CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that life of great men are not lived on the surface for men to see and yet the outward events are of absorbing interest for they do not follow a stereo typed pattern. It is absolutely true in the case of Sri. Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo's life was immensely strange, unique and fascinating and almost unparallel in recent Indian history, in that it is multifarious. It is astonishing that his contribution in various fields like literary, political, social, philosophical, and spiritual is exemplary and exceptional. He was a poet, philosopher, patriot and revolutionary of a unique class by himself and above all a supreme Seer and Yogi all at once. He integrated life and spirit visualizing the transformation of the vast field of existence through the Power and Light of spiritual truth. His interpretations of Indian culture and spirituality, of the Veda and Upanishads and his concept of Nationality and Hinduism all Primarily based on his vast spiritual experiences is also considered unique and exceptional in Indian philosophical literature.

At the outset it is of interest to note what Sri Aurobindo told to his biographers “It would be only myself who could speak of things in my past giving them their true form and significance. I see that you have persisted in giving a biography – is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life, it has not been on the surface for men to see. But why write my biography at all? Is it really necessary? In my view, a man’s value does not depend on what he learns, or his position or fame, or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes.”!
However I would like to commence the chapter of introduction with a few words from one of the eminent personalities of our times about Sri. Aurobindo.

In his final and concluding speech in defense of Sri Aurobindo, in the famous Alipore bomb case Mr. Chittaranjan Das an advocate of high repute and a patriot, who later came to be known as ‘Deshabandu’, and whose utterance about Sri Aurobindo has been recognized as a master-piece in the art of legal advocacy. He said “My appeal to you therefore is that a man like this who is being charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar of this court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History, and my appeal to you is this. That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and reechoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court but before the bar of High Court of History”.  

It is astonishing to note that Sri Aurobindo who was brought up entirely in the anglicised manner and amidst European culture and society and people, throughout his childhood and school and college days until the age of 21 years, later became the champion of Indian Nationalism, Culture and Hinduism, became a patriot par excellence, electrified the whole nation by his inspiring speeches and writings, contributed his might in the struggle for India’s freedom first as a member of Indian National movement and later as a revolutionary and finally had to give a new dimension and meaning to the entire gamut of Indian thought and spirituality and also in revealing the
secrets of antient treasures of Indian Philosophical literatures like the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita.

It is also equally surprising that Sri Aurobindo who was never allowed to learn even his mother tongue Bengali as a child became a champion and master of many Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi, Gujarathi, Samskrit and Tamil in later years, as he was a champion and master par excellence of all European languages like English, French, Latin, Greek and German.

Sri Aurobindo stated that the very principle of his yoga was not only to realize the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity, into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action, and base life on the Spirit and give life a spiritual meaning. Sri Aurobindo also said, that his yoga was not done for himself personally whose aim was never his personal salvation, but his yoga was precisely for the earth consciousness and to open a way for the earth consciousness to change.

In many of the traditional paths of yoga, it is considered necessary to renounce the world, to become a sanyasi in order to find God, because the world is looked upon as unreal, an illusion or maya and the aim is to realise the pure spirit which is the sole Reality. In Sri Aurobindo's view, this ascetic renunciation is not necessary. Spirit and matter, the two poles of existence are not mutually exclusive or antagonistic, for spirit is involved in matter and is progressively manifesting itself in the material world through the evolutionary process. According to Sri Aurobindo "There is an ascending evolution in Nature that goes from stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal from the animal to the man. Because man is for the moment, the last rung at the summit of this ascending
evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly Nature can not be satisfied with such an imperfect result. She endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance."

Sri Aurobindo further said that, the evolutionary process in Nature has not stopped, and that “Man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness but with a possibility of acquiring a new consciousness and is capable of living a perfectly harmonious, good, beautiful and happy and fully conscious life right here on earth. This new consciousness Sri Aurobindo called the Truth consciousness or The Supramental. During the whole of his life upon earth Sri Aurobindo gave all his time and effort to establish in himself this new consciousness which he called Supramental and to help those gathered around him to realise it.”

Sri Aurobindo declared that he had discovered yoga as a method of accelerating this evolutionary process. He found however that each system of yoga is a specialization in a more or less limited field of achievement and therefore none of them was sufficient for the total movement of evolution. In his analysis of the various systems of yoga he showed how an integrating principle of yoga could be discovered, and how a synthesis could be achieved so that the yoga could meet the total demands of evolutionary movement. Therefore Sri Aurobindo called his yoga as Integral yoga or A synthesis of yoga or Supramental yoga and gave an exhaustive description of the details of his yoga and as to how it differs from all other yogas of the past and
as to how it will accomplish its purpose of bringing out an Integral Transformation of Nature and Humanity by establishing this new principle of Supramental or the Truth Consciousness into the earth consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo also said that essentially all problems of existence, are problems of harmony and in the levels of consciousness beyond the mind lies our destiny and the solution to our problems.

In this yoga of Sri Aurobindo, Mirra Richard (whom Sri Aurobindo later called the Mother) was an indispensable collaborator. Mrs. Mirra Richard a lady of French origin, like Sri Aurobindo was a born mystic and a great spiritual seeker and a master who came to settle down in India to collaborate with Sir Aurobindo in his mighty sadhana of Integral or Supramental yoga. Like Sri Aurobindo Mirra was also a multi-faceted genius from her early childhood. She was a born accultist and later became a distinguished artist and a painter of a very high repute. At the same time she was highly interested in true spirituality even from her early child days. It is said that she had all the spiritual realizations which Sri Aurobindo had, before she came to Pondicherry and was treading the same path of yoga and had exactly the same aim and aspiration as that of Sri Aurobindo. Mirra’s Mother often told little Mirra that she was born to realize the highest Ideal.

The spiritual significance of this meeting between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was immeasurable. Superficially it represented a meeting of the East and West but Sri Aurobindo himself was an embodiment of East-West synthesis and the Mother a living expression of the finest flower of European culture along with spiritual allocations with the East. Sri Aurobindo has later said that the Mother’s coming greatly helped him in his work and sadhana. “All my
realisations Nirvana and others would have remained theoretical as it were so far as the outer world was concerned. It is the Mother who showed the way to a practical form. Without her, no organised manifestation would have been possible". This is echoed in the Mother's profound words: "Without him I exist not, without me he is unmanifest".

There are ample evidences in the records of writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, that the path and the aim of their endeavour were the same from the beginning. It is surprising and strange that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (Mirra Richard of France) who were born and brought up under entirely different surroundings and circumstances and who were totally unaware of each other until almost the middle of their physical existence, had exactly the same mission and vision and were traveling in the same path of sadhana. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who met for the first time at Pondicherry at their respective ages of some 42 and 36 years of their life, at once realised that their path and mission were exactly the same and persued their sadhana together at Pondicherry till the end. Consciously unaware of the path they would tread together, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother nevertheless had met fully prepared for such a spiritual collaboration. In them East and West met for a momentous turn in the global history of humanity.

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother represented in themselves the highest and deepest spiritual aspirations of Humanity and are together considered as the leaders or masters of evolution. Their aim was to hasten the evolutionary process and to manifest the supermind as its decisive step. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given an exhaustive description of the nature of the supermind and its immense potentialities when it is manifested or replaced in place of mind. The essential character of the supermind is a Truth
consciousness. It is the knower possessing the knowledge. It is both a dynamic and static power or shakti which can manifest its world of Truth and Light in which all is luminously based on the harmony and unity of the One, not disturbed by a veil of ignorance or any disguise as in the case of mind.6

This concept appears to be unique to Sri. Aurobindo as he differs from the basic principles of Advaita and Buddhism. Advaithins accept reality as only static and Buddhists accept only change. Absolute identity and absolute change cannot satisfactorily explain the creation. Hence, both Advaitins and Buddhists deny the very concept of creation as a myth. But however Sri Aurobindo cannot accept this view. The world should be real as it is given to our experience and whatever that is given to our experience cannot be rejected as unreal. Such a world needs a cause which is capable of explaining the world creation. If the cause is purely static it can not be responsible for creation. On the other hand if the cause is purely a dynamic principle, even then it can not explain the creation, because, absolute change without reference to identity is philosophically inconceivable. So if the world is real and if there is any cause for that world creation it should have both a static as well as a dynamic phase, an unchangeable as well as a changeable phase and this is what Sri Aurobindo accepts.

Sri Aurobindo conceives the Supreme Reality as an Absolute which, when turned to manifestation reveals itself as Sat-Chit-Anada, Existence - Consciousness - Bliss. This Reality manifests the Universe out of its own Being. What is manifested is as real as what manifests it. The manifestation is not a sudden Jump from the Reality that is Divine, that is to say, Perfect. There is a graded devolution, the Consciousness becoming more and more self-limited, less and less subtle, till it culminates in the Inconscience of Matter. At each level
of the descent, planes of consciousness are formed each with its special character based upon its particular principle. Sri. Aurobindo's classification of these planes correspond to the seven planes of Vedic System; Sat-Existence, Chit-Consciousness; Ananda-Bliss, Vijnana – Gnosis; Manas – Mind, Prana – Life; Anna – Matter. This is an ordered universe, a cosmos with its several planes and worlds interacting.

If devolution or involution is the course of the descent of the Reality into material form, evolution is the way in which its manifestation takes place gradually. Every form in creation has a divine spark which is developing in consciousness till it becomes the soul in the human and thereafter it enters into a new stage of conscious evolution. Karma, rebirth and progression are the necessary corollaries of the upward movement from matter to life, from life to mind from mind to the Divine-Mind ‘Supermind’ and from there to Sat-Chit-Ananda.

The human body is in the process of a new birth from the Mind into the Supermind. The mental being is being replaced by the Supramental Consciousness. When this inevitable step is taken and the Truth-Mind begins to function in the human, a new era of freedom of the Spirit, universalisation of Consciousness and transformation of life will mark the beginning of Life-Divine. That is the next goal.

It is also a fact that mind being an instrument of ignorance, by itself can never understand the Supermind. This is not surprising. After-all, the animal with all its vital instincts and sensations can not follow the working of man’s mind. Supermind represents a level and realm of consciousness radically different from and superior to mind, just as in the evolutionary process mind is a higher range of
consciousness than life. Sri Aurobindo tells that in its passage to Supermind, the mind must learn to fall into silence and then progressively open itself to the ranges of higher consciousness, which also conforms to the views of Brodley and Patanjali. Brodley says that in order to understand reality the thought should commit suicide, and we can also compare Patanjali’s sutra “Yogaha chilttavritti nirodhaha”. Yoga is the cessation of mental impression. This is how Sri Aurobindo sums up the role of mind in the evolutionary scale. “Mind is a clumsy interlude between Nature's vast and precise subconscious action and vaster infallible superconscient action of the Godhead. There is nothing mind can do that can not be better done in the mind’s immobility and thought-free stillness.”

Thus Sri Aurobindo gives a new depth and dimension to the human thought, through which he claims, the whole world and humanity can rest in everlasting peace and harmony which is the very need of the day and probably the biggest hope and aspiration of man ever since he has begun to think. It is also evident that this faculty, the thinking principle, the mind, is the fundamental cause for all the existing problems of humanity, as it has also been the cause for all the tremendous progress the mankind has achieved hitherto. Sri Aurobindo also claims that all these problems of humanity will exist eternally as long as the humanity is based on this principle the mind, which itself is imperfect. So it is his endeavour to replace it by an yet higher principle the Supermind or Truth consciousness through his yoga.

What is new in this yoga or how it differs from all other older yogas. According to Sri Aurobindo “It aims not at departure out of the world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental but as a distinct and central object. In old yogas the ascent of the individual into the
Heaven or to become one with the Divine is the real object. But here the descent of the New Supramental Consciousness into the earth consciousness is the basic object. Here the object sought is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth consciousness. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of the power of the Supramental Consciousness into the earth and to organise and make it active in the earth consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says "It is not for some personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense. I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony and Peace into earth consciousness". 

About this Supramental descent with certitude Sri Aurobindo declares "I see it above and know what it is. I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half light and half darkness. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this idea before them that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth sense and Truth vision. If I feel practically certain of the Supramental descent it is because I have my grounds for this belief. Not a faith in the air. I know that the Supramental descent is inevitable. I have faith in view of my experience that the time can be and should be now and not in a later age". Therefore Sri Aurobindo called this period in the universal movement as "The Hour of God".

It is only such a half state as this which prompts the individual for a spiritual life. If man were to be in the state of darkness totally, no amount of sadhana would extricate from such a state, and if he were to be in the state of wisdom the very sadhana would become superfluous. In fact man is neither totally in a state of darkness, nor
totally in state of light (wisdom). This indeed is a state of calamity on man. But this state of imperfection is not a thing to be at all deplored, but is rather a privilege and a promise. Therefore man is still a transitional being in the evolutionary ladder and is consciously moving towards this perfection.

The descent of the Supramental is to bring the Higher consciousness down into earth consciousness and establish it there as a constant realized force, just as mind and life have been established and embodied in matter, so as to establish and embody the Supramental Force. This force will be there in the earth consciousness as a living force just as thinking mental and higher mental are already there.

In the course of his Evolutionary yoga or Supramnetal yoga, Sri Aurobindo discusses several issues and stages that have marked the ascent of the emerging consciousness, and the part played by Religion, Mysticism, Occultism, Reason, Science, Intuition, the various theories of knowledge, the movement from Sevenfold Ignorance to Sevenfold Knowledge, and the direction in which the Nature is being Precipitated by the pressure of the manifesting Spirit.

Regarding this evolution of consciousness Sri Aurobindo further clarifies that if there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being, with consciousness and life as its two key terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness and fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny. The self, the Spirit, the Reality that is disclosing itself out of the first inconscience of life and matter would evolve its complete Truth of being and consciousness in that life and matter. It would return to itself. Or if its end as an individual is to return into its
Absolute, it could make that return also not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completeness of itself in life.

The nature of his spiritual quest, which led to his great conquest, Sri Aurobindo has described in a letter to Mr. C.R. Das which he wrote in 1922. The letter reads “I see more and more manifestly that man cannot get out of the futile cycle the race is always treading, until he has raised himself to a new foundation...... How could our present instruments, intellect, life, mind and body be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation. This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis a wide knowledge, and some mastery of the secret.”

The Mother worship in India is almost an inseparable part of Indian culture, tradition and spirituality and also is as old as Indian civilisation itself. But according to Sri Aurobindo the concept of the Divine Mother has a special and unique place and significance in the sadhana of his Integral or Supramental Yoga.

In his yoga Sri Aurobindo describes the Mother as “The Mother is the Divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many sided that to follow her movement is impossible even to the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness and Force of the supreme and far above all she creates. But something of her ways can be seen and felt through her embodiments, emanations and forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures.

There are three ways of being of the Mother of which one can become aware when one enters into touch of oneness with the conscious Force that upholds us and the universe and they are (1) The
transcendent or the original supreme shakti; (2) The universal or the
cosmic Mahashakti and (3) The Individual.”

“According to Sri Aurobindo in all that is done in the universe,
the Divine through His shakti is behind all actions. But He is veiled
by His Yoga Maya and works through the ego of the Jiva in the lower
nature. In this yoga also it is the Divine who is the sadhaka and the
sadhana. It is His shakti that is the Divine Mother with Her Light,
Power, Knowledge and Consciousness and Ananda acting upon the
Adhara or Jiva and when it is opened to Her pouring into it these
Divine Forces that makes the sadhana possible. But so long as the
lower nature is active the personal effort of the sadhaka remains
necessary. This personal effort required is a triple labour of
Aspiration, Rejection and Surrender”, which are popularly known
as the three basic or fundamental principles of Sri Aurobindos Yoga
Sadhana. Thus although Sri Aurobindo is to be regarded as a
profound advocator of Mother worship, his concept of The Mother
principle appears to be conspicuously different from the one in the
Indian traditional systems.

In this yoga although life is not to be renounced, it demands the
complete rejection of all the lower movements of nature of man such
as instincts, sensations, desires, passions, the liking and dislikings,
vanity and anger and a host of others which bind man to his lower
nature. Therefore the Mother has clearly said that to do this Integral
yoga one must resolve to surrender entirely to the Divine. There is no
other way and it is the only way. Then comes the practice, growth
and perfection of the five psychological virtues: Sincerity, Faith,
Devotion, Courage and Endurance. Truly it is not an easy path.

Just to give only a glimpse of the mountainous task they had to
do in heaving an altogether new path and in this unprecedented
tapasya Sri Aurobindo wrote “As for the Mother and myself we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass, deserts and forests, hostile masses to conquer, a work such as I am certain none else had to do before us”.

But at the same time his assurance to others who want to follow his path of sadhana is rather overwhelming, “But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated over again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others if they will only consent to take it.”

I would like to conclude this brief introduction with a few words from Sri Rabindranatha Tagore a great Indian Poet and Philosopher, founder of Shantiniketan and a Nobel Prize winner for literature, and more than anything else who is widely revered as a great Rishi of our times, about Sri Aurobindo, which he said when he met Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry in the midst of his intense sadhana in the year 1928. “At the very first sight I could realize that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realization had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life…. I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world.”
Because of his very nature of being a versatile genius throughout his life and even from his childhood and also because of the uniqueness of his teachings, philosophy and yoga. I am highly attracted to study Sri. Aurobindo in detail, with a special reference to the role of the Mother Principle in his yoga.

Before, entering into the Mother Principle and to know as to how he could derive at this principle as a significant and inevitable component in his Integral yoga, it is very important to study Sri Aurobindo's life sketch and his spiritual experiences which form the basis of his philosophy and yoga. These aspects are dealt with in detail in the first few chapters. And Also because the Mother happens to be an indispensable component of his yoga and as he himself has declared time and again that both himself and the Mother represent the same principle and consciousness and his yoga is not a product of his own but a combined creation of both of them, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a brief life sketch of the Mother is also dealt with separately including her contributions in various fields, before dealing with the role of the Mother principle in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.