CHAPTER – II
SRI AUROBINDO - A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

1) Parentage and Early Life:

Sri Aurobindo was born on August 15th 1872 as a third son of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh and Swarnalatha. Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh was a remarkable person, an inspired man who was in many ways in advance of his time. After graduating from Culcutta Medical College, he went in the year 1869 to England for further Medical studies. He was one of the first Bengalis to do so. Even earlier as a student of Medical College he had broken away from orthodoxy by marrying Swarnalatha the daughter of Rajanarayan Bose, in accordance with Brahmo Samaj rites. Rajanarayan himself was an outstanding product of the new India that was then rising. A contemporary of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar and a close friend of the poet Michael Madhusudhan Datta, Rajanarayan represented in himself a composite culture of his time – Vedantic, Islamic and European. Because of his piety and consecrated life he was popularly known as Rishi Rajanarayan. His daughter Swarnalatha was well educated, used to write poems and was gifted with unusual beauty that her husband’s friends at Rangapur often used to call her ‘The Rose of Rangapur’. But unfortunately her life was blighted in later years by a sort of mental illness, a tragedy that cast its shadow on the family and particularly affected Krishna Dhan Ghosh who was deeply attached to her. Dr. K.D. Ghosh after his return from England in 1871 joined the Civil Medical Service of the Government and served as a Civil Surgeon with distinction first at Bhagalpur, then at Rangapur and later at Khulna. After his return from England, he admired the British and determined to model himself on the British and throw away all the Indian ways of life, customs and manners. At
the same time he had a strong aversion to the inertia and blind orthodoxy and general social degradation which were so prevalent in the Indian society. He had no regard for conventional religious worship. On his return from England he refused to undergo any form of expiation for his sins of crossing the seas. Sri Aurobindo once said of his father that he was a tremendous atheist. Although he admired the English, he did not hesitate to criticize the Government for its misdeeds or Englishmen for their arrogance. Moreover he had a very deep love and compassion for the poor of his country and his door was always open to the sick and needy. To the poor he was generous to a fault and he always freely helped them with money and medicines and in many other ways and so he was very popular and highly respected for his social service. In fact at Rangpur a drainage canal was called ‘K.D. Canal’ after his name by the people and later at Khulna, a school was also named after him. It was no exaggeration that in all places wherever he worked, poor people almost worshipped him as a demi-God and for this exemplary service he many times invited the displeasure of his British friends, who were not happy with this sort of his attitudes towards the poor. Sri Bipin Chandra Pal has paid a remarkable tribute to Dr. K.D. Ghosh in his book “Indian Nationalism – Its principles and personalities” in which he writes “Keen of intellect, tender at heart, impulsive and generous almost to recklessness, regardless of his own hurts, but sensitive to the sufferings of others”.¹

As a child Sri Aurobindo grew up in the Anglicized atmosphere of the house. Bengali was not allowed to be spoken, only English or Hindustani, and in food, dress and manners the English pattern was strictly followed. When he was five years old, he along with his two elder brothers Benoy Bhushan and Manmohan were kept in a convent missionary school in Darjeeling where almost all other students were British children. After two years of stay in this school, all the three children were taken to England in 1879 for education. Krishna Dhan
Ghosh had great hopes about the future of his sons, particularly Aurobindo and to give shape to his hopes he decided to send all his three sons to England for education, which in itself was quite unusually daring for those days. Although not much of Sri Aurobindo's child days are known Sri Aurobindo clearly remembers that during his stay at Darjeeling, one day suddenly he saw a great darkness rushing into him and enveloping him and the whole universe around him, which remained all through his stay in England and this darkness he says, fell off from him when he was sailing back to India after 14 long years of stay in England. Sri Aurobindo also remembers that as soon as the ship touched, the Appolo Bundar at Bombay and as he stepped at last on Indian soil he had a very strange experience. A vast calm and quite descended on him and this calm remained with him for months there after. So it was a strange coincidence that Sri Aurobindo who was never allowed to learn even his mother tongue Bengali, became a champion and master of many Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi, Gujarathi, Sanskrit and Tamil in later years, as he was a champion and master par excellence of all European languages like English, French, Latin, Greek, German.

It is still more surprising that Sri Aurobindo, who was brought up entirely in the Anglicized manner and amidst European culture, society and people, throughout his childhood and until the age of 21 years later became the champion of Indian Nationality and culture and Hinduism, and spirituality.

2) Education:

Sri Aurobindo was to stay in England for the next fourteen years from 1879 to 1893. First five years he spent at Manchester. During his entire stay at England, he was virtually cut off from his motherland, the only contact being through occasional letters, newspapers and few acquaintances later at Cambridge. About this he
once wrote that “He grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and culture”2. But love of the motherland was ingrained in him and at destined time it burst into flame.

There is very little information available about Sri Aurobindo's stay at Manchester as a boy. During these five years he was taught exclusively at home and later he was admitted to St. Paul's School at London. As he grew up, his studies covered a wide field; poetry, literature, history; Shakespeare, Shelley and the Bible. Shelley's “Revolt of Islam” pleased him a lot, although as he said later, much of it was then not intelligible to him but the vision of freedom from tyranny and injustice appealed to his Juvenile sentiment, leaving its impact on his formative mind. He has also said that from early childhood he had abhorrence for all kinds of cruelty and oppression. He has also said that even at the early age of eleven, he reminds of a strong impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes were coming in the world and that he was destined to play an important part in it. This although is rather very unusual for a boy of that age, it is indeed an indication of an extraordinary life in the making.

St. Paul’s London was then one of the best schools in England and the Head Master, Mr. Walker a great educationist of the Victorian period. He could spot at once Sri Aurobindo's exceptional merit. He gave his personal attention to the boy and finding him to be well up in Latin, but a little deficient in Greek, he helped him in this and other subjects pushing him rapidly into higher classes. Soon the boy caught the attention of other teachers by his quick intelligence and industry. He took an active part in the school literary society and came to be recognized as a good speaker. His faculties began to flower rapidly. He was also very active in reading books of all kinds outside of school curriculum, poetry, novels, history and French literature, he
even learnt a few other European languages. He also often composed poems in Greek and Latin, which were used to be complimented by his teachers. He would find his class lessons quite easy and secured many prizes. Once he remembers to have secured a full set of the Arabian Nights in prize, which he read with great pleasure. Of his school career, perhaps the last word was said by Mr. Walkar "Of all the boys who passed through his hands at St. Paul’s, Aurobindo was by far the most richly endowed in intellectual capacity". Their school period for early few years for these three children was quite comfortable until their father Dr. K.D. Ghosh used to send 360 pounds a year a sum sufficient to meet their expenses at that time. But in later years they had great difficulty when Dr. Ghosh almost gradually stopped sending any money, until they found a timely benefactor in James Cotton a brother of Sir Henry Cotton who was a well known figure in India and a friend of Dr. K.D. Ghosh. In the period of immense hardship in London, the three brothers had to live without proper food, clothing and any protection from cold during winter. Sri Aurobindo has later said that for a whole year they lived daily on a few slices of bread, butter and occasional sandwich or two, few cups of tea and a penny worth of sausage.

To a question from a friend, whether this life of poverty he had to endure in England at such an young age had any adverse effect on his growing faculties or whether it acted as an incentive Sri Aurobindo has replied "Not in the least, ..... poverty has never had any terror for me nor an incentive". This shows how equal souled was he to hardships and comforts even from his early age and gives an indication of his inner strength, and it is noticeable that in spite of all their difficulties, the brothers never complained about their father’s failure to support them.
After passing matriculation from St. Paul’s in December 1889, with his own effort and exceptional abilities he secured a seat in the Prestigious King’s College, Cambridge and also succeeded in securing a senior classical scholarship of 150 dollar a year as stipends for two years. His passing the Prestigious ICS exam in England was the dream hope of his father and Sri Aurobindo did not want to disappoint him. As a brilliant student he also participated fully in all other University activities except of course games, in which he was not interested. But his first love was reading poetry and writing poems, which he did extensively. For his ICS exam he had to study Law and Jurisprudence, Political Economy, Indian History and some Sanskrit and Bengali. Even from early school days he occasionally wrote poems in English, Greek and Latin and as he grew up his interest in poetry also grew enormously and as he has said he derived inspiration to write poems from his brother Manmohan who was almost a born poet and had very close acquaintances with few important literary personalities like Stephen Phillips and the famous Oscar Wilde. Laurence Binyon who later became a famous literary figure was a close friend and a classmate to Manmohan.

In August 1892 Sri Aurobindo passed the ICS final examination, which opened the way to joining the coveted civil service in India. The only formality left was passing the riding test.

Even before Sri Aurobindo went up to Cambridge his mind had turned towards his motherland and he had begun to take interest in the political and social conditions in India.Ironically enough it was his father Dr. K.D. Ghosh who was mainly responsible for first arousing patriotic feelings in young Aurobindo. In the course of his official duties Dr. Ghosh came across many instances of injustice and harshness to Indians from English masters. Some times reports of misbehaviours and arrogance of English masters were published in
local newspapers and sometimes Dr. Ghosh would have an open clash with English higher ups for some or the other reasons which was intolerable to his independent character. So many times he would write to his sons about these instances and would send the paper cuttings to them, which would have a long lasting influence over the minds of the children. So then it was Dr. Ghosh who had asked that his sons were not to be exposed to any Indian influence, himself in later years helped to turn Sri Aurobindo’s mind towards his motherland. Sri Aurobindo’s growing interest in Indian affairs and in politics led him to take part actively in the affairs of the Indian Majlis, an association of Indian students studying at Cambridge, which was formed few years earlier. Although it was apparently a social club, in fact it was more a union of political minded students who resented the British rule in India. This association helped him to know more and more about his motherland, its culture and the plight and hardships Indians were undergoing under the British rule. By this time Sri Aurobindo already had made up his mind not to go in for the ICS, which would mean serving the British rule in India. Therefore although he passed the final ICS examinations in August 1892, he decided not to appear for the formal riding test, which was obligatory at that time for completion of ICS. About this he has later said to a disciple “why did you appear at all for the ICS? Was it on account of some Yogic intution that you did not go for the riding test?” “Not at all, I knew nothing of yoga at that time. “I appeared for the ICS because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand it. Later I found out what sort of work it was and I had no interest in the administrative life. My interest was in Poetry and literature and the study of Languages and Patriotic action”.

Finally because he repeatedly failed to appear for the riding test, he was rejected for the ICS for failing to pass the riding test. His growing love towards his motherland made him to reject the highly
coveted ICS. It was not a small matter to have thrown away a glittering prize like the ICS at his age of 21 years. He was the first example of this kind and this might have influenced Subhashchandra Bose another prestigious son of India to reject the ICS later in 1920.6

At that time in London Sri Aurobindo was a member of a secret society by name 'Lotus and Dagger'. Its members were to take a Solemn vow to work for the liberation of India and not to serve the alien Government. The society was short lived but Sri Aurobindo kept his vow and remained faithful to it by rejecting the ICS. But by this act of his, his brothers were utterly disappointed, but at the same time his seniors and respectable tutors at Cambridge James Cotton and G.W. Prothero, who knew Sri Aurobindo very well as their student, were so much upset about the fact that ICS was rejected to him for not appearing for the horse riding test, that they both wrote a lengthy letter to the authorities appealing to reconsider their stand. This letter written by these eminent men of Cambridge, throws light on the exceptional qualities and abilities of Sri Aurobindo and also summarizing the plight he had to undergo as a student in England. The letter reads as follows:

"I am very sorry to here what you tell about Ghosh, that he has been rejected in his final ICS examination for failure in riding. His conduct through-out his two years here was most exemplary. He performed his part of the bargain, as regards the college, most honourably and took a high place in the first class of classical tripos at the end of second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes, showing command of English and literary ability. That a man should have been able to do this which alone is quite enough for most under graduates, and at the same time keep up his ICS work proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship, he possessed knowledge of English literature far beyond
the average of undergraduates, and wrote a much better English style than most young English men. That a man of this caliber should be last to the Indian Government merely because he failed in sitting on a horse or did not keep an appointment, appears to me, I confess a piece of official short-sightedness, which it would be hard to beat.

If he is finally turned out, it will be however legally justifiable, a moral injustice to him and a very real loss to the Indian Government. Moreover the man has not only ability but character. He has had a very hard and anxious time of it for the last two years. Supplies from home had almost entirely stopped and he has had to keep his two brothers as well as himself, and his courage and perseverance have never failed. It happens that I have known Mr. Aurobindo Ghosh and his two brothers for the past five years and I have been a witness of the pitiable striates to which they have all three been reduced through the failure of their father, a civil surgeon in Bengal and I believe a most respectable man, to supply them with adequate resources. In addition they have lived an isolated life, without any Englishman to take care of them or advise them.

...... Should the secretary of State feel himself able to give Mr. Ghosh one more chance, I undertake to provide the necessary expenses of riding lessons, Journey to Woolwhich etc.,.”

These representation on behalf of Sri Aurobindo from these two eminent men had their effect and authorities conceded to give him one more chance, but their efforts to communicate with him failed and finally he was rejected.

Although Sri Aurobindo lived in England for 14 years, he had no feelings of regret at leaving. To a discipie he once wrote “There was an attachment to English and European thought and literature, but not to England as a country. If there was attachment to a European
land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen and lived in this life, not England but France”.

This feeling of his is of a very great significance as later in his yoga, he had to collaborate with Mrs. Mirra Richard (the Motehr) of France who was a great visionary and a spiritual master who came from the west and settled down in Pondicherry to collaborate in the yoga of Sri. Aurobindo.

On January 12, 1893 Sri Aurobindo left England by ship S.S. Carthage, but a great tragedy marred his homecoming. Dr K.D. Ghosh who was waiting for his son to come back after so many years with great eagerness went to Bombay to receive him. But in the absence of any exact information about the ship by which he was coming, he returned to Khulna. Later his bankers, Grindlay and Co., informed him that Sri Aurobindo had left England by the vessel Roumanic and that the ship had been wrecked in heavy weathers off the coast of Portugal with hardly any survivors. This was a tremendous shock to him to bear and he died with son’s name on his lips.

But Sri Aurobindo duly arrived at Bombay on Feb. 06 1893 by the ship S.S. Carthage.

Soon after coming to India he joined an appointment at Baroda service which was offered to him in England by the Gaekwad of Baroda when he was on a visit to London at that time.

3) Social And Political Activity:

Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretariat work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice Principal in the Baroda College. These were the years of self-
culture, of literary activity, for much of the poetry which was afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time, and of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father’s express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East. At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

Sri Aurobindo married in April 1901. The bride Mrinalini, was the daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose, a well placed Government officer. Sri Aurobindo selected her from the many offers he had before him. The marriage was performed in Calcutta. A difficulty of a special kind – typical of those times came up at the time of the ceremony and that was the question of prayaschitta, purificatory rites, that Sri Aurobindo was required to undergo for having crossed the seas in going to England. Like his father earlier, Sri Aurobindo refused to comply. A via media of shaving the head was proposed, that too was turned down. However, an extra monetary consideration persuaded a sensible Brahmin priest to do the needful and complete the marriage ceremony. It was performed according to Hindu rites and was attended by Lord Sinha and Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose among others. Sri. Aurobindo was twenty-nine and Mrinalini fourteen. As in the case of several other great men who later turned to spiritual life in Sri Aurobindi’s case also his marriage did not prove to be a conspicuous success.
The political action of Sri-Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the public initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then been the creed of the Indian National Congress. In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section, small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress. The political theory of this party was a rather vague gospel of Non-cooperation; in action it had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with Moderate leaders at the annual Congress assembly behind the veil of secrecy of the ‘Subjects Committee’. Sri Aurobindo persuaded its chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (total independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate’s hope of colonial self-government to be realized at a distant date of century or two by a slow progress or reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit, though not in its details, the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue of Ireland. The principle of this new policy was self-help; it aimed on one side at an effective organization of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-cooperation
with the Government. Boycott of British and foreign goods and the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British law courts and the foundation of a system of Arbitration courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National Colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defense and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance, as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, ‘Bande Mataram’, of which he was at the time acting editor. The ‘Bande Mataram’, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding up in 1908 when Sri Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentous existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipore conspiracy case as implicated in
the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipore Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the party organisation broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. He published at this time to aid his effort a weekly English paper, the ‘Karmayogin’, and a Bengali weekly, the ‘Dharma’. But at last he was compelled to recognize that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a time he thought that the necessary training must first be given through a less advanced Home Rule movement or an agitation of passive resistance of the kind created by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. But he saw that the hour of these movements had not come and that he himself was not their destined leader. Moreover, since his twelve months detention in the Alipore Jail, which had been spent entirely in the practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.

In February, 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement at Chandernagore and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. A third prosecution was launched against him at this moment for a signed article in the ‘Karmayogin’; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed. Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon the magnitude
of the spiritual work he had taken up appeared to him and he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement. During all his stay at Pondicherry from 1910 to the end of his physical existence in 1950, he remained more and more exclusively devoted to his spiritual work and his yoga sadhana.

The first decade of 20th century, that is between 1901 to 1910 Sri Aurobindo had a very hectic political career and even amidst his intense political activities also was seriously involved in the practice of yoga, pranayama etc, and also received extra-ordinary spiritual experiences which finally made him to abruptly leave politics once and for all and go into total seclusion far away in Pondicherry to involve himself in pursuit of intense spiritual Sadhana for rest of his life for 40 long years 1910 to 1950.

About his coming to Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo wrote “I did not leave politics because I felt I could not do any thing more there. Such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want any thing to interfere with my yoga and because I got a distinct Adesh. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from with-in that the work I had begun there, was destined to be carried forward on the lines I had foreseen, by others and that the ultimate triumph of the movement was sure without my personal action and presence. There was not the least motive of despire or sense of futility behind my withdrawal.”

He also said “...I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquility for a fixed object, having nothing to do with present politics - in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country, in my own way I have
constantly done. And until it is accomplished it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of Tapasya not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention, I must finish that. I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

In this sense Sri Aurobindo was not only a Seer but also a scientist who could apply his spiritual experience to the practical day-to-day life. He made a great experiment trying to bring this experience into social application. He was aware of the fact that spirituality without any social relevance would be futile.

About the nature of work he was doing in Pondicherry, he said “I am no longer first and foremost a politician, but have definitely commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of almost revolutionary kind, and I am even making or at least supervising a sort of practical or a laboratory experiment in that sense, which needs all the attention and energy that I can have to spare.”

This is quiet evident from his last letter written to his wife Mrinalini from Pondicherry. He wrote “------ But I am no longer free, from now on you will have to understand that all I do, depends not only on my will but is done at the ‘Adesh’ command of God. When you come here you will understand the meaning of my words. I hope God will show you the Light He has shown me in His infinite Grace. But that depends upon His will. If you wish to share my life and ideal you must strive to your utmost so that, on the strength of your ardent desire He may in His Grace reveal the path to you.”

How mysteriously does the Divine move in protecting those who surrender themselves to Him. This is enormously evident in a series of a surprising events that took place while Sri Aurobindo came to
Pondicherry from Chandranagore near Calcutta. In fact at every stage of the events, which culminated in his final departure to Pondicherry one feels the presence of Sri Aurobindo’s all seeing friend and master controlling the events. And Sri Aurobindo’s own comments on the ‘Adesh’, which he received are wonderfully revealing: “As for Adesh people speak of ‘Adesh’ without making the necessary distinction. But these distinctions are to be made. The Divine speaks to us in many ways and it is not always the imperative ‘Adesh’ that comes. When it does, it is clear and irresistible, the mind has to obey and there is no question possible even if what comes is contrary to the preconceived ideas of the mental intelligence. It was such an Adesh that I had when I came away to Pondicherry.”

To sum up what Sri Aurobindo did for the Nation during the four brief but tumultous years (of which one year was spent in Jail). His first achievement was to awaken the Nation from its torper and slavish mentality under the British rule. His magnetic personality and his inspired writings in the Bande Matharam exercised a profound influence and it was he who first demanded in explicit terms, that India must have complete political freedom. Next he spiritualised politics, placing God at the head of the National movement as its leader, inspirer, force and strength. He saw the country not as a political or geographical entity, but as the very body of the Divine Mother. This was the key to the inspiration he provided. Lastly, Sri Aurobindo developed the theory and practice of passive resistance as a means of giving a direction to the political struggle with the aim of achieving freedom. These ideas and programmes were imperfectly understood at that time but they influenced subsequent political developments such as the non-cooperation movement with far-reaching results and eventual success.
To sum up his role in social and political fields from 1893 to 1910, it is very significant to note that how on many instances he rejected or denounced willingly many lucrative positions in order to take up the National and spiritual causes.

First and foremost he voluntarily rejected an ICS which would give him a highly lucrative position throughout his life and which was highly sought for by any person of ordinary mentality at that time, but which would mean to serve the British for his entire service. Secondly while he was serving the Baroda Princely Service from 1892 to 1906 in various capacities first in the king's secretariat department and then as professor in the Baroda college and as he was drawing around Rs.750/- per month, almost an highly attractive salary for those days, he suddenly left the job to join as a principal in the Newly fromed Bengal National College at Culcutta but at a much less remuneration of around Rs. 150/- per month only in order to enable himself to freely and openly participate in the freedom struggle against the British rule. Finally after the Alipore bomb case soon after he was acquitted he silently withdrew himself from the social and political scene of India to a far off place of Pondicherry totally new and unknown, to enable himself to plunge into an altogether different kind of work totally spiritual for rest of his life for over 40 years from 1910 to 1950.

In this context it is very important to know his ideas about the role of money in one's life and also as a teacher of repute for many years, to know his ideas about the principles of education.

i) Sri. Aurobindo on money power:

Sri Aurobindo defines his philosophy of money in clear terms:

"Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and
is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine. But like other powers of the Divine it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower, Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego or held by Asuric influences and perverted to their purpose. This is indeed one of the three forces – power, wealth, sex – that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessors: few escape entirely a certain distorting influence stamped on it by its long seizure and perversion by the Asura. For this reason most spiritual disciplines insist on a complete self-control, detachment and renunciation of all bondage to wealth and of all personal and egoistic desire for its possession. Some even put a ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and bareness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is an error; it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the divine life is the supramental way for the Sadhaka...

All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors. It is with them today, tomorrow it may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge their trust while it is with them, in what spirit, with what consciousness in their use of it, to what purpose...

If you are free from the money-taint but without any ascetic withdrawal, you will have a greater power to command the money for the divine work. Equality of mind, absence of demand and the full dedication of all you posses and receive and all your power of acquisition to the divine Shakti and her work are the signs of this freedom. Any perturbation of mind with regard to money and its use,
any claim, any grudging is a sure index of some imperfection or bondage....

As the money power today is in hands of the hostile forces, naturally, we have to fight them. Whenever they see that you are trying to oust them they will try to thwart your efforts. You have to bring a higher power than these and put them down....

To sum up: Money is a universal force, impersonal in character, which flows where it is drawn by congenial condition of care, conservation, and right and abundant use. Money-power demands to be largely used, thrown into creative channels, to be kept constantly on the move. It must be cherished and utilised with a consciousness of its purpose. Reckless spending, waste, disregard of its sanctity, repels the flow of wealth.”

**ii) Sri Aurobindo on Education:**

According to Sri Aurobindo, the central principle of education is: “Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose.

The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is
he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature.

The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, the sounds, habits to which he is accustomed.

He explains further: To bring out the real man is the first business of education. It can be done by promoting powers of observation, memory, reasoning etc. Through these the man within must be touched and brought out. The second thing that acts is the personality of the teacher. The teacher may not directly guide or instruct but the influence keeps the children engaged. The third thing is to place a man in the right place in the world.

It may be noted that Sri Aurobindo follows very much the same principles in his Yoga. The sadhaka is given full freedom to grow at his own pace, in his own way; the Teacher teaches not so much by precept as by example. He builds and shapes by an inner influence rather than by an external discipline."\(^16\)

Sri Aurobindo's sudden departure to Pondicherry and thereafter his complete severance with politics left a vacuum which was all the greater because of the powerful impact he had made earlier. The British did not believe that he had infact withdrawn from politics but suspected that he was preparing for a revolutionary action in secret. On the other hand those concerned with day to day politics deplored his retirement and thought he was lost to India and the World, being interested in his spiritual salvation, so he was even called a truant or an escapist. Even now there is insufficient understanding of what led to his decision.
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 to base life on the spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. To say therefore that he had shunned the world is to misunderstand the nature and purpose of his Yoga. The vast range of significance of his spiritual force and action, which he was to radiate from Pondicherry – his ‘Cave of Tapasya’ which extended to the rest of his life for over forty years.

Ever since his arrival in Pondicherry, he was wholly absorbed in his Yoga. He was not following any of the traditional lines, but obeying the dictates of his inner Guide, was opening out a new path and sailing the unchartered seas of the spirit. A letter dated July 1911, written a little more than a year after his arrival gives an indication of this new path and the magnitude of his spiritual endeavour. He wrote “.... I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane, and I am now able to put myself into men and change them, removing the darkness and bringing light, giving them a new heart and a new mind.... What I perceive most clearly is that the principle object of my yoga is to remove absolutely, and entirely every possible source of error and ineffectiveness, of error in order that the Truth I shall eventually show to men may be perfect and of ineffectiveness in order that the work of changing the world, so far as I have to assist it, may be entirely victorious and irresistible. It is for this reason I have been going through so long a discipline and that for a more brilliant and mighty results of yoga which have been so long withheld. I have been kept busy laying down the foundation, a work severe and painful. It is only now that the edifice is beginning to rise upon the sure and prefect foundation that has been laid.”
In another letter written in August 1912 to Motilal Roy Sri Aurobindo was even more specific about his realisations and objectives. He wrote: “My subjective Sadhana may be said to have received its final seal and something like its consummation by a prolonged realisation and dwelling in Parabrahma for many years. Since then, egoism is dead for all in me except the Annamaya Atma, - the physical cell, which awaits one farther realisation before it is entirely liberated. My future Sadhana is for life, practical knowledge as Shakti, not the essential knowledge of Shakti in itself which I have got already, but knowledge and Shakti established in the same physical cell and directed to my work and I may as well impart something of that idea to you; since you look to me as the center, you should know what is likely to radiate out by that center.

1) To re explain the Sanatana Dharma to the human intellect in all its parts, from a new stand point. Sri Krishna has shown me the true meaning of the Vedas. He has also shown me the meaning of all the Upanishads that is not understood either by Indians or Europeans. I have therefore to re-explain the whole Vedanta and Veda in such a way that it will be seen, how all the religions arise out of it and is one everywhere. In the way it will be proved that India is the center of the religious life of the world and its destined saviour through the Sanatana Dharma.

2) On the basis of Vedic knowledge to establish a yogic sadhana, which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity and help in the restoration of the Satyayuga. That work has to begin now.

3) India being the center, to work for her restoration her proper place in the world, but this restoration may be effected as a
part of the above work and by the means of yoga as applied to human means and instruments, not otherwise.

4) A perfect humanity being intended, society will have to be remodeled so as to be fit to contain that perfection."^{18}

So completely absorbing was Sri Aurobindo's Sadhana that he rarely moved out of his residence. Indeed many notable persons in the town of Pondicherry were very much aware of his presence and held him in high esteem.

Sri Aurobindo was a contemporary philosopher who came to reinterpret the whole Vedanta in the light of his personal mystic experience. He claims that Vedanta was here-to misunderstood, which he now wants to put in proper perspective. He concurred with Swamy Vivekananda, that Vedanta is the mother of all religions. Swamy Vivekananda said in his Jnana yoga that all the religions of the world come either under advaita or vishistadvita or dvaitha. Sri Aurobindo made a similar daring statement in later year.

About the contribution of all religions Sri Aurobindo has said “Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other, but intellectual dogma and cultegoism stand in the way.
All religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind. For that there is needed not cult and creed, but a sustained and all-comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution."