order that the whole world could benefit from it and live and progress in Peace and Brotherhood is a constant theme of this insightful, objective, scholarly study of the key to Indian history and civilization.  

“Spirituality is indeed the master key of the Indian mind, the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning and even in her ages of reason and in her age of increasing ignorance, she never lost hold of the insight – that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities. She was alive to the greatness of material laws and forces; she had a keen eye for the importance of the physical sciences, she knew how to organise the arts of the ordinary life. But she saw that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical, she saw that the complexity of the universe could not be explained in the present terms of man or seen by his superficial sight, that there were other powers behind, other powers within man himself of which he is normally unaware, that he is conscious only of a small part of himself, that the invisible always surrounds the visible, the supra-sensible the sensible, even an infinity always surrounds the finite. She saw too that man has power of exceeding himself, of becoming himself more entirely and profoundly than he is. Truth which have only recently begun to be seen in Europe and seem even now too great for its common intelligence. She saw the myriad gods beyond man, God beyond the gods and beyond God his own ineffable eternity. She saw that there were ranges of life beyond our life, ranges of mind beyond our present mind and above these she saw the splendours of the spirit. Then with that calm audacity of her intuition which knew no fear or littleness and shrank from no act whether of spiritual or intellectual, ethical or vital courage, she declared that there was none of these things which man could not attain if he trained his will and
knowledge, he could conquer these ranges of mind, become the spirit, become a god, become one with God, become the ineffable Brahman. And with the logical practicality and sense of science and organised method, which distinguished her mentality, she set forth immediately to find out the way. Hence from long ages of this insight and practice there was ingrained in her, her spirituality, her powerful psychic tendency, her great yearning to grapple with the infinite and possess it, her in-eradicable religious sense, her idealism, her yoga, the constant truth of her art and her philosophy.17

With all his spiritual background and as a Prophet, this is the declaration Sri Aurobindo has made “India is a country apart in which, as in a fortress the highest spiritual ideal could maintain itself in its most absolute purity.”18 “India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India.”19 – wrote the Mother. India must be saved for the good of the world since India alone can lead the world to peace and a new world order.

But one should not forget that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother advocated ‘spiritual realism’ and they never spoke out of emotional idealism. They based themselves on what they experienced as perceived with their highly evolved inner faculties.