

## SRI AUROBINDO'S NOTION OF BOYCOTT

**Prof. Debashri Banerjee**  
Assistant Professor & H.O.D.,  
Department of Philosophy,  
Chatra R.P. Mahavidyalaya,  
Bankura

In the social-political theory of Sri Aurobindo swaraj seems to be the path mandatory for transforming a common life into the Life Divine and boycott remains as one of its important corollaries. In his spiritual dream of fulfilling the union with the Divine, he had taken the political path as he truly realized that for making our country wholly prepared for this spiritual destination, our first priority must be the attainment of its political freedom. Political liberty, in his opinion, serves as the gateway of achieving the spiritual liberty. He had a firm belief over India's spiritual excellence and for making our mother-land as the spiritual guide of all other spiritually backward nations it has to be made free from the shackles of its political servitude. Boycott is actually treated as an excellent weapon in this regard. A boycott is generally an act of voluntary abstaining from using, buying or dealing with a person, organization or nation as an expression of protest against any kind of exploitation, usually for political reasons. It can be used in the local, provincial, national as well as international context of politics. Local to international politics can be affected by the good as well as the bad sides of boycott. Before India, the Europe was quite accustomed with such use of boycott in the political context. However we have to concentrate with the concept of boycott as found in the social-political thought of Sri Aurobindo. According to Karan Singh 'Sri Aurobindo had no hesitation in using violent means to achieve his country's freedom from foreign oppression. He was, however, by no means an impractical dreamer. It appears he soon realized that an armed revolt at that stage of India's history was not feasible, and though he continued to support and guide the underground terrorist movement in the hope that it would demoralize British serving in India, he could have had no illusions as to the possibility of mere terrorism securing the country's freedom. In fact his writings make it clear that in the light of the massive upheaval of public protest as the result of the partition, he wished the national movement to be not merely an affair of secret societies and clandestine activities but a broad, open, sweeping movement which would enthuse and organize the vast Indian masses in an irresistible upsurge towards emancipation and independence. Thus, although violent methods may have their place in Sri Aurobindo's technique, his vision and foresight led him to advocate an entirely different method which he rightly thought was 'the most natural and suitable weapon' under the circumstances, whereby the nation could achieve its liberty – the method of passive resistance'<sup>i</sup>. In this way we became acquainted with the fact that, Sri Aurobindo, even though, known as a revolutionary activist or extremist, accepted both the path of violent and non-violent means to gain freedom from the British servitude. In his writings he often mentioned it as a form of defensive resistance; however both passive and active resistance is included within the vast arena of defensive resistance'<sup>ii</sup>.

Now let us concentrate on the etymological meaning of boycott. Actually ‘boycott’ entered into the dictionary of politics following the name of Captain Charles Boycott, the land agent of a landlord, Lord Erne, who lived in Count Mayo of Ireland in 1880. As the condition of harvest had been very poor that days, Lord Erne offered his tenants a ten percent reduction in their rents instead of their demand of twenty-five percent. Boycott then, unable to succumb the situation, attempted to evict eleven tenants from the land to broke the backbone of the peasants. But the result was devastating in nature. The situation became worsen then as Boycott soon found him isolated – his workers stopped working in fields and in his home; local businessmen stopped working in the fields; and even the local postmen refused to deliver his mails. Within weeks Boycott’s name became famous in everywhere. It was used by *The Times* in November, 1880 as a term for organized form of isolation.<sup>iii</sup> However after that incident, we became acquainted with the term ‘Boycott’ for many times in the international politics. Montgomery bus boycott, the successful Jewish boycott organized against Henry Ford in USA in the i920, the boycott of Japanese products in China after the May Fourth movement, the Arab League boycott of Israel and other companies trading with Israel etc are most popular instances of boycott in international politics.

In the history of Indian politics Boycott played immensely efficient role in achieving our most desired Indian Independence. The cry for swaraj was aroused after the crude incident of Bengal Partition took place in 1905 by the order of Lord Curzon. Eventually the New Party or the well-known Extremists (established in 1906) became immensely popular as they always gave importance on the mass-opinion against Partition. By their sincere effort, the Anti-Partition Movement began to take the concrete shape. Boycott agitation was popularly known as one of its most important corollary. Actually to show protest against British tyrannical rule, the nationalist leaders took up the concept ‘boycott’ for their instant help. Boycott is that type of agitation in which results has to be gained instantly, not gradually. Hence, in the hands of extremist, boycott agitation immediately became an essential corollary of Indian independence movement. However who among them first used the name ‘boycott’ in the Indian political context is not well-known. So still now we are ignorant about the founder of boycott in Indian politics.

At that time of Bengal Partition in 1905 a feeling of mutual distrust spread as fire over both parties within the Indian National Congress. The moderates assumed prayer and petitioning as the only means of gaining the most speculated freedom of India, whereas the nationalists or the so-called extremists demanded for self-government or swaraj by the means of Boycott agitation. The nationalist leaders, among whom Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose were more popular, first raised their voices in the favor of Swaraj. In their opinion, petitioning or begging theory (they even declared the moderate leaders as the ‘bunch of beggars’) will not be at all be helpful in bringing independence or swaraj, rather boycott seems much more necessary in bringing the same.

Boycott movement was actually the result of anger, distrust and hatred gathered in the minds of common Indians against the British government. At 1905 Lord Curzon decided to break the United Bengal in the name of customizing better administrative control over it. However the extremists as well as the moderates were well aware of the underlying reason i.e. to destroy the unity among the hindu and muslim races, two important corollaries of educated Bengali class because they were the strong protestors of British tyranny.

To protest against this nasty conspiracy the educated people in Bengal raised their voice. Sri Aurobindo was one among them. He claimed the Prayer and Petition theory of the Moderate Congress leaders as the Beggar's policy. In his own exclusive explanation, our aim should be nested on gaining freedom or independence. Prayer and petitioning theory will not at all up to the marks in this endeavor. By begging in front of our foreign masters, we are just proving ourselves helpless jokers in front of them. But the moderate Congress leaders were not at all in the mood of rejection to take the help of this prayer and petition theory. This theory is a mark of disrespect towards our own capabilities, our own potentialities. If we, the common Indians, can be able to maintain the unity of such a huge nation like India, then why are we not able to gain our liberty and fulfill all the responsibilities of the administrative works in the able hands? If we pray for something, then it seems to be the proof of our helplessness, our solitude, our diversity. But if we learn how to capture our own birth-rights and how to use them successfully, then we can prove ourselves not as weak persons, rather as strong enough to mould our lives according to our own desires. Perhaps this is inherent reason of Sri Aurobindo's refuting the theory of prayer and petition theory so strongly<sup>iv</sup>. In this context of studying boycott, we can make a comparable story about it as we discover in both the theories of Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi.

Let us start with the first comparison i.e. dissimilarity between the duos. Even though Boycott is included within the realm of passive resistance by Sri Aurobindo<sup>v</sup>, some critics mentioned it as an echo of the blood-shaded active type of protest. However the inner difference between the passive and the active resistance is very narrow in nature as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. In Active Resistance we actively took part in doing harm to our opposition, whereas in passive one we want to stop the enemy from doing any harm of us by providing no help to him. Even though boycott was commonly thought to be an active type of resistance but, according to Gandhi, it was nothing else than a form of passive resistance. If we go through Gandhi's thesis of Passive Resistance, then we will discover that he always believed in giving love to his opponents. He never liked the word enemy, as he had a strong belief that all people are the appearances of the same Lord, the Almighty. Thus he used the weapon of *Satya* or Truth-Force to win over their heart. According to Gandhi, 'Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms...For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I, force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.'<sup>vi</sup>

Actually Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of Boycott is quite different from that of Gandhi as the former never thought it as a kind of aggression like the latter. Sri Aurobindo criticized the critics by telling that boycott is not just a kind of aggression. It is not totally aggressive in its inner sense. Boycott appears as a war and in war we have to take the help of both aggression and non-aggression. Violence is not inherent in boycott, it is a means to use boycott. In war against the British agitation, we can be violent and also non-violent. Sri Aurobindo was in the favor of using both the passive and the active forms of resistance in the movement concerning Indian independence. Actually when necessary, we can use violence. Boycott is considered to be a war to Sri Aurobindo. In war our main focus has to be nested on the aim or goal, i.e. winning or success, but not on the means, whether violent or non-violent in nature, to attain it. All persons in war-front wants to win over their enemies, the question of means necessary for their attainment seems completely irrelevant here. In the same way, at the time of the Boycott movement of

India, Sri Aurobindo declared that, all Indians should be indulged into it with whatever weapons they got in their hands. If our house is being looted by the dacoits and our lives are in danger, then for the sake of securing our lives and property we can use whatever means we can. No question of ethics will be prevalent here. In the same way, at the time of war, our main aim should be on achieving success and for achieving it we are free to use whatever means we want, passive or active it does not matter at all. The amount of pressure given by the tyrannical rule over the masses is the main determining object in this entire process. In this way, Sri Aurobindo's thesis of boycott as a corollary of passive resistance and as a means of active resistance sometimes is somewhat different in nature than Gandhi's boycott, as it is nothing but a form of passive resistance. Perhaps this is the reason why he was accused to be anti-nationalists (as demanded by the British government) for his 'doubtful' engagement in the Alipore Bomb case. So war is not aggression or a means of spreading aggression. It is a battle-field where aggression may take place. Boycott is a war, where we can take the help of aggression, but cannot call it aggressive in nature.

But Gandhi, on the contrary, was strictly against the use of violence in the name of Boycott. Thus he always wanted to limit it within the reach of Passive Resistance or Satyagraha.<sup>vii</sup> Actually boycott is essentially passively accepted by him. He always preached for passive resistance, but not active resistance. In his agitation against the British raj, he was against the use of violence, for that reason he did not care to stop the hanging of Bhagat Singh. Gandhi was never in favor of using violence in the name of Boycott whether provoked or unprovoked. That is another important difference between the theories of the duo.

Secondly, Gandhi proposed the name wrong-doers for the evil persons, but not foes unlike Sri Aurobindo. He had enormous belief on the goodness of heart of even evil doers. In his view, if by the help of our soul-force we can show the evil doer what is his fault, then it will get stuck to his heart and he will certainly turn out to be a good human being. Actually Gandhi nested this huge responsibility of turning his foe into his friend upon the able shoulder of a *satyagrahi*. A true satyagrahi never have any misconception that his enemy could never be changed. As a true believer of God's divine will, he will, by the help of soul-force, can be able to transform the heart of his enemy. So, according to Gandhi, boycott should be treated as a means to convert an evil-doer into a golden hearted person.<sup>viii</sup>

Here arises a superb as well as an important question – Sri Aurobindo treat boycott as a means to set back the British raj, even though he, also like Gandhi, had enormous faith of the existence of *Basudeva* even within the body of guilty persons?<sup>ix</sup> British person can also have some amount of goodness of heart. Lord Bentinck, Lord Mayo etc Lieutant Generals of India had enormous influence on the context of the welfare of India and Indian masses. Governor general Lord Bentinck approved the sati-daha pratha nibarani bill unless Raja Rammohan Roy's lifelong struggle would become fruitless. William Kerry, Dirozio etc several foreigners even sacrificed their whole lives for the upliftment of the Indian masses. But how could forgetting all these achievements under the British era, Sri Aurobindo declared all foreign rulers as the enemy of Indians through his boycott movement? Their answers are also quite interesting just like the questions. Aurobindo never tried to harm any foreign persons, whether administrative or common. He had no hatred towards the foreigners, but certainly to the antipathy of the foreign exploitation over India for two such long decades. And this rage and hatred of Sri Aurobindo towards the British administration seems the main cause behind his preaching for boycott. Due to the revolutionary acts took place in his Maniktola residence, he was always taken to be guilty for



the upsurge of Indian revolutionary activities in Bengal. Also his several writings on *Bande Mataram* (especially ‘the Bhavani Mandir Manifesto’) influenced young Bengali bloods to dedicate their precious lives in the revolutionary activities. It is true that at that time of his staying at London, he became a member of a London-based Revolutionary club, probably the Lotus Club.<sup>x</sup> But he never killed any person in his whole life-time. Actually Sri Aurobindo was a man made of Iron from heart. He never preached the use of active resistance unless it seems mandatory to him. Because he knew the possibility that passive resistance will not become able to get the complete control over India’s struggle movement, thus the use of active resistance is not banned by him just like Gandhi. He advocated active resistance whole-heartedly for the welfare of India and Indians, but not for the killing of innocent persons at any cost. Hence we cannot blame him to be indulged into the massive killing of the British administrators or even in making plans for it.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo was completely against the use of the word ‘hate’ in the context of Boycott as he found out an intrinsic value of love even in our political field. This love is nothing else but a part of the same Divine *Ananda* or Bliss from where the urge of creation becomes prominent. Boycott is, according to him, the sign of our intense love towards our Mother-land as well as also to our Mother-Nature. The physical root of this love lies within the pride in our past glory, the pain and suffering of our present and the passion for our upcoming future. The inherent love for everything given to us by mother India has to be loved intensely by us. Self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness seems to be custom for loving our country. Actually Boycott is the divine work of adoration and the service of the Mother nested on the broad shoulders of Indians by the Divine Mother herself.<sup>xi</sup> Amusingly Gandhi also took boycott as a means of spreading love. But the inner sense is quite different in nature from that of Sri Aurobindo. Unlike Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi thought boycott as the process of spreading love between the oppressor and the oppressed. However love towards the motherland of a true satyagrahi is prevalent here, because his self-sacrifice and self-less love to the nation is also the demand of Gandhi like Sri Aurobindo. A true satyagrahi, in Gandhi, has to boycott the evil side of his enemy, not the enemy himself. The inner touch of love must be prevalent within the idea of boycott everywhere. Hence we can claim that, both Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo never accepted boycott as an act of hate.

However boycott never considered as a means of spreading love within the oppressor and the oppressed by Sri Aurobindo like that of Gandhi. This is the fourth distinction between them. In Sri Aurobindo’s explanation – ‘A certain class of mind shrinks from aggressiveness as if it were a sin. Their temperament forbids them to feel the delight of battle and they look on what they cannot understand as something monstrous and sinful. ‘Heal hate by love’, drive out injustice by justice’, ‘slay sin by righteousness’ is their cry. Love is a sacred name, but it is easier to speak of love than to love. The love which drives out hate is a divine quality of which only one man in a thousand is capable. A saint full of love for all mankind possesses it...but the mass of mankind does not and cannot rise to the height. Politics is concerned with the masses of mankind and not with individuals...The Gita is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin, as a lowering of morality.’<sup>xii</sup> So we can claim by citing from Sri Aurobindo that, Gandhi’s thought of making love even with the enemies is just a utopia. Because love is a divine quality, to love even the enemy is the quality of a saintly human being. It is not at all characteristic feature of any common man. And boycott is a war where every common man’s entry is the necessity of time. Hence in boycott agitation, the spread of love towards our enemies

in spite of their using coercive methods is not at all acceptable in reality. ‘Heal hate by love’ [which means spreading love even among the foes, and convert their heart] is indeed a wonderful theory, but not applicable in reality. In this way Sri Aurobindo criticized Gandhi’s theory of love towards enemies.

Fourthly, in the context of discovering the true meaning of Boycott we can find out another difference between the duos. It has a positive as well as a negative meaning. The positive sense of boycott says that it is a weapon in the hands of commoners by whose application they can assure their minimum necessities of daily life from the ruling government. Whereas its negative sense implies that by it we can stop every kind of governmental functioning forcefully. From Gandhi’s point of view, we can differentiate between the two of them. Strike, Picketing, *Dharna* and Fasting are some among the several sides of Positive Boycott. In the negative side of Boycott, there are – Negotiation, Arbitration, Agitation & Demonstration, Economic Boycott, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Direct Action, Non-Payment of Taxes etc. in the book named *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, B. K. Lal claimed that all these are not favored equally by Gandhi. The forms of Satyagraha Gandhi seems to favor most are Disobedience, Non-Cooperation, Direct Action and Fasting. Disobedience is considered to be a protest against unjust laws. Non-cooperation, according to Gandhi, is refusal on the part of the exploited to succumb to the forces of exploitation. Swadeshi is the perfect example of this. Direct Action is conceived as an open and mass rebellion. Although the word rebellion has associations with violent ways, Direct Action is essentially non-violent. The Quit India movement in 1942 was an example of this kind of satyagraha. But, the most effective form of satyagraha, according to Gandhi, is fasting. Fasting works in double way, it aims at self-purification and also by honestly choosing the way to death it can mend even the obstinacy of the other party. But, Gandhi feels that this should be used only when other means of persuasion have failed as it is, according to Gandhi, the highest form of satyagraha.<sup>xiii</sup> In Sri Aurobindo’s thesis, we can also discover the negative and positive meaning of boycott, but quite different in nature than Gandhi. In Sri Aurobindo, the negative sides of boycott are – industrial boycott, educational boycott, judicial boycott, administrative or executive boycott and social boycott; and in their positive side there remains – swadeshi, national education, national arbitration court, national organization etc.<sup>xiv</sup> however the positive side of social boycott was never mentioned by Sri Aurobindo, perhaps because we can mention that the social boycott is fully negative in nature. This is another dissimilarity of Sri Aurobindo’s theory of boycott with that of Gandhi.

The similarity between both of them is regarding the inner nature of boycott and its users. Many critics consider boycott as an act of hate. However in Sri Aurobindo’s clear vision, it should not be considered as an act of hate; rather an aggressive act of self-defence essential for the sake of self-preservation. If it is thought to be an act of violence, then it should be meant that the tortured person should not resist the torture took place over him and accept his gradual death in the hands of his assailants without showing any protest. To tell that a man must not use weapon against his assailant, because it is an act of hate, is completely impractical. So it appears that in Sri Aurobindo’s thought boycott is nothing else than an efficient tool used for self-security. But it does not mean that Boycott is a weapon of the weaker class, rather a way to show the inner strength and anger of the deprived class against his assailant. In this context we can discover Sri Aurobindo’s similarity with that of Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhi, boycott is a way to show protest against the oppressor and it is not a sign of cowardice, rather that of

inner strength of the tortured person.<sup>xv</sup> In this way we can compare Sri Aurobindo's thesis of boycott with that of Gandhi.

In Sri Aurobindo's opinion there are five different categories of Boycott<sup>xvi</sup> -

1. Industrial Boycott
2. Educational Boycott
3. Judicial Boycott
4. Administrative Boycott
5. Social Boycott

The British merchants are eventually responsible for the economic exploitation of India; thus we need to boycott the British goods so that we could promote our own swadeshi industries. This was known as the Economic/Industrial Boycott. The economic boycott is truly meant for boycotting British goods so that the foreign merchants failed to exploit the Indian merchants and small traders. The British people are mainly known as the merchant race. The main aim of the British government behind making India as one of its colonies [like America] is to exploit its richness. In the starting the British people like Dutch and French merchants concentrated just on trading Indian goods on foreign merchants. Raw materials in India were very cheap, so they bought those materials in cheap rate from our country; exported them to England to make good quantity of goods made from them; and then imported them again in India and also exported to other foreign markets to sell these goods in high rates. However clothes, sugar, indigo etc goods were indeed produced in India and sold in other foreign markets openly by the British merchants. For that reason the clothes made in Manchester and imported to India were higher in cost for the common Indian masses. These goods were, thus, made available only to British officials and Indian rich people. Hence the urge for economic boycott of foreign goods is just a time-bound incident. On August, 1905 at the Calcutta Town Hall this resolution of economic boycott was taken by the intellectuals and common Indians. Its effect was tremendous over the British administration. Actually the true founder of Gandhi's boycott –swadeshi thesis was none other than Sri Aurobindo himself. The boycott movement of Non-Independent India was based on two major inferences – first, the British rule in India was mainly dependent on its economy which came from gradual exploitation of our country; secondly, by boycotting the British goods Indians could be able to give a devastating blow over the British economy. Eventually both of them are quite relative to each other. Because if the Indian economy was exploited by the British people then by boycotting their goods we can fetch back the golden era of the early India.<sup>xvii</sup>

An important corollary of economic boycott is swadeshi i.e. encouraging the development of national goods manufactured in any part of India. So, not only the negative side of Boycott, but also its positive side was developing gradually. So boycott is not only used to hamper the British rule, but also to develop Indian industries by promoting Indian goods. Thus from Karan Singh's writings, we can find out that Boycott has two great objectives hidden behind. The first is to shake the foundations of British power in India; the second is to bring about a rapid growth in indigenous industries for producing in India goods required by its people, by whose help the economic resurgence of the nation will be possible.<sup>xviii</sup>

In the same way we have to reject the British system of education and try to reconstruct the educational system of India in new way. This was named as the Educational Boycott. Actually the basis of educational boycott had a deep impact upon the Indian educational system.

When the East India Company managed to become the ruler of India, then they tried hard impulsively to destroy the educational system of our country which was one important source of India's greatness. Indian traditional *Tol* system was the cause of enlightenment among its countrymen. But after the arrival of the British people in India the main focus was shifted towards the making of educated clerks who would help the British rulers to rule over entire India with their support. In the changing political arena of India, the British government wanted to make some obedient native 'babus', local 'zamindars', provincial 'rajas' to give them safe-guard against the rage of the Indian masses. In the regime of Lord Curzon when in 1902 the Indian Universities Commission published its *Report* along with a note of dissent by Gooroo Das Banerjee, its only Hindu member. On the basis of this majority report the Government passed in 1904 the Indian Universities Act. The whole report and the Act led to a keen spurt in public interest regarding the problem of education, and to the establishment in 1902 of the 'Dawn Society' by Satish Chandra Mukherjee. The 1904 Indian University Act demanded self-less obedience from its students, they should not be indulged into any kind of furious political agitation. They had to concentrate on their studies [in this context we can discover the phrase '*chatranam adhayanam tapa*' from our ancient scriptures]. They had nothing to interfere with the ongoing political turmoil of India after 1905. Students were banned to join any political agitation; they were not permitted to meet any political leader or to utter anything about politics openly. If they broke the governmental rules, then the government had enough reasons to imprison them. This barbarous act of 1904 was capable enough to raise the fury of Indian masses. The political leaders were not in the mood to let to go this golden opportunity and in this context included Indian students as an inevitable part of politics. In this way educational boycott i.e. to boycott the British educational system became a craze among pupils. Many of them refused to take the foreign degrees and so the effect of educational boycott seemed all-pervading over Indian students. However in Karan Singh's analysis, we can discover that the partition of Bengal in 1905 marked as immensely important for the upsurge of anti-British feeling and agitation throughout the India and the cry of 'boycott' and 'swadeshi' spread like wild fire. Its effect seen prominently in the educational field, and educational boycott became an important part in the political programme of the new Nationalist party. In this political context of India, Sri Aurobindo, the first Principal of the Bengal National College, tried to reconstruct the national educational system by reuniting the glory of past with the scientific methods of the present so that it could lead us to a splendidly extraordinary future. In 1918 Tagore also established Sriniketan, for the same reason, which later took the form of today's Visva-Bharati University.

Judicial boycott is another very well-known form of boycott. British judicial system was another symbol of their tyrannical rule over India and its masses. The foreign government was never in favor of tolerating the political upsergence of India. So the British rulers used the judicial system as a part of its dominative machinery. Whenever Indian people even tried to focus on their political urge for independence, the British constituency used their judicial system as a weapon against them. The immediate result was the hangings of Maharaja Nandakumar and Khudiram; the suicide of Prafulla chaki etc. Entire india became furious against the British domination. Several revolutionary groups were formed, revolutionary activities increased in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. Among them Anushilan Samiti founded by Pramathanath Mitra in 1902, Jugantar Dal was also formed as one of its important corollary, Gadar party was established by Lala Hardayal and Ajit Singh, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar took a part in Tilak's Swaraj Party etc. gained their popularity among Indians. To stop them the British judges, as a



part of dominative British administration, helped the government by giving judgments in their favor. They gave heavy punishments to Indian people even for smallest faults. The deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai, ‘Bande Mataram’ newspaper case, Alipore Bomb case and Sri Aurobindo’s one year imprisonment were the prominent instances of the tortures of the British judicial system. Thus judicial boycott seemed mandatory in the pre-independent India after 1905. Indian political leaders understood the necessity of establishing the national arbitration court. However this dream was never fulfilled as the Indians did not gain enough courage to establish supplementary judicial machinery against that of the British judicial system.<sup>xix</sup>

However from Sri Aurobindo’s own view it can be proved that this notion of Judicial Boycott was not paid much attention while compared with swadeshi and national education. It failed to achieve the settled goal because of two essential reasons – first, it was not at all possible to replace the supremely powerful British judicial system; and secondly, there was actually no need of replacing the old system as the British judiciary was devoid of any charge of partiality against their Indian counter-parts. The proper example of British Justice was perhaps Sri Aurobindo himself who in the able advocacy of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das escaped from suffering a long punishment by transforming it into only one years imprisonment in the Alipore Conspiracy Case. Perhaps we can consider this theory as the weakest thesis among Sri Aurobindo’s entire notion of Boycott.

The British administration played the major part to sustain the tyrannical rule over India for two long decades. The foreign rulers used its executive part to torture Indian masses. The inhuman torture over Sushil Kumar; the suicide of Prafulla Chaki and the hanging of Khudiram Bose in the offence of killing Mrs. Kennedy with her daughter; the sacrifice of lives of Bagha Jatin and his gangs; the hanging of Masterda Surya Sen were among many evidences of British tyrannical rule over India. All of these incidents arouse limitless anger among the Indian masses. The domination of British rule never ended up with such sad incidents and its degree increased randomly. A successful administration has to unite its rulers with the subordinates. But the British executive rule had no connection with its people. So this dominative rule had to be soon ended and the Indian political atmosphere after 1905 also indicated towards the gradual downfall of the British empire. Being fade up with the crude and intolerable Executive administration of our British rulers Sri Aurobindo advocated for the organized form of Bureaucratic Administrative Boycott i.e. Executive Boycott. Actually the boycott of the foreign rule was meant for boycotting its executive part. The misbehavior of the police and the executive department over the common Indians led Sri Aurobindo to draw such analysis.<sup>xx</sup>

The Indian political leaders truly realized the necessity of establishing the national organization by whose help we can end the tyrannical foreign empire ruling over India for two decades. For that above reason Satish Chandra Mukherjee formed the Dawn Society in 1902; Tilak formed Swaraj party; Pramathanath Mitra formed Anushilan Samiti in 1902 and Jugantar Dal also developed as its corollary. However the Indian National Congress got the reputation of a recognized national organization only after the appearance of Gandhi in the political arena of India.

And actually non-payment of taxes was the most effective and tremendously popular among other forms of executive boycott. In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, by paying taxes we directly assist the administration and thus the non-payment of taxes directly hamper the executive activities of the foreign rule and in this way our goal of executive boycott would become possible in reality.

And being much more advanced from his age, Sri Aurobindo also mentioned about social boycott, which means not only to boycott the foreign administrators, but also their supporter *desi Babus* even from attending any social occasion. Social boycott theory is perhaps much more effective as compared with others because nothing could affect the British dynasty more than it. The concept of social boycott is much easier than other kinds of boycott. The foreign administrators and the English-minded ‘babus’ has to be socially boycotted for their attitude towards ‘native’ Indians. They actually helped the British dynasty to sustain over India for two long decades. They should be boycotted from attending meetings, ceremonies etc. They should be banned from social gatherings. The fellow beings should boycott them from any social ceremony or ritual. Participation in any meeting or agitation is strictly prohibited for them. We have to avoid the guilty persons socially. We can arouse, in this way, guilt feelings among them. Here we are not allowed to do any direct violence to our enemies. In social boycott, no physical harm has to be done to our opponents, rather mental pressure has been given to them.<sup>xxi</sup>

Karan Singh explored this idea of Social Boycott as very simple in nature. The offender is to be shunned socially, in parties, festivals, weddings and so on. He is to be made to feel the scorn and contempt of his fellow-countrymen due to his anti-national activities. A great advantage of the social boycott was that it did not involve any direct clash with the law or resort to violence.<sup>xxii</sup>

However the necessity of social boycott became visible in Sri Aurobindo’s own opinion – ‘Whereas passive resistance has been accepted, the necessity of the social boycott has been recognised as its natural concomitant. “Boycott foreign goods and boycott those who use foreign goods” must be accepted by all who are in earnest. For without this boycott of persons of things cannot be effective; without the social boycott no national authority depending purely on moral pressure can have its decrees effectively executed; and without effective boycott enforced by a strong national authority the new policy cannot succeed’<sup>xxiii</sup>. Thus among all forms of boycott social boycott seems much more crucial than others as it brings instant success which others bring gradually.

Actually there is nothing new in accepting the former four types of boycott; rather the exclusiveness of his theory lies inherent in preaching for Social Boycott. However at that time in Bengal (from 1905’s Bengal Partition) and even after his age in all over India (towards 1947), Boycott is somewhat limited within the arena of Industrial Boycott of Salt, Sugar, and Cloth made in England; and it becomes helpful only in hampering the British merchants directly (economic boycott) and British bureaucrats along with its judiciary indirectly (administrative and judicial boycott). Thus not only economic boycott, but also some amount of executive boycott and judicial boycott was preferred by the Indian political leaders. However educational boycott along with the trial of Administrative Boycott also seemed prominent in these eras. In the context of accepting social boycott, we can find out the dissimilarity of Sri Aurobindo with that of Gandhi who never believes in the concept of social boycott at all.

However the boycott, approached by Sri Aurobindo, not only contains the negative side, but also the positive side. By the help of Industrial Boycott of Sri Aurobindo dreamt of bringing a gradual development in indigenous industries based on goods manufactured in India (Swadeshi). By boycotting the foreign educational system, Sri Aurobindo developed the Bengal National College and accepted the role of its first Principal (National Education). But his dream of establishing National Arbitration Courts by boycotting the British Judicial system was never

been faithful and his other long cherished dream of establishing a National Organization becomes possible in the hands of his successor, Mahatma Gandhi.

Some critics can even argue that social boycott being non-violent in nature may be justifiable, but not burning or drowning British goods in the name of Industrial Boycott along with other forms of boycott. However Sri Aurobindo conceived the other kinds of boycott, except the social boycott, not as morally unjustifiable, even though illegal from the judicial and administrative context. In its response he clearly declared that – ‘The morality of a Kshatriya justifies violence in times of war, and boycott is a war. Nobody blames the Americans for throwing British tea into Boston harbour, nor can anybody blame a similar action in India from the point of view of law, of social peace and order, not of political morality. It has been eschewed by us because it is unwise and because it carried the battle on to a ground where we are comparatively weak, from a ground where we are strong....Justice and righteousness are the atmosphere of political morality, but the justice and righteousness of a fighter, not of the priest. Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked; violence, unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends. It is a barren philosophy which applies a mechanical rule to all actions, or takes a word and tries to fit all human life into it.’<sup>xxiv</sup> Thus according to Sri Aurobindo We all have to be as courageous, as brave as the *Kshatriya*. A true *Kshatriya* never give up, he can even sacrifice his own life in the battle field. He never even thought to quite from it, even though the battle seems very much tough in nature. And boycott is nothing else but a strong battle by whose help we can gain our independence or swaraj. Thus no question of quitting from the battle-field seems relevant here. We all have to achieve the morality of the *Kshatriya*; so that the use of violence would not be able to break up the firmness of our mind and we can, being prepared in that way, could be able to go ahead in our path of achieving the national freedom, where the question of violence seems inapplicable. Boycott is a battle, and in battle-field the question of violence or non-violence is unnecessary. However we cannot even have enough freedom to quit the battle of boycott as we are not the doers, rather just the instruments or tools used by. God himself is the doer, and uses us as equipments for such a devastating war.

And what is the need of such battle? In *Gita*, Lord *Krishna* himself preaches the great war of *Kurukshetra* as it seems mandatory for the well-being of India and its countrymen. Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, this battle of swadeshi and boycott agitation also seems necessary as per God’s wish. Hence whatever has been done in the pre-Independence age in India is all due to the Supreme Command of the Almighty. We, the common Indians becomes proud of being liberated from the hands of the British domination, even though the achievement of Indian independence in 1947 happens only due to the master plan of the And also whatever we have lost and whatever we have gained in the name of boycott agitation at the time of Indian independence from 1905 to 1947, has also been done according to the Divine will. Thus, whatever had been done at the time of India’s political movement was not according to the free will of any human being, rather according to the supreme will of the Brahman. Thus whatever we have to do in the name of boycott agitation stands as a part of the Divine plan by Sri Aurobindo. Actually behind every theory of Sri Aurobindo the metaphysical touch is prevalent everywhere. His social-political thought is not at all an exception in this regard. And boycott as one of his most important political tool has to be allied with this inner metaphysical touch hidden behind.

## REFERENCES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1997.
3. Mukherjee, Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo & the New Thought in Indian Politics*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1997.
4. Shriman Narayan, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [Volume – six, The Voice of Truth], Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968.
5. V. Geetha, *Soul Force: Gandhi's Writings on Peace*, Tara Publishing Ltd, UK, 2004.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Karmayogin*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1918.
7. Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches : on Indian Political and National Education*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1922. (7 th Edition 2005).
8. Brown, Judith M. (eds.), *Mahatma Gandhi : The Essential Writings*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008.
9. Boycott : the free Wikipedia [[www.google.co.in/boycott](http://www.google.co.in/boycott) the free Wikipedia]
10. Gandhi, M.K., *Hind Swaraj*, The International Printing Press, Natal, 1910.

---

<sup>i</sup> Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, p. 118-119.

<sup>ii</sup> 'if the instruments of the executive choose to disperse our meeting by breaking the heads of those present, the right of self-defence entitles us not merely to defend our heads but retaliate on those of the head-breakers..Nor does it make any difference if the instruments of coercion happens to be the recognized and usual instruments or are unofficial hooligans in alliance or sympathy with the forces of coercion. In both cases active resistance becomes a duty and passive resistance is, for that occasion, suspended. But though no longer passive, it is still a defensive resistance. Nor does resistance pass into the aggressive stage so long as it remains coercive violence in its own kind and confines itself to repelling attack. Even if it takes the offensive, it does not by that mere fact become aggressive resistance, unless the amount of aggression exceeds what is necessary to make defence effective...there has been no instance of aggressive resistance in modern Indian politics.' [Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', chapter VI : Its Limits, p. 115]

<sup>iii</sup> Boycott: the free Wikipedia [internet version]

<sup>iv</sup> As we found in Sri Aurobindo's view - 'Petitioning, which we have so long followed, we reject as impossible, - the dream of a timid inexperience, the teaching of false friends who hope to keep us in perpetual subjection, foolish to reason, false to experience. Self-development by self-help which we now propose to follow, is a possible though uncertain path, never yet attempted under such difficulties, but one which must be attempted, if for nothing else yet to get free of the habit of dependence and helplessness, and re-awaken and exercise our half-rooted powers of self-government...Petitioning will not bring us one yard nearer to freedom; self-development will not easily be suffered to advance to its goal. For self-development spells the doom of the ruling bureaucratic despotism, which must therefore oppose our progress with all the art and force of which it is the master; without organized resistance we could not take more than a faltering steps towards self-emancipation. But resistance may be of many kinds, - armed revolt, or aggressive resistance, short of armed revolt, or defensive resistance whether passive or active...' [Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', chapter VIII : Conclusions, p. 119]



---

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, p. 112

<sup>vi</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, p. 126

<sup>vii</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 278

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>ix</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Biography*, p. 65

<sup>x</sup> Ibid, p. 90

<sup>xi</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'the Morality of Boycott', p. 124

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid, p. 124

<sup>xiii</sup> B. K. Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 121-122

<sup>xiv</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'the Morality of Boycott', p. 122

<sup>xv</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 204

<sup>xvi</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, the Doctrine of Passive Resistance, 'Its method', p. 102

<sup>xvii</sup> In this context we can quote Sri Aurobindo – 'Boycott may be graduated in two ways. First, by the gradual growth of the idea of excluding foreign goods a steadily increasing check may be put on the import of particular impulse given to the use of the same articles produced in India....Boycott may be graduated in another way. When the boycott was declared in Bengal, it was declared specially against cloth, sugar and salt, and only generally against other articles. It is therefore the imports of English piece-goods, Liverpool salt and, though only to a slight extent, of foreign sugar into Bengal have suffered. When this specific boycott has been proved effective, it may be extended to other articles. Thus the boycott may be graduated not only in its incidence on particular articles, but in its extent and range'. [Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Morality of boycott', p. 293-294]

<sup>xviii</sup> Singh, Karan, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, p. 124.

<sup>xix</sup> In the context of Judicial Boycott Sri Aurobindo wrote that - 'We are dissatisfied with the administration of justice, the ruinous costliness of the civil side, the brutal rigour of its criminal penalties and procedure, its partiality, its frequent subordination to political objects. We refuse accordingly to have any resort to the alien courts of justice, and by an organized judicial boycott propose to make the bureaucratic administration of justice impossible while these conditions continue'. [Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', p. 38]

<sup>xx</sup> In Sri Aurobindo's writing he proclaimed that – 'We disapprove of the executive administration, its arbitrariness, its meddling and inquisitorial character, its misuse of the police for the repression instead of the protection of the people. We refuse, accordingly, to go to the executive for the help or advice or protection or to tolerate any paternal interference in our public activities, and by an organized boycott to reduce executive control and interference to a more skeleton of its former self'. [Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance', p. 38]

---

<sup>xxi</sup> According to Sri Aurobindo – ‘The social boycott is a weapon absolutely necessary for the enforcement of the popular in this matter...it consists merely in a passive abstinence from all countenance to the offender – sending him to Coventry.’ [Sri Aurobindo, *The Karmayogin*, ‘the Social Boycott’, p. 25]

<sup>xxii</sup> Singh, Karan, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, p. 138.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, ‘The Doctrine of Passive Resistance’, p. 58.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127