CHAPTER - II

Sri Aurobindo’s Idea of Politics

While offering his remarks on public figures in India, Sri Aurobindo once said “politics is like that a dirty and corrupting business full of ‘policy’, ‘strategy’, ‘tactics’ and ‘diplomacy’: in other words lying, tricking and manoeuvring of all kinds’. A few escape but most don’t. It has always been a trade of art of Kautilya from the beginning and to touch it and not be corrupted is far from easy.”

Earlier sometime between 1916 and 1918, Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles in the journal Arya. It was published under the title ‘The Psychology of Social Development’. In the articles Sri Aurobindo said, “India is a nation without a political dimension. It has a common soul-life, common culture, common social organisation, a common political head but not a nation – state. Indian history is a succession of empires each breaking up because they could not withstand the pressures of
centrifugal forces. India always lacked the political vigour which characterised the West”. The articles were later published in the form of a book titled ‘Human Cycle’.²

Sri Aurobindo left Bengal under controversial and challenging circumstances and decided never to return even after being acquitted by Calcutta High Court. This was the third occasion the colonial rulers have failed to prove him guilty. The other two being in Bande Mataram Case and Alipore Bomb Case. Many are still why he did not return.

Even today, there are divergent opinions most being condescending and uninformed. In a third person account, Sri Aurobindo wrote, ‘‘the part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry. Much of his political programme of passive resistance, guerrilla warfare and open revolution lapsed in his absence but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian politics and the spirit of Indian people.’’ Further evidence revealed that he did not return to active politics for three reasons – (a) as he said, six British officers decided to make my life hell.
(b) he received a financial assurance from one of his close associate in Pondicherry, and (c) his wife Mrinalini’s brother Saurindranath Basu carried a message from Mrinalini for Sri Aurobindo. It is understood after hearing the message Sri Aurobindo turned overnight and changed his decision. He decided never to return to Bengal. (It is still not known what message Saurindranath carried). Moreover, it seemed Sri Aurobindo had lost interest in practical politics. He felt interested in dealing politics on a mental level. To him “the siege of Troy created Hellas, Jesus humanized Europe from the cross, the banishment of Lord Krishna to Vrindavan instilled devotion so also the colloquy at Kurukshetra will show humanity the path to eternity.”

In Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo transformed into an ‘internationalist’. To him, fraternity was the fulcrum that upheld liberty and equality. He based his idea of politics on the principle of fraternity. Sri Aurobindo therefore said, “the problem of all existense is the problem of harmony.”
As a modern day narrator of the war-epic Mahabharata Sri Aurobindo uses the epic as a tool to define politics with the help of the three maxims set in the epic - justice, ethics and duties.

He also uses the Srimad Bhagavad Gita to base his idea of politics on the attachment-detachment theory. It is very interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo defines `mukti' not as salvation but as a concept that is free of dualities. He uses this concept to define politics. In Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo held himself as a `fugitive' under British laws.

The British made all efforts to extradite Sri Aurobindo but failed. Matteo Alfassa did not proceed on a letter written by the British government to extradite Sri Aurobindo. Matteo was the Governor in Congo at Brazaville (11th Jan 1913 - 19th May 1926) and also in charge of the French colonial desk in the foreign office in Paris. He was rewarded with the Legion d' Honneur. Later, Matteo said `I left the extradition request lying in my drawer'.
The British were left aghast and surprised on the stunned silence of Matteo as they well knew that Sri Aurobindo was dangerous even if he remains outside British India. Therefore they decided to deport him.

The British officers always viewed Sri Aurobindo as a 'political Subject and a volatile political person' possessing enough strength to break the empire in India with the stroke of a straw.

In his Saptachatustaya Yoga, Sri Aurobindo explains 'Mukti' as 'free of dualities' and not salvation. Politics to him was a similar concept that would be free of frills and tension. It should work for harmony.

In 1934, Matteo Alfassa, the brother of Mirra Alfassa or Mirra Richard, (later known as the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry), helped the Ashram from getting dissolved when French authorities raised objections against some of its unapproved activities, especially on the operation of an unknown 'common fund'. Investigations proved that there was no such fund. Sri Aurobindo said, 'it was a concerted and wanton attack from outside on
my inner life', The French colonial office debarred the Ashram from buying and selling property in and around Pondicherry.

Having dropped his paternal traditions of growing up as an Anglophile on the shores of Arabian sea when he returned from Cambridge in February 1893, Sri Aurobindo, was, filled with an unknown and undefined euphoria of getting associated with a country, or an otherwise psychological mother’s care, that had been snatched away from him by no other than his Anglophile father Dr Krishto Dhon Ghose by sending him away to Manchester, London and Cambridge for fourteen years.

On his own admission `he knew nothing about India or her culture’ and was only trained in European academic disciplines that resulted in developing on certain ideas and imaginations about the country from which he remained divorced.

To Sri Aurobindo, it was synonymous of Rama’s fourteen-year exile to the forests in ancient epic poetry the Ramayana. But the euphoria remained with him for the rest of his life as he continued
evoluting, like the non-diminutive Arjuna, from nationalist to internationalist a world spiritual preceptor, and a claimed Indian yogi not of the conventional type and a sage. Sri Aurobindo’s de-nationalization and a subsequent re-nationalizing of matters was, dominated by what he claims are ‘temperamental feeling and preference for all that is Indian. His love for India was an intense natural attraction towards Indian culture’. This love for India was geared towards filling up a huge psychological void and could be considered an intense expression of a pronounced sense of loss. In England, Sri Aurobindo suffered psychologically for fourteen years. He felt lonely and craved for the ‘mother-touch’. He lived in a land which he did not like but was forced to accept to keep to his father’s ideosyncracies like rearing his children as Anglophiles. But that was not very long and Dr Ghosh laterovercame the illusion. Sri Aurobindo’s training in nationalism started. Dr Ghosh started sending him translated passages published in a local liberal nationalist magazine ‘Bengalee’ edited by nationalist leader Surendranath Banerjea, highlighting maltreatments of Indians by their British masters. Sri Aurobindo admitted that by ‘eleven, he was,
convinced that the world is set to witness a great upheaval and revolution and that he should be part of it’. 16

It was only then that he started channelising his thoughts for liberating India and got associated with the Indian Majlis at Cambridge. He took part in the formation of a romantic revolutionary society `Lotus and Dagger’ - but it remained still-born. `A number of fiery speeches at the Indian Majlis could have also cost Sri Aurobindo his I.C.S job’, 17, as he said in this third person confession `On Himself’.

While returning from Cambridge on boarding the ship called Carthage, Sri Aurobindo dropped his middle name `Ackroyd’ given by his father. He started signing either as Aurobindo Ghose or A.G. This present dissertation relates to Sri Aurobindo’s quite unexplained love for politics enmeshed in spirituality, that his devotees would not like to aver on and only hold on to their guru as an `Avatar’ or re-incarnation of some mythical god-head. It is true that Sri Aurobindo himself never encouraged or discouraged such an idea.
Despite being a prolific writer and a great scholar Sri Aurobindo’s articles on `Avatarhood’ failed to impress on his followers that he is not the type that his devotees would like him to be. He was only a very modern person who sought to use his Western materialist education to develop a syncretic alacrity with spirituality of the East.

Politics, to Sri Aurobindo, was never an art for capturing power or remaining in active association with people or persons who would always love to have power. Neither was it a definition for the impossible. To him `Politics’ had many points of entry and exits. He chose as he wished.

Sri Aurobindo was an iconoclast and he abhorred all forms of institutions, social, political or economic. He felt that institutions blocked free thinking and the individual’s inner self is not revealed as it remains cocooned in institutions, ruled by few over a huge majority.

The thesis has therefore purposely refrained from analyzing the known boundaries of politics and power. Sri Aurobindo never considered that even the profoundest and surest political instinct to be wisdom. To him politics in mundane is only play of force and the
practical mind of the politician only reflects on the average reason and temperament of the time.

Sri Aurobindo said politics can bring about great political changes but can never ensure on changing moral sentiments. Sri Aurobindo’s idea of politics is close to the concept of ‘Dharma’ laid down in the great epic ‘Mahabharata’ where Vyasa points out that ‘Dharma’ is something which is determined by ‘behaviour’.

Sri Aurobindo was quick to translate Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s ‘Anandamath’ novel and the jingoistic song ‘Bandemataram’ in his very own and classical style. He translated ‘tumi vidya, tumi dharma’ in the song Bande Mataram as ‘Thou Art Knowledge, Thou Art Conduct’.

Rabindranath Tagore, the poet and international bard from India, observed, ‘I do not know what is the political philosophy of Aurobindo Ghose. All that I know of him is that he is a great and wise man. One of the greatest and wisest we have and is therefore liable to be misunderstood even by his closest friends’. 18

Interestingly, in 1908, Tagore became the president of Provincial Conference at Pabna while Sri Aurobindo never held any political
position. However, later Sri Aurobindo claimed that he broke the Indian National Congress at Surat in 1907 when it was vertically split between the nationalists and the moderates.  

Tagore and Sri Aurobindo met less physically and more mentally and formed a mystic `rainbow bridge’. In Tagore’s opinion Sri Aurobindo was `Indian Saraswati (goddess of learning)’.  

French savant Romain Rolland called Sri Aurobindo the best mixture of West and East. This thesis too perceives the great savant, Sri Aurobindo, as a type always willing to give up power and embark on a life of ‘deathless bliss’ a never-ending journey to reach the deepest levels of id, ego and super-ego. Modern history maker Prof Antony Kopley says: ‘Aurobindo’s yogic path matched Freud’s exceptional one in psychoanalysis, that the subject can know itself as the object’. However, meanderings into Sri Aurobindo’s past are unnecessary as he was always conscious that his past does not overtake his present and future. He said, ‘we do not belong to the past dawns but the noons of the future.’
Sri Aurobindo’s political approach is thoroughly embedded in his theory of Shama (Balance) and Shanti (Peace) and never can we read into him in an egoistic or conflict mode, be it true for a devotee or a scholar. His fight for India’s freedom mostly relate to the salvation and freedom of an individual from the shackles of earthly bondage.

He found man everywhere in chains and therefore stressed on his spiritual and cosmic salvation, which he felt was the key to his freedom. In his opinion only a free nation can ensure a free individual and a race representing the nation. He was the first Indian leader to give the call for ‘Purno Swaraj’ (complete political independence) a concept adopted by the Indian National Congress twenty-three years later at the Lahore session of the Congress in 1929.

In Sri Aurobindo’s view, politics could be the art of the impossible that has no entry point peculiar to itself and where a person’s freedom is as much bonded to the freedom for his country, to the men and of course his inward development which he formats in the enigmatic word ‘evolution’.
Sri Aurobindo’s mindful theses of politics found culmination in a global concept of city-state. His ideas might have its origins in Neo-Platonian and Aristotelian thoughts of 'Politikos' or 'Plotique' concerning citizens and those related to it. 23

Though not forcefully, Sri Aurobindo had quietly floated the Indian idea of 'Rajarshi' (the sage and philosopher king). He found Platonic politics ‘very mental’ and therefore silently accepted it. 24

Sri Aurobindo never believed that theories of modern nation-state could bring real good for humanity. To him every nation thrived in falsehood, deceits and cover-ups. 25 Sri Aurobindo’s idea of politics took concrete shape almost eighteen years (1968) after he passed away in 1950.

In February 1968 under the Auroville Foundation an experimental township was set up by the Mother of the Pondicherry Ashram collecting bits of land from 124 nations. It received due recognition from the United Nations Educational and Social Council (UNESCO). A four-point charter was prepared which spoke of human unity
and fraternity. Auroville was a type of global village, a concept very dear to Sri Aurobindo.

Remarkably, on 8th Nov 1982, a five-judge constitutional bench of the Supreme Court of India headed by Chief Justice Y V Chandrachud held ‘Auroville Foundation’, as an institution that speak of India’s highest aspiration. The judges held that Sri Aurobindo’s followers were ‘not a religious denomination’ nor his philosophy spoke of any ‘new religion’ and were therefore beyond the purview of Art 25 to Art 30 of the Indian Constitution.

According to the apex court, Sri Aurobindo’s position and understanding of metaphysics was far higher than the bench can conceive of and therefore it stayed away into explaining the almost impossible. The Court said, ‘Sri Aurobindo’s concept of philosophy and metaphysics was much beyond the scope and limit of the Court.’

To the common man it might be imaginary and not achievable. Sri Aurobindo’s politics during the Pondicherry days (1910 – 1950) was purely mental and metaphysical waiting to get crystallized over a material point.
Every lesser pedestrian could consider it to be an ‘utopia’. Sri Aurobindo said, "I am an idealist to the marrow and could only be useful when there is something drastic to be done, a radical or revolutionary line to be taken". 27

Kept close to heart or lost within sheafs of metaphysics and spiritual thought, Sri Aurobindo’s political and social visions and dreams only became public when his speech ‘Five Dreams’ were broadcast from the Tuticorin station of All India Radio on the eve of India’s attaining of Independence on August 14, 1947.

The Congress leadership felt he was the only capable person around at that point of time to deliver such a speech to the world. Sri Aurobindo wrote the speech in long and short. His ‘Five Dreams’ were based on issues like a) harmony and peaceful co-existence, b) resurgence of Asia, c) forming a world federation for unity, d) India’s contribution to world spirituality and e) evolving a global consciousness to build a new race of humans or gnostic beings.

Sri Aurobindo’s notion of conventional and traditional politics, by his own admission, had a very low and limited interference. To some it could also be an utopia and can never be
achieved. Sri Aurobindo, however, felt that politics as is conventionally conceived had outlived its purpose and was archaic. Therefore it should be either dumped or abandoned for a bigger and nobler cause. He changed the conventional definition of politics and based it on the psychological unity and harmony of individual beings transgressing the known barriers of states and institutions.

Sri Aurobindo rejects the objective or institutional method and the value neutral positive approach on the ground that it is devoid of the real problem. He views politics and state from the individual’s point of view and not from the theory of general will or collective consciousness as it is made out to be by Rousseau and Hegel for state rulers and other forms of authorities. Sri Aurobindo’s concept of politics agitates against the concept of state. He holds state, politics and the conventional ways of thinking as lacking in tact, taste and delicacy. In Sri Aurobindo’s opinion, politics in conventional form is petty, selfish, egoistic and self-deceiving. The day the modern and common man realizes that he is indifferent to his own rights and unconscious of his duties, politics as a mundane concept will
cease to exist. It is only through psychological unity, that politics can find its real place and be used as a tool for advancing humanity.

Sri Aurobindo advances his radical idea, enough to term him as a 'terrorist or an anarchist' when he emphasizes the necessity of the spiritual transformation resulting in a change in material forms for the establishment of an ideal society, 'an anarchist society' 29

However, in later years, Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts had limited interference on a few English speaking intellectuals as they felt there was some meat in it. The larger section either summarily rejected it pointing out their incompetence to understand Sri Aurobindo’s dialect and language or confused and jumbled up with the concept unable to penetrate beyond their egoistic and normal levels of conflict oriented thinking.

Whatever the position, Sri Aurobindo is still not considered as a pioneer political thinker of India, but only as a person who assumed the form of a sage or Rishi and spiritual guru, a guide for many although he was too eager to shed the guru cult, but only failed to do so in a spirituo-religiously charged country like India.
The political intellect of Sri Aurobindo was lost in the easier model of accepting him as an `Avataar' or a `Man from the Heavens'.

Even in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo kept hoping that his model of passive resistance and non-co-operation will change the face of Indian politics and spirit of the people on its path towards achieving of independence. Sri Aurobindo's politics remained in mind.

The foundations for the triple transformation - Psychic, Spiritual and Supramental that Sri Aurobindo underwent in solitary confinement at Alipore Jail between 1908 and 1909 stayed with him for the next forty years in Pondicherry.

In jail he visualized `Narayana or Vasudeva'. Sri Aurobindo's vision was not of the transcendental god meant for worship as deity but the god omnipotent and omniscient residing in criminals and prisoners with `misused bodies and darkened souls'. He said, `they put me to such compassion that humanity triumphed. I witnessed Narayana and Vasudeva in their misused bodies and dark souls'. 31
Later in Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo said, `I had an Europeanized mind and never believed a god in the distant heavens'. He however praised the Alipore jail and said that it was a `siddhipeth' or `seat of perfection' for him. He said, that the wrath of the British government helped him find `god' with a small but expanding `g' that is `humanity.' Sri Aurobindo's mysticism was neither of the erotic variety perceived in the Indian pantheistic society nor of devotional kind. His mystic ways of thinking were metaphysical, devoid of ecstasy. He was a cool and passive thinker of society, individual, community and spirituality. He merged the components to build his `politics of future'.

By linking his metaphysical thought to reality Sri Aurobindo used it as politics for the future. He visualized the creation of a new race of human being with a supermind or superconsciousness and that had nothing to do with blessings and grace from `above' and distant heavens. It made him the highest of the mystics whose visions are material in nature.
The present thesis tries to prove Sri Aurobindo, as a 'divine materialist' and a 'political yogi'. Sri Aurobindo equated his concept of divinity to "visvamanabata (universal humanity)" and "god" to immortality in the mortal. However, by his own admission, he remained a 'political fugitive' \[^{34}\] in the eyes of the British rulers.

The colonial masters never relished Sri Aurobindo's staying on British Indian soil. They were happy that he did not return floating around his kind of ideas of politics of passive resistance, guerrilla war and open revolution. Many might feel animated that the present researcher stands apart from calling Sri Aurobindo a spiritual preceptor but rather views him as a political being engaged in the experiment of creating a new race of politically and spiritually conscious gnostic beings, however abstract it could be.

Sri Aurobindo's intellectual dexterity and western education helped him mix up his first love of politics with spirituality. It could be accepted and rejected by the scholar and the ordinary. Each were free to take sides. However Sri Aurobindo survived as a synthesizer of politics and spirituality. Sri Aurobindo consciously executed his syncretism of mixing of politics with spirituality.
In 1943 and 1950 Sri Aurobindo was nominated for Nobel Prize in literature and peace respectively for his metaphysical magnum opus and treatise `Life Divine'. In 1943, the Prize could not be given as the Nobel Committee was in financial crisis. In 1950 Sri Aurobindo passed away and the prize could not be given posthumously.  

There might be only three occasions where Sri Aurobindo did intervene actively in politics at the ground level. First, during 1920s when the lawyer from Bengal and his defence counsel in the Alipore Bomb case Chittaranjan Das visited him in Pondicherry and came back with some political advice; secondly, during the Cripps mission of 1942 requesting the Congress leadership to accept the mission plan; and thirdly, while discussing the merger of Pondicherry with the Indian state after Independence with local representatives of the French government.  

Sri Aurobindo, however claimed that he had intervened twice.
There are a number of political correspondence, still unknown to ordinary people as to how Sri Aurobindo was regularly getting engaged in politics. The documents are scattered and are without sequence. It is true Sri Aurobindo loved dealing in politics, but it is also true that was his chosen way of thinking global spirituality and expanding consciousness. Obviously to the pedestrian mind it was different and abstract. Sri Aurobindo remained in politics but never allowed him to be taken over by its mundane nature.

Sri Aurobindo interacted with persons like Surendra Mohan Ghosh, a high profile party member of the Indian National Congress and a close associate of Jawaharlal Nehru between 1938 and 1950. Ghosh was the President of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) from 1938 to 1950. He took advice and guidance from Sri Aurobindo on all political matters during this period. In 1946 Ghosh became a member of Constituent Assembly.

In 1948 and 1949, Sri Aurobindo wrote several letters to Ghosh guiding him how best to position politics for a free nation, using the spiritual tool. Most letters were on practical politics.
Between 1923 and 1943 Sri Aurobindo held regular evening talks in the Ashram with his followers, friends and accomplices. Most of these discussions were connected to world politics and national issues and especially focusing on the beginning of the Second World War.

Between 1920s and 1940s Sri Aurobindo answered a huge number of queries. He is believed to have written thousands of letters to his followers. Many of these letters were queries on day-to-day politics, both national and international. Sri Aurobindo loved to answer their questions and discuss political matters with them at the evening sessions.

Correspondences with close accomplices like Nirodbaran, later his amanuensis and A B Purani also reflect on his getting engaged in political matters. Sri Aurobindo was an avid listener of all political and social events in India and world that were broadcast on the radio and a minute reader of newspapers. The radio was kept in a separate room where one of his followers `Pavitra'
lived. Pavitra was an engineer and had arranged for a speaker in Sri Aurobindo’s room linked through an extension chord from the radio. He switched on every news broadcast throughout the day for Sri Aurobindo to listen. 42

To Sri Aurobindo, politics was both material and spiritual. Both were his favourites. In `Life Divine’ he got the concepts married in the chapters `The Denial of the Materialist’ and `Refusal of the Ascetic’. He once said, `I am a poet and politician. Later he changed and said, I am no longer a politician’. 43

He meant practical politician. He was always a theoretician and remained so throughout his life.

Sri Aurobindo said it when he refused rejoining politics after repeated requests from different Indian luminaries. But that was only to get rid of his active involvement in regular and daily political affairs which he considered as `petty and selfish’.
Sri Aurobindo wanted to spiritualize politics. That was his only secret wish. Sri Aurobindo had been doing so in his just concluded revolutionary days. That was the main reason the British masters could not find sufficient evidence to prove his direct involvement in the Alipore Bomb case of 1908.

It is, however true that he had decided to quit practical politics. Rather he had lost interest in it. But, it is also true that he was firm on preaching and practising politics in his very odd ways in the cause of the country, the world and humanity.

The present researcher finds that coming out of jail Sri Aurobindo’s only transformation was that he had changed himself into an international being. He was no longer ready to confine himself within Indian borders. It is not known, whether such a move was deliberate and purposive or something voluntary that Sri Aurobindo might have felt from within him. Remaining in a French enclave and getting transformed into an internationalist could obviously give Sri Aurobindo the necessary immunity from all British disturbances.
Therefore, in Pondicherry, he chose to remain in daily politics and yet not get chosen by political actors and subjects involved in political issues.

It is only convention to believe and accept that Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo was a spiritual subject submerged in contemplation. It is only a partial and incomplete reading of Sri Aurobindo. In Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo gave himself enough time to find out how politics can be spiritualized in the Indian way to the cause of world humanity. He wanted to develop a model for a global human potential movement in the Indian way, however odd and utopian it might look. He was thoroughly devoted to the cause.

He never lost sight of politics as a relevant subject and therefore always kept it as a priority although writing profusely on Indian spirituality and interpreting Indological scriptures and texts.

A close reading of his works would only suggest that he interpreted all scriptures and indological texts in his very own and animated ways departing from traditional thinking. But it would be wrong if some one would think that it was purely a western style of interpreting Indian texts.
On contrary, it was an Indian way of interpreting the texts with a western view. Sri Aurobindo’s sole aim was to get these texts engaged and involved in real life and therefore he had to delve into politics and events of all kinds interpolating or extrapolating them wherever necessary, be it in the domestic political arena or international.

From available documents it is clearly established how Sri Aurobindo enjoyed in discussing national and international politics while answering queries from accomplices, devotees and disciples rather than spirituality.

His evening talks with his disciples and devotees at Ashram shows that Sri Aurobindo provided very long, explanatory and elaborate answers on national and political affairs while remaining far more reticent dealing with spiritual issues. He was against mixing up religion with politics. He was one of India’s first proponents of secular thinking and had doubts whether he and the Mother of the Pondicherry Ashram would be accepted by the Indian mind as they were ‘non – Hindus’.
Contrary to common belief, he never quit or severed connection with politics only for the purpose of continuing yoga and spirituality. He built a new system of Integral Yoga based on the 15th Canto of the Bhagavad Gita, the Purushottam Yoga’ but only did so to use it to build a race of Gnostic Beings, who would be politically liberated and socially ready to express a divine life in man and humanity.

His aim remained how to use yoga in social and political life. The prospectus of Arya, the monthly magazine he published for almost seven years, justifies his stand on yoga vis-a-vis politics. His articles on Human Unity, Human Cycle and War and Self-determination justify how deep was his thoughts on socio-political matters. It could easily be said that Sri Aurobindo was the first thinker to have derived a psycho-political view of individual, state and community in socio-political matters.

Sri Aurobindo’s voluntary withdrawal to Pondicherry was with a political purpose. Most tend to forget that he left British India under political compulsions as a revolutionary intellectual does only to take the liberty to think ‘out of the box’ by not clinging or
getting attracted to power and exile himself in a French enclave quite alone from the 'madding crowd'.

Sri Aurobindo’s hibernation for nine months in Pondicherry was with a political purpose. He arrived in Pondicherry on 4 April 1910 and made his presence known in public in November 1910. He wrote a political letter justifying his non-return and quite tacitly pointed out that he was a victim of political conspiracy and deceit and therefore unless he is proved 'not guilty' he would not return to British India. In the letter he pointed out his temporary withdrawal from practical politics. 45

The conspirators were dumb struck. The day he wrote the letter, the same day the Calcutta High Court acquitted him of all charges. But even after that he didn’t return? It is found from letters written by him in the later stages that he had lost all interest in the traditional forms of politics and was convinced that India would be free. Sri Aurobindo’s presence was not indispensable.
Some of his comrades like Hemchandra Kanungo and Charu Chandra Dutta sulked. In their opinion Sri Aurobindo took a safe route of avoiding responsibility. But they failed to realise that Sri Aurobindo had a bigger and wider vision of politics.

It could only be equated to the highest aspiration of India, its civilization, its people, its culture and above all its authenticity. His politics was to prove himself one of the most 'authenticated Indian' available in the present and in the future context. His political engagement was never to belong to 'past dawns but to future noons'.

The British rulers sent out umpteen assurances to bring him back. He refused all. His Secretary in Pondicherry Nolini Kanto Gupta points out in his memoirs`` the British rulers had even offered Sri Aurobindo with a well built resort to live in Darjeeling. There, he could practise his Yoga and write books and articles''.

Sri Aurobindo refused. It was a type of 'house arrest'. He knew the British rulers wanted to monitor his movements as they did not trust him. Moreover, by then, Sri Aurobindo had become interested
in different kind of politics, which would be difficult for the
British masters to conceive of. It was the politics of humanity,
internationalism, transformation, liberation and free thinking. It had
nothing to do with the violent overthrow of British rule in India. It
was also not the politics of power, subjugation, high posts, deceit,
falsehood, lie, back stabbing and treachery.

Sri Aurobindo’s unconscious drove him towards engaging
in politics and yet not remaining in it. In the triune
Sri Aurobindo belonged to the realm of ‘Jnana’ or knowledge. Preceeding
him were persons like Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, a
temple priest at Dakshineshwar, a place close to Calcutta. They worked
in the fields of ‘Karma’ – mission and action and Bhakti- devotion.

Sri Aurobindo had a political mission to fulfil. For that
he needed to become the most authentic Indian. The British would not
allow him to work within their jurisdiction and therefore he had to settle in a French enclave. He did it purposely to avoid deportation.

His friends in South India offered him safe passage to Europe and France but he clearly said `I shall not budge an inch' \(51\) from Pondicherry which was part of Indian land which would one day be free in a free India. His sole wish was to experiment his new theory of politics and yoga, a discipline he innovated and would like to implement within and outside India. He therefore called Pondicherry a political laboratory.

Sri Aurobindo chose to remain in Pondicherry purposely. Critics who until today feel that Sri Aurobindo was an `escapist' and had avoided political responsibilities out of fear of British atrocities are only living in a `fools paradise'.

On the contrary there is evidence to prove that Sri Aurobindo deliberately stayed away from British India. He did not want to escape to any foreign land and had refused offers of moving to Algeria. \(52\) As long Sri Aurobindo remained in Pondicherry, the
British rulers spied on him and deployed an elite intelligence police unit to monitor Sri Aurobindo’s daily activities. The British rulers were not ready to believe that Sri Aurobindo had quit practical politics. Therefore, they put him under secret surveillance and got him home-interned. It is not known when the British decided to lift the home-intern. However, the British rulers heaved a sigh of relief when Sri Aurobindo refused to accept the offer to become the President of Indian National Congress in 1920 and 1922. They might have been elated when Sri Aurobindo decided to go into recluse from 1926. After 1926 the British rulers became sure that Sri Aurobindo would not return to British India and had lost all interest in practical politics. From 1926 Sri Aurobindo stopped meeting people from outside the Ashram, barring a few exceptions like Rabindranath Tagore, Sylvan Levi and Maitland Marsh. He only remained confined to a few inmates of the Ashram and offered four annual darshans (public opportunity to see).

Even in recluse, Sri Aurobindo, offered his reactions to most political developments. Sri Aurobindo was of the view that India had forgotten her past and was suffering from cultural amnesia. This
had to be driven out. He gave himself the job of reviving Indian nationalism, which he said was a message from god and a step towards internationalism.  

Sri Aurobindo defines politics on the principle of `niskama karma' or desire-free action mentioned in `Srimad Bhagavad Gita. But he is cautious that it is not of the disinterested type. In the epic Mahabharata, after the Kurukshetra war ended Arjuna forgets the Gita and requests Lord Krishna to repeat it to him for the second time. Lord Krishna repeats the Gita to Arjuna before returning to his kingdom in Dwarka. That `Gita' is known as `anugita'. Sri Aurobindo's animated thoughts on the Gita overturned all conventional ways of thinking. His expressions of signifying Lord Krishna as the `Divine Teacher' and Arjuna as his `Human Disciple' are even today a matter of distaste for the greater Indian population who finds Gita as a heavenly song sung by the Lord. To Sri Aurobindo, `Gita is not the sublime of all texts available to mankind'. 
He tried to hint that there could be texts of higher value and beauty.

Sri Aurobindo felt that Lord Krishna had dragged a disinterested Arjuna into the war of `Kurukshetra' and that was the reason Arjuna forgot Gita. He didn’t approve of such an action. In his book `Essays on Gita' Sri Aurobindo tried to prove that desire-free action was meaningless if it is involuntary and disinteresting by nature. Actually Sri Aurobindo was aiming towards a higher form of material politics. A state of higher matter and thinking and not only that of the spirit.

What is particularly interesting is how Sri Aurobindo positions himself against tumultuous political events between 1910 and 1950 like attack on Viceroy Lord Hardinge (1911), the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy (1919), Rowlatt Act (1919), non-co-operation movement(1920), closure of Andaman Jail (1935), Cripps Mission (1942), Cabinet Mission (1946), Bengal’s Great Famine (1943), landing of Azad Hind Fauj in the Penal Colony (Andaman Jail), alleged disappearance of Netaji Subhas
Chandra Bose (1945), killing of Gandhi (1948), death of Tagore (1941), partition and mass killings (1947), first and second world wars (1914 & 1939) and Kashmir, China and Korean war issues (1951).

On most occasions Sri Aurobindo offered his reactions. However, in some cases he purposely avoided it. But his reactions were confined within a few persons surrounding him in the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo never made any public statement.

Meanwhile, on March 11 1942, Rashbehari Bose’s first speech from Azad Hind Radio was broadcast. The speech was dedicated to Sri Aurobindo - ‘Salute to Sri Aurobindo’. Similarly Sri Aurobindo felt that Subhas Chandra Bose was taking an emotional and wrong step by asking help from the Japanese to drive out the British. He said, ``We (read the Mother and I) reproached Subhas’s action as treason and crime against the Motherland. Okawa told the Mother once the Japanese got hold of India they would not leave it. The Mother knows what type these Japanese people are. Subhas ought to refrain from such acts''.
It is found that Sri Aurobindo took immense interest in all major political events. In fact, he discussed the political issues at length and in detail with the inmates and sadhaks of the Ashram, while offering monosyllabic answers to spiritual and occult queries. It could be that he felt that spiritual matters were highly personal and loaded and that it was only misfit in discussing such matters in public with persons who are not ‘elevated’ or ‘spiritualized’ enough to deal on it. Most sadhaks were novice to understand the metaphysical dynamics of spirituality. Moreover, most sadhaks, out of curiosity were prone to ask many wayward questions. Quite obviously to a scholar like him they were not palatable and rather discouraging. However, he never expressed his displeasure in public or to the sadhaks during the discussions. To Sri Aurobindo, spirituality seemed to play a second fiddle and politics the first string. It is not proved or conceived properly, in his own words or in the words of all those who followed him, that he came from England to join the spiritual school of thinkers of India. Rather he left all and everything in England and Baroda and ‘went out of the way’ to join politics and free India by armed struggle achieved through a radical
transformation of the static Indian mind on the lines of French revolutionaries.

His transformation in Alipore is yet another form of getting engaged in human society and politics. He viewed Lord Krishna or Vasudeva, the God-head in ‘misused bodies and darkened souls’. The prisoners put him to such compassion and help despite being criminals and degenerate humans in jail that ultimately humanity triumphed for him. The transformation of Sri Aurobindo was not of a spiritualist, he became an internationalist.

Aurobindo’s views on politics and interpreting of spirituality are open issues. Sri Aurobindo loved dabbling in both with a preference towards politics as he knew without a test and verification his Integral Yoga was meaningless. Sri Aurobindo’s politics was without any mundane flavour and responsibility to save the organization, the party or its frontal bodies. It was an act of yogic consciousness, a type of national prejudice in India. In Indian system Yoga is regarded as a high object which could be the panacea for all material and spiritual problems. However, till now, yoga is without any scientific basis. Therefore the present researcher calls it a national prejudice.
However Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is different in form and matter from the conventional yoga of Patanjali. To Sri Aurobindo, politics is only suitable for those who had attained a ‘yogic consciousness’, where a person harmonizes with another consciously and vice-versa. Sri Aurobindo felt politics was all about ‘fraternity and unity’. To him liberty and equality are institutional concepts. They need to be tempered according as per the fraternal relations. He sought harmony as he felt that the problem of all existense was the problem of harmony.

Sri Aurobindo uses the peaceful atmosphere of Pondicherry in dealing with politics remaining outside British India. Sri Aurobindo preferred Pondicherry to develop a unique type of politics. He said, ‘it is my type of experiment and has no relation with the available models of politics’. The silent atmosphere of Pondicherry was free from the excesses of British rule. Sri Aurobindo took the opportunity to give a new definition to politics.
The normal question arises, how does a yogi get engaged in the mundane world of politics, when he is claimed to have left it in the bigger cause of humanity, contemplation, divine descent and transformation of consciousness.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "my ideas and philosophy do not take one away from earth. Rather it teaches him to live in it. I never believed a god in the distant heavens." His politics is not of body but of a higher being. Not of matter but of a supra matter. Not of mind but of pulling down and establishing the super mind. He hints that a person with a supermind can only lead the politics of spirituality or higher matter.

As pointed out earlier, he had established his theories on lines of a 'divine materialist', an idea unheard of and unconceived of before. He never claims to be a divine materialist. Neither does he claim that he had been able to establish the supermind. In his words, 'I do not know what it is. It was never tried before. I have only been able to see
its tail'. To some, the 'mumbo jumbo' theory of super consciousness is only a figment of imagination and fantasy created by Sri Aurobindo. To others, it is reality. The present thesis suggests it is both and part of Sri Aurobindo's ideal thinking and position of politics. It could be achieved, or it could be ignored. But surely it has living value. Sri Aurobindo was aware of it. He only tried to establish the concept in humans and their society. It was his way of politics.

Sri Aurobindo practises Integral Yoga that allows him free access to all. He accepts the Vedic principle of 'earth consciousness' which according to him is the real 'truth consciousness' required for the descent of the supermind. This is his theory of involution and evolution. He named it as 'saptachatusaya yoga' or the seven quartets of becoming - Samata, Shakti, Vijnana, Sharir, Karma, Brahma, Siddhi staring from equanimity to perfection. According to Sri Aurobindo any one trained in the discipline of 'saptachatusaya yoga' could be the ideal leader of men.
Rg Veda says it is  `divya prithivi’ which is the thirty third god, the others being twelve of aditi, eleven of diti, eight of basu and `divya prithvi’. Sri Aurobindo says only  `earth consciousnes’ can make one aware of the descent of supermind. The universe has three gods viz: god of sky is the sun, god of earth is fire and god of life or prana is vayu. The three gods symbolically combine to form matter, life, mind and light.

Sri Aurobindo relates the awakening and realisation of the truth and earth consciousness to everyday life and society and defines politics in the realisation of these existense. Regularly listening to radio news and reading newspapers were part of his regular life in the Pondicherry Ashram. Quite normally this is not to be seen with the normal yogis or persons in recluse. It is yet another glaring example of Sri Aurobindo trying to get engaged with the world events although he had taken a voluntary recluse since 1926. To him, radio and newspapers were real life instruments and Sri Aurobindo used it as a platform through which he could remain connected and also testify his principle and politics of Integral Yoga.
The purpose was to find out whether life could be imparted in a stone statue of a created or developed god. Sri Aurobindo only toyed with the idea of spirituality, the umbilical chord of Indian culture and civilization, while keeping himself mostly engaged in how to use it in politics and social life for a better world and humanity. Sri Aurobindo’s politics does not take one away from the earth. On contrary, it ensures that one remains in it to face all its ups and downs. Sri Aurobindo wants to remain on earth and enjoy pleasure while remaining in humanity, love, fraternity and unity. His epic poem and mantra ‘Savitri’ is the song of love and life over death. Sri Aurobindo holds death as darkness and life as light. To him, it is life unbound. Among many other ways, he stays connected to this life through radios, newspapers, political, social, economic and spiritual dialogues and discussions with his disciples, devotees and sadhaks in the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo banishes the traditional concept of moving away from life through Yoga and communicating with the infinite and divine. He feels it is in life that one becomes immortal. Moving away from life is death. To him, physical decay and destruction are only the normal ways of moving towards a clinical death. However, Sri
Aurobindo says it carries no meaning. He avoids the problem and finally sheds it by remaining connected to material life.

Use of Yoga in social and political life is one of his five principles. He wants to use yoga as an instrument of strategy and a weapon to open up the human realms of consciousness. The question that he confronts from critics and rationalists is, 'why doesn’t he practice yoga in British India and instead chooses a French enclave'?

In the opinion of most critics it was a political move executed in a planned way to stay away from the clutches of oppressive British rule. 66

The answer is simple, the process is long-drawn-out and such experiments are unlikely to yield fruits on an immediate basis. In British India by the time the political objective of practicing Integral Yoga is achieved the British would have enough time to smoke out 'its most dangerous enemy'.

According to Barindra Kr Ghose, the principal accused in the Alipore Bomb Case of 1908 'fear is a thing unknown to Sri Aurobindo' 67.
Twice he voluntarily accepted arrest. In the Bande Mataram Case (1907) he voluntarily surrendered to police and in the Alipore Bomb Case (1908) he accepted the arrest on a search warrant. As per law arrests are prohibited without a body warrant.

To Sri Aurobindo, yoga meant communicating. In his opinion it could be politically, socially or spiritually. For him, politics was almost similar to the Marxist concept propagated by the South African political scientist Adrian Leftwich, `it is not only a power equation as many find it to be. Politics is an ensemble of social relations.'

Sri Aurobindo wanted to cultivate these relations with his Yogic experiments, the search being to establish harmony and equanimity within the humanity. In Pondicherry he embarked on the politics of humanity as an internationalist.

In 1893 Sri Aurobindo began a journey in politics as a die-hard nationalist. Seventeen (17) years later he transformed into a confirmed internationalist. He wanted states without borders and conceived of a global village that eventually took shape in the form of Auroville in 1968, eighteen years after his death.
In Sri Aurobindo’s opinion every nation lived in falsehood and deceit with humanity being the biggest sufferer.

Despite quitting practical politics Sri Aurobindo continues discussing about world political personalities like Truman, Stalin, on the pitfalls of Socialism, Mao Ze Dong’s expansive policies in Tibet and India. Even today, his ‘Message to America’ (1949) and statements on ‘Nehru – Liaqat Ali Pact’ (1950), on the Communist Movement (1949) are relevant.

In 1963 an Indian diplomat in Washington Sudhir Ghosh met John F Kennedy, the President of USA and showed him what Sri Aurobindo had predicted in his ‘last testament’ published in the Pondicherry Ashram journal ‘Mother India’.

In 1950, Sri Aurobindo had predicted India’s relation with China and Tibet ‘as grave as it can be’. Indo-China war took place in 1962.

Kennedy was surprised and said, ‘surely there is a typing mistake here. The date must have been 1960 and not 1950. You mean to say that a man devoted to meditation and contemplation sitting in one
corner of India said this about the intentions of Communist China as early as 1950?'' Kennedy then concluded with a remark, ``one great Indian Nehru showed you the path of non-alignment, another great Indian Aurobindo showed you another way of survival', 71

The incident reflects on Sri Aurobindo’s deep political sagacity and power of observation on political matters. Sri Aurobindo became a larger and keener follower of politics in his Pondicherry days.

In Pondicherry he had none to disturb his thinking. He drank, he read, he wrote and he meditated. He was always a man of laughter and wisdom. It flourished in Pondicherry. His inward involvement with politics of yoga and society increased although his outward contacts diminished than before. Sri Aurobindo’s interest in practical politics increased manifold in Pondicherry. He could do so without being a direct stakeholder in practical politics. It was politics without any mundane responsibility and was purely on a theoretical plane. In this way, politics became a pleasure object for Sri Aurobindo. After coming to Pondicherry he continued to live in politics in his very own and odd ways.
Endnotes (Chapter - II)

1. CWSA, Vol 35, p.200, Oct 28, 1936
3. Quoted in Heehs Peter, The Lives of Sri Aurobindo, p.226
5. Karmayogin, Dec 25, 1909
6. Mukti, according to Sri Aurobindo means free of dualities from a confused and splintered mind
7. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAP, 1972
8. Brother of Mira Richard, Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry
9. A very high recognition from the French Government
10. Richard Paul: Without a Passport: The Life and Times of Paul Richard
13. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archvies, some misconceptions cleared, on Himself, Pp. 95-97
15. Ibid
17. Ibid
18. Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to an unknown recepient, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Nov 30, 1919
20. Manuscript, August 24, 1907
22. Shonar, Of Past Dawns and Future Noons, Sri Aurobindo Society and UBSPD, 2006
23. Aurobindo Sri, Early Cultural Writings, II, p.77
24. Ibid
25. Aurobindo Sri, The Ideal of Human Unity, SAAP, 1919
26. Judgment of Hon'ble Supreme Court, Nov 8, 1982
27. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAP, 1972
30. Aurobindo Sri, Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, SAAP, 1948, 
Sri Aurobindo claimed to have undergone this transformation while in Alipore Jail
32. Aurobindo Sri, Letters on Yoga, On Himself
34. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication,1972
35. Heehs Peter, The Lives of Sri Aurobindo
36. Ibid
37. Aurobindo Sri, Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, SAAT Publication, 1948, (Political Life)
39. CWSA, Vol 36, Autobiographical Notes, p.602
40. Purani A B, Evening Talks, SAA Press, Pondicherry, 1995 and field reseach conducted at Pondicherry, Jan 16-20, 2014
41. Saint Hillaire Phillippe Barbier, a French engineer who joined the Ashram in 1926
42. Purani A B, Evening Talks, SAAT, Pondicherry, 1995
43. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAT, 1972
44. Rolland Romain, Prophets of the New India, Albert and Charles Boni, 1930, New York, p.628
45. Letter from Sri Aurobindo to The Hindu newspaper, Nov 7, 1910, Special Number on Sri Aurobindo’s Political Ideas and Activities, All India Magazine, Oct, 1997.
46. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAT, 1972
47. Comrades of Sri Aurobindo during his revolutionary days between 1901-1910. Both criticized Sri Aurobindo for irresponsibly leaving politics and settling down in Pondicherry. Later, Charu Chandra Dutta realized his mistake of criticizing Sri Aurobindo and went back to live with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry.
49. Three pillars of Hindu spirituality – Karma, Jnana & Bhakti
52. Ibid
53. Ibid – A Heehs Peter, The Lives of Sri Aurobindo
54. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAT, 1997
56. Speech by Rashbehari Bose, Radio Tokyo, March 11, 1942
58. Letter to his wife Mrinalini Ghosh, 1906
59. Sage Patanjali developed the traditional Indian yogic system consisting of four padas viz. Sadhanpada, Bibhutipada, Kaivalyapada and Samadhipada. Sri Aurobindo organically differed from all the four systems and developed his own form of socio-ethical yoga, which he called integral yoga
60. Letter to Barindra Kumar Ghosh, 1922, Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, SAAT, 1972

63. The expansions are follows Viz: acceptance, right state of activity, reasoning of objects, body and health, delight of the world, realising the supreme consciousness and perfection

64. Satpatha Brahman and Mahabharata, Rk 3.9.9, Bankim Rachanabali, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Vols 1, Hinduism and the Theory of gods and vedic gods

65. Pandit M.P., Dictionary of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, Lotus Light Publications, 1992, it is also known as truth-consciousness, the consciousness that lives in truth or is in constant touch, not as the ordinary mind does.


68. Leftwich Adrian, What is Politics, Its Activity and Study, Hey, 2002 & Leftwich, 2004

69. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAT, 1972

70. Journal published from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, by K D Sethna (Amal Kiran) an accomplice of Sri Aurobindo, Jan 28, 1950